

The Christian Worldview
and Apologetics

Chris Schlect

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C250 The Christian Worldview and Apologetics

Logos School Materials
110 Baker Street, Moscow, Idaho 83843
208-883-3199
www.logosschool.com

Course Syllabus

Apologetics and the Christian Worldview

Chris Schlect, Instructor

“Come, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.”

Isaiah 1:18

Contents

Foreword	1
Part One: Introduction to Christian Thought	5
I. The Structure of Human Thought	6
II. Distinctives of the Christian Worldview	17
III. Justification of the Christian Worldview	23
Part Two: An Outline of the Thought of Cornelius Van Til	29
Preface	31
I. Apologetics Defined and Explained	32
II. The Biblical View of Reality (Metaphysics)	34
III. The Biblical View of Knowledge (Epistemology).....	35
IV. The Biblical View of Ethics.....	43
V. Implications for Natural Science.....	43
VI. Implications for Laws of Thought	46
VII. The Christian Approach to Non-Christian Thought.....	47
VIII. Exposing the Folly of Unbelief.....	50
Part Three: <i>Why I Believe in God</i> by Cornelius Van Til	57
Part Four: Apologetical Debates	81
Geisler-Till Debate	83
Frame-Martin Debate.....	105
Appendices	137
Appendix A: Can Empiricism Justify Itself?.....	139
Appendix B: Challenge to Atheists on the Internet.....	145
Appendix C: Exposition of Romans 7:7	155
Appendix D: Some Objections to Christianity.....	157
Appendix E: Letter on Doctrinal Intolerance	159

A Note About This Manuscript

For the past eight years I have taught a course titled *Apologetics* to high school seniors at Logos School, a private Christian School in Moscow, Idaho. The school's administration has allowed me the freedom to develop the course curriculum myself. The character of the course has developed well beyond the narrow confines of "Apologetics" as the subject is traditionally understood. It has become a study in Christian worldview thinking, a course in Theology as the "mistress-science," to use Dorothy Sayers's expression: a study of God and the Scriptures as the Grand Unifier of all knowledge, the capstone of a distinctively Christian curriculum.

The value of this course to students, and to the Logos program, has been evidenced in delightfully surprising ways, for which I am very thankful. This success, coupled with the rising nationwide interest in Logos School's curriculum, has led to many requests for course materials. From discussions with teachers around the country, and from my own searching, I have grown disappointed in the absence of good teaching materials on the Christian worldview. A glaring need exists for the publication of a student text and a special teachers' edition. The demands of my teaching responsibilities have kept me from such an undertaking, though I would eagerly take on such a project if time would allow. Until then, I continue to hold my own students in the highest priority. My affection for the classroom, and for my students who inhabit it, will never allow me to be lured away by publishing opportunities.

I am grateful for the interest many have shown in my *Apologetics* course. Lord willing, this manuscript will one day be expanded into a proper textbook. It began as a two-page class handout. I have modified and expanded it numerous times since then. In its present state it was issued to my students for the 1998-99 school year. It includes additions and corrections to the 1995 edition.

At Westminster Seminary, Cornelius Van Til's students grew accustomed to the seven "unpublished syllabi" he prepared for his *Apologetics* courses. I suppose that I have accidentally followed Van Til in this respect, for the present work is but a course syllabus intended for use by my students at Logos School, and it isn't refined enough for me to call it "published." Where I follow Van Til in other respects I do so deliberately, for he is worth following. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Van Til's best interpreters, the late Dr. Greg Bahnsen and Dr. John Frame. For whatever success I've had in interpreting Van Til to high schoolers, credit goes to them for helping me understand Van Til.

I do not advertise this syllabus, and I print it in very short runs to meet demand. Outside Logos School, it is distributed at education and apologetics conferences where I speak, and sent out to those who ask for it. I seek to improve it every summer, and one day, Lord willing, it will become a "published" text without any typographical gaffes. For now, it is adequate for my use at Logos School. I pray that it will be helpful to you.

