

Lesson 5

Alternative Worldviews

Based on Lecture 2 of

Greg L. Bahnsen's *Basic Training for Defending the Faith*

**“Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright,
but they have sought out many devices.”**

(Ecclesiastes 7:29)

Once again we must understand that a proper apologetic requires that we engage unbelief as an entire worldview and seek to expose it at the foundations. In our last lesson, we noted that worldviews necessarily involve three fundamental issues: A theory of reality (metaphysics), a theory of knowledge (epistemology), and a theory of ethics (morality). Consequently, worldviews must answer three leading questions: What is real? How do I know? How should I live?

I. Central Concerns

In the final portion of Dr. Bahnsen's second lecture, he focuses on two central issues: (1) He provides us with examples of several worldview options, and then (2) he highlights the presuppositional cores sustaining those worldviews.

As we have noted before, one of the beauties of Presuppositional Apologetics is that it does not require you to be an expert in the entirety of human knowledge so that you can be ready to respond to unbelief. Rather, it digs down to the basic presuppositions men hold, showing that

their most basic assumptions cannot support their worldview whatever its extraneous details may be.

Particular Worldviews

Dr. Bahnsen highlights four worldview options that compete against Christianity in the world today. As Christians you should desire to understand the culture around you, for you are to witness to that world (Acts 1:8) striving to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19). As apologists, you have seen that you are obliged to “always be ready to make a defense of *everyone* who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Let us briefly introduce the sample worldview options presented.

Hinduism. Hinduism arose in India somewhere between 2500 B.C. and 2000 B.C. To get our historical bearings, Abraham lived around 2000 B.C., and Moses led the exodus from Egypt about 1450 B.C. Though Hinduism is an indigenous religion to the East, and may be largely unfamiliar to you, it has 900 million devotees placing it third among world religions, with Christianity being the largest (2.1 billion) and Islam second (1.3 billion).¹ This makes Hinduism an important worldview—this, as well as other reasons which we will mention below.

Hinduism is actually a family of merged religions arising out of a thoroughly pagan backdrop. This is very much opposed to Christianity which is exclusivistic (claiming to be the singular truth and offering the only way of salvation). Historically, Hinduism developed its worldview from the forces of nature (seen in storms and fires) and ancient heroes which serve as gods, whereas Christianity’s holds to one God who controls the forces of nature. The Hindu

¹“Major World Religions”: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religions>

adherent worships his own chosen deity among the millions available, while Christians hold to only one living and true God.

More developed Hinduism holds that Brahman is the one, ultimate spiritual reality which is the formless, indescribable, unknowable and impersonal Divine. Since Brahman is the sum total of reality, all else is illusion (*maya*). Creation has no beginning or end, and the history we “experience” is an endless cycle of creation and destruction. Man is but the spark of the divine Brahman who is imprisoned in the physical body and who undergoes a series of reincarnations (the transmigration of the soul through *samsara*) until absorbed into Brahman. We are ultimately not separate individuals, for all is one.

In several important respects, Hinduism comports well with several leading Western perspectives, and especially the New Age movement: It has no problem with evolution in that the Hindu religion itself involves an ongoing adaptation of other religions and an upward spiritual evolution. Much of modern psychology affirms the inherent goodness of man, while Hinduism speaks of man’s basic divinity. Relativity of all truth claims, so widespread in our culture, fits comfortably with the Hindu view of illusion, god being a part of everything (both good and bad), as well as its practice of absorbing various beliefs (all other religions are *yoga*, “paths”). Its hyper-spirituality (elevating the spiritual to the exclusion of the material) is alluring to many who are disenchanted with the materialism in Western culture.

Behaviorism. Behaviorism is a psychological school particularly associated with the name of Harvard psychology professor B. F. Skinner (1904–1990). It has exercised a powerful influence in modern thinking, spilling over into sociology, politics, criminology, and many other fields.

Skinner argued that people behave as they do through a process known as “operant conditioning.” Our individual behavior is a response to certain environmental factors, especially consequences we experienced in the past. Simply put, experience reinforces behavior. In a purely naturalistic way, if a certain action produces pleasant experiences, it will become a conditioned behavior. The material world is the ultimate reality in which man is passively shaped. Some worldview behaviorists speak of “mental processlessness,” that teaches that man can be understood totally by external events without reference to any rational processes in the mind. Consequently, free will is a myth, an illusion.

