A Defense of Van Til’s Transcendental Argument Against the Stroudian Challenge

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Abstract

The transcendental challenge presented by Barry Stroud in the 20th century has gained widespread popularity within presuppositional circles since the untimely death of the late Greg Bahnsen. As such I will be analyzing a recent work by Bàlint Békefi, whose paper concedes Stroud’s objection to Van Til’s transcendental argument. I argue ultimately that while Bàlint does a brilliant job at expositing the contemporary literature of transcendental arguments, his conclusion proceeds either from misunderstandings of the presuppositional method or from a rejection of the foundational truths of the method as put forward by both Van Til and Greg Bahnsen. I then proceed to rebut Bàlint’s viewpoint (and those he is sympathetic to) and ultimately conclude that Van Til’s transcendental argument does not succumb to Stroud’s ontological challenge.

Preface

Though the Stroudian critique has demanded much scholarly work and research out of Van Tillian presuppositionalists to conjure up a satisfactory answer, I have sought to keep this work as practical as possible so that both the layman and the scholar can benefit from it. After all, since this challenge potentially renders Van Til’s argument useless in setting out to objectively prove the truths of the Christian worldview, it would do no good if only the philosophical “elites” could partake in this discussion. Moreover, I believe that this issue has already been addressed directly by Bahnsen (and perhaps others) before Stroud’s criticism gaining widespread popularity among the contemporaries of today. As such—and to preserve the practical nature of this work—I will refrain from citing an innumerable number of authors and works in order to not bog down the already complicated issue. Therefore, most of the citations given will come from both Bahnsen as well as Van Til. This is not meant to discredit contemporary presuppositionalists, but rather as a testament that the material
needed to refute the Stroudian challenge has been with us all along. It just has not been utilized properly (as will be illustrated).

I. Setting up the Issue

Cornelius Van Til

Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) revolutionized the world of apologetics. A 20th-century philosopher and theologian, Van Til attended Princeton Theological Seminary, wherein he received his ThM in 1925 and subsequently his Ph.D. in philosophy in 1927. During this time he benefited from solid biblical instruction, including direction from C. W. Hodge Jr., the grandson of Charles Hodge and the successor to B.B. Warfield. He likewise lived on the same floor as J. Gresham Machen, who, during this time, published his Christianity and Liberalism (1923). Van Til thus had been surrounded by and received perhaps the greatest Reformed theological training one could hope to attain in the early 20th century.

Shortly after receiving his Ph.D., the seeds of Van Til’s presuppositional apologetic were already evident. In two issues of the Princeton Theological Review (1927 & 1929), Van Til reviews two authors – Alfred North Whitehead and Hermann Bavinck. Within these reviews, we most prominently see Van Til’s treatment of analyzing opposing presuppositions, the impossibility of neutrality between the Christian and non-Christian, and arguing that Christian theism is the only viable alternative to autonomy.1 At the turn of the 1930s—by which time he was at Westminster Theological Seminary—Van Til procured his first significant publication in apologetics in 1932 – The Metaphysics of Apologetics.2 His apologetic had thus evolved and matured even more into what it is known as today.

Crucial to Van Til’s apologetic is the acknowledgment—contrary to the classical and evidential methods—that neutrality is both impossible and immoral. It does not proceed from a neutral position wherein the Christian’s beliefs are forfeited to appease the non-Christian opponent for the sake of pretended open-mindedness. For Van Til, Christ’s words reign supreme: “He who is not with Me is against Me” (Matt. 12:30, cf. Luke 11:23). Moreover, Van Til recognized both the futility of unbelieving thought and the necessity of presupposing the truth of the Christian worldview in order to make sense of anything whatsoever. Not only was this presupposition of

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2 This syllabus was retitled A Survey in Christian Epistemology, which is the title we today are familiar with.
Christianity’s truth necessary for intelligibility, but the actual truths of the Christian worldview themselves must be true lest we fall into abject skepticism and end up in the same position as the non-Christian. Van Til argues that this must be shown transcendentally. He writes that in the transcendental method:

… we must seek to determine what presuppositions are necessary to any object of knowledge in order that it may be intelligible to us. It is not as though we already know some facts and laws to begin with, irrespective of the existence of God, in order then to reason from such a beginning to further conclusions. It is certainly true that if God has any significance for any object of knowledge at all, the relation of God to that object of knowledge must be taken into consideration from the outset. It is this fact that the transcendental method seeks to recognize.³

However, coming from a solidly Christian background, Van Til’s transcendental program differs starkly from Kant’s or any in contemporary literature. Van Til writes:

… we may speak of our method as being transcendental. But if we do we should once more observe that our meaning of that word is different from the Kantian or modern meaning. Kantian thought does not really find its final reference point in God. Modern thought in general does not really interpret reality in eternal categories. It seeks to interpret reality by a combination of eternal and temporal categories. For all non-Christian thought, as we have observed before, eternity is nothing more than a correlative of time. It is only the Christian who really interprets reality in exclusively eternal categories because only he believes God is self-sufficient and not dependent upon time reality.⁴

Moreover, Van Til’s apologetic seeks to turn sinners away from their pretended intellectual autonomy by showing that only on the Christian worldview can such intellect be possible. They

must acknowledge that which they already know to be true in their heart of hearts – that they are made in the *imago Dei*, that God their Creator exists, that they are living in rebellion, and that they must turn from their wicked ways and submit to the one, true holy God. We can thus summarize the uniqueness of the presuppositional transcendental method against the secular use of transcendental arguments as such:

1. Van Til’s transcendental argument for the existence of God (hereafter TAG) begins first and foremost with the existence of God and His self-disclosed revelation.
2. By extension, TAG does not recognize the mind of man as the final arbiter of truth, as is the case in autonomous thought.
3. TAG does not argue over isolated principles or operations, but over entire worldviews.
4. TAG does not set out (falsely) as being neutral for the sake of open-mindedness.
5. TAG calls for nothing less than a turning away from autonomy and a converting to Christianity.
6. Perhaps most importantly, Van Til’s TAG argues *concretely* over the objective truths of Christianity. It does *not* argue *abstractly* by beginning with a general principle, law, or operation of the universe by which we can make conclusions over isolated experiences.
7. Therefore, Van Til’s TAG is an in-your-face argument. If you do not submit to the Christian worldview, you will intellectually die.

These truths are fundamental if one is to properly understand and appreciate the insightful work Van Til achieved in his apologetic and to distinguish his argument from the futile transcendental ventures made today by autonomous men.

**The Contemporary Transcendental Climate**

The analytic trend in 20th-century philosophy dissuaded most from the study of transcendental considerations. The favoritism of analytical philosophy to study the minute details of a particular subject(s) is juxtaposed to transcendental arguments, which have wide-ranging implications. Nevertheless, transcendental reasoning is quite a common occurrence, and it need not be used solely in the context of Kant’s procedure. A. C. Grayling, a British philosopher well-read on the transcendental climate of today, gives a succinct summary of transcendental uses in contemporary secular literature:
Wittgenstein … in the *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty* argues transcendently about the impossibility of private language and the possibility of knowledge, respectively. J. L. Austin … argues transcendently in formulating a theory of truth by distinguishing between demonstrative and descriptive conventions in language, his point being that some such distinction is required for a certain other concept—that of truth as correspondence—to have application. A different example is supplied by Gilbert Ryle in his use of “polar concept” arguments. The sceptical suggestion that we might undetectably be in error on any given occasion is refuted, Ryle claims, by the fact that just as we cannot have counterfeit coins unless there are genuine ones, so we cannot have a concept of error unless we have the concept of being right, and therefore we must sometimes know we are right.5

It becomes evident rather quickly how the nature of secular transcendental arguments (hereafter TAs) differs from Van Til’s TAG. We see in these considerations no allusion to God, no allusion to broad worldview considerations, and the presupposition of the self-sufficiency of man’s mind, all of which, according to Van Til, reduce one’s position to skepticism and absurdity.

Another pivotal difference between contemporary secular TAs versus Van Til’s TAG regards the issue of a corresponding metaphysic to the argument. It is one thing to utilize a TA on a conceptual level wherein the conclusion is merely that we must believe the premises of the argument. However, it is another thing to utilize a TA on a metaphysical basis wherein the conclusion is that the external, objective world really operates the way the transcendentalist argues it does. Most, if not all, contemporary secular transcendentalists do not utilize such a metaphysical TA; Van Til does.

A. C. Grayling writes of this issue:

One of the crucial questions about transcendental arguments concerns what they might hope to establish. The options, simply put, are that either they establish the existence of something (an external world, other minds), or they establish that

certain concepts are necessary to our conceptual scheme. Clearly these are quite different results, and the latter involves the further problem of whether our conceptual scheme is the only possible one, for if not the terminus of a transcendental argument is strictly relative.  

Grayling refers to the ambitious, ontological TA of “establishing the existence of something” as an “option A” (hereafter Opt.-A) TA while the conceptual TA of “establish[ing] that certain concepts are necessary to our conceptual scheme” as an “option B” (hereafter Opt.-B) TA, the latter obviously being less forceful and meaningful than the former. Grayling continues:

The chief difficulty faced by option A is that even if one could show that it is a necessary condition of our having coherent experience that we possess and apply a concept of an independently existing world, it still needs to be shown that something “out there” answers to that concept; in other words, that it is a necessary condition of our having the concept of an external world that an external world exists. It is one thing to argue that we must have and employ concepts of space, time, causality and particulars conditioned by them, and another to show that there exist things corresponding to these concepts and existentially prior to their use.

We turn now to a particular philosopher whose TAs came under criticism from Barry Stroud, whose challenge this paper is addressed towards.

