

Young Earth Presuppositionalism

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My Concerns

As a Philosophy and Christian Apologetics professor, I am very interested in the differences between various apologetic methodologies. Over the past few years I have become increasingly concerned about the degree to which the Presuppositional apologetic methodology has become prevalent within Young Earth Creationism.¹ By this I mean that strategic leaders of Young Earth Creationism, including Ken Ham of **Answers in Genesis** and Jason Lisle of the **Institute for Creation Research**, are doing apologetics (and teaching others to do apologetics) by means of the Presuppositional Apologetic methodology (or some modified version thereof).²

My Commitments

My concerns arise from two commitments I have, to wit, I am a Young Earth creationist, and I am a Classical apologist.³ As a Young Earth creationist, I regret that Young Earth

¹ I would like to thank Eric Gustafson, Director of Development at Southern Evangelical Seminary, for drawing my attention to this issue and for suggesting to me the title "Young Earth Presuppositionalism."

² My main sources for Ken Ham's thinking in these matters consist of a talk on apologetic methodology he gave at First Baptist Church, Woodstock, GA, as well as a panel discussion on the Trinity Broadcast Network (available at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgueGotRqbM>> (accessed 07/29/13) and other places) in which he participated with Hugh Ross. Other participants were Sean McDowell, John A. Bloom, Eric Hovind, Ray Comfort, with the moderator, Matt Crouch. In the interest of completeness and coherency, I will try to unpack and extend Ham's position perhaps further than a strict limit of his words might seem to warrant. My sources for this unpacking and extending will consist of certain of Ham's defenders and other interested parties who have interacted with me on my blog (<<http://www.quodlibetalblog.wordpress.com>>) regarding this matter. I will let the reader decide whether such unpacking and extending are faithful to Ham's methodology. For the Presuppositionalism of Jason Lisle see *The Ultimate Proof of Creation: Resolving the Origins Debate* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009) [My thanks to Lalo Gunther of the **Institute for Creation Research** for the gift of this book] and Jason Lisle and Tim Chaffey, *Old Earth Creationism On Trial: The Verdict Is In* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008).

³ For my annotated bibliography on Christian apologetics go to <http://www.richardghowe.com/apobib.pdf>. For a model (among many) of how Classical apologetics can be done see, J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1987). For an extended treatment of how Classical apologetics differs from Presuppositional apologetics see, R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley,

Creationism is being done a disservice when it is tethered to what I consider to be an illegitimate apologetic methodology. As a Classical apologist, I desire to show Young Earth creationists that the Presuppositional method not only does not serve to convince detractors that Young Earth Creationism is true, but it scandalizes Christians in what constitutes sound apologetics in the first place.

This is not to say that every aspect of the Young Earth Creationism case is undermined by its Presuppositionalism. It is to say that the way they sometimes employ their presuppositional arguments runs into problems. In order to help the reader (or hearer) see where I am going with this critique, let me state as directly as I can the main problem I have with Young Earth Presuppositionalism and then visit additional problems.

Such teachers as Ken Ham maintain that it is illegitimate to use "outside sources" to try to interpret the Bible. He characterizes this as "Man's Words vs. God's Words." It is my contention that there are at least two "outside sources" viz., philosophy and science, that are sometimes necessary in understanding the meaning of Scripture. In seeking to show this, I will unpack enough of my own views of Classical apologetics to serve as a basis upon which to make my critique. I will then address these additional these problems as time allows.

How Philosophy Is Necessary for Theology and Apologetics

I shall begin with how philosophy is necessary for theology and apologetics. I will save to the end my example of how science is necessary when I deal with the problem of inconsistency within Young Earth Presuppositionalism.

Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics (Grand Rapids, Academie Books, 1984).

Classical apologetics is characterized by three levels: philosophical foundation, the existence of God, and the truth of Christianity.⁴ Of these three levels, only the first is germane to this critique. There is no need to flesh out the contours of step two "the existence of God," and step three "the evidence for Christianity" since not only is this august group familiar with them, but they are not as directly relevant to my paper as step one is. Let it suffice to say that, regarding the classical approach to apologetics, the *sine qua non* of the method is the principled (if not practical) primacy of steps one and two to making the case for Christianity in particular.

The first level maintains that philosophy is essential in establishing the foundation for dealing with both believers and unbelievers who might bring up certain challenges. Two areas come readily to mind. The first has to do with the principles of hermeneutics, generally considered. The second has to do with specific interpretive issues dealing with the nature of God Himself.