Man’s behavior is so thoroughly subject to external conditioning that pure behaviorism teaches that man’s thoughts and feelings do not determine his actions. We are biological machines that simply react to stimuli so that we are conditioned by our environment.² This removes all responsibility for his actions from the individual.

This view of man leads to efforts to control man’s environment in order to manipulate desired behaviors from us. It has significant influences on political theory and practice, as well as jurisprudence and criminology.

Marxism. Marxism is based on the philosophy developed by Karl Marx (1818–1883), a Jewish philosopher and social critic who lived in Germany. It is an inherently atheistic, socio-political scheme holding that the material world is the ultimate reality and that religion is an illusion.

²David Cohen, “Behaviorism,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, ed. Richard L. Gregory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 71.

This worldview affirms a process known as dialectical materialism, wherein social conflicts between opposing forces and ideas gradually merge into a new synthesis.³ History is controlled by ideas, by the struggle of thesis against antithesis until a new and better synthesis arises. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines dialectical materialism this way: “The Marxian interpretation of reality that views matter as the sole subject of change and all change as the product of a constant conflict between opposites arising from the internal contradictions inherent in all events, ideas, and movements.”

Marxism is fundamentally Utopian⁴ in its historical outlook, seeking to root out religious faith as the “opiate of the masses.” In the materialistic worldview of Marx, human love and faith are inconsequential, whereas competitive exploitation controls man’s conduct and societies. Marxists, therefore, believe that history is the story of the struggle between men, classes, societies, and nations moving through revolution from one socio-economic arrangement to another. This will progress through the “dictatorship of the proletariat”⁵ (the arising of the oppressed classes to overthrow the privileged ruling class), ultimately arriving at the stage of scientific socialism. At this final stage, the State will no longer be needed and will whither away as we move into a classless society of harmony and peace.

The Marxist does not understand man in terms of any individual dignity as the image of

³“Dialectic” (from the Greek *dialogo*, “to discourse”) is the philosophical process (the “dialogue”) whereby truth is arrived at by the exchange of ideas between opposing viewpoints.

⁴The word “utopia” is based on the Greek *ou* (“not, no”) and *topos* (“place”). It literally means “no place” reflecting only an ideal place rather than reality.

⁵“Proletariat” derives from the Latin *proles* (“offspring”). In ancient Rome this signified the lower class poor in society.

God. He is a social creature bound up and defined by various external relations with others.

“Adam Schaff relates the Marxist view of man: “Man is a product of society . . . it is society that makes him what he is.”⁶

Existentialism. Though existential thought existed prior to these men, it arose to a position of enormous influence as a formal secular and atheistic philosophy in the writings of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980). Existentialism is concerned above all else with freedom and self-expression. It exalts the experience of living over against knowing, willing over thinking, action over contemplation, love over law, personality over principle, the individual over society. The religious existentialist seeks the “personal encounter” with God over “propositional understanding” of God. The secular existentialist rids God altogether:

- “To kill God is to become god oneself: it is to realize on this earth the eternal life of which the gospel speaks” (Albert Camus).
- “If God exists man cannot be free. But man is free, therefore God cannot exist. Since God does not exist all things are morally permissible” (Jean Paul-Sartre).

Existentialism in its various forms prefers viewing man in terms of his will and feelings rather than his mind. It can be, therefore, so subjectivistic as to border on mysticism. The subtle impact of existentialism on our common outlook today is such that whereas we used to ask others “What do you think about that?,” we now tend to ask “How do you feel about that?” This has also lead

⁶Adam Schaff, *Marxist and the Human Individual*, trans. Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 64.

to the current relativistic conception of truth as expressed in the popular response: “that’s true for you, but not for me.”

These are four of the popular schemes impacting our society both directly and indirectly. After mentioning these schemes, Dr. Bahnsen presents five underlying principles supporting the fuller worldviews in their various forms. We will now consider these.