P. F. Strawson (1919-2006), an English philosopher, likewise put forth TAs of his own to refute skepticism in two areas: the existence of other minds and the perception-independent existence of material particulars. While one may ascribe success to Strawson here—or the previous group of philosophers utilizing transcendental reasoning—the question to be asked is to what extent were his TAs successful? In his 1968 article “Transcendental Arguments,” Barry Stroud mistakenly attacks Strawson for concluding that his argument has ontological force. That

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7 Ibid., 770.
9 See Barry Stroud, “Transcendental Arguments.” *The Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968), 241-256. Strawson did not conclude, for instance, that material objects, in fact, do exist unperceived. Rather, merely that we must believe that they continue to exist. Herein lies Stroud’s error, which, though mistaken against Strawson, is itself a considerable challenge against TAs in general.
is, he believes Strawson concludes with an objective, metaphysical, “matter of fact” conclusion rather than a subjective, “we must conceptualize that” conclusion. Strawson was certainly not putting forth any ontological, Opt.-A TAs in his work; his TAs were strictly conceptual, Opt.-B arguments. Yet Stroud somehow misconstrues Strawson’s TAs to think that they are Opt.-A. Stroud was severely misguided in this analysis, but from it came to his very relevant challenge of arguing (as we have seen with Grayling) that conceptual necessity does not equate to ontological truthfulness. Another way of putting it is in arguing that we must believe something it does not follow from the premises that what we must believe is actually the case external to us. Such a criticism has dealt a lethal blow to the contemporary transcendental climate of today.

We must therefore ask whether or not this transcendental criticism has any relevance to Van Til’s TAG. Is Stroud’s challenge applicable to the presuppositionalist in that he can only ever prove the necessity of conceptualizing the truths of the Christian worldview? Or does Van Til’s argument overcome Stroud’s objection in showing that, objectively speaking, God and the truths of the Christian worldview are “out there” despite Van Til formulating his argument decades before Stroud coming into the picture? We turn now to a Van Tillian who argues that TAG does indeed succumb to Stroud’s challenge and thus needs to either be revised or rejected altogether.

II. Békefi’s Challenge

Bàlint Békefi is a solid brother in Christ as well as a very good-looking man. In his 2017 paper “Van Til versus Stroud: Is the Transcendental Argument for Christian Theism Viable?”10 Bàlint argues thoroughly through both sides of scholarship to ultimately prove that Van Til’s TAG (his acronym, TACT) succumbs to the challenge of Stroud. Whether one agrees or disagrees with this conclusion, it is abundantly evident upon reading his paper that he is very well-read on the contemporary authors of TAs and the current issue at hand. There is no question in this regard. However, despite his vast knowledge of TAs, Bàlint has, in my analysis, either overlooked, taken for granted, or rejected foundational truths of the presuppositional method in order to postulate his criticism against the presuppositional argument.

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Laying Out Stroud’s Challenge

Békefi does a great job in making clear what the Stroudian challenge entails. Crucial to it is the distinction in a proposition being self-stultifying and self-falsifying. He writes:

A proposition … is performatively self-falsifying if its affirmation implies its falsehood; it is self-stultifying if its truth implies that one can never be rationally justified in affirming it.¹¹

Herein lies the crux of the issue: “Stroud’s objection is that showing that we must believe something … does not establish its truth” (emphasis original).¹² In other words, it is not enough for the Van Tillian to show that the Christian worldview rationally justifies the preconditions necessary for intelligible experience since it does not logically follow, according to Stroud, that what we must believe is itself objectively true. However, Stroud’s critique also works in the inverse:

… the Stroudian thesis, can be formulated in the following way:

(ST): Self-stultification does not imply falsehood.¹³

That is to say, not only does showing a proposition’s rationality not necessitate its truthfulness but showing a proposition’s irrationality does not necessitate its falsehood either. The reason for this dilemma lies in the problem of egocentrism. At most, we can only know of the existence of our “self,” but any metaphysical knowledge beyond that is impossible. So, try as the presuppositionalist may to objectively prove the validity of the Christian worldview, at most, he can only prove the rationality behind it, not whether or not it is objectively true.

After giving a lengthy exposition, Békefi offers two ways by which the Van Tillian can formulate his TAG, and they run as follows:

(C1) If the negation of [Christian theism] (CT) is either self-stultifying or performatively self-falsifying, then CT is true.
(C2) The negation of CT is either self-stultifying or performatively self-falsifying.

¹¹ Ibid., 145.
¹² Ibid., 145.
¹³ Ibid., 145.
(C3) Therefore, CT is true.\textsuperscript{14}

Békefi implies that the preceding argument is enough to prove CT’s ontological necessity (if the presuppositionalist \textit{can} prove that self-stultification necessarily implies falsehood). However, should this not be the case and Stroud is victorious, he offers stronger premises to this argument, and they run as follows:

(C1’) If the negation of (CT) is performatively self-falsifying, then CT is true.  
(C2’) The negation of CT is performatively self-falsifying.  
(C3) Therefore, CT is true.\textsuperscript{15}

The crux of Stroud’s argument now comes into play. Békefi offers two routes by which the Van Tillian can circumvent the Stroudian challenge: The first he calls “Strengthening the second premise: The Biblical justification strategy,” wherein we can strengthen the premise that the negation of CT is self-falsifying, the second, “Weakening the first premise: The objection-undermining strategy,” wherein we merely show that the opponent’s position reduces itself to absurdity.

\textit{Strengthening the second premise: The Biblical justification strategy}  

Békefi begins by citing Michael R. Butler, who would’ve been considered Bahnsen’s protégé.\textsuperscript{16} In his Master’s thesis on TAG, Butler writes:

… the Christian worldview is not a mere conceptual scheme. It claims to do more than simply provide us with the necessary preconditions of experience. The Christian worldview posits a sovereign, creator God who is both personal and absolute in His nature. This God is, moreover, a speaking God who reveals truths to us about Himself and the world. In His revelation to us He declares that He has made a world and that this world exists independently from Himself and us. On the  

\textsuperscript{14} Bálint Békefi, “Van Til versus Stroud,” 146.  
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 146.  
\textsuperscript{16} Butler fell out of the picture around the time of this publication in 2002 for reasons unbeknownst to many.
basis of His revelation, therefore, which is itself a necessary precondition of experience, we can know truths about the world and God.17

From this analysis Békefi questions Butler in two regards, saying first that:

… while this could sound initially appealing, it is difficult to see how Butler’s response aims to answer Stroud. The fact that the Christian worldview ‘posits’ a God … in no clear way contradict[s] the idea that it is ‘a mere conceptual scheme’ in its relevant aspects (i.e. being a set of propositions), which is being argued against.18

Immediately after, Békefi says:

Moreover, this response seems to be circular, as [Brian] Sims Explains: ‘However, Butler seems to assume the very thing he asserts, namely the metaphysical truthfulness of the Christian worldview based on God’s existence.’ (Sims, 2006, 56: n. 88)19

Békefi ultimately concludes from Butler’s argument that Butler “fails in a surprisingly straightforward way”20 on the basis of merely proclaiming the metaphysical scheme of the Christian worldview without proof and by extension begging the question in order to prove (C2’) is not satisfactory. However, Butler may have an out, Békefi writes, by saying that perhaps Butler was “suggesting that the justification for believing premise (C2’) (that the negation of CT is performatively self-falsifying) comes through divine special revelation.”21 That is to say, if indeed we receive special revelation from God that the contrary of CT is self-falsifying, then definitionally, given the nature of this infallible revelation, Stroud’s objection is defeated. However, Békefi argues that if this is the case, “the costs are devastating.”22

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18 Békefi, “Van Til versus Stroud,” 147.
20 Ibid., 147.
21 Ibid., 147.
22 Ibid., 149.
The first of his two criticisms of appealing to divine revelation to prove the existential necessity of the Christian worldview infallibly lies in the fact that if we appeal to divine revelation to prove CT’s ontological truths then a TA is not utilized. The appeal to divine revelation operates as a type of verificationist principle wherein we have “verified” the metaphysical truths of Christianity through revelation, but which ultimately amounts to the use of TAs being superfluous and therefore unnecessary. He lays out additional premises in this appeal:

(4) Whatever the Bible affirms is true. (premise)
(5) The Bible affirms [that the negation of CT is performatively self-falsifying]. (premise)
(C3) Therefore, CT is true.23

Remember, the Van Tillian aims to prove that non-Christian positions are self-falsifying, not merely self-stultifying, since if they can only be proven to be self-stultifying (irrational), then Stroud has not been defeated. However, by appealing to Scripture, the Van Tillian has not proven the ontological necessity of CT by using TAG, but rather on a verification principle. But if this is the case, Stroud’s challenge hasn’t actually been answered since the appeal to revelation does not utilize a TA in the first place and, the use of a verification principle makes superfluous the use of TAs.

Békefi’s second criticism in appealing to divine revelation to prove the truthfulness of CT lies in the fact that the very nature of a Reformed epistemology would nullify any “persuasive power” of TAG. Such a revelatory epistemology would satisfy the Christian’s outlook, to be sure, but would by no means operate as a persuasive proof for the non-Christian. At best, the Christian is satisfied in believing in the Christian worldview’s ontological reality but at the cost of losing a meaningful apologetic.24 Békefi concludes:

The argument could thus not aspire to convince the skeptic, which one would expect a TA to do. For all these reasons then, I consider the biblical justification strategy untenable.25

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23 Ibid., 149. Only premises (4) and (5) are laid out explicitly by Békefi’s on this page. I have purposely added (C3) to the syllogism for the sake of cogency.
24 Due to the tangential nature of this criticism, it is addressed in the Appendix.
25 Ibid., 150.
In short, and as stated earlier, Stroud shows us that just because “we must believe something (probably because we can never be justified in believing its negation) does not establish its truth.” How, then, does the Van Tillian show the stronger premise (C1’): “If the negation of (CT) is performatively self-falsifying, then CT is true?” That is since self-stultification is not enough to refute Stroud, how then do we show that non-Christian worldviews are left not only rationally unjustified, but also performatively false? Butler’s response of appealing to Christianity as a worldview was accused of circularity, and taking Butler to mean the Scriptures teach non-Christian worldviews are performatively false does not itself utilize a TA and thus leaves Stroud’s objection unchallenged.