As for the first, the question is: where does one get one's principles of hermeneutics? It is impossible to get one's principles of hermeneutics from the Bible itself. This is so because, if one could understand the Bible in order to get these hermeneutical principles, then he understands the Bible *before* he has his principles of understanding the Bible (which means he would not need the principles he was seeking to get from the Bible). On the other hand, if he thinks he cannot understand the Bible without some principles of understanding the Bible (I would argue that this has to be the case.) then that means he could not understand the Bible enough to get the

⁴ For an annotated bibliography on Christian apologetics go to <http://www.richardhowe.com/apobib.pdf>. For a model (among many) of how a more classical style of apologetics can be done see Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004) and J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1987). For an extended treatment of how Classical apologetics differs from Presuppositional apologetics see R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, Academic Books, 1984).

principles themselves (if he was committed to the notion that he gets those very principles from the Bible). Either way, he runs into an impossible situation. We see, then, that it is impossible to get all of one's principles of interpretation of the Bible from the Bible itself, even if he can get some of them. Instead, they have to come from somewhere else.

The reader might be expecting me to argue here that these principles must come from philosophy. This is not my position. Instead, these principles of hermeneutics are grounded in the nature of reality itself. To be sure, reality is what it is because God is who He is and creation is what it is because of how God created it. In all of this, I am not suggesting that one has to do an in-depth examination of reality in order to somehow excavate principles of hermeneutics so that he can then begin to understand his Bible. Rather, I maintain that, in many (if not most) instances, such principles of understanding are very natural to us as rational creatures created in the image of God (in a way analogous to how we naturally perceive the physical world around us with our sensory faculties). It remains, however, that there are occasions where a more in-depth philosophical examination of the issues is warranted. This is increasingly so as false philosophies grow in their influence on people's thinking.⁵

The second interpretive issue has to do with the specifics of what the Bible says about the nature and attributes of God. Without a sound philosophy, the student of the Bible would be unable to ground the classical attributes of God, including God's immateriality and infinity. This is so because many passages of the Bible speak metaphorically about God as having various bodily parts. Unless there is some way to judge that such passages are figures of speech, one runs the risk of falling into heresy.

⁵ For an essential reading on the philosophical issues underlying hermeneutics see Thomas A. Howe, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation* (N.c.: Advantage Inspirational, 2004).

Consider the problem lying behind Henry Morris comments "[The words of Genesis] describe and present a Being whose power is limitless and whose knowledge is all-encompassing. Neither you nor I can experience such a condition, and therefore, we must either accept (believe) that there is an all-powerful and all-knowing God, transcendent to the universe, who is the First Cause of all things, or we must reject the existence of such a Being and retreat into our own experience and intelligence."⁶ The problem with how Morris characterizes the Genesis text is that this same Genesis narrative says that Adam heard the sound of God "walking in the garden in the cool of the day." (Gen. 3:8)⁷ How could this God walk in the garden without legs? If He has legs, how could He be transcendent to the universe? With such descriptions, how can Morris so confidently assert that God is transcendent to universe, or, more troubling, how can Morris so confidently assert that the Genesis narrative presents God as a transcendent being? It seems clear that it does not.⁸

It will not do to appeal to other verses of Scripture to adjudicate the matter. While I appreciate the "analogy of faith" principle and believe that it is valid as far as it goes, it has its limits.⁹ I believe Westminster professor K. Scott Oliphint (a Presuppositionalist who is not

⁶ Henry Morris, III, "The Genesis Controversy" in *Real World Christianity Conference Program* of the Nineteenth Annual National Conference on Christian Apologetics 2012, p. 25.

⁷ *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). All Scripture references are to this version unless otherwise indicated.

⁸ Some may think that Morris can get off the hook by claiming that these specific descriptions are a Theophany (an appearance of God in human form, referred to by some as a Christophany). Even if I conceded that this explains the narrative here, there are many other physical descriptions of God, some of which cannot possibly be explained as a Theophany. Consider Ruth 2:12 "The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge." or Psalm 17:8 "Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me under the shadow of Your wings."

⁹ For a brief discussion of the principle, see Thomas A. Howe, "The Analogy of Faith: Does Scripture Interpret Scripture?" *Christian Research Journal* 29, no. 2 (2006): 50-51. The article is available for download at <http://www.equip.org/articles/the-analogy-of-faith> (accessed 07/30/13)

necessarily committed to Young Earth Creationism) overstates the situation when he says, "As Turretin notes, given the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, interpretation of Scripture is given to us by way of other Scriptures. We do not need another external source in order to compare and bring together the truth as God has given has given it to us in his Word."¹⁰

As an example, one might suggest that we can know from John 4 that God is Spirit and therefore He cannot literally have bodily parts. Thus (they might say), when Genesis 3 talks about God walking, it must be speaking metaphorically (if it is not a Theophany). The problem with this response is that there would be no way to judge whether the Genesis passage is to be taken as metaphor and John 4 is to be taken as literal or whether John 4 should be taken as metaphor and the Genesis passage is to be taken as literal. We can only defend the fact that the above verses are indeed metaphors and John 4 is literal by an appeal to reality.

When we read in Isa 55:12 "For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" we know that this is metaphor precisely because we know from reality that mountains cannot sing and trees do not have hands. Our ability to know this is because of our simple apprehension of the nature of mountains and trees by means of our sensory faculties.

