

Schaeffer Lecture 12

April 24, 2023

12A:

- by this point in our study, we are beginning to sense an uneasy tension between Schaeffer and CVT
- biographer L.G. Parkhurst describes this dynamic without naming CVT: Schaeffer kept CVT's materials at L'Abri but removed his own material about CVT and their disagreements; this was part of Schaeffer's effort to discuss ideas and avoid personalities
- the reference to a clash of "personalities" we suspect is an important clue about the nature of their debates

- Schaeffer: "A Review of a Review"

- backstory: E.J. Carnell published *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* in 1948
- J.O. Buswell—who was then editor of *The Bible Today*—wrote a review of Carnell's book; in this article he uses the term "presuppositionism" and credits Allan MacRae for coining the term in early 1948
- Schaeffer then wrote "A Review of a Review"
- more backstory: Buswell and CVT had previously exchanged their views in 1937
- later in 1948 Buswell would publish a review of CVT's *Common Grace*; then in 1949 Buswell reviewed Warfield's *Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, and CVT responded with a two-part article

- Schaeffer's article takes the form of a written mediation
- it was an attempt to show that Buswell and CVT were perhaps not as far apart as they believed
- written at a time when Schaeffer says he still had vivid memories of CVT's courses at Westminster (1935-36); at this time he was transitioning out of ten years in pastoral ministry and preparing to move to Europe
- Schaeffer lays out what he sees as the points of agreement and difference:
 - 1. both sides agree on the necessity of the sovereignty of God in salvation—arguments are not sufficient
 - 2. both sides agree that fallen man cannot reason from nature to salvation without faith; i.e. knowledge alone does not save
 - 3. both sides agree that there is warrant to speak and to preach to the fallen man; apologetics can be part of the means used by the Spirit
 - 4. CVT's approach was to show that the worldview of the fallen man leads to irrationality
 - 5. Buswell's improvement to Aquinas was to show the fallen man that the God of the Bible is the most probable eternal being

- 6. both sides urge a comparison between the outcome of the Christian and non-Christian position, with the Christian view being shown as the correct one
- 7. the problem therefore is whether inductive evidences can be used as a starting point
- 8. Schaeffer then proceeds to his answer:
 - A. the unsaved man is seldom consistent (he would later say *never*)
 - B. the consistent unsaved man would be an atheist in religion, an irrationalist in philosophy, and amoral in ethics
 - C. most men are not consistent in any of these three areas; they hold part of a worldview that belongs to Christianity; Schaeffer attributes the inconsistency to common grace
 - D. therefore, the average man has two parts to his worldview:
 - (1) if he is logical in his unbelief his system is hopeless (skepticism);
 - (2) few have come to that state; the rest rely on ideas from Christianity
 - E. those who cheat the most, have the most that belongs to Christianity
 - F. men illogically hold some parts of Christian belief, which we can appeal to
 - G. the Lord uses this inconsistency to show men their bankruptcy; this does not take place apart from the Spirit or the sovereignty of God; election includes the means and the ends
 - H. “to the extent that the individual is illogical we have a point of contact” which can be used in preaching and apologetics; the specific approach depends upon the individual (which leads me to suggest the cheeky term “situational apologetics” since Schaeffer spoke to people in so many varied ways; or perhaps we could alternately call him an “*improvisational* presuppositionalist”)
 - I. the “solution” recognizes that
 - (1) the Christian system has no common ground with the non-Christian system, and
 - (2) there is a point of contact to talk to the unsaved man
- Schaeffer also points out the inconsistency of the Christian; quoting Machen: “No one knows how little a man has to know to be saved”; nor can any of us be completely consistent in this life
- Frame: “Some Thoughts on Schaeffer’s Apologetics”
- not well-aquainted personally, but spent a couple days at Swiss L’Abri in 1960
- read “A Review of a Review” while attending Westminster (1961-1964)
- led Frame to believe that CVT was closer to traditional apologetics than he realized
- Schaeffer’s evangelism was even more impressive to Frame
- Frame knew many who had been converted at L’Abri and was impressed with their maturity; it influenced his own ministry from a distance