Worldview Cores

You have undoubtedly heard of the particular worldviews Dr. Bahnsen highlighted: Hinduism, Behaviorism, Marxism, and Existentialism. But now we dig further down to their more basic worldview cores: Monism, Dualism, Atomism, and Pragmatism/Skepticism. The first three are less familiar to those who haven’t studied philosophy. Since we are engaged in system analyses (whole worldviews) by focusing on their philosophical foundations (key presuppositions), we must give these some thought, as well.

When you first hear about some of these issues, you may scratch your head and wonder why in the world would philosophers ponder such things?⁷ To answer this, you should recognize two important truths: (1) God created man in His image, which includes rational thought, so that man has an innate desire from his creation to know; (2) God specifically calls man to seek and to learn, so that man has an moral obligation from his creator to discover.

First, God created man to reflect Him. We see this at the very creation of man: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’” (Gen. 1:26).

⁷According to Ambrose Bierce’s amusing *Devil’s Dictionary*, “philosophy” is defined: “A route of many roads leading from nowhere to nothing.”

As God exercises absolute dominion over all things, so man was created to exercise derivative dominion on a creaturely level: “The heavens are the heavens of the Lord; but the earth He has given to the sons of men” (Ps. 115:16). “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with glory and majesty! Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field” (Ps. 8:3–7).

Second, man is obligated to search out truth. We could bring forward a great number of Scriptures, but a couple will suffice to illustrate this call.

- “You shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you...” (Deut. 13:14).
- “If it is told you, and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination has been committed in Israel...” (Deut 17:4).

In the matters of judicial inquiry mentioned in these texts, man must search for truth: he must do research to establish his understanding of a situation. He does not instinctively know all things. The same is true in any area of life: we learn through diligent inquiry. Man’s philosophical and scientific understanding comes *discursively*⁸ by involvement in God’s world and under His rule.

⁸Discursive reasoning is analytical reasoning that proceeds by moving from fact to fact, point by point, in a logical fashion, rather than by intuition.

Elsewhere we read that “it is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter” (Prov. 25:2). Even our Lord urges us to “Seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7b).

Seeking understanding is a virtue. Solomon returns to this theme often enough in his wisdom literature.

- “A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not find it, but knowledge is easy to him who understands. Go from the presence of a foolish man, when you do not perceive in him the lips of knowledge” (Prov. 14:6–7).
- “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Eccl. 9:10:).

Legitimate, careful research and contemplation seek to uncover knowledge and promote understanding. Philosophical inquiry opens new vistas of comprehension and service to God, Who is the source of all wisdom.

Now then, what of the five worldview cores of which Dr. Bahnsen speaks? The first three issues are directly related to the perennial metaphysical problem facing philosophers all the way back to antiquity: the relationship of the one and the many, or universals and particulars. The problem is resolved in the Christian system. But what is this problem? And how does Christian doctrine resolve it?

Philosophers see in the world certain particulars as well as a basic underlying unity. For instance, many particular dog breeds exist: dachshunds, Dobermans, terriers, pit bulls, etc. Yet

all of these have a basic unity, which we might call “dogness.” They are all members of the one biological family known as Canidae. The *many* dogs are related by their *one* dogness.

In the world, we see cats, pigs, horses, and humans. Each of these quite diverse, particular creatures is also a living organism related in some ways to dogs. In fact, they are warm-blood vertebrates of the unified class Mammalia. Everywhere we look in the Universe we see an array of particulars; yet we see underlying unities tying these together and ultimately being related into an overall unified system of reality. You must have basic unity to help you organize and understand the various particulars of experience. So the philosopher wonders: Which is more basic: The one,⁹ or the many?

Yet, the problem of the one and the many is resolved in the biblical doctrine of God. God is both One (the Trinity) and Many (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Christianity holds to the equal ultimacy of Oneness and Manyness in that the Trinity is equally as important as each of its individual members, and vice versa. Van Til speaks of the one and the many, resolving the matter in the Trinity:

If we wish to know the facts of this world, we must relate these facts to laws. That is, in every knowledge transaction, we must bring the particulars of our experience into relation with universals As Christians, we hold that in this universe we deal with a derivative one and many, which can be brought into fruitful relation with one another because, back of both, we have in God the original One and the Many. If we are to have coherence in our experience, there must be a correspondence of our experience the eternally coherent experience of

⁹The “one” may be expressed as universals, ideas, general concepts, laws, essences, categories, classes, and so forth.