But our coming to know of the nature of God (i.e., whether He does or does not have bodily parts) cannot be done directly by our sensory faculties. It requires more actions by the intellect. These actions constitute doing philosophy (or, more precisely, metaphysics). By sound

¹⁰ K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2006), 24. As a Reformed Christian, Oliphint is showing his fidelity to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* which says "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." (I, IX)

philosophy, we can know not only what the nature of God must be like (and thus we know He cannot literally have such bodily parts) but we can also know certain principles of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics). The question one must ask is how we defend against the aberrant or heretical thinking of the Word of Faith movement (God has a inch hand span (Copeland)), the Dake Annotated Reference Bible, and Clark Pinnock's flirting with the notion that God is corporeal and embodied. They can only be answered by sound philosophy and sound principles of hermeneutics (which themselves are defended by sound philosophy).¹¹

Presuppositional Apologetics

The apologetic method that has come to be known as Presuppositionalism is largely the legacy (in America) of the Westminster Theological Seminary professor Cornelius Van Til.¹² Presuppositional apologetics does not consist of merely examining the legitimacy of the unbeliever's presuppositions. No model is better at doing that than the Classical model. As such, to examine presuppositions is not what distinguishes different apologetic methodologies. Jason Lisle is simply wrong when he says "The method ... is called 'Presuppositional Apologetics'. ... It could also be called a 'Transcendental' approach or 'Transcendental Apologetics' which I sort

¹¹ As yet, I have said nothing about what I think sound philosophical reasoning would look like. To be sure, this is a subject that has occupied thinkers for millennia. My own views have been variously labeled as Classical Realism, Philosophical Realism, Scholastic Realism, Thomistic Realism, and Thomism. Thomistic Realism (to pick one of the labels) begins with the common sense experiences of sensible (physical) reality. My use of the expression 'common sense' should not be construed as an embracing of the Scottish Common Sense Realism of Thomas Reid, et al. While such realism might share some surface similarities and common terminology with the Thomistic Realism that I embrace, the two systems are distinct in critical ways. As such, legitimate criticisms of Scottish Common Sense Realism would not necessarily apply to Thomistic Realism.

¹² For an extended bibliography of resources (primary and secondary, sympathetic and critical) dealing with Presuppositionalism see note 2 of my "Some Brief Critical Thoughts on Presuppositionalism," available at <<http://www.richardhowe.com/Presuppositionalism.pdf>>.

of prefer but 'Presuppositional' has probably caught on more. And you can see why it's called that. We deal with world views. We deal with presuppositions. That's how it gets its name."¹³

To be sure, Presuppositionalists do deal with presuppositions and world views. Though Lisle's explanation might seem plausible (and I have encountered several who wonder why, as an apologist and philosopher, I would be critical of examining presuppositions when they discover that I am critical of Presuppositionalism), the reason the method is called 'Presuppositionalism' is because there is something in particular that must be presupposed. It maintains that a proper apologetic methodology must be built on the solid Reformed (Calvinist) theological doctrines of the sovereignty of God and the total depravity of the human race. The God of Christianity (together with the Scriptures) must be presupposed before there can be any consistently coherent or rational thought (i.e., intelligibility) in the first place. Van Til summarizes it thus: "The only 'proof' of the Christian position is that unless its truth is presupposed there is no possibility of 'proving' anything at all. The actual state of affairs as preached by Christianity is the necessary foundation of 'proof' itself."¹⁴

We see, then, that Presuppositionalism maintains that it is not possible (or appropriate) to try to appeal to "facts" (what Ken Ham despairingly calls "man's words" as opposed to "God's words") to adjudicate the dispute between Christianity and non-Christianity. Since (according to Presuppositionalism) our understanding and interpretation of these "facts" is part of what is in dispute between the Christian and non-Christian, the non-Christian needs to be shown that,

¹³ Jason Lisle, DVD "Nuclear Strength Apologetics, Pt. 1"

¹⁴ Cornelius Van Til, "My Credo," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1971), 21.

unless the Christian faith (or the Word of God) is presupposed, then these "facts" are not (consistently) intelligible at all.

Problems with the Presuppositionalism of Ken Ham, Jason Lisle, et al.

The Problem of Presuppositionalism Collapsing into Classical Apologetics

Lisle likens his method of defending Young Earth Creationism to an argument about air.¹⁵ Just as air is a necessary pre-condition for anyone who might want to argue against the existence of air, so Evolutionists (for example) "must assume the preconditions of intelligibility in order to make any argument whatsoever."¹⁶ The parallel is illicit. Air is only accidentally a pre-condition to an argument for or against air. To be sure, air is a pre-condition for a *human being* to make such an argument. But that is only because of the nature of the human being, not because of the nature of the air as such or because of the nature of the relationship air bears to an argument about air. God would be able to make an argument against air without air. Air bears a different relationship to an argument about air than the preconditions of intelligibility bear to argument as such (i.e., to argument as argument). In the first instance, it is an argument *about* x where x is (accidentally) required for the arguer to make his argument. With the latter instance, it is not an argument *about* something. Instead, it is argument itself. Thus, what follows is that all the elements of which argument is comprised are necessary for there to be any argument at all. In other words, if x is itself a constituent of argument qua argument, then, necessarily, x is a pre-condition for argument itself. I suspect that one would find little quarrel as to what these constituents might be. Logic and inferences, together with terms and premises (whether factual or not) are certainly necessary. What Lisle is (commendably) trying to do is to get the

¹⁵ Lisle, *Proof*, 45.