**Weakening the first premise: the objection-undermining strategy**

Békefi’s second out for the Van Tillian is to weaken the first premise in showing that the Stroudian position itself leads to absurdity on its own terms and that such self-stultification is sufficient for refuting it. That is, instead of fortifying the premise that Christianity is exempt from Stroud in positing an actual reality as opposed to a conceptual scheme, we instead undermine the objector’s position showing its futility. However, as has already been addressed, just because a belief is self-stultifying (“its truth implies that one can never be rationally justified in affirming it”), it does not follow that such a truth is itself false (irrationality ≠ falsehood). So, then, how does the Van Tillian justify the weaker (C1) premise that “If the negation of [Christian theism] (CT) is either self-stultifying (merely irrational) or performatively self-falsifying (untrue), then CT is true.?”

After citing a couple of examples in contemporary literature, Békefi illustrates that these authors do not actually prove that self-stultification implies falsehood in showing how the Stroudian position reduces to absurdity. It is rather taken for granted, and such criticisms can themselves be subjected to this dilemma: merely showing that the Stroudian side reduces to skepticism (and, thus, a meaningless criticism) does not necessitate that it is actually false.

From these considerations, Békefi concludes that he does not see a way out for the Van Tillian to prove the self-falsifiability of autonomous worldviews. It is not enough to show that the opposing side reduces to irrationality since such a demonstration itself does not actually prove this side to be false in an objective sense. In fact, if anything, these two notions seem to have been conflated by Van Tillians in the past. Such considerations prove the extent and potency of the Stroudian challenge against the apologist.
III. Responding to The Stroudian Challenge

As was alluded to earlier, Békefi (and other sympathetic Van Tillians, scholarly or not) seem either to misunderstand, take for granted, or reject some of the presuppositional method’s foundational tenets to postulate their arguments with Stroud. Those more learned in the apologetic will have at this point already noticed areas in which Békefi has diverged from the basics in order to postulate his argument. These issues will now be addressed.

Circularity

Recall Békefi’s criticism against Butler when Butler argued that “the Christian worldview is not a mere conceptual scheme. It claims to do more than simply provide us with the necessary preconditions of experience.” On this basis, Békefi concludes that merely asserting that the Christian worldview “‘posits’ a God … in no clear way contradi[ct[s] the idea that it is ‘a mere conceptual scheme’ in its relevant aspects (i.e., being a set of propositions), which is being argued against.”

While fault can be made towards Butler for not expounding more on the differences between worldviews and conceptual schemes, we can elaborate further for him that conceptual schemes, taken as ultimate paradigms of human experience, are predicated upon the egocentricity of man. On such a predicament, the arguer is reduced to skepticism on the grounds of his inescapable subjectivity. In contrast to this, worldview considerations (which must be ultimate paradigms by definition) do not necessitate the subjectivity of individuals since they also posit objective, metaphysical beliefs. In this regard, the positing of a worldview as opposed to a conceptual scheme at the very least paves a way out of inevitable skepticism. While both conceptual schemes and worldviews are relevant in that (a) they both involve the interpretive activities of man, and (b) they both consist of “being a set of propositions” as Békefi puts it, the set involved in conceptual scheme considerations leaves out any room for external metaphysical propositions (contrary to worldview considerations), and thus such a set amounts to subjectivism and skepticism (again, contrary to worldview considerations). Butler was ultimately arguing this point.26 The positing of a

26 This conclusion is reached by the fact that he sat in on, and taught briefly in, the Transcendental Arguments Seminar conducted by his teacher, Greg Bahnsen, in the summer of 1995, where this material was covered either directly or indirectly. Assuming he did not forget the memorable three days it took for them to get through it, it seems Butler simply lacked the intellectual acuity of his teacher in trying to respond to Stroud in his thesis.
worldview, therefore, indeed does contradict the idea “that it is a mere ‘conceptual scheme’”, contra Békefi, in the fact that it (a) allows for metaphysical propositions, and therefore (b) gives an out to the inevitable skepticism involved in conceptual scheme considerations. Herein, says Butler, lies a pivotal difference in the Van Tillian position against Stroud.

Of course, any astute philosopher would rightfully call out the circularity involved in making such a statement. Butler has not so much proven the Christian worldview’s external reality but merely postulated and taken it for granted. Békefi quotes Dr. Michael Riley, another faithful brother and apologist, when Riley writes on Butler’s point:

Indeed, I think that Butler’s suggestion not only fails to answer Stroud’s dilemma: it may in fact exacerbate the problem. To increase the richness of the world-directedness of one’s transcendental argument, as Butler clearly seems to suggest, hardly seems an advisable move when the very possibility of any kind of world-directed argument is precisely what is at issue. It seems that Stroud’s response here would remain unchanged: no matter how rich the conception of the worldview that one finds necessary by transcendental argument, it is always possible to insist that we merely must believe that a sovereign, personal, absolute, Creator God exists, that he has created a world that he says is independent of him and of us.27

Riley, too, sees the problem of circularity in Butler’s answer to Stroud. Even granting the fact that worldview considerations are the only out to skepticism against conceptual scheme considerations, the pervasive problem of actually proving the objective truthfulness of worldviews is another thing altogether.

To this issue, we must ask the painfully obvious question: was Stroud being presuppositionless and neutral in putting forth his criticism? Any presuppositionalist would know this to be false. What Békefi, Riley, and others who sympathize with Stroud have either taken for granted or misunderstood is that Butler was not the only one being prejudiced from the outset. Stroud, too, has his metaphysical presuppositions which he adhered to when postulating his criticism against Strawson, namely, the existence of the self, the ignorance/non-existence of God, the problem of egocentrism, and thus the impossibility of metaphysical knowledge apart from the self, and less

immediate but just as necessary presuppositions such as the reliability of the inductive principle, the necessity of logical norms, the causal principle, etc. – what we can refer to as a non-Christian worldview.\textsuperscript{28} Ironically, if this be the case, Stroud’s venture of epistemology-only conceptual scheme considerations is predicated on metaphysical assumptions. It would appear, then, that the criticism of circularity on Butler’s part is based on special pleading. Assuming Békefi was knowledgeable enough to realize the presuppositional commitments of both individuals, why should Butler be accused of begging the question while Stroud gets a pass in order to conclude that his challenge still stands victorious?

It would appear that the special pleading involved in such a conclusion lies on either another misunderstanding or a taking for granted of neutrality—again, another primer element of presuppositionalism.\textsuperscript{29} The issue of neutrality does not concern the fact that each party merely has its biases. Rather, both sides argue and assume in advance the correctness of their position on all accounts – epistemic, metaphysical, and ethical. Thus, each side interprets all opposing positions based on these taken-for-granted beliefs. Taking a step back and analyzing the presuppositions of Butler and Stroud, Békefi ought to have told each of them that, “Since the issue of egocentrism and the knowability of the external world is what is in question, neither of you are allowed to assume in advance whether these issues are true or false. To do so would amount to question-begging, which is not allowed. We must all be presupposition-less in this regard until a definitive conclusion is reached.” Of course, anyone can see the error in this line of reasoning. To put it bluntly, it is impossible to be presupposition-less on a subject of this magnitude. You either believe it to be true or false at the outset of your argument. Whereas Butler assumed in advance that egocentrism is not an issue on the Christian position in laying out his worldview argument, so, too, did Stroud assume in advance that there is a problem of egocentrism in laying out his argument.

Bahnsen illustrates this issue, for instance, with regard to one’s view of Scripture:

> When the Christian apologist points out that his ultimate standard is God’s revealed word, the non-Christian will rightly observe that it is just the truth of this standard

\textsuperscript{28} In his paper, Békefi cites Gabriel Fluhrer’s dissertation “‘Reasoning by Presupposition’: Clarifying and Applying the Center of Van Til’s Apologetic,” in which at one point Fluhrer argues along the same lines. However, Békefi notes that Fluhrer’s treatment of Stroud’s presuppositions was not handled “properly.”

\textsuperscript{29} Békefi likewise cites that he is “well aware of the distinction between common ground and neutral ground.” Granting this is the case, it would seem that it is not so much a misunderstanding of neutrality by which he sides with Stroud as it is a rejection of it as understood by Van Til and Bahnsen.
that is now in question. The believer has not been requisitely ‘open-minded.’ To this we must reply that, on the other hand, the unbeliever has not been uncommitted and neutral from the outset either; he has used an espoused standard for weighing and interpreting the facts which precludes the truth of the Christian position. He has been begging the question. The unavoidable fact is—regardless of how intensely some apologists lament or decry it—that nobody is a disinterested observer, seeing and interpreting the facts without a set of assumptions and pre-established rules.\(^\text{30}\)

Interpreting and evaluating contrary evidence based on “pre-established rules” spans whatever field is being argued, and thus everyone begs the question in this regard. Van Til was already well-aware of this long before Stroud and Békefi, as is evidenced when he writes:

> It is taken for granted that everybody begins in the same way with an examination of the facts, and that the differences between systems come only as a result of such investigations. Yet this is not the case. It could not actually be the case. In the first place, this could not be the case with a Christian. His fundamental and determining fact is the fact of God’s existence. That is his final conclusion. But that must also be his starting point…

> But if it be readily granted that a Christian begins with a bias, it will not so readily be granted that his opponents also begin with a bias. Yet this is no less the case. The antitheist is one who has made up his mind in advance that he will never look through a telescope. He maintains steadfast in his conviction that there are some facts that can be known truly without looking through a telescope. This much is implied in the very idea of starting to see whether there is a God.\(^\text{31}\)

> It would appear, then, that Békefi and others sympathetic to Stroud have missed this pivotal point. If everyone begs the question based on their presuppositional criterion, then Stroud has just

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\(^{31}\) Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, PDF page 14. The telescope analogy represents that all facts must be interpreted through man’s knowledge of God. “If I must look through a telescope to see a distant star, I cannot first look at the star to see whether there is a telescope through which alone I can see it.”
as much begged the question as Butler here. Why did Békefi not go after Stroud on his own argument of assuming in advance the metaphysical truth of the non-Christian worldview (hereafter non-CW) at the outset in giving his argument? After all, to be consistent, Békefi ought to have pointed out that Stroud should not have assumed his non-CW outlook at the outset. Butler’s “out” of appealing to a *concrete* Christian worldview as opposed to a conceptual scheme that reduces to subjectivism is therefore valid and still holds water because both sides are just as equally guilty of circularity. We can conclude with a succinct summary given by Bahnsen on this issue:

There are two different ways of picturing us as knowers: one says that God created us and our minds, and God also created the world that we know with our minds. This is the Christian view of things; God made the mind and the objects that the mind knows. Therefore, our conceptual scheme is automatically in touch/automatically corresponds with the objects of experience on this presupposition. Another approach says that we can’t know anything about God at the outset. All we can know is that we have a human mind and we assume its sufficiency, and we are pretty sure that there are objects out there that the mind can know. Everything here is loose and disjointed. The objects of knowledge are not connected to one another by God’s sovereign work, nor are the objects automatically connected to the mind of man in his conceptual scheme. In fact, *all* minds are loose and disjointed as well. God is not brought into the picture here because we don’t want to do theology in the place of philosophy after all, right? We begin with man and then work out from man, and this mind also operates on a conceptual scheme. (emphasis mine)

The skeptic comes along and asks, ‘How do you know there is a connection between your conceptual scheme and the objects in the world?’ This worldview by definition cannot answer the skeptic because it begins with a separation between minds and the objects in the world. There’s no connecting link. And any attempt to bridge the dividing link is going to be easily criticizable by the skeptic. If you begin

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32 It should be noted that later in his paper, Békefi acknowledges the circularity of TAs wherein the conclusion must be presupposed at the outset in order to make intelligibility (or at the very least the intelligibility of a particular experience) possible, and he cites Stroud’s own words in doing so. However, the ontological circularity he is accusing Butler of is not the same type wherein the conclusion in the TA is already being presupposed in giving the argument.
with an egocentric picture don’t be surprised when you end with an egocentric predicament. If you start your philosophy with man you end up with man separated from everything in the universe. How do you know there’s any connection between your thinking and what’s outside the mind? If pushed hard enough this leads to solipsism. If you leave God out of the picture you leave man separated from everything.

And then a little later:

If somebody says, ‘Well how do you know that the mind is in contact with objects? That the conceptual scheme corresponds to objects?’ you say, ‘Well that by definition is my worldview. That’s what I start with.’ Now I realize that people will say, ‘Oh, you’re begging the question!’ but I’m not begging the question; that’s my worldview.\(^{33}\) … Not only can we show that rationality is justified in terms of God’s existence and man being made in His image, but if you take that picture, you’ve already overcome the egocentric predicament because there is no egocentric predicament if you’re a creationist.

… God created everything, and He created man in His image so that the fundamental biblical picture of what this world is, who we are, what our place in the cosmos is, already says we’re in contact by our minds with the world that God created because God created our minds to know that world imaging Him.\(^{34}\)

This crucial discussion of the inevitability of circularity by all parties is critical in understanding how the Stroudian critique is to be dealt with and refuted accordingly. In the coming issues to be discussed, it will be even more evident how the rejection of this circularity results in such criticisms by Békéfi.

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33 It is not entirely clear why Bahnsen says that there is no question-begging involved here since he gives no elaboration in the tape. Perhaps he was implying that since both parties begin with their foundational assumptions it’s not as though the Christian is begging the question while the skeptic is not. In other words, to accuse the Christian of begging the question in this answer commits the accuser to a double standard.

34 Bahnsen/Butler, “Transcendental Arguments,” (Covenant Media Foundation), tape 6: Summary of Transcendental Arguments I.
Self-Stultification and Self-Falsifiability

Where, then, does this lead us over the issues concerning a belief’s being irrational (self-stultification) and a belief’s actually being false (self-falsifiability)? Recall that Békefi argues that the difficulty of overcoming the Stroudian challenge concerns whether a belief’s being rational necessitates it being objectively true (which is what he believes Van Til’s argument fails to do). Likewise, the Stroudian challenge concerns whether a belief’s being irrational necessitates it being objectively false.

Békefi first cites Brant Bosserman’s response to Stroud:

Another objection to Van Til’s presuppositionalism is that it is covertly pragmatic. Far from making any headway toward demonstrating that Christianity is objectively true, Van Til has really only proven that Christianity represents a most, or even the most useful and desirable belief system. Yet, again, the objector has lapsed back into the very sort of position that Van Til has proven untenable. If reality were the sort of place where subjective and objective truth could be so disconnected, the objector would have no ground for supposing that his reasoning process advances by objectively valid references. Hence, the objection that Van Til’s proof is merely pragmatic, rather than both useful and true is itself incoherent, until and unless the objector can prove that reality is, or even could be, marked by such a dichotomy.35 (emphasis original)

Békefi points out that Bosserman’s critique of the Stroudian position reducing to incoherence and therefore being dismissible is not enough to refute it since it does not show that self-stultification actually implies that said position is itself false (irrationalism ≠ falsity). Yet Békefi does not end here. He continues to turn the Stroudian challenge on Bosserman’s critique itself:

Curiously, however, Bosserman’s answer to the Stroudian critique can itself be subjected to the Stroudian critique, since, as we have pointed out earlier, it only shows—granting that it succeeds—that [self-stultification not implying falsehood]

is [itself] self-stultifying [and not false]. The burden, then, is still on Bosserman to show how this implies that [self-stultification does imply falsehood]. (emphasis original except in brackets)

Békefi afterward cites Fluhrer’s dissertation (see fn. 28), in which he criticizes him of the same issue of not necessarily proving that self-stultification implies falsehood. One of the “lines of reason” we can discern from Fluhrer’s work lies when:

… he argues that presenting ST (position p’s irrationalism ≠ position p’s falsity) as an objection against [TAG] begs the question because CT denies [such a position]. However, since [TAG] seeks to be a persuasive anti-skeptical argument, the skeptic has to be shown that ST is false if [TAG] is to succeed – pointing out that it (allegedly) contradicts CT does not achieve what a TA is expected to achieve. (emphasis original)

Again it would seem that another Van Tillian has succumbed to the failure of proving that irrationality necessitates falsehood, or, if he has, failed to prove it convincingly.

What, then, is the proper resolution to this seemingly pervasive problem? To reiterate Bahnsen’s “two different ways of picturing us as knowers,” the Stroudian circle is plagued by egocentrism leading to skepticism and a lack of transcendental justification apart from on a purely subjective basis. Set against this is the Christian’s circle, which immediately overcomes the problem of egocentrism, posits an all-controlling Sovereign, and justifies all preconditions necessary for intelligibility at an objective level. Transcendentally, then, the Christian worldview is true on all accounts.

Granting that the Christian circle is true, that this world and reality we all share are objectively from God, then all non-Christian circles which themselves reduce to inconsistency and therefore irrationalism are altogether false. All one needs to do now is make the short leap to conclude that given this is the case, irrationalism does entail falsehood (at the very least in worldview considerations). The argument to prove that self-stultification = performative falsehood can thus be illustrated as:

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37 Ibid., 153.
(P1) Given the Christian worldview is true on all accounts, all other non-Christian worldviews are false.

(P2) All other non-Christian worldviews additionally amount to irrationalism on their own grounds.

(C Therefore, self-stultification amounts to self-falsification in worldview considerations.

Taking Fluhrer’s argument in his dissertation, how, then, is the skeptic to be practically shown that position p’s irrationalism actually equates to its falsity and vice versa? It is not enough, as Fluhrer has done, for the apologist to merely assert that he rejects the Stroudian thesis on his own position, since, according to Békefi, the non-Christian needs demonstrable evidence of this if TAG is going to succeed as a persuasive argument. We can illustrate this by way of dialogue. The presuppositionalist can lay out the issues for the unbeliever as such:

“For Stroud, the impossibility of metaphysical knowledge rightfully necessitates the conclusion that conceptual necessity does not entail metaphysical certainty. Given his worldview, Stroud cannot know of an external reality, and so his argument is valid against all autonomous philosophers who would likewise want to venture out into transcendental analysis. On this point we agree. However, on the other hand, in my Christian worldview, we are automatically in touch with the external world since both we and it have been made by God. God moreover made us in His constitution, and thus our ability to rationalize, predicate and live our every-day lives is only the result of His creative power and will. On the Christian worldview, we can thus reject Stroud’s argument since it ultimately amounts to a non-issue. It most certainly has power over your unbelieving worldview, to be sure, but not mine.

To this, you may respond by showing me the error of circularity involved on both sides, and you would be right in doing so – Stroud has at the outset of his argument assumed the problem of egocentrism and subjectivism. In contrast to this, the Christian has assumed at the outset the metaphysical truths of the Christian worldview which overcome egocentrism and subjectivism. However, such
circularity is inevitable since, on issues as grand as these, it is impossible for anyone to be a neutral bystander, not assuming the truthfulness of a position either way. There is no way to stand outside of all worldviews in order to judge whether or not Stroud’s critique is objectively valid against all worldviews. Since we all assume at the outset our metaphysical commitments, you have the option of either beginning autonomously and reducing yourself to absurdity and skepticism or you have the option of beginning with my worldview which saves intelligibility. But if my worldview is the only one that justifies intelligible discourse and if it already overcomes the problem of egocentrism, then you have no choice but to submit to it and the truths which it harbors, namely, the metaphysical contact we have with the external world.”

Stroud’s critique is predicated on his worldview circle. Likewise, the presuppositionalist’s rejection of this critique is predicated on his worldview circle. However, the Christian worldview’s claim to (1) exclusivity, (2) intelligibility, and (3) metaphysical contact is all that is needed to refute Stroud. The unbeliever must be shown first the inevitability of circularity in worldview considerations, and second, these three paradigmatic truths of the Christian worldview if the presuppositionalist is to be persuasive in his argument. Herein lies the answer to Fluhrer’s accusation of question-begging against the Stroudian critique. Herein lies the persuasive achievement of TAG, contrary to Békefi’s analysis.