God. Human knowledge ultimately rests upon the internal coherence within the Godhead; our knowledge rests upon the ontological Trinity¹⁰ as its presupposition. . . .

In paradise Adam had a true conception of the relation of the particulars to the universals of knowledge with respect to the created universe. He named the animals ‘according to their nature,’ that is, in accordance with the place God had given them in his universe. Then, too, Adam could converse truly about the meaning of the universe in general and about their own life in particular with Eve. . . . In paradise man’s knowledge was self-consciously [to think God’s thoughts after him]; man wanted to know the facts of the universe in order to fulfill his task as a covenant-keeper.¹¹

Now let us survey the five worldview cores that Bahnsen sets before us. You will note how the first three relate directly to the problem of the one and the many.

Monism. The word monism is rooted in the Greek word *mono*, “single.” Monism is a metaphysical system asserting only one ultimate substance or principle in the Universe. This

¹⁰Ontology is the study of the nature of being. The “ontological Trinity” is God’s triune being in itself, the one being of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The “economic Trinity” looks at the Trinity in terms of the scheme of salvation, the plan of redemption: The Father elects us and sends the Son, the Son becomes incarnate and dies for us, the Spirit calls and sanctifies us. The notion of the economic Trinity focuses on the *roles* of each member of the Trinity. Neither the Father nor the Spirit died on the cross, only the Son.

¹¹Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 22, 23, 25. Cited in Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 239.

view derives from antiquity: Thales¹² (c. 635–543 BC) held that one substance to be water, Anaximenes (c. 585–525 BC) air, Heraclitus (c. 535–475 BC) fire.

Monism denies the multiplicity of things, holding that those many things we deem real are simply phases of a one and are somehow illusions. Through Hinduism and the modern West's fascination with Eastern mysticism, monism is making its impression upon us in various forms, such as the New Age movement, Christian Science, and Hare Krishna.

Dualism. Contrary to the Monist, the Dualist holds that there are two ultimate realities, usually designated as mind and matter. The Greek philosopher Plato (428–348 B.C.) was a Dualist in dividing reality into the ideal world of eternal “Forms” and the perceptual world of temporal sense experience. In the eternal world beyond the spatio-temporal world exist ideal Forms in perfection as unchanging realities. Whereas the world of experience is populated with dim, imperfect particular copies of those ideal forms (which ideal forms are known to us only through intuition).

Many Dualists hold to an intuitionist epistemology. We can only know truth through intuition of the rational forms that are innate in us. In such a system, ethics is also intuited rather than rationally argued and justified.

Atomism. Atomists are materialists who hold that the material Universe is composed of indestructible particles. In fact, the word “atom” is from the Greek *a* (“no”) and *temnein* (“cut”), which speaks of the smallest material particle that can be cut down no smaller. In antiquity the Greek philosophers Democritus (460–370 B.C.) and Epicurus (341–270 B.C.) held that reality was composed of an infinite number of atoms. Atomism necessarily denies Monism in that it affirms infinite atomic differentiation in reality.

¹²Aristotle considered Thales the Miletian to be the first philosopher. He is considered the father of science, in that he attempted naturalistic explanations of the world that avoided any reference to the gods.

Generally speaking, Atomism is materialistic. The material order composed of atoms is all that exists. Atomists do not accept ideals, forms, or gods.

Dr. Bahnsen points out, however, that there are two basic types of Atomism: deterministic and non-deterministic. Deterministic atomism denies freewill, as in Behaviorism and Marxism. We have already reflected on the denial of freewill in Behaviorism. Marxism ultimately crushes freewill through its concept of historical determinism which results in predictable (i.e., unavoidable) outcomes.

Non-deterministic atomism endorses man's freewill. Even some materialists believed in freewill. For example, Epicurus believed that though man was controlled by an infinite number of atoms, he should live for pleasure.