Moscow, 1998

Foreword

I became aware of the necessity for sound, biblical thinking in each of the academic disciplines while I was in college. At that time I had become convinced from Scripture that up to that point in my academic career I had been disobedient to the greatest commandment: to love God with all of my heart, soul, and *mind*. I had no idea what a distinctively Christian outlook on mathematics or history would be like, but I knew that as a student I was called to develop such an outlook.

I had graduated from Timberline High School near the top of my class in 1986. My graduation ceremony capped twelve years of instruction in public schools. I had succeeded in my studies, I thought, having earned a strong G.P.A. and an academic scholarship. Over the previous twelve years I had been taught by about thirty different teachers. I learned more from some of them than I did from others, I liked some more than others. But what all of my teachers shared was a commitment to public school education, and each of them did well to teach within the bounds of public school guidelines. For my teachers, staying within the guidelines meant, among other things, that no particular theological stance would be advocated in the classroom. In fact, there were almost no references to God at all. But there were certainly references to other things. I learned trigonometry and differential Calculus in math classes. I learned about the Renaissance and the Civil War in history classes, and of the anatomy of a frog in Biology class. Never in any of these classes was there a reference to Jesus Christ. Nor did I expect there to be such a reference, for at the time it would have seemed out of place to discuss Him, for religion had nothing to do with these subjects. Or so I thought.

In not mentioning God, my public school teachers preached a thundering sermon every day. By implication, they taught that God is not relevant to most areas of human endeavor. The most destructive things I was taught in public school were not the outright falsehoods that were presented (e.g., I descended from apes, the Puritans were nasty people, etc.). The most destructive things I was taught were, by far, subtle lies about the character of God. Daily this lesson was reinforced to me: two and two are four, the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, and frogs breathe in water, *regardless of whether or not Jesus Christ is Lord*. I had been a theist since childhood, and I never relinquished this belief. But with every school lesson, in every class period, I was taught to think like an atheist. And I didn't even know that I was being indoctrinated.

The results of such constant exposure to unbiblical, "God-neutral" thinking in my own mind should not have been surprising at all. Jesus taught, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). Having been trained for twelve years in the public schools, schools in which *as a matter of principle* Christ is not exalted as Lord over all things, it is only natural that I had no idea of the lordship of Christ. To me, Christ's relevance had become restricted to very narrow confines of morality and worship—churchy stuff—

and yet I still thought that I was a good Christian. I was not; I was a student who had been perfectly trained to become like his teacher.

I went on to Washington State University, another public school, from which I eventually took a degree in History. In spite of what was presented in the classroom, it was there where I realized that my Christianity had been intellectually compromised. At that time some good men taught me to study the Scriptures seriously, and I read books written by men who devoted their minds to the service of God. I was most profoundly impacted by Puritans and by Cornelius Van Til. These influences led me to find that, in order to be faithful to God in my studies, I had to devote about twice the effort to each class than did most other students. Since I did not want to become like my professors, I sought instruction from these other sources. This meant spending a good deal of time at extracurricular studies. It was a lot of work, but it was blessed work.

I now teach in a Christian school where Christ is acknowledged as Lord in every area of study. In that capacity I have seen a tremendous need for both teachers and students to beware of slipping into unbiblical patterns of thought, even in Christian schools. Scripture clearly states how this is to be done—by “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). This includes every mathematical thought, every historical thought, every artistic thought, etc. This syllabus offers an introduction to this kind of thinking.

When asked to identify the greatest commandment in the law, our Lord replied, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matt. 22:37-8). If Jesus understood this to be the greatest commandment, then we most certainly ought to heed it.

Discerning the meaning of this command is not difficult. It takes little analysis or exposition to see what it requires of us: that all our faculties are to be committed to the love of our God. But carrying out this command is not nearly as simple as understanding it. How are we to love God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds as we take out the trash? When we order a soda at a fast-food restaurant? When we put on our shoes in the morning? These are important questions to ask.

Students must obey the greatest commandment in every area of academic pursuit: mathematics, history, science, literature, etc. What does it mean to think like a Christian and act like a Christian while solving a math problem? Do unbelievers solve math problems in an unChristian manner that Christians must avoid? A student’s failure to adequately address questions like these is a failure to love God with *all* of his mind.