Békefi has sought to prove in an autonomous and neutral fashion how a worldview's irrationalism necessitates its falsity as well as its negation. His paper has evidenced that this is no easy task if done on his own assumptions, and thus the attempt to refute Stroud by a reductio of his own position (as Bosserman has attempted) falls short of defending Van Til's TAG. It makes sense that the rejection (or lack of the realization) of a priori circular commitments at the outset by both parties leads one to bow at the feet of Stroud. Yet, at the end of the day, proofs by both sides will ultimately be justified by those very positions, respectively. And if circularity is inevitable, one must either embrace all-or-nothing the Christian circle, which justifies intelligibility and contact with the external world, or the non-Christian circle, which reduces to a disconnect of the external world and thus egocentrism and skepticism. Additionally, if we must accept all-or-nothing a particular circle, and if Christianity claims exclusivity, then by definition (on the all-or-nothing
basis), the Stroudian critique has no content, and the possibility of other worldviews being valid is negated. Both sides are equally guilty of “begging the question” metaphysically speaking, but only one overcomes egocentrism and thus negates Stroud’s challenge. The Christian worldview’s claims to exclusivity, intelligibility, and metaphysical contact necessitate the conclusion that a contrary worldview’s self-stultification amounts to its self-falsification. Only in acknowledging the inevitable circularity of embracing the Christian worldview (or any worldview) can this conclusion be rightfully drawn. That we live within the Christian reality of things proves de facto that all other systems of thought are performatively self-falsifying.

**Scriptural Appeal; Superfluous TAG**

Turning now to the superfluidity of TAG in regards to appealing to Scripture as a direct verification of the metaphysical truths of CT, how should we approach this subject? Recall Békefi’s modified argument to prove the self-falsifiability of non-CWs:

1. **(4)** Whatever the Bible affirms is true. (premise)
2. **(5)** The Bible affirms [that the negation of CT is performatively self-falsifying]. (premise)
3. Therefore, CT is true. (C3)

Notice how given this argument, there is no transcendental analysis employed. There is no comparison of worldviews, no elaboration on necessary preconditions, and the like. The problem with this, says Békefi, lies in the fact that the lack of employing TAG in order to satisfy the self-falsifiability of non-CWs leaves Stroud unanswered and Van Til’s apologetic superfluous and unnecessary. He writes:

> Accepting (4) is tantamount to accepting CT, especially on a confessional Reformed understanding thereof, characteristic of Van Til and his disciples, who espouse the claim that “the Bible affirms CT,” or maybe that “CT is the sum of what the Bible affirms.” (Van Til 2008, 127) On this definition of CT the conclusion (C3) follows from premise (4) without utilizing the transcendental argumentation found in (C1’) and (C2’), rendering it superfluous.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{38}\) Békefi, “Van Til versus Stroud,” 149.
Remember that Békefi draws this conclusion in the context of avoiding circularity at all costs, lest we fail “in a surprisingly straightforward way.” He is right, however: any Christian could concoct an argument against the non-Christian as such:

(P1): Whatever the Bible affirms is true based on its self-authorizing, infallible authority as being God’s revealed Word.

(P2): The Bible affirms that all non-Christian worldviews are self-falsifiable.

(C): Therefore, the Christian worldview is true.\(^{39}\)

Békefi concludes this as problematic for the Van Tillian, however, in that it acts as a sort of “last resort” to proving the objective truthfulness of Christianity without utilizing TAG. This criticism, of course, assumes the lack of objective power that comes with TAG, which is precisely what has been proven on the fundamental premise of inevitable circularity.

However, we can deduce an intriguing conclusion over this alleged superfluidity the Van Tillian is faced with. Recall the criticism that the inability for TAs to prove ontological truths necessitates another method by which such truths can be proven, namely, a verification principle whereby we can “verify” whether or not the external world and the mind of man are connected for these truths to be known. Such a venture would nullify the use of TAs since TAs cannot accomplish this task. However, given the proper treatment and view of the inevitable circularity committed by all sides of the debate, it is easily demonstrated how TAG does prove the ontologically truths of CT. This, in turn, leaves the presuppositionalist with two different valid arguments proving the truths of CT at an ontological level. If this is the case, then contrary to Békefi’s claim that Scriptural appeal acts as a last resort and nullification to TAG, he has actually given the presuppositionalist a supplementary argument to aid him of equal ontological force!

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\(^{39}\) There are a number of potential problems with arguing in this fashion. First, it proceeds from an a priori assumption with very little justification for the position’s truthfulness. All the Christian can do is expound on P1 over the nature of self-authorization, attestation, etc., to make his case. Second, as a result, it negates meaningful discussion between the Christian and non-Christian (which is Békefi’s following point in his paper). Third, based on the first problem, the defense of the self-authorizing circle is less potent than in transcendental analysis. While it is true that God authorizes Himself and that is enough justification for the Bible’s veracity, in transcendental analysis the apologist can also demonstrate the self-justifying nature of Scripture transcendentally by showing that affirming the Bible’s truths (q) presupposes that it is true, but also denying the Bibles truths (not -q) also presupposes that it is true. Its truths have to be assumed in order to bring it into question, a further demonstration of its veracity and a further refutation of the non-CW as opposed to merely claiming that this Holy Book we stand on is self-authoritatively true.
Békefi’s analysis of resorting to the Bible’s affirmations of the self-falsifiability of all non-CWs is, as we have seen, misguided based on the supposition that only the Van Tillian side amounts to circularity in presenting TAG as an all-or-nothing force. This is simply untrue, and both Bahnsen and Van Til were aware of it. The “last-ditch” argument he gives in this section is thus nullified based on misguided assumptions over the nature of circularity and neutrality. Rather than proving that Scriptural appeal amounts to a “last resort” basis, once TAG is treated in the proper light, Békefi has only given the presuppositionalist another ontological-force argument to use in supplication to TAG.

A Proper Objection-Undermining Argument

Taking into account the inescapability of circular commitments, we can now formulate an objection-undermining argument of our own, having now dealt with strengthening the premise of Biblical justification. Recall that Bosserman’s argument, while showing the Stroudian position’s futility, was not enough to ultimately refute his critique. We see in Bosserman’s argument a reductio but at the same time a lack of acknowledgment of Stroud’s equally-committed circularity.40

In transcendental analysis, we are seeking to find what ultimately and necessarily must be true in order to justify intelligible experience. A sufficient condition will not suffice since it does not logically follow that another sufficient condition could not also be out there. However, should necessary conditions be found, it follows that there cannot be other necessary conditions out there that would bring about logical incompatibility between the two sets of transcendentals. The same logic applies in entire worldview analyses. In this context, Bahnsen argues:

…in the nature of the case there can only be one transcendental. There cannot be two ‘ultimate authorities.’ Why? Because if there are two systems of truth you’ve then lost unity, coherence, continuity, and therefore intelligibility and truth. If you had two transcendentals you’d have to ask what the relationship is between the two systems. What unites the two? What’s further is that in order to make sense of the claim that there are two systems by which facts can be made intelligible requires another system in terms of which you’re saying that about the other two. But you

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40 I do not doubt Bosserman’s knowledge on this subject, only that he did not bring it into account when arguing against Stroud here.
see if these two transcendental systems are by hypothesis we can’t get behind them to have the one that unites the two … To even talk about there being two there needs to be one perspective in which you talk about the two. But these two that you’re talking about are by definition ultimate! And so there can’t be a one that unites the two even to talk about their relationship.41 (emphasis mine based on his vocal emphasis)

The inescapability of circularity in transcendental analysis can only mean that we begin with a foundation for knowledge or a foundation for skepticism. Additionally, there cannot be two ultimate worldviews/transcendentals since a conflict of these ultimate maxims would amount only to skepticism and metaphysical contradiction. The all-or-nothing circle of Christianity not only justifies intelligibility (epistemically and metaphysically), but also claims exclusivity. A venture to still posit other potential worldviews not only reduces to absurd consequences, but it also already relies on the all-or-nothing Christian system.

With this material covered, we can thus formulate an objection-undermining argument against Stroud predicated on the laws of logic:

(P1) In order for Stroud’s argument to be objectively valid requires the laws of thought to be objective, external to us, absolute, and universally applicable.
(P2) Stroud’s metaphysical assumptions and/or worldview circle do not justify the laws of thought to be as such.
(P3) The Christian circle, however, transcendentally justifies these qualifications for the laws of thought.
(P4) By default, every other circle is false given the law of non-contradiction, and that transcendentals hold ultimate status.
(P5) The Stroudian critique, which is grounded on its own autonomous circle, must therefore assume the all-or-nothing truths of the Christian circle even to be posited, including Christianity’s exclusivity.
(P6) But if the Stroudian critique is dependent upon the all-or-nothing truths of the Christian circle, then the Stroudian critique cannot affect any Christian apologetical argument.

41 Bahnsen/Butler “Transcendental Arguments,” tape 10: Van Til’s Critics.
(P7) TAG is a Christian apologetical argument.

(C) Therefore, the Stroudian critique does not compromise TAG.

Not only does this argument act as a reductio against the Stroudian circle, it at the same time proves the validity of the Christian’s. Additionally, it illustrates that Stroud relies on the Christian’s metaphysical assumptions despite his disposition to the contrary. Stroud, if wanting to postulate a meaningful argument, must unwittingly presuppose in advance the Christian metaphysic. In this regard, Stroud has undermined his own position.

Békefi rightfully points out that Bosserman’s use of a reductio against Stroud is not enough to refute the Stroudian challenge since it ultimately does not prove that irrationalism equates to falsehood; it only puts Stroud’s critique back on his argument. Bosserman should have also pointed out the back-of-everything circularity involved on both sides in order to formulate a reductio with objective force. Only on such a basis can a proper objective-undermining argument be made to refute Stroud. Only on such a basis can TAG proceed successfully. Neutral standing outside of all circles is a myth, an immoral venture, and an impossibility.

The Impotency of the Stroudian Challenge

A final rebuttal we could make against the Stroudian challenge need not even involve worldview considerations. Rather, it argues on the Stroudian’s own terms of rejecting a priori circular commitments (even though this is blatantly false). Thus, even assuming the above argument is invalid in one way or another, Stroud’s position still undermines itself in this forthcoming way.

To reiterate Békefi’s outlining of the Stroudian challenge: “Stroud’s objection is that showing that we must believe something … does not establish its truth” (emphasis original). Moreover, Békefi’s analysis of the Stroudian challenge seems to refer to propositional status irrespective of epistemology or metaphysics when he sets out in defining his terms:

A proposition … is performatively self-falsifying if its affirmation implies its falsehood; it is self-stultifying if its truth implies that one can never be rationally justified in affirming it.