Dr. Bahnsen also speaks of three forms of freewill, of which we need to be aware. *Egoism* (not "egotism" which is conceit) holds that self-interest is the proper motive for human conduct. This philosophy is strongly individualistic. Libertarianism is egoistic in that it is committed to freedom in human action. *Utilitarianism* holds that men must seek the greatest happiness for the greatest number. This entails living for the group, which leads to socialism. *Existentialism* holds that man defines what he will be. Freedom gives meaning to life, providing self-essence and character.

Pragmatism and Skepticism. Pragmatism holds that the meaning of an idea or proposition lies in its observable practical consequences. Pragmatists argue that we must live to solve our problems, even though we do not need to theoretically account for explanations. We must be able to adapt to the environment, solve our problems and get ahead in life. Pragmatism shuns the traditional problems of philosophy: We do not need certainty, but utility. Pragmatism can be heard saying, "Whatever works for you!"

The Skeptic says we do not know anything for certain at all. All human knowledge is so deficient that at best it can only be probably true. Because of this, knowledge is deemed to be simply opinion.

These last two worldview cores are generally quite familiar to us today, though not always as formal schools of philosophical thought.

Conclusion

As a Christian desiring to defend the faith, you must remember that the presuppositional apologetic is a *worldview* approach. The basic worldviews summarized above, and the general core features should be mastered in order to get at the heart of the issue and avoid extraneous rabbit trails. Our worldview presuppositions should be able to account for the structure of reality (since it is God's creation). It should also be aware of and able to challenge the core presuppositions that lie beneath other worldviews.

II. Exegetical Considerations

A classic illustration of the presuppositional method of arguing is found in Acts 17:16–34 where Paul addresses the Athenian philosophers at the famed Aeropagus. Luke records Paul facing a crowd with varying philosophical positions. Several of the differing perspectives in Athens correspond with the worldview cores highlighted above: Luke mentions the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

Remember that you must *always* engage *whole worldviews* in apologetics. Dr. Bahnsen points out that “The currently popular tendency of distinguishing witness from defense, or theology from apologetics, would have been preposterous to the apostles. The two require each

other and have a common principle and source: Christ's authority."¹³ That is, apologetics is not a separate, philosophical meeting of the minds in a neutral, theology-free zone. It is the rational pressing of the *theological outlook of Scripture*, the biblical worldview, in opposition to antagonistic worldviews.

In Acts 17:16 Paul is burdened by the city's indulgence in idolatry, which represents a worldview at odds across-the-board with the Christian faith. This leads him to philosophically engage the idolaters: "So he was *reasoning* . . . in the market place every day with those who happened to be present." The word "reasoning" is the same word found in Plato's "dialogues" in which Plato presents Socrates' philosophical discussions. Paul openly declares his viewpoint and provides a reasoned, philosophical defense for it. This is apologetics in action. And again, he *includes* theology in his philosophical argumentation because his is a worldview critique and challenge.

We will be noting that Paul did not approach the Athenians from a position of neutrality. This is evident in many ways, including his audience's response to him. Rather than "agreeing up to a point" with an attempted neutrality, they outright decry him as a "babbling." They further complain that he was proclaiming "strange deities" (17:18c), a "new teaching" (17:19), and "strange things," demanding "we want to know therefore what these things mean" (17:20). They see no points of agreement with him. They respond threateningly: "they took him and brought him to the Aeropagus" (17:19). Not only does this taking-hold language speak often of arresting Paul (16:9; 18:17; 21:30), but they actually drag him before the judicial Council (which met at the Aeropagus). And all of this was due to his "preaching Jesus and the resurrection" (17:18d)—a most definite declaration of the Christian system and its truth claims.

¹³Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*, ed. Robert R. Booth (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1996), 237.