¹⁶ Lisle, *Proof*, 45.

Evolutionist to realize that the Evolutionist's view of reality (what Lisle calls his 'worldview') cannot account for the very logic that the Evolutionist uses to formulate his arguments against creation. I certainly agree with Lisle's method here. But the crucial question becomes: Is this Presuppositionalism? I contend that it is not. The reason it is not, is because Presuppositionalism insists that it is the Trinitarian God of the Bible that must be presupposed. It is the whole of the Scriptures that must be presupposed. Bahnsen says "The Christian must not only recognize [that every apologetic encounter is ultimately a conflict of worldviews or fundamental perspectives] for the purpose of developing and responding to arguments with an unbeliever, but also be aware that the particular claims which the apologist defends are understood within the context of *the entire system of doctrine revealed by God in the Scriptures.*"¹⁷ He goes on "The Christian apologist does not argue for just any kind of abstract, general theism ('a god of some sort or other'), but rather for the specific conception of God revealed within the Christian Scriptures."¹⁸ I defy Lisle or anyone else to show how it is that the demonstration that logic is a precondition to intelligibility equals a presupposition of Christianity.

I want to make sure that I am clear as to what exactly is my problem. I celebrate what Lisle is arguing here. I make the same kind of argument in my apologetic encounters (though I would not use the misleading air analogy). But it will take more argument moves to show the unbeliever that, because logic is a necessary precondition to intelligibility, therefore the God of Christianity exists. But this first step, together with the following steps in making this argument

¹⁷ Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 30, emphasis added.

¹⁸ Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 31. Bahnsen has set up another false dilemma. With this method, he is in no position to fend off the heresies of Dake since Dake could argue that the God of Scripture has all of these bodily parts enumerated earlier. But sound philosophy (coupled with a broader apologetic case) can show that the only true God cannot be Dake's God and that the God of the Bible is the only true God. To do this is to do Classical Apologetics.

is *exactly what Classical Apologetics does*. So, my quarrel is that what Lisle is doing is engaging in Classical Apologetics while insisting all along that his method is Presuppositionalism and implying (where others are more explicit) that the Classical method is a compromise of the authority of God's Word.

The Problem of "Biblical Principles" and the Preconditions of Intelligibility

Another problem I have is that Lisle goes on to characterize the preconditions of intelligibility (logic, morality, uniformity of nature) as "biblical creation principles." While I might celebrate the specifics of his arguments for each of these, his argument is not a transcendental one which it would have to be in order to be Presuppositionalism. Instead, his arguments (at least in the case of morality and the uniformity of nature) are *demonstratio quia* (argument to grounding or cause) arguments. (I am indebted to William Lane Craig for pointing out this distinction.)¹⁹ Granted that logic, morality, and the uniformity of nature are truths that one can find in the Bible, he never (nor has any Presuppositionalist that I have read or talked with) shown that it is the Bible (or Christianity) that is this precondition. In other words, it is fallacious to argue that x, y, and z are preconditions of intelligibility; x, y, and z are found in the Bible (or Christianity); therefore the Bible (or Christianity) is a precondition of intelligibility. As soon as one unpacks the arguments to demonstrate to the unbeliever that Christianity is true, one is doing Classical Apologetics.

The Problem of Ontology vs. Epistemology

One enduring inconsistency throughout is the issue of whether Presuppositionalism is making an epistemological point or an ontological point. In his debate with R. C. Sproul, Greg

¹⁹ See his "A Classical Apologist's Response," in Steven b. Cowan, ed. *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 233. See also Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 78^a22-^b12 and Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle*, I, 23.

Bahnsen was adamant that Presuppositionalism is making an epistemological and not merely an ontological point. By this he meant that it would not be enough to argue that if God did not exist, we would not be able to know anything. Obviously, if God is the Creator, then, if the Creator did not exist, the creation would not exist. Making this ontological point is saying nothing that distinguishes Presuppositionalism from Classical Apologetics (which is what their debate was about). Instead, Bahnsen was claiming to be making an epistemological point, meaning that, in terms of knowing, the truths of Christianity have to be presupposed (epistemologically) before there can be any (consistent) intelligibility. Thus, to be a Presuppositionalist (if we allow Bahnsen to be the standard), it is not enough to merely make the ontological point about God's existence. He has to make the epistemological point.