Thus:

Stroud’s objection is that showing that we must believe something (probably
because we can never be justified in believing its negation) does not establish its
truth. We can plausibly take Stroud to be talking about self-stultification—and so
the gist of his critique, the Stroudian thesis, can be formulated in the following way:
(ST): Self-stultification does not imply falsehood.

To put Stroud’s question “bluntly”: “Why should one think that what one must believe … is
actually true?”

Earlier, we observed Békefi’s treatment of Bosserman’s objection to Stroud’s position in
reducing to skepticism. However, Bosserman’s showing that Stroud’s position amounts to extreme
irrationalism does not refute Stroud since he has not shown that self-stultification equates to falsity.
Thus, Van Til’s transcendental argument does not actually prove the truths of the Christian
worldview, only that we must believe it. This carries such a force, says Békefi, that alterations or
even a total rejection of TAG are warranted if one is to objectively prove CT since such an
argument is ultimately “unsuccessful”:

… the grave problems TACT faces with respect to the Stroudian critique, by my
reckoning, render TACT an argument that can quite safely be called unsuccessful.

At this juncture, we must ask the critical question: why has this same critique not been applied
to itself? Must we, as Van Tilian presuppositionalists, believe the Stroudian challenge to be a
relevant criticism? Békefi argues that this is indeed the case. But this same challenge, Békefi says,
argues that just because “we must believe something … does not establish its truth.” Thus, we can
turn Stroud’s own critique against itself: just because we must believe in Stroud’s critique does not
mean that it is true. But if it is not objectively true, exactly how much of a problem is it to TAG?
Remember that Békefi concludes in his paper that the Stroudian challenge carries such a force
within itself that it renders Van Til’s argument “unsuccessful.” If this is the case, and if we are to
be fair in our analyses, we can therefore call Stroud’s criticism of TAG equally unsuccessful, for
just because we must believe in it does not make it objectively so. Békefi would first have to prove
that Stroud’s thesis is objectively true before demonstrating that it is a rationally justified
proposition since it does not follow, according to Stroud, that rationality implies truthfulness. But

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42 Ibid., 141.
43 Ibid., 157.
the very act of *proving* something as true requires the assumption of rational justification. Thus any attempt to prove the Stroudian thesis as being true inevitably begs the question on its own terms.

At this point, the Stroudian may come back by pointing out that Stroud’s thesis was formulated in the context of metaphysical considerations in TAs, not towards any and all arguments in general. However, we must now ask why this is the case. As has been lamented throughout this paper, Stroud has assumed at the outset the non-Christian position of man being at the center of the universe and thus being subjected to the problem of egocentrism; he has likewise begged the question. On this presupposition, Stroud concluded that no metaphysical knowledge is possible apart from the existence of our “self.” Ergo, by Stroud’s own admission, that we must believe in an external reality, laws of logic, the causal principle, etc., does not entail that such realities are true.

It is curious to note, however, that Stroud acknowledged the futility of his own worldview by concluding in his paper that radical skepticism cannot be defeated. But if radical skepticism cannot be defeated, then, once again, by Stroud’s own admission, no truths can be known. That is to say, on Stroud’s own position and by his own admission, metaphysical knowledge is impossible. The Stroudian challenge is, therefore, valid and necessary. However, on Stroud’s position and by his own admission *all* knowledge is impossible since radical skepticism cannot be defeated. This is all that is needed to use Stroud’s critique universally, whether in metaphysical considerations in TAs or not. It naturally follows that whether the subject be over metaphysics or epistemology, that we must believe in something does not necessitate it being true. This would include the Stroudian challenge itself. Thus, the Stroudian challenge *does* fall prey to its own conclusion that merely having to believe in it does not necessitate that it is an objectively true critique against TAG.

From this discussion, it becomes evident that should one apply the Stroudian critique consistently—that is, to all propositions—then the Stroudian critique loses its potency against TAG. Whereas TAG proving the rationality of the Christian worldview does not necessitate its truth, Békefi proving the Stroudian critique’s rationality likewise does not necessitate its truth either. Of course, if Békefi responded to this objection by saying we do have knowledge despite Stroud’s critique, he has unwittingly assumed the truthfulness of Christianity *on all accounts* in doing so, which is the very thing he will not grant in argumentation. At best, granting (erroneously)

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44 This, in turn, leads to the infinite regression of “how do you know that you know” *ad infinitum.*
that there is no a priori circularity on the Stroudian side, he can only conclude that Stroud’s challenge ends in a stalemate. Granting Békefi’s assumption that circularity must be avoided, he is left only with an impotent argument – if TAG be objectively unsuccessful on the grounds of the Stroudian critique, then the Stroudian critique is likewise objectively unsuccessful on its own grounds.

IV. Conclusion

The challenge presented by Barry Stroud has become increasingly more relevant in contemporary presuppositional literature due to the obvious consequences it presses on the presuppositional method. With the death of the late Greg Bahnsen, who single-handedly championed most faithfully Van Til’s apologetic, we are left only with his dealings of Stroud on a few cassette tapes and nothing significant in any of his scholarly work. Whether one faults him for this or not (perhaps because he didn’t see Stroud as a threat as is evidenced by my quotes of him in this work), his protégé, Michael Butler, saw Stroud as a very imminent and immediate problem that needed to be dealt with in his 2002 Thesis.

Békefi has sympathized with the Stroudian objection and concluded ultimately, against Butler and others, that TAG is unsuccessful. The error of his reasoning, as we have seen, lies in the special pleading involved in not acknowledging the equally-committed circularity on the Stroudian side. The presuppositionalist is not the only one who has assumed in advance the truthfulness of his position, whether epistemically or metaphysically. As such, the crux of refuting Békefi and Stroud lies on this crucial point. Békefi has not fully understood (or, if he has, then simply rejected) the nature of neutrality, presuppositions, and circularity—three fundamental tenets of the presuppositional method. After showing the error of his argument, we rebutted his position on circularity, clarified the issue of self-stultification and self-falsification from the Christian worldview perspective, rebutted the notion that appealing to Scripture is superfluous, formulated our own objection-undermining argument against Stroud, and illustrated lastly that on Stroud’s own position his own challenge does not live up to its own standards. In the end, with proper

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45 Dr. Fluhrer’s assessment of CT rejecting the Stroudian premise that self-stultification does not necessitate self-falsification is, I believe, the closest and most faithful answer to the Van Tillian/Bahnsenian answer. In his paper, Békefi’s only criticism of this point was its lack of persuading power. However—and once again revolving around the issue of circularity—the answer to this lies in illustrating to the unbeliever the inevitable circularity committed by both sides.
treatment of the transcendental implications occurring on both sides, Stroud’s challenge ultimately fails against Van Til’s transcendental apologetic.
Appendix
An Epistemological Impasse

Békefi has been confronted on the issue of circularity on social media. When broached by the fact that Stroud was equally begging the question, Békefi responded:

Wouldn’t this leave us in a sort of epistemological impasse? On the Christian worldview, TAG is sound; on the non-Christian worldview, TAG is unsound. In what sense is TAG an *argument* for Christian theism?46

It would appear from this response that he is willing to give up at least the criticism of circularity, granted he still has more. He laments this issue in his paper as another criticism of TAG:

The problem is that Reformed epistemology cripples the Biblical justification strategy so that it *voids TACT of all persuasive power* (emphasis mine). The crucial fault with the utilization of the Plantingan model here is that the [inner instigation of the Holy Spirit] produces beliefs *only in the minds of Christian believers*. Christians, in turn, believe at least the main points of [Christian theism]—so the argument’s crucial premise is only warranted for those who mostly accept its conclusion … The argument could thus not aspire to convince the skeptic, which one would expect a TA to do. For all these reasons then, I consider the Biblical justification strategy untenable.47

We see once more how Békefi believes in the necessity of a neutral method by which to argue and win over the unbeliever; the dogmatism of the circularity involved in transcendental argumentation would reduce to a futile apologetic.

Interestingly enough, this same issue was put at the forefront in recent literature by J. W. Montgomery in his essay “Once Upon a Priori,” an essay in Van Til’s Festschrift, *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*. In it, Montgomery gives a series of three different parables to illustrate how the Van Tillian position

47 Békefi, “Van Til versus Stroud,” 150.
amounts ultimately to fideistic resolve centered around internal consistency within systems and a total disregard for the use of empirical evidences.

His first parable, “The Universe of Tlön,” is a parable in which a secret society “conceives of the idea of producing a total philosophy of life in the form of a detailed and full description of the world as it ‘really’ is.” As he ultimately concludes against Van Til that since there are ‘no exceptions’ to the jaundiced vision of the sinner, and [since] sin is a universal condition to which both the non-Christian and the Christian are subject…then how it Tlön to be distinguished from reality?” As a devastating result, Montgomery writes:

The conclusion is inescapable: if everyone without exception has colored glasses cemented to his face, no one can criticize another person’s spectacles, or indeed the ‘spectacle’ of another world-view. Suddenly Tlön and the New Jerusalem become interchangeable, along with an infinite number of other resting places …

Van Til’s notion of the noetic effects of sin leading to jaundiced and therefore interchangeable viewpoints requires an answer. For the Christian, it is sovereign election and the truths within Scripture. Montgomery’s second parable concerns this response.

Referring to two societies by Jacques Rouxel, the story goes that the planets inhabited on either side of the earth—Shadok and Gibi—both inhibited unpleasant properties. The planet Shadok would change form without warning causing people to fall off of it. Gibi, on the other hand, was shaped long and thin like a blade and acted like a teeter-totter, likewise dumping many of its inhabitants off into the void. Due to this quite obvious problem, both societies planned on moving to earth. Montgomery tells, however, that these peoples “being totally opposed in appearance, temperament, and goals, … constituted an irrevocable threat to each other …”

Supposing, then, that these two groups engaged in presuppositional apologetic discourse in order to convince each other of the truthfulness of their respective views, what exactly would commence? Since they are diametrically opposed to one another, both groups would have their

49 Ibid., 3.
50 Ibid., 4.
51 Ibid., 5.
views of election, Scripture, and the like. On and on they go with their disagreements, and neither side is willing to appeal to the facts since, according to Van Til, there are no such things as brute facts. Everything is simply reinterpreted to fit the other group’s theological viewpoint. On this position, each side has their own “context” of the facts which nullifies the usefulness of arguing from them. The results are devastating for Montgomery:

Van Til rejects the fact-oriented alternative, thereby eliminating in principle the possibility of his opponents’ marshalling evidence against Christian claims. But the victory is entirely pyrrhic, for by accepting aprioristic circularity, he at the same time eliminates all possibility of offering a positive demonstration of the truth of the Christian worldview … ‘Such criticisms are irrelevant, for right reason—true interpretation of fact and genuine application of the standards of consistency—begins with commitment to my presuppositional starting point!’  