This is a text for students who desire to obey the greatest commandment *as students*. It is limited in that it offers no discussion of shoes or soda drinking. What it does present is an introduction to that which is central to a student’s calling: his studies. It offers insights into what it is to think like a Christian and to act like a Christian in academics.

This is also a text for parents. It is they who must answer to God for their child’s education. They are responsible for teaching their children to think the way the Lord has commanded them to think. This is evident in the greatest commandment itself. What Christ identified as the greatest commandment is found in Deuteronomy 6:5. But the full command includes more than the

Part One

Introduction to Christian Thought

I. The Structure of Human Thought

The Interconnectedness of Beliefs

Imagine that you have been working for several years under a supervisor who treated you and your fellow workers very well; thus he is respected and well-liked by all. He has a strong work ethic, and by his leadership in word and example, your work environment has been the most productive and pleasant you have ever known. Now suppose that a police detective comes to your door one evening to question you about your supervisor. You find that he has just murdered one of your fellow workers in an attempt to cover up the drug smuggling operation that he and two accomplices have been operating out of the office. Though you generally regard police officers as trustworthy, your initial reaction is disbelief. But as you hear him explain you see it all to be true. He asks you detailed questions about working in the office, and you realize that many things that went on day after day did relate to drug smuggling, though you were never aware of it.

In this situation you would experience a significant adjustment to what you believe about your supervisor and about life in your office. In fact, given your recently-acquired information, you will probably view a great number of things in a different light. You will change what you had believed for years about your supervisor, many aspects of your office routine, and many people with whom you have worked.

The human mind is incredibly powerful, cataloguing what it remembers while constantly adding new information to the old. It keeps track of what we believe, even as new beliefs are added. Oftentimes when we embrace a new belief, other beliefs must be adjusted or even discarded to accommodate it. The scenario described above shows that beliefs do not stand alone; they come in sets. Each belief is connected to others, and adjusting one belief inevitably leads to adjustments in others. This adjustment occurs when we become aware that two (or more) of our beliefs are inconsistent with each other. We tend to tinker with one (or more) of the contrary beliefs to resolve the inconsistency. Sometimes this means that we will completely “change our mind” about a certain opinion. But what determines *how* these adjustments are made?

Priority of Beliefs

Suppose one of your beliefs is challenged. You believe, for example, that the 24-hour convenience store down on the corner is open. But a friend tells you that he just passed the store

and saw that it is closed for remodeling. Having no reason to doubt your friend's testimony, you relinquish your belief that the store is open.

Notice that it didn't take much for you to give up your conviction that the store on the corner was open. A passing remark by a friend is all that was needed for you to give up what you had believed to be true. Because you were so willing to give up this belief, we may call it a *weakly held belief*.

You embrace other beliefs that you would not so willingly relinquish. If you have studied British history, you surely believe that Queen Elizabeth I was the daughter of King Henry VIII. It would take much more than a friend's say-so for you to relinquish this belief, for all of the sources with which you are familiar clearly state that this is the case. Now suppose your friend challenges this belief, suggesting that Elizabeth was in fact not in the Tudor royal line at all. Before you will believe him you would undoubtedly require him to produce a great deal of historical evidence.

We see that you hold to this belief about the British monarchs much more strongly than you held to the previous one about the store being open. You relinquish this belief reluctantly, and only after strong evidence has compelled you to do so. This kind of belief we might call a *firmly held belief*. Your belief about the Tudor family line is stronger than your belief about the corner store's business hours.

There are other beliefs to which you hold even more strongly. Imagine now that your friend asserts that Queen Elizabeth I had no biological father at all! This would be impossible, you would say, and you would dismiss at the outset any of the historical evidence he might try to produce. You know as a biological fact that everyone has a natural father, an idea to which you hold so strongly that no amount of historical data about Elizabeth will convince you that she had no father. Why are you unwilling to subject your belief to your friend's historical test? Are you closed-minded on this matter?

Your belief that everyone has an earthly father is one to which you hold very firmly—even more so than the belief that Elizabeth I was Henry VIII's daughter. One of these beliefs you are willing to subject to a careful historical test, and the other you are not. Why is this? Perhaps one reason is that giving up your belief that everyone has an earthly father would force you to make numerous, radical adjustments to other things you believe. These adjustments would be far more significant than those you would make after denying that Elizabeth was Henry's daughter.