In response, I believe that the Presuppositionalist (at least, Bahnsen) is confused. When he thinks he is making an epistemological point (to do his Presuppositionalism) he is actually making an ontological point *about the epistemological event*.²⁰ In other words, Bahnsen's position collapses back into ontology or metaphysics (which ends up making his method Classical). Repeatedly I see the Presuppositionalist make the ontological point while thinking that he is make an epistemological one. For example, consider this from Don Collett. "By way of contrast, the transcendental argument preserves the logically primitive and absolute character of God's existence by *starting* with the premise that God's existence is a necessary precondition for argument itself. In this way argument is made to depend upon God, rather than vice versa, since argument is possible if and only if God's existence is true from the outset of argument itself."²¹

²⁰ I would like to thank my brother Tom for helping me see Bahnsen's confusion here.

²¹ Don Collett, "Van Til and Transcendental Argument," in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2007), 261, emphasis in original. I cannot here explore to very much detail what I see as problem with this characterization. There is a difference between saying that x must be the case "from the outset of the argument" and saying that there

But, of course, to argue that God's existence is necessary for something (in this case, argument) is to make a cosmological argument. What Collet needed to say to be true to the Presuppositional criteria (and to avoid being a Classical apologist) was not merely that argument depends on God (what apologist would not say this?) but that the *assumption of God's existence* was necessary. But this is manifestly false. If I construct a simple Modus Ponens argument, it can be entirely sound without any of the premises being "God exists." To be sure, the Modus Ponens could not exist without God, but, again, this ontological point is not Presuppositionalism.²²

The Problem of "God's Words vs. Man's Words"

The juxtaposition of "God's words vs. man's words" is sometimes captured by the phrase 'autonomous human reason'. What Ham and others mean by the "God's words vs. man's word" template is that it is illicit to allow what they perceive to be merely human arguments or reasoning to affect our understanding and interpretation of Scripture. They sometimes argue that

must be a premise "x is the case" as a precondition to the argument. The former is merely to make the ontological point that Bahnsen is saying that Presuppositionalism *is not merely making*. To argue that God must exist before arguments can exist is just to make a cosmological argument as a Classical apologist would do. It is just to do Classical Apologetics. The latter is what would need to happen for the argument to be presuppositional in as much as the latter would be (epistemologically) presupposed as a condition of the argument itself. But, of course, the latter is not necessary. It does nothing to demonstrate that God exists.

²² In fairness to Collett, his article seeks to draw critical distinctions between the semantic relations in truth-functional arguments (like Modus Ponens) and the semantic relations in transcendental arguments (i.e., arguments by presupposition). As such, I believe he would not be without a response to me here. However, I believe his point still fails to deliver what he wants regarding the transcendental argument. It is ironic that his entire discussion of these distinctions utilizes these truth-functional relations. Now this is not necessarily a problem in my estimation in as much as I have long maintained that the formal schematizations sometimes understate reality. In saying this, I do not mean that *reality* is beyond our understanding—quite the contrary. Instead, I mean that our formal schematizations of reality fall short of what we know (by other means) to be true about the nature of reality. (Take the oddness of the Material Implication as an example.) Indeed, they sometimes fall shore even by their own standards, as Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem proved. To substitute one limited schematization (truth-functional) with another limited schematization (transcendental) does not help. To cast these aspersions upon these formal systems merely shows that I am a Classical Realist instead of a Rationalist; that I side with Aquinas rather than Leibniz. For an introductory treatment of the metaphysical grounding of logic see Peter Kreeft, *Socratic Logic: A Logic Text Using Socratic Method, Platonic Questions, and Aristotelian Principles*, 3rd ed. (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2008). For a more in-depth treatment see Henry Babcock Veatch, *Intentional Logic: A Logic Based on Philosophical Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), reprinted (New Haven: Archon Books, 1970).

it is wrong to use data from outside the Bible to help us understand the meaning of the Bible. However, they run into trouble when they frame certain issues as if it was a matter of accepting the authority of God's Word over man's word. To be sure, some who utilize this template are certainly on to something when they recognize that many unbelievers (and even perhaps some believers) resist acceding to the plain teaching of Scripture on certain matters. I do not at all dispute that it can sometimes boil down to a matter of whether one is going to accept what God has to say about a matter or accept what they or others say about a matter. What bothers me, however, is when this template is used illicitly to cast aspersions upon sources or data from outside the Bible that can be brought to bear on how we interpret certain verses of Scripture. I do not pretend that it is always an easy thing to interpret the Bible. But I do believe that some aspects of legitimate debates are being dismissed out of hand and are being mischaracterized as stemming from a resistance to wanting to be submissive to the authority of Scripture.

For example, Ham asserts "All versions of the gap theory impose outside ideas on Scripture and thus open the door for further compromise."²³ Ham seems to be saying that by virtue of a theory utilizing "outside ideas," that theory is a compromise. In a panel debate on the Trinity Broadcast Network with Old Earth creationist Hugh Ross Ham said "Shouldn't you take outside ideas and reinterpret [the Bible]? No, you can't do that." I would argue that we cannot *but* do this in some instances. In fact, I am confident that Ken Ham himself does so at times.