We will see that he is not presenting an *argument for* the resurrection here, as do neutralist apologists.¹⁴ He does not present alternative explanations for Christ’s resurrection, then counter them by various evidences. He is not giving an *argument for* the resurrection, but declaring the *fact of* the resurrection as an element of his wider Christian worldview (which feeds into his “reasoning”), as presuppositionalists do. He confronts their *worldview* which discounted resurrections altogether. The Greek mind was unalterably opposed to any idea of a physical resurrection. Both Ancient Greeks and Romans had a conception of the afterlife, but these were Platonic, denying the resurrection and calling for the immortality of the soul only: “Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8).¹⁵ This perspective is well exhibited by the Greek playwright, Aeschylus (525–456 B.C.) “When the dust drinks up a man’s blood, once he has died, there is no resurrection.” Had Paul wanted to establish *neutral* ground, he would have spoken of the immortality of the soul, which many Greek philosophies allowed. Paul is using the resurrection to set up his whole Christian worldview which does allow for resurrection.

Thus, we see in Paul’s method that he is counterposing two complete worldviews. He did not believe the Athenians needed just a little more evidence to correct their thinking and to nudge them over the line into the Christian faith. Instead he presents the Christian truth claim and calls them to wholesale repentance on that basis (26:30–31). You should recall from an earlier lesson that Paul’s view of the unbeliever is that he is overcome with vain thinking, ignorance, and

¹⁴The evidentialist method of apologetics presents “neutral” arguments for the historicity of the resurrection in attempting to prove by human reason the probability of the Christian system. If Christ is resurrected from the dead, how can you explain it? This shows the real probability (but not the certainty) of Christianity.

¹⁵For example: Socrates' *Phaedrus* and Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* 10; Pliny, *Natural History* 1:7; cf. Tertullian, *Apology* 48 and *Against Marcion* 5:9; Origen, *Against Celsus* 5:14; Julian *Against the Christians* (known only through Cyril, *Contra Julian* 1:7).

hardened hearts (Eph. 4:17–24), that his worldly wisdom is foolish (1 Cor. 1:17–25; 3:18–20), and that that ignorance is morally culpable, not simply embarrassingly deficient (Rom. 1:19–20; 2:1). Paul holds that only in Christ do we find “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). Clearly, Paul does not stand in “neutrality” but contrasts worldviews.

Paul is presenting the God of Scripture as the answer to their culpable ignorance and their need of a Savior (later he calls on them to repent, Acts 17:30). Though they mock him as a babbling charlatan, he points out their own admission of “ignorance”: they even provide an altar “To An Unknown God” (17:23b). As a worldview presuppositionalist, he appears before them to “proclaim” that very God (17:23d), and not simply the bare philosophical possibility of God’s existence, as in evidential apologetics. He even charges that their own philosophers merely “grope” for the truth in darkness (17:27). Note that he “proclaims” God; to “proclaim” speaks of an authoritative declaration. Paul is arguing presuppositionally on the basis of God’s absolute authority, not on a shared neutrality about questions of authority. He even charges that their own philosophers merely “grope” in darkness (17:27).

When engaging in worldview apologetics, an important feature of your challenge will be to demonstrate the internal contradictions in the unbeliever’s worldview. Consequently, presuppositional apologetics always engages in an “internal critique” of the unbeliever’s worldview to show its inherent, destructive self-contradiction. Paul does so here: The Athenians have a God-created, knowledge of their Creator in their heart-of-hearts, which is evidenced in their altar “To an Unknown God,” their own religiosity (“I observe that you are very religious in all respects,” 17:22), and their poets’ musings about God (“even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His offspring,’” 17:28).¹⁶

¹⁶Elsewhere, Paul directly emphasizes the universal of God in the sinner (Rom. 1:19–20).

Thus, the unbelieving worldview is schizophrenic, and necessarily so: It has to presuppose the real world implications of the biblical worldview in order rationally to operate in life. But it denies the reality of the God, Who alone can account for those worldview presuppositions.

Now Paul warns them that their ignorance and resistance to the truth would no longer be tolerated by God: “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God *is now declaring* to men that all everywhere should repent” (17:30).