Your belief that everyone has a biological father is one that you carry with you when you consider most historical questions. You also carry it with you when you consider most scientific questions, and other sorts of questions as well. Notice that you will not test this belief historically; rather, it is a belief that conditions how historical data is tested. Any data you see which testifies that Elizabeth I had no biological father would be automatically discredited because of your commitment to a certain belief about human reproduction. In this example, your belief that every human has a biological father functions as a *presupposition*. A presupposition is a belief that places conditions or limitations upon other, less essential beliefs. When making an assumption before approaching an investigation that limits the possible outcomes of the investigation, that assumption is a *presupposition*—its truth is supposed prior to engaging in the investigation at hand.

When lawyers on both sides of a murder case argue over whether or not the defendant is guilty, they both presuppose the authority of laws against murder. When botanists in a laboratory debate a question about the cellular structure of a particular plant cell, they both presuppose that plant cells exist and that the scientific method informs us about plant cells.

Presuppositions are rather powerful because they condition how we approach or think about certain topics. Imagine a deluded person who has become convinced that he is dead. Trying to help him overcome his delusion, a friend introduces him to a number of medical writings. The writings teach that a dead person has no heartbeat, thus he has no blood pressure, and consequently, he will not bleed when cut. After some study the deluded person is convinced that dead people do not bleed. Hoping to finally persuade him that he is not dead, his well-meaning friend lightly nicks the “dead” man’s finger and blood flows from the cut. The deluded man looks at his bleeding finger and exclaims, “Dead men bleed after all!” Thus the power of presuppositions. This man’s belief in his own deadness contradicted his belief that dead men don’t bleed. One of the beliefs had to go. He chose to relinquish his belief that dead men don’t bleed, revealing that the belief in his own deadness held more prominent status in his mind.

All investigations are conditioned by certain presuppositions. We may note an historical example of this in the Copernican Revolution. For centuries, medieval astronomers believed that all planets revolved around the earth, following the teaching of the ancient astronomer Claudius Ptolemy. As they observed the movements of heavenly bodies, they interpreted them according to their earth-centered conception (called the geocentric theory). They plotted planetary movements on vastly complex diagrams, depicting earth at the center. But later, scientists like Copernicus, and especially Kepler and Galileo, challenged Ptolemy’s geocentric presupposition. They became convinced that the sun, not the earth, was at the center of our system of planets (called the heliocentric theory). They in turn interpreted astronomical data according to their heliocentric presuppositions. At a time during the Renaissance, there were both geocentrists and heliocentrists in the scientific community, and both had access to the very same astronomical data. Though they could in many cases agree with one another on the raw data that was available to them, their differing presuppositions led them to very different conclusions about how that data should be interpreted.

Every mind is guided by its presuppositions. For example, Christians presuppose the truth of Scripture—a presupposition that conditions how Christians view certain natural phenomena. Recall the earlier example in which we dismissed any historical testimony suggesting that Elizabeth I had no biological father. Along with most unbelievers, Christians presuppose that everyone has a biological father, thus both Christians and non-Christians would reject such a claim about Elizabeth I. But what about Jesus Christ? Did *He* have a biological father? If we say no, and affirm Christ’s virgin birth, the non-Christian will charge us with inconsistency. But his charge fails to take into account the priority of our belief in Scripture. While Christians presuppose biological order (as evidenced in the Christian response to the claim about the Queen), that presupposition is not as basic as the presupposition of scriptural authority. Because the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, Christians believe it no matter what they believe about biology. A consistent

Christian will subject scientific assertions to the test of Scripture, while many non-Christians subject Scripture to the test of science. Again, here we see the power of presuppositions.

It takes little reflection to realize that there is indeed a priority to our beliefs. We hold to some things with far greater tenacity than we do others. A serious challenge to one of our beliefs may be rather unimportant, while a serious challenge to another may subvert our entire outlook on life. Oftentimes disagreements between two parties may not be brought about merely by conflicting facts or figures; many disagreements are rooted in conflicting priorities in belief or a clash in presuppositions.