As I have argued above, there is no way the Christian can (or should) somehow filter or block "outside" ideas in our attempt to understand Scripture. The Bible is situated within a reality that is the creation of a transcendent God. It is only by a sound understanding of aspects of that reality that the reader would be able to properly interpret the Bible. This is what I argued above

²³ <<http://www.christiananswers.net/q-aig/aig-c003.html>> (accessed 08/10/12)

when I discussed principles of hermeneutics in general and biblical passages on the nature of God in particular. A sound understanding of reality (when pursued deeply enough) will lead us into the disciplines of the natural sciences and philosophy (and perhaps other disciplines as well). Yet Ham seems (albeit selectively) to reject the application of sound science and philosophy. For example, in Ham's discussion with Ross, after Ross had summarized his desire to use the findings of contemporary science to demonstrate to the unbeliever that God was the Creator and designer of the physical universe, Ham said,

My big issue is one of biblical authority. What does Scripture tell us? ... We have whole generations of kids in our churches today that are told "You can believe in the millions of years and evolution. You can reinterpret Scripture here. You don't have to take that as written. You can believe in a local flood. You don't have to believe in a global flood." And you know what's happening? It's unlocked the door to undermine biblical authority.²⁴

For Ham, for one to argue for an ancient Earth by "imposing" on Genesis a paradigm stemming from the contemporary scientific viewpoint is to reject the authority of the Bible. Clearly, Ham was rejecting Ross's use of scientific data to guide his interpretation of the biblical text. To be sure, Ham does not grant that such scientific data is true. But it seems to me that his response to Ross stems not from this. He is not rejecting Ross's scientific data because Ham opts for opposing scientific data. To be sure, sometimes Young Earth creationists do make scientific arguments. But it is telling that Ham did not do this here. Instead, he juxtaposed the (proffered) scientific data from Ross with "biblical authority." Thus, he is not merely responding that Ross has misinterpreted Scripture. He is characterizing Ross's take on Genesis as undermining biblical authority precisely because Ross (whether rightly or wrongly) appeals to "outside ideas."

²⁴ "Ken Ham vs. Hugh Ross," <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgueGotRqbM>> (accessed 09/14/12).

Again, I want to make sure that I am clear as to what exactly is my problem. I certainly grant that there can be faulty assumptions that are illicitly imposed on the reading of a given biblical passage or illicitly employed in putting forth scientific data. If Ham sought to show how it was that Ross's reading of the text was hermeneutically flawed or that his scientific data was faulty or misunderstood (because of faulty assumptions), this would constitute a fair response.²⁵ He does not do this. Ham seemingly takes it for granted that the Genesis text must mean what he takes it to mean.²⁶

The Problem of Inconsistency

Despite the fact that Ham rejects the use of scientific data to affect one's interpretation of the Scriptures, he undoubtedly uses science to understand other Scriptures. Joshua 10:12-13 is the account of the Sun standing still.

²⁵ I believe that this is what Ham thought he was doing by his example of how we cannot defer to the current scientific viewpoint that people cannot come back from the dead when we are trying to understand the passages that deal with Jesus' resurrection. But the parallel is illicit. The reason the resurrection example does not work is because there the issue is one of naturalism vs. supernaturalism (i.e., whether God exists and miracles are possible). I do not see how this is the same as the dispute between Young Earth creationists and Old Earth creationists, both of whom grant the possibility (and actuality) of miracles. If Ham wants to argue that Ross is indeed conceding to naturalism in his appeal to his science in this instance, I would listen with patience. I have not seen where he ever makes such an argument.

²⁶ By now, perhaps my young Earth readers are beginning to wonder how sincere I was when I earlier claimed to be a Young Earth creationist. It might be helpful for me to suggest how I would have tried to respond to Ross. First, not being a scientist, I would not try to refute any scientific data he would bring forth. I would defer to Ham and Lisle and others in this regard. Further, in what I have said so far, I do not mean to suggest that any interpretation of a given text is just as viable (even in principle) as any other. The key for me is this. If the Earth is as old as the Old Earth creationists say, then what principles of hermeneutics can one employ to render the Genesis narrative consistent with that age? I have yet to find an interpretation of Genesis that seems plausibly compatible with an old Earth. Being more comfortable with the hermeneutical issues than I am with the scientific ones, it is easier for me to opt for a young Earth and suspend my judgment about the science than it is to opt for an old Earth and suspend my judgment about the hermeneutics. My worry is that, whatever are the hermeneutical principles that one might adopt that renders Genesis compatible with the current scientific viewpoint on the age of the Earth, what other interpretive conclusions might these hermeneutical principles necessitate? To be sure, the issue of interpretation can be complicated, and Christians who have equally high regard for the inerrancy and authority of the Bible can differ on some things. For a discussion of hermeneutics, particularly in the context of biblical inerrancy see Earl D. Radmacher, and Robert D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy & the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books/ICBI, 1984).

Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel: 'Sun, stand still over Gibeon; And Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.' So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the people had revenge upon their enemies.