Thus, for Montgomery, appealing theologically as an out to the jaundiced viewpoints we all face is not enough since contrary societies can conjure up their same theological views. It is vital to see where Montgomery is going with his conclusion. Presuppositionalism, he says, amounts only to a priori circularity, a total disregard for the use of evidences, and consistency as being the final arbiter for truth. If this be the case, all presuppositionalism amounts to is a stand-off with no final arbiter available to prove which side is correct (if either), leading to solipsism.

Montgomery’s third and final parable is an ancient parable from a ninth-century “Syrian theologian and bishop of Hatran in Mesopotamia, Theodore Abu Quorra …”  He lays it out as such:

A great king [God] had a son [mankind] who had grown up out of contact with his father. While journeying in a distant province the son fell seriously ill. The doctor accompanying him [reason] was incapable of treating the disease, but the kin, learning of his son’s plight, sent instructions [the gospel] for the healing of the boy. However, the king’s numerous enemies also discovered what had happened, and they likewise sent remedies—purporting to come from the king—which were

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52 Ibid., 8.
53 Ibid., 9.
actually poisonous [non-Christian religious and philosophical options]. The Son’s solution to this dilemma was to evaluate the remedies by three tests: first, what each remedy revealed about his father … second, how accurately each remedy pictured the nature of the disease; and thirdly, how sound the various curative methods appeared to be. With the help of the doctor, the son finally made his decision in terms of the remedy that best satisfied all three tests.54

On this parable, Montgomery argues that man is not faced with just one religious truth as the presuppositionalist would claim, i.e., all men know in their heart of hearts the existence of God. He sympathizes with Abu Quorra in concluding that, instead, man is faced with “a cacophony of conflicting religious claims. What is he to do?”55

He cannot very well try all the various remedies in an arbitrary fashion, for all except the true remedy are poisonous in varying degrees, and his constitution could not possibly tolerate the infinite number of experiential trials necessary. … But the apologetic presuppositionalist, as we have seen, cuts off all opportunity to determine the truth-value of competing religious remedies prior to the acceptance of one of them as a first principle of all meaningful thinking.56

Montgomery draws a devastating conclusion about presuppositionalism from this parable:

Thus the non-Christian is not left ‘without excuse’ in the face of gospel proclamation: he can legitimately ‘excuse’ himself from commitment to Christ on the ground—actually provided for him by the Christian apriorist!—that since no facts can be properly evaluated as evidence for a position without prior acceptance to that position, Christianity can have no more claim to his life than an infinite number of competing views that demand faith in them as the necessary condition for discovering ‘the truth.’ Theologically, one enters the cloud-cuckoo land of fideism, which borders the philosophical realm of solipsism—where an infinite number of doors open out of Tlö̱n, Gibi, and Shadok.

54 Ibid., 9-10.
55 Ibid., 10.
56 Ibid., 10.
From the preceding parables, we can draw three primary conclusions: first, Montgomery believes that the presuppositional approach of a comparison of systems reduces to aprioristic circularity predicated on deductive reasoning—internal consistency is the ultimate criterion for truth; second, presuppositional apologetics, therefore, rejects the use of inductive methods by which to prove the veracity of Christianity since everyone without exception has colored glasses cemented to their faces; and third, since everyone has their colored glasses on, proceeding to argue even deductively based on competing systems—whether in consistency, theology, or both—likewise fairs no better. Thus no matter what is being argued, there will inevitably be an impasse between the two parties, which will not and cannot amount to anything fruitful. We must thank brother Montgomery for these criticisms since they are relevant as evidenced in Békefi’s earlier objection.

**Response from Van Til**

It is difficult to begin with Van Til’s response without getting involved in the theological discussion presented by him (and a summary of Van Til’s theological opening would only be inadequate). Are we all, then, entrapped in our own closed deductive circles with our own colored glasses, as Montgomery believes? Is an epistemic impasse the only outcome from TAG as Békefi purports with Stroud’s challenge nullified? Van Til’s first major response to Montgomery is responding by explicitly stating that he does not belong to the camp of “deductive systems”:

… after all, you are not (as I am not!) interested in _a priori_ deductive systems. I have argued on a number of occasions against various people to the effect that the biblical ‘system of truth’ is based upon the exegesis of the authoritatively given truth content of Scripture. When exegesis seems to lead into so-called ‘antinomies’ such as the relation of the all-controlling sovereignty of God to the freedom or responsibility of man, I simply admit that I cannot logically penetrate the situation.58

Following this clarification he continues by illustrating two opposing camps: extreme Calvinism and Arminianism. Of the extreme Calvinists he writes:

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57 As further substantiation to this claim, Van Til later cites Montgomery’s _Where is History Going_., wherein he says presuppositionalism adheres to “seemingly deductive systems.”

Extreme Calvinists think they can show that the teachings of the Bible can be related to one another in a logically penetrable system.\textsuperscript{59} When they construct their logical system they virtually destroy the significance of historical factuality and with it the significance of the Christian story.\textsuperscript{60}

In other words, to hold so strictly to logical consistency within a particular system negates the meaningfulness of inductive methods, hence why this camp destroys “the significance of historical factuality and with it the significance of the Christian story.”\textsuperscript{61} For this camp, correspondence to reality is inevitably meaningless; it is ultimately logical coherence that determines the meaningfulness of a position. Van Til responds to Montgomery that he explicitly rejects this deductivistic camp in which he was mistakenly placed in. On the other hand, the Arminians, says Van Til:

… think they can show that the teachings of the Bible can relate to one another in the way inductivist philosophers like John Lock and others relate the facts that springs from the womb of chance to one another. When these men construct their inductive systems, believing all facts ‘speak for themselves,’ they build an island of ice floating on a bottomless, shoreless cauldron of chance.\textsuperscript{62}

The error of both of these parties, according to Van Til, lies in the fact that:

… both the extreme Calvinist and the Arminian are unwilling, at the most critical juncture, to submit their logical thinking based on the idea of human autonomy, to the obedience of Christ. Neither of them seems to realize that they are virtually employing the methodology of a man like Parmenides, who, in order to relate temporal facts to one another, destroyed their reality.

\textsuperscript{59} In response to the seemingly conflicting logic of the Bible teaching both God’s absolute sovereignty and the “freedom or responsibility of man,” he writes that the extreme Calvinists “virtually denied the universal offer of the gospel” in order to keep their system holistically coherent. However, Van Til does not subscribe to such a “deductive” stance. Instead, he refers to these logical difficulties as “limiting concepts.” (ibid., 20).

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 20.

\textsuperscript{61} In the same way that the extreme Calvinists reject the universality of the gospel message in order to keep their system logically coherent, so it also is that one would reject the meaningfulness of empirical means for the sake of shelter in their enclosed deductive circle.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 20.
Again, both the extreme Calvinist and the Arminian fail to see that when they employ a legislative view of human logic such as that of Parmenides, they are bound, willy nilly, also to employ the notion of pure contingency as correlative to their logic.  

The exaltation of human reason within these two camps leads to the ultimate inability to relate all facts to one another. What Van Til has done is remarkable: in the first place, he explicitly shows how he does not reduce to fideistic deductive systems lest his apologetic negate the meaningfulness of evidences, nor does he believe that all philosophical positions reduce as such leading to nothing more than futile shouting matches. Montgomery’s analysis of Van Til’s apologetic mistakenly conflates alleged deductive systems (which care not about the external world) with worldviews that are immanent states of affairs about the world itself. Yet after this, he turns Montgomery’s own position on itself! For by Montgomery following the inductive evidential approach, were he consistent, he would invariably place the autonomy of the human mind at the forefront, leading to an apologetic predicated on sheer contingency. Not only was Montgomery’s analysis of Van Til’s apologetic wrong in concluding that evidential analysis is worthless on its own grounds and that presuppositionalism amounts ultimately to deductive comparisons of consistency between opponents, but Montgomery’s own position (which he refers to as a “fresh start”) itself reduces to contingency and chance by proceeding from a “legislative” view of human reason.

In short, Van Til’s response to Montgomery was first and foremost that presuppositional apologetics does not amount to a comparison of deductive systems wherein inductive inferential analysis is either ignored or rendered useless thus negating the meaningfulness of the Christian story. For such would be the case – Christianity will have been strictly formalized, void of any meaningful content and history, and always subject to its master, the autonomous logician. On the other hand, going too far in the opposite direction of induction likewise deifies the intellect of man, makes man the final arbiter of what the facts and their interrelations are, and thus likewise reduces the position to pure contingency.

Moreover, the stand-off scenario, as Montgomery presents it, misses the entire point of transcendental analysis. Van Til’s argument does not reduce to abstraction wherein logical consistency is the final determiner for justifying intelligibility. It is rather a concrete argument that

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63 Ibid., 20.
the metaphysical reality of Christianity is a necessary precondition for intelligibility. This sort of argument definitionally requires the use of concrete evidences! For by negating the meaningfulness of empirical analysis for the sake of deductive consistency, we cannot say that the metaphysical concreteness of the Christian worldview is a transcendental in the first place. We rather cut off all metaphysical ties to it, which brings us precisely to the Stroudian problem.