Review and Analysis:

1. Define: weakly held belief, firmly held belief, presupposition.
2. Other than the examples given in this section, list some disagreements--scientific, political, religious, or otherwise—that flow not from disputes about data, but rather from conflicting presuppositions.
3. A sub-heading in this chapter is “Priority of Beliefs.” It should be noted that the term “priority” has numerous different connotations. One theologian observes that this term “can indicate a pedagogical order of topics, an emphasis, a method of study, a conviction about prominence or importance, a relation of necessary or sufficient conditionality, or a criterion of truth.”¹ In which of these senses is the term “priority” used here? Explain your answer.

Worldviews

In our examination of the priority of beliefs, we have seen that some of our beliefs serve as prerequisites to others. For example, a scientist’s belief in the uniformity of nature is prerequisite to his belief in Newton’s second law of motion. In turn, his belief in Newton’s second law is prerequisite to his belief in jet propulsion.

At this point we ought to ask how far back this analysis can go. If belief B is antecedent to and provides the basis for belief A, then is there a belief C that is similarly antecedent to B? If so, is there a belief D that supports belief C? Is there an E back of D? Does this ever stop?

It does stop somewhere. We all have a few core beliefs that form the foundation for our entire system of thought. Such core beliefs are our most fundamental presuppositions. We do not doubt or

¹John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 224.

question our most fundamental presuppositions; rather, they form the basis for all of our doubting and questioning.

What are our most fundamental presuppositions? In order to identify them, it is helpful to consider three areas: our view of the contents and structure of reality, our view of the nature and limits of human knowledge and our view of moral claims and their justification. These are regarded as the three great arenas of philosophy. They are called, respectively, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

One's metaphysical presupposition, or fundamental view of reality, establishes and controls how he views reality. For example, a materialist (one who believes that reality is comprised of nothing but matter and its physical properties) will deny the existence of angels, souls, and the Christian God, for these entities are not material. If a mystic claims to have had some sort of spiritual experience, a materialist might believe that the experience was nothing more than a hallucination created in the chemical activity of his brain. In a similar way, a solipsist (one who believes that reality is confined to one's own mind) will deny the existence of other people if he is consistent with his metaphysical presupposition. The Hindu metaphysic is unusual to many Westerners. Hindus hold that reality is ultimately one; hence they believe that distinctions are not real, but merely illusions. As a result, Hindus have come to reject Western logic because of its dependence upon key distinctions such as true and false, valid and invalid, universal and particular, etc. The implications of the Hindu metaphysic for logic will be discussed in a later section. At this point we need simply to observe that metaphysical presuppositions guide our notions of what is real and what isn't.

As with metaphysics, one's epistemology has a determining effect upon what will be and what will not be considered as knowledge. What can be known? How is knowledge to be attained? When someone claims to know something, how can such a claim be defended? What are the limits of our knowledge? These are important epistemological questions. Many modern empiricists (those who believe that knowledge is fundamentally gained through the senses) disaffirm the existence of God because knowledge claims about God cannot be tested by the senses. These empiricists reject knowledge claims about spiritual entities because they believe such claims to be untestable. They assert that God, if He exists, cannot be known, because entities beyond the reach of our senses are unknowable.

Ethics is the third main branch of philosophy. The following questions relate to Ethics: What is good? What is right? What is just? By what method are such questions to be approached? How are moral claims justified? Many ethical theories have been articulated through the centuries. For example, utilitarians teach that an act is ethical if it brings about the most happiness in a given situation. Human happiness is their fundamental ethical standard; by this standard they examine all acts. Positivism is another school of ethics. Positivists hold that no ethical claims are objectively verifiable, but are rather nothing more than the opinions of the one making the claim. Positivists assert that claims like "murder is wrong" are merely self-reports; they mean the same as "I don't like murder."

Having defined metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, it is important to see how fundamental they are to philosophy. Everyone's philosophy touches each of these three areas, and each area impacts the other. Consider the philosophy of a selfish person. Suppose his ethical outlook is, "whatever behavior feels good to me is right." He will likely hold to a corresponding metaphysic: "whatever seems true to me is real." If he is consistent, his epistemology will undoubtedly concur with his ethic and metaphysic: "whatever conclusion derived from my senses and my reasoning faculties is known as certain." This is not a very sophisticated worldview. In fact, the one who embraces such a worldview is probably unfamiliar with the categories of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. But like all of us, he has a philosophy of life that touches these three areas whether he knows it or not.