What is interesting about this passage is how it was used in the sixteenth century against the new science from Copernicus that was promulgated by Galileo. No doubt some in that day considered the thinking of Copernicus and Galileo as "outside ideas" that were being used to "reinterpret the Bible"—things which Ham says you cannot do. Virtually all the church leaders (together with the university scientists) held to the Aristotelian/Ptolemaic system that maintained that the Sun moved and that the Earth stood still. The theologians appealed to the straightforward reading of this text in Joshua to prove that the Bible taught exactly this. As they saw it, it would not be possible for the Sun to be commanded to stand still if it was not moving in the first place. Thus, the Copernican system (which Galileo was defending) must be false.²⁷

The parallels to the current controversy over Genesis should be obvious. I suspect that not even Ken Ham would defend the old Aristotelian/Ptolemaic system. Yet, the only reason to conclude that the Joshua passage does not mean what it clearly seems to say is because of what we believe we know from contemporary astronomy. Today the standard interpretation of this passage is that the text is employing phenomenological (or observational) language. This means that the description of the event was from the perspective of the observer. To someone on Earth, it indeed looked like the Sun was moving and that it was made to stand still. We still use such phenomenal language today when we talk about sunrise and sunset. My point here is that, regardless of whether Hugh Ross's interpretation of the Genesis narrative is correct, he is doing

²⁷ For an excellent treatment of the exegetical aspects of this Galileo affair see Richard J. Blackwell, *Galileo, Bellarmine, and the Bible* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991). What is interesting is that, in his "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina," Galileo shows how a straightforward reading of the Joshua passage is also incompatible with the Ptolemaic system. See Stillman Drake, trans. and ed. *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo* (New York: Random House, Anchor Books, 1957).

in principle exactly what Ken Ham (I suspect) would do with the Joshua passage. There can be no doubt that there is nothing wrong (as a matter of principle) with using the data of science to guide us in scriptural interpretation. What goes for the data of science goes also for the data of sound philosophy.

My accusation of inconsistency makes Jason Lisle and Tim Chaffey's comments all the more telling. On one hand they say "However, when someone 'reinterprets' the clear meaning of the words to accommodate outside notions, it simply means he does not believe the words."²⁸ The context is a discussion about the age of the Earth. For them, Genesis clearly teaches a young Earth. Therefore, (they argue) to use the "ideas of men"²⁹ when they conflict with the Word of God is to "place more faith in men than in God."³⁰ Yet compare this sentiment with this comment they make. "Supporters often used a hyper-literal reading of Joshua 10:12-13 to buttress their position [of geocentrism]. However, it is *quite obvious* that Joshua was simply using observational language."³¹ The problem is that it absolutely was not "quite obvious" at the time. It is only "quite obvious" to us today because we have come to believe through astronomy and mathematics (i.e., "outside ideas" or the "ideas of men") that, indeed, the Earth does rotate on its axis and moves relative to the Sun's standing still. Notice then, that here Chaffey and Lisle are guilty of the same act of "not believing the words" that they accuse the Old Earth creationist of committing. They are doing with Joshua 10 what the Old Earth creationists are doing (in principle) with Genesis. For the Old Earth creationist, it is "quite obvious" that the Young Earth

²⁸ Chaffey and Lisle, *Old Earth*, 110-111.

²⁹ Chaffey and Lisle, *Old Earth*, 110.

³⁰ Chaffey and Lisle, *Old Earth*, 110.

³¹ Chaffey and Lisle, *Old Earth*, 62, emphasis added.

creationist is being "hyper-literal" in their reading of Genesis. What is more, Hugh Ross comes to his position because he believes (whether rightly or wrongly) that the science shows (i.e., he believes because of "outside ideas") that taking Genesis as the Young Earth creationist does is taking Genesis in a hyper-literal way. Thus, he is doing, in principle, exactly what Chaffey and Lisle are doing with Joshua 10.

Philosophy is Not Elitist

In a panel discussion on this topic, Oliphint took exception to my first level of apologetics as being elitist in as much many Christians who might wish to do apologetics are not experts in philosophy. Thus, in Oliphint's estimation, such a move or requirement would put the task of apologetics out of the reach of many Christians.

I should like to say two things in response. First, Oliphint has misunderstood what I meant by saying that philosophy is essential. I do not mean that one must be a philosopher to do apologetics. Without a doubt, one does not have to study philosophy to understand many things about reality. An illustration might help. A child can know what a flower is. She can know that a flower is not a human when her mother asks her to go pick a flower and bring it to mommy. However, to delve deeper into the physical nature of a flower, one would need to understand botany. To delve deeper still, one would need to understand chemistry (to understand, e.g., photosynthesis). And to delve deeper still, one would need to understand physics.