In his desire to “proclaim” God, Paul highlights the unbeliever’s admitted ignorance (17:23). And from there he forcefully declares the absolute authority of the true God of Scripture. As Bahnsen argues, “Their *ignorance* was made to stand over against his unique *authority* and ability to expound the truth. Paul set forth Christianity as *alone* reasonable and true, and his *ultimate starting point* was the authority of Christ’s revelation. . . . This antithesis was fundamental to Paul’s thought, and it was clearly elaborated at Athens.”¹⁷ As noted previously, Paul’s “proclaiming” solemnly presents the truth with authority. God is now authoritatively “declaring to men that all everywhere should repent” (17:30). The word “repent” is the Greek word *metanoeo*, which speaks of a “change of mind” (*nous* being the Greek word for “mind”). They must change their whole way of thinking, their whole worldview. Paul is using general revelation in opposing the philosophically minded Athenians’ worldview and in demonstrating their mishandling of the truth.

Paul challenges the Athenians by setting before them various aspects of the Christian worldview. We see this in his speaking of God as the Creator of all things and providential Governor of history: “He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the

¹⁷Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 256–257.

earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation” (17:26; cp. also 14:17). To hold that all men sprang from one original man (Adam) was an affront to the Athenians whose pride was such that they considered all other men “barbarians.”¹⁸

Returning to the charge that the Athenians grope in darkness (17:27), we note that Paul points out the remarkable nature of their ignorant groping: Men “should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (17:27). God is not far away and hard to find. He magnifies their error by quoting two of their own poets who recognize that God is near them, which underscores the truth that men inherently know God and cannot escape from that knowledge. His statement that “in him we live and move and have our being” (17:28a) is taken from Epimenides the Cretan (sixth century B.C.) in an address to Zeus. Then he quotes (17:28b) Aratus (*c.* 315–245 B.C.) who wrote: “for we are also his offspring” in his poem on “Natural Phenomena,” which is also reflected in Cleanthes’ (*c.* 330–232) “Hymn to Zeus.” Even the pagans’ abuse of the truth does not shield them from the reality of God.

In Acts 17:24–31, Paul reflects on the Old Testament, which he employs as God’s authoritative word. In verses 24 and 25 we read: “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things.” This clearly is based on Isaiah 42:5: “Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk in it.” When he speaks of men groping as in darkness (17:27), he is alluding to Isaiah’s context which speaks of men in a dark “dungeon” (Isa. 42:7). When he dismisses idols (17:29), he alludes to Isaiah’s reference to “graven images”

¹⁸See Paul’s culturally-relevant, derogatory reference to barbarians in his epistle to the Greek city of Corinth (1 Cor. 14:11), as well as his setting “Greeks” over against “barbarians” in Romans 1:14.

(Isa. 42:8). Dr. Bahnsen comments on Paul's methodology which presupposes the authority of God:

Those who have been trained to think that the apologist must adjust his epistemological authority or method in terms of the mindset of his hearers as he finds them will find the Aeropagus address quite surprising in this respect. Although Paul is addressing an audience which is not committed or even predisposed to the revealed Scriptures, namely educated Gentiles, his speech is nevertheless a *typically Jewish* polemic regarding God, idolatry, and judgment! Using Old Testament language and concepts, Paul declared that God is the Creator, a Spirit who does not reside in man-made houses (v. 24). God is self-sufficient, and all men are dependent upon Him (v. 25). He created all men from a common ancestor and is the Lord of history (v. 26). Paul continued to teach God's disapprobation for idolatry (v. 29), His demand for repentance (v. 3), and His appointment of a final day of judgment (v. 31). In these respects Paul did not say anything that an Old Testament prophet could not have addressed to the Jews.

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Consistent with his teaching in the epistles, then, Paul remained on solid Christian ground when he disputed with the philosophers. He reasoned from the Scripture, thereby refuting any supposed dichotomy in his apologetic method between his approach to the Jews and his approach to the Gentiles.¹⁹

¹⁹Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 264, 265.

Now let us note how he challenged the various worldview cores among the differing views of the Athenians. When Paul proclaims “The God who made the world and all things in it” (Acts 17:24a), he confronts the monism of the philosophers, the materialism of the Epicureans, and the pantheism of the Stoics. This overt supernaturalism also confronts the naturalism inherent in many philosophies of the day.

In declaring God “made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation” (17:26), he effectively dismisses the pagan view of fate, replacing it with the infinite personal God as providential Governor. His asserting that God is not far from anyone (17:27d), overthrows the Stoics’ elitist claim to knowledge.