This example also displays how metaphysics, epistemology and ethics affect the other. Notice that self-centeredness characterizes each of the three areas. Only a wildly inconsistent philosophy would have, say, a God-centered metaphysic and a man-centered ethic (i.e., Whatever God has created and providentially sustains as real is truly real, and whatever I arbitrarily stipulate to be right and good is truly right and good, regardless of what God says). Similarly, a materialist would be inconsistent to his metaphysic if he held to an epistemological view that true knowledge comes through channeling ancient spirits.

Presuppositions do not stand alone, they come in groups. In one's belief system, each presupposition is regulated by the others. A systematic network of metaphysical, epistemological and ethical presuppositions is called a *worldview*. Not every worldview is consistent with itself—that is, not all of one's presuppositions are consistent with one another. But each worldview naturally attempts to be internally consistent.

Exercises:

1. Define: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and worldview.
2. If one held to a materialistic metaphysic, what do you suppose his epistemology and ethic would be?
3. For further study: What was the metaphysic of Thales? of Plato? What is the metaphysic of Hinduism? What was the epistemology of David Hume? of Immanuel Kant? What was the ethic of Epicurus? of John Stuart Mill?

Circularity

The most basic presuppositions in a worldview are that worldview's ultimate standards. But there are many disagreements over ultimate standards. When ultimate standards are challenged, how are they defended? If I give a reason in defense of my standard, then that reason would be *more* ultimate than the standard; thus the standard wouldn't really be an ultimate standard. But if I appeal to the standard itself, a challenger could simply dismiss my appeal because he doesn't submit to my standard.

An example will demonstrate the point well. The most basic epistemological presupposition of an empiricist is that knowledge is ultimately gained by the senses. Suppose a skeptic challenges the empiricist's claim. If the empiricist stands firm under the challenge, he will argue from his senses to establish the point that knowledge is gained by the senses. This only frustrates the skeptic, for reasons that will soon become apparent. Here is their conversation.

Empiricist: Knowledge is ultimately gained by our sensory faculties: taste, touch, sight, hearing and smell.

Skeptic: How can you be so confident that this is the case?

Empiricist: Scientists make observations in their laboratories, you and I make observations in our everyday lives, and so on. In fact, we are having this conversation only because you and I perceive one another with our senses.

Skeptic: But we have all known our senses to have perceived some things incorrectly. How do you know that you aren't misperceiving something right now? And if that is the case, why do you so confidently say that knowledge is ultimately gained through the senses?

Empiricist: If I perceive something, and later discover my perception to have been wrong, that later discovery would itself have been a discovery of the senses, would it not? So we see that the only test to which the senses submit is a test of themselves. Thus the senses are ultimate in acquiring knowledge.

Skeptic: You are reasoning in a circle, arguing *from* empiricism *to* empiricism. You see, the only support you have offered in defense of empiricism is empirical evidence. But such an argument would be compelling only to another empiricist. I am not an empiricist, so I do not share your faith in empirical evidence. Therefore I am not at all swayed by your argument.

Empiricist: As a skeptic, I know that you doubt the reliability of sense perceptions. You even said that senses can be mistaken; they can convince us that mirages are real. I grant this point. But how does one come to know that which he had once thought to be real was just a mirage? He comes to know this by his senses!

Skeptic: You don't understand my position because you are still reasoning in a circle. Perhaps an example will help explain. Suppose I make two sensory observations, and it turns out that the second observation reveals that the first one was wrong. Isn't it possible that my second observation was mistaken, revealing that the first observation was

correct after all? Do I need to make a third observation to confirm the second? If so, that third observation would need confirmation as well. This process never ends, and we never arrive at sure knowledge.

Empiricist: You seem to be saying that all tests for proof are unreliable. That would mean that we can't really know anything!

Skeptic: No, I haven't argued that *all* tests for proof are unreliable (at least not yet). So far I have just been arguing against *empirical* proofs.