But suppose we wanted to account for a number of other aspects of the flower and the human. What makes a flower a flower and a human a human (or what it is in virtue of which all flowers are flowers and all humans are human) are their respective natures or essences.³² This

³² One important application of the issue of natures or essences or universals is in the pro-life/abortion debate. We understand that the fertilized egg in the womb *is* a human being, not by virtue of the particular functions it might possess (since it has virtually no functions that one might associate with being human) but because it possesses the nature or essence of humanness (what the theologians call a soul). As long as one defines its

takes one into metaphysics. We can know that one is a flower and the other is a human by our senses. This takes one into epistemology. We value the human over the flower because of the different kinds of things they are. This takes one into ethics. We know that both the flower and the human cannot account for their own existence but are created by God. This takes one into philosophy of religion.

My point here is that, while there may be things regarding apologetics for which one might need technical training, it does not follow that everything in apologetics needs such training. I only meant that there were truths that even a child can know, an *in-depth analysis of which* is doing philosophy.

Surely this is manifest. If, in the course of doing apologetics, a Christian is challenged by (for example) a *Tractatus* era Wittgensteinian who challenges the Christian's use of language to speak of transcendent things, he would not be able to make any headway in defending the faith (with this specific challenge) without some expertise in philosophy. All that this means is that, to respond to any challenge to a deep enough level, a Christian will either need to deal with the

humanness exclusively in terms of the possession of certain functions like self-awareness, rationality, a sense of the future, or others, he cannot understand why killing the fetus is murder.

Other philosophical doctrines arise as one seeks to delve more deeply into the metaphysical aspects of objects. While the child could tell whether the object in front of her is a flower or a human (e.g, mommy), to understand what the difference is between the essence and the existence of the flower or human any why that matters (the essence/existence distinction), how it is that the flower or human remains numerically the same flower or human throughout all the changes that happen to them during their lifetimes (hylomorphic or form/matter composition), and relationships of the substance, accidents, and properties of the flower or human, one would need to study the discipline of philosophy.

What is more, even the judgment of whether a given question is a question for the natural sciences, for theology, for philosophy, or for some other discipline is itself a philosophical question. For a succinct treatment of some of the philosophical aspects of Thomism and its bearing particularly on the question of the existence and attributes of God see Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2008) and his *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneword, 2010). To assuage certain concerns an evangelical might have with embracing the thought of Thomas Aquinas see Norman L. Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991). To assuage certain concerns any Reformed evangelical might have with embracing the thought of Thomas Aquinas see Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, & Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views of the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: Christian University Press, 1985). For an extended bibliography on Thomistic thought see my bibliography at <<http://www.richardghowe.com/BibThomistic.html>>.

issue at the appropriate level of expertise or lateral the apologetic response to an expert who can. This is not elitist.

Second, surely Oliphint, when sharing the gospel, would defend the use of deeply rigorous theology (for example in dealing with soteriological issues) if the occasion warranted. Yet, just as surely he would recognize that there would be certain Christians who would be unable to delve into these deeper theological matters. Does this mean that it would be wrong to insist that, when the occasion warrants, we should adopt this as a tenet of evangelism? Thus, if it is ever legitimate to go into deeper theology when doing evangelism (even though this might put the task out of the reach of some Christians who do not understand such deep theology) then, by parallel, it is legitimate to go into philosophy when doing apologetics (even though this might put the apologetic task out of the reach of some Christians who do not do such philosophy). This is not elitist.

Conclusion

It is one thing to be inconsistent with selectively applying "outside ideas" to the Bible to help us understand what it means while insisting that Christians should not do that and to do so is to reject the authority of God's word. Perhaps what is worse is that, by telling Christians that doing so is an abrogation of the authority of Scripture, he is disabusing them of some of the most powerful apologetic tools they have to not only defend the faith against the critics, but also to strengthen the faith of those who already believe. In addition, such tools like sound philosophy are the very things needed in the evangelical church today to fend off the encroachment of aberrant and heretical theology, especially about the nature of God.

I have tried to summarize as directly as I can my concerns regarding how Young Earth Creationism is increasingly embracing Presuppositionalism. My concerns arise out of a commitment to the conclusions of Young Earth Creationism and a passionate celebration of the

method of Classical Apologetics. Proverbs 27: 6 tells us "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." I suspect that some of my young Earth readers will take my comments as harsh. I certainly do not mean them so. Despite the push-back I have received (primarily through comments on my blog) I know that I am not alone within the Young Earth community in my concerns. I have addressed this issue because I believe that it is more than just academic. In repudiating the Classical method of apologetics, due partially to an unwarranted desire to avoid appealing to truths from reality as God has created it, certain Young Earth Presuppositionalists are robbing themselves of a very powerful tool to be used of God in our in carrying out the commands of the Lord to defend (1 Pet. 3:15) and earnestly contend for (Jude 3) the Christian faith.

But neither did I intend to be harsh to the greater Presuppositionalism camp. I have no doubt as to their integrity in their endeavors and their sincere desire not only to defend the faith, but to do so in a manner that is worthy of the Lord and which honors His character and attributes. I hope that my analysis is useful is serving as a corrective to certain aspects of their methodology. Despite our deeply held differences, I know we can celebrate each other as part of a larger Christian family that recognizes the grace of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It for God's glory that I engage in this discussion.