The Athenians must hear Paul’s proclamation, for it comes from the absolutely self-sufficient God who “neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things” (17:25). They must hear his doctrine of salvation in Christ, for Christ’s resurrection assures the future day of judgment wherein God will judge the world: “He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer” (17:31–32)

The Greeks (and virtually all ancient cultures) held to a cyclical view of history. Aristotle wrote: “For indeed time itself seems to be a sort of circle” (Physics 4:14). The Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 56–117) wrote that “not only the seasons but everything else, social history included, moves in cycles” (*Annals* 3:55). Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (A.D. 121–180), the Stoic philosopher and Roman emperor, clearly expressed the cyclical view: “Future generations will have nothing new to witness, even as our forefathers beheld nothing more than

we of today, but that if a man comes to his fortieth year, and has any understanding at all, he has virtually seen—thanks to their similarity—all possible happenings, both past and to come” (*Meditations* 11:1). Over against this Paul asserts both a creational beginning (Acts 17:24, 26) and a consummating ending (17:31, cp. 24:15) of history.

In all of this Paul is calling men to repent of their way of reasoning which resists God (17:30). Throughout his defense he unashamedly and forthrightly contrasts the Christian worldview over against the non-Christian. His appeal was not built up from neutralist, autonomous philosophical agreements, but from the foundational authority of God’s Son who will judge the world (17:31). He challenged the very core presuppositions of their various worldviews.

III. Questions Raised

1. What are some key issues you must understand in dealing with Hindus? What aspects of Hinduism comport with several contemporary Western views?
2. What are some key issues you must understand in dealing with those influenced by Behaviorism?
3. What is Marxism’s view of the progress of history? What is “dialectical materialism”?
4. What is the key idea involved in Existentialism?
5. Discuss two biblical reasons justifying philosophical reasoning.
6. Name the five core worldview presuppositions Bahnsen surveys.
7. What is the central principle of Monism?
8. What is the central principle of Dualism?
9. What is the central principle of Atomism?

10. What is the central principle of Pragmatism?
11. What is the central principle of Skepticism?

IV. Practical Applications

1. Read two brief encyclopedia or Internet articles on Hinduism, with one of them being from a Christian apologetic perspective and the other from a general secular or even Hindu perspective. Summarize the areas of conflict between Hinduism and Christianity.
2. Go to a New Age website and summarize their areas of agreement with Hinduism.
3. Read two brief encyclopedia or Internet articles on Behaviorism, with one of them being from a Christian perspective and the other from a general secular perspective. Summarize the areas of conflict with the Christian view of man.
4. Discuss the principles of Behaviorism with a friend who is sympathetic to the view. Show him how this psychological outlook destroys human freedom.
5. Think about movies you have seen. Name two or three movies that operate on Behaviorist assumptions. Explain how the movie does so.
6. Visit an Existentialist website and summarize distinctive elements of the view which conflict with Christianity.
7. Think about and jot down popular phrases that reflect Existentialism.
8. With a Christian friend watch one of the following existentialist movies: *Forrest Gump*, *The Weatherman*, or *The Truman Show*. Be alert to its existentialistic perspective. Jot down existential elements and discuss them after viewing the movie. (For help with this, see Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002 and check his webblogs at www.godawa.com.)

9. Watch either of these two movies reflecting a Monistic worldview: *Phenomenon* or *I (Heart) Huckabees*. Be alert to its Monistic perspective. Jot down Monistic elements and discuss them after viewing the movie.

V. Recommended Reading

Bahnsen, Greg, "Prolegomena to Apologetics": www.cmfnow.com/articles/PA002.htm

"Hinduism":

www.4truth.net/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=hiKXLbPNLrF&b=784491&ct=932107

Lewis, Gordon, "Creationists of the World: Unite!": www.leaderu.com/aip/docs/lewis.html

Snow, Eric, "Christianity: A Cause of Modern Science":

<http://nwcreation.net/articles/christianityacause.html>

Vlach, Michael J., "What in the World is an Eastern Worldview?":

www.chalcedon.edu/articles/article.php?ArticleID=60