Furthermore, Montgomery (and Békefi) have not fully appreciated the transcendental program Van Til gives us. What takes place in transcendental analysis is not one enclosed circular system against another competing over internal consistency and a corresponding rightful view of the facts to disprove the other position. This surely would lead us to an epistemic impasse. Transcendental analysis is, rather, concerned to seek what the necessary preconditions must be for such argumentation even to be possible. As such, it is the duty of the presuppositionalist to give up his own position and grant his opponent’s is correct on all accounts for argument’s sake to show that on their own arguments, on their own circle, their position is reduced to absurdity. Such a cross-examining argument is not inductive nor deductive. Rather, it proceeds simply by a comparison of worldviews. This is the nature of transcendental analysis, and if in transcendental analysis we are seeking which worldview can justify intelligible experience, then by definition, contrary to Montgomery’s claims, these positions are not interchangeable. Van Til writes:

We must therefore give our opponents better treatment than they give us. We must point out to them that univocal [unbelieving] reasoning itself leads to self-contradiction, not only from a theistic point of view, *but from a non-theistic point of view as well.* It is this that we ought to mean when we say that we must meet our enemy on their own ground. It is this that we ought to mean when we say that *we reason from the impossibility of the contrary.*64 (emphasis mine)

While all parties begin with some sort of authority and thus have their own corresponding epistemology which submits to that authority, we are not left in a stand-off scenario without resolution. The transcendental authority of the Christian worldview is not only proclaimed but *demonstrated* by arguing *on our opponent’s own terms,* which includes his epistemology. We grant

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that they are correct on all accounts so that, as Van Til says, “they may see the consequences.”

Herein lies the resolution of Montgomery’s straw man.

A second error—for Békefi potentially, and Montgomery for sure—seems to be that believing in the necessity of a presuppositional approach necessarily nullifies the meaningfulness of evidential analysis and inductive methods since it utilizes a transcendental argument. Once more, this has been a historical criticism that Van Tillians have been well-aware of. Presuppositionalism by no means rejects the usefulness of inductive or deductive arguments if done within a Christian framework. Van Til again:

An a posteriori method is one that is practically identical with the empirical or inductive method. The a priori method is usually identified with the deductive method. We need only observe that a priori reasoning, and a posteriori reasoning, are equally anti-Christian, if these terms are understood in their historical sense.65

(emphasis mine)

Contrary to Montgomery’s misguided analysis, Van Til does not favor deductivism to the exclusion of inductive methods. Van Til explicitly writes that he endorses both induction and deduction in his apologetic if only they are used on Christian presuppositions, not pretended anti-Christian neutral presuppositions, which falsely assume the self-sufficiency of autonomous human reasoning. While neutrality is not to be utilized by the Van Tillian, he still can appeal to evidences in support of Scriptural accuracy in translation and preservation, archaeologically to the great exodus from Egypt, the conquests of Joshua, the historical existence of Christ, and so on, the wonders of the stars above displaying the marvelous works of their Creator, and more. This is especially attested to in Acts 14:17 when Paul himself argues evidentially to the pagans in Lystra on the basis of God not leaving Himself “without witness” in His providentially giving “rains from heaven and fruitful seasons” to them. The difference between Montgomery and Van Til’s views on the use of evidences, rather, is that Van Til recognizes the pervasive problem of the sinful, distorted interpretation of natural revelation by the unbeliever in order to justify his non-Christian worldview. Arguing evidentially alone is not enough to convince the non-Christian to turn from his wicked ways since he is at enmity with God. This is brilliantly illustrated one verse later when

Paul, after he had proclaimed these evidences, was still being regarded as a god for miraculously healing a crippled man earlier. The pagan audience he was preaching to proclaimed, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” (v. 11). Given their pagan worldview, their pagan outlook on life: “Even with these words [Paul and Barnabas] scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them” (v. 18). Paul’s evidential apologetic here “scarcely” worked with the crowd.66

Where then is the epistemic impasse to be found from Békefi’s criticism? Even rightfully granting that the epistemologies of the presuppositionalist and the non-Christian are staunchly opposed to one another, are we left on our own positions, regarding each other’s arguments as unsound and leaving all rationality at that? Of course not. It seems that both Békefi and Montgomery share the common criticism that TAG does not operate on a rational basis by which to prove its conclusion. At this juncture, enough has been said to summarize this discussion of the nature of Van Til’s transcendental program in order to refute this underlying objection:

1. The transcendental method does not seek merely to find which system forms wholistic coherence and consistency by which to prove its truthfulness.
2. The transcendental method does not argue that internal consistency is the only necessary precondition to intelligible experience.
3. The transcendental method argues concretely, not abstractly and formally.
4. The transcendental method does not argue deductively as Montgomery believes, nor inductively, but transcendentally.
5. The transcendental method seeks to show what the necessary preconditions must be for objective reality to be intelligible.
6. The transcendental method thus claims exclusivity to the truthfulness of only one worldview and therefore rejects the interchangeability of competing systems.

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66 Moreover, Paul’s apologetic in Acts 17 is further proof that, while he argued evidentially, he himself did not subscribe to evidentialism. His apologetic at the Areopagus is staunchly Scriptural and proceeds from Its authority, not the authority of brute facts. Thus, the synchrony of Acts 14 & 17 proves that Paul used both evidences in his apologetic as well as Scriptural authority, which just so happens to be the same method the presuppositionalist employs.
7. The transcendental method necessarily requires the transcendentalist to leave his circle—which includes his epistemology—so that he may go to his opponent’s position and epistemology in order to show its absurdity and impossibility.

8. The transcendental method thus does not amount to a fideistic, solipsistic resolve since it requires granting the opponent’s position correct merely for argument’s sake.

9. The transcendental method likewise is dogmatic yet at the same time objectively demonstrable.

A last short consideration we must look into concerns the difference between proof and persuasion. The epistemic impasse issue has been addressed and rebutted on the basis of its ignorance of the transcendental method. In doing transcendental analysis, we must grant our opponent’s position and epistemology correct in order to illustrate its transcendental inadequacy and dependence on the Christian worldview. However, assuming the non-Christian is still not convinced of the Christian worldview’s veracity in transcendental analysis, does this warrant altering or completely rejecting TAG as a whole simply because it was not persuasive? The consequences of this logic are absurd since it is agreed by both parties of this debate that there is no one argument in existence that is universally persuasive, whether theological, philosophical, political, scientific, etc. If universal persuasion (or at the very least “general” persuasion) is a prerequisite for a meaningful apologetic—especially holding to a Reformed confession of God alone saving sinners and not the tactics of men—then there never will be a meaningful apologetical argument. The consequences of Békefi’s objection to an inevitable epistemic impasse and thus inevitable lack of persuading power in TAG invariably renders all apologetic arguments useless since they, too, are not generally persuasive.

Békefi should have acknowledged the impossibility of neutral thinking when leveling this criticism. Since neutral thinking is impossible and if both parties interpret the evidence—whether empirical, philosophical, or transcendental—in light of their own worldview, then naturally there would be an impasse in any and all arguments. In most cases, there indeed remains an impasse between the believer and unbeliever even after objectively illustrating the impossibility of the
unbeliever’s position.\textsuperscript{67} But this just so happens also to be the case in evidential and classical apologetics: even after the evidentialist gives his list of evidences proving the truth of Christianity, the unbeliever, standing on his unneutral, anti-Christian foundation, remains unpersuaded of the apologist’s argument and thus believes it to be unsound; likewise the classical apologist may argue better than anyone that the causation of the universe points to the existence of Yahweh, yet the unbeliever, again standing on his unneutral, anti-Christian foundation, will remain unpersuaded and thus likewise believe the argument to be unsound. In both cases, we are faced with an epistemic impasse. Should we therefore give up the God-given mandate of apologetics since we do not see general persuasion and conversion? Of course not. As has been belabored throughout this paper, Békefi has naively assumed the possibility of a neutral position whereby such epistemic impasses are avoided (or at the very least lessened). This is not the case. Even though a neutral position is impossible, it is God alone who saves sinners; the apologist is merely the means by which He accomplishes His purpose.

Interestingly enough, the elaboration of marking the differences between proof and persuasion was the very first subject Bahnsen opened his Transcendental Arguments seminar with. He was well-aware of the logical problems of conflating the two (as is evidences in Békefi’s objection). Bahnsen says:

\begin{quote}
An argument need not be accepted by everyone for it to be conclusive. I’m tempted to make reference to the O. J. Simpson trial … my guess is as long as we’re on this planet you’re not gonna get everybody convinced one way or another. Now, should we just say, ‘Well then why don’t we just give up courtroom protocol – calling witnesses, garnering evidence, arguing with one another – because, you know, you can’t get everybody to agree one way or another, so it’s just really a crapshoot. So why don’t we get together, throw the dice, flip the coin,…decide whether the guy’s guilty and then just get on with it?’

When we say we can objectively prove God’s existence we’re not saying we can universally persuade people … ‘A man convinced against his will is of the same
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{67} By impasse here, I am referring to disagreement. It very well may be the case that the unbeliever rejects TAG’s conclusion, leading to an impasse, but it also very well may be the case that the unbeliever does see the devastating conclusion of TAG yet still rejects the faith due to his love of sin.
opinion still.’ That’s true … If you don’t [recognize this difference between proof and persuasion] you’re really gonna be strung out working on your Christian apologetic … because over and over again what you’re going to do is use an argument and see that somebody doesn’t just fall immediately and then say, ‘Oh, I gotta revise the argument.’ Well that isn’t true. Sometimes you gotta repeat the argument. Sometimes you just have to keep coming back, coming back, coming back ‘til the coin drops for the person. But even when you have the greatest of arguments … if a man’s heart is not changed he’s not going to have the coin drop. He’s not going to say he understands.68

Békefi’s objection that the consequence of circumventing Stroud’s criticism on the basis of equally-committed circularity by the opposing side leads to an “epistemological impasse” ultimately holds no water. In the nature of the case, such a conclusion misconstrues the nature of neutrality, misconstrues the nature of the transcendental analysis of Van Til’s apologetic not reducing to abstract interchangeable “deductive systems,” misconstrues the exact role of evidences, misconstrues the nature of presuppositionalism’s dogmatism, misconstrues the nature of proof versus persuasion, and misconstrues the nature of our points of contact with unbelievers. Van Til’s transcendental argument still does not succumb to the Stroudian challenge either directly via circularity or consequentially via epistemological impasse.

68 Bahnsen/Butler, “Transcendental Arguments,” tape 1: Four Types of Proof.