Empiricist: But an argument against empirical proofs is ultimately an argument against all proofs.

Skeptic: Oh really? *Prove it.*

Empiricist: If I try to prove my last assertion empirically, you would accuse me of circular reasoning again. You wouldn't be convinced. But if I used a different sort of proof, then I would thereby abandon empiricism. I'll have to get back to you . . .

Notice that the empiricist was incapable appealing beyond his ultimate presupposition. If he could go beyond it, then his presupposition wouldn't be *ultimate*. Concerning ultimate presuppositions, therefore, circular reasoning cannot be avoided. This analysis offers a key to identifying ultimate presuppositions. An ultimate presupposition is a belief that is not justified by a prior or more basic belief. If it is justified at all, it is justified by itself in a circular manner.

Transcendentals

A transcendental is a basic and inescapable premise that is prerequisite to the coherence of all human experience. There are many transcendentals, such as, *nature is uniform, language has objective meaning, and laws of logic exist.*

We will look closely at the third transcendental listed above, *laws of logic exist*, in order illustrate the peculiar nature of transcendentals. Most reasonable people believe that there exist some laws or standards of logic (e.g., the law of non-contradiction: two contradictory claims cannot both be true, and the law of identity: a thing is itself and not something else). A brief analysis will reveal the *transcendental* character of the laws of logic. We will see that the laws of logic are prerequisite to making sense of human thought and experience. This transcendental character of logical laws becomes evident in an attempt to prove their existence. Any such proof would have to assume the existence of the very laws that are in question. Consider this attempt at a proof of the laws of logic.

Premise 1: Claims can be proven or disproven if and only if there are laws of logic.

Premise 2: Claims can be proven or disproven.

Conclusion: Therefore, there are laws of logic.

Logic students will quickly see that the above argument is valid. This means that *if* the premises are true then the conclusion *must* be true as well. More simply put, in a valid argument, the conclusion

follows from the premises (whether or not the premises are true). Given that our example is valid in form, the remaining step would in testing the argument's strength would be to determine whether its premises are true. But for this particular argument, do we really need to go on to examine the premises? In deciding whether the argument is valid, didn't we make use of logical laws? We couldn't possibly prove the existence of logical laws without using logic in the makeup of the proof. The existence of the laws of logic were presupposed in the formation of the argument.

Now imagine someone who did not believe that logical laws existed. How would he argue his point? Say he were a radical relativist (one who denies the existence of universals and absolutes). He might argue this way:

Premise 1: Universal laws do not exist.

Premise 2: Logical laws are universal laws.

Conclusion: Therefore, logical laws do not exist.

Like the earlier argument, this argument is valid: *if* the premises are true then the conclusion *must* also be true. But, as we noted with the previous argument, a *logical* analysis is necessary to see that this argument is valid. In other words, the argument is compelling only if logical laws exist. If there were no logical laws, then the argument above would neither be compelling nor unconvincing; it would be a pure blank. But if the relativist wants to justify his conclusion, he must use the laws of logic. So we see that the force of the argument depends upon the existence of the very laws that the argument denies.

The claim, "The laws of logic exist," is a transcendental claim because the truth of the claim must be assumed even in an attempt to challenge the claim. We could apply a similar analysis to other claims to show their transcendental character.

Consider the statement, "Language is objectively meaningful." Now imagine someone attempting a challenge to this claim. How would the challenge be communicated? How would one articulate an argument against this claim without some form of language serving as the basis for the articulation?

Similarly, "sensory perceptions can be reliable," is a transcendental claim. The expression, "sensory perception" is meaningful only in a discussion in which the knowledge we have is regulated at least in part by our senses. How can the expression "sensory perception" even be defined in the discussion without making some sort of reference to knowledge that was gained through the senses? Consistency would forbid one who would challenge the reliability of sense perception to acknowledge his opponent's argument, and even his opponent's existence! For these he can discern only through his senses. On his view, all he could really know is what he thinks he knows, for he has denied any connection between his mind's activity and things outside his mind.

Here is another transcendental: "Nature is uniform." If nature and its laws and properties were in constant flux, then the one who argues for constant flux should never believe his own argument. Once his argument is articulated, he must admit that reality may have changed so that the argument