- CVT referred to Buswell as having an “unsound” apologetic; Christianity is not one hypothesis among many, and the use of evidences gives too much credit to the natural (unsaved) man
- Frame agrees with Schaeffer regarding the “fruitfulness” of unsaved man’s inconsistencies as a point of apologetics—which inconsistency CVT resisted as a “point of contact”
- Frame describes Schaeffer as a “modified presuppositionalist”; he is an evangelist who seeks to give answers and to demonstrate God in daily life
- Schaeffer talks like CVT—that we must begin with Christian presuppositions
- but . . . presuppositions are then tested for their accuracy in relation to the real world
- modern skepticism is downstream of Hegel; men must be first taught to think in terms of antithesis (appealing to Plato and Aristotle)
- Frame’s evaluation: Schaeffer has accomplished much good; his emphasis on presupposition and verification may be an advance over CVT; living your presuppositions is a point often ignored; but Schaeffer ignores natural man’s rejection of standards for verification
- by calling us back to the Greeks, Schaeffer fails to see the Greeks were just as bad
- he seems to rely on a neutral notion of truth that does not rely on scripture
- he maintains that antithesis must precede the gospel (hence pre-evangelism)
- Frame’s epistemology (and potential errors):
 - 1. propose norms/standards (wrong norms)
 - 2. apply to the evidence (wrong interpretation of evidence)
 - 3. adopt the best conclusion (wrong conclusions)
- CVT would not have included verification of presuppositions; the proof of Christian theism was circular; Frame’s approach is also circular in the broad sense
- Frame thinks CVT would have agreed with his definition of verification
- Schaeffer’s appeal to coherence should be taken as advocating the kind of circular argument that depends upon biblical presuppositions
- L’Abri’s 1997 qualification: we are not arguing from a Thomistic natural theology; epistemology must be rooted in scripture
- Schaeffer didn’t think clearly about epistemology during his lifetime; the L’Abri statement represents a turn in the direction of CVT
- CVT is more accurate than Schaeffer in his history of philosophy; for CVT the ancients were as irrationalistic as the moderns; the Greeks did not have a laudable possession of objectivity—their rationalism was grounded in human autonomy; for CVT there was not a drastic shift in philosophy as there was for Schaeffer
- CVT had a profound influence on Schaeffer (and many others, by extension); Schaeffer saw himself as a bridge between traditional and presuppositional apologetics
- CVT wrote a critique of Schaeffer that was similar to those he wrote for Butler and Carnell: he used a traditional method, presented Christianity as a “supplement” to knowledge, used evidences without grounding them in scripture, and viewed the Greeks too favorably

- Frame states that Schaeffer was unclear on important matters like the biblical concept of truth
- Schaeffer is closer to CVT than traditional apologists: use of the Trinity to solve the one/many problem; transcendental in the sense of the alternative being time, chance, matter, and motion
- his influence has continued through the work of his family members and close associates; though their work is not explicitly Van Tillian they have benefited evangelical apologetics in many ways (intelligence, balance, cultural awareness, etc.)
- Schaeffer used *ad hominem* arguments to compel the unbeliever to look at himself; John Cage as an example of someone who's music expressed disorder while his interest in mushrooms required objectivity in order not to be poisoned; this kind of argument has "force" even though it doesn't disprove the notion of disorder
- perhaps the most persuasive element of Schaeffer's apologetic is the inability of irrationalists to live consistently with their beliefs
- regarding atheism: Schaeffer vividly presents the dangers of atheistic relativism
- regarding idolatry: Schaeffer sees man in terms of irrationalism and misses the idolatry of his rationalistic dogmatism
- inquirers are to be treated as people—with respect and without contempt or manipulation
- the books and articles by Schaeffer and associates are profitable for understanding the current cultural environment

12B:

- Schrock: "It is There and It Should Not Be Silent"
- CVT: Schaeffer refuses to be immediately Christian in his first principles of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics; he speaks instead about the necessity of pre-evangelism (starting with the truth of the external world before appealing to the truth of scripture); pre-evangelism is "taking the roof off"
- for Schaeffer, pre-evangelism is more existential than natural theology (theistic proofs)
- comparison to Lutheran law/gospel paradigm: show man his lostness first, then present the gospel; Schaeffer's "law" is driving the unbeliever to the despair of his existential misery
- "One does not need Moses for this; one only needs Sartre."
- another line of pre-evangelism for the relativist: turn him into an objectivist before turning him into a Christian; the argument is more about the *concept* of truth than the *content* of it
- Schrock sees Schaeffer trying to lay a foundation of philosophical objectivism before building Christianity on top of it
- Schaeffer appeals to the Greek concept of truth as closer to the biblical concept of truth than modern thinking; CVT calls him to task: "Greek philosophy was based upon the same assumptions as is modern philosophy. There is no 'classical view of

truth' that is basically any better or any worse than the philosophy of 20th century man."

- we cannot have a theory of truth that separates *content* and *concept*
- existential angst is not enough; misery is misery because man stands in rebellion to the God who created him; Christianity defines the "nature" of the misery
- nor is the correspondence theory of truth enough; there is nothing we can know that is not immediately related to Christ; it's no use to turn the non-Christian subjectivist into a non-Christian objectivist—he still thinks he operates autonomously
- Schrock quoting Edgar: "Schaeffer's view of presuppositions does not allow him truly to be transcendental"—presuppositions are an adjunct to traditional methods of argumentation; he does not confront the unbeliever with the preconditions of knowledge
- in spite of his criticism of Schaeffer, CVT expresses his personal affection for Schaeffer and appreciation for the work of L'Abri

- Bahnsen: "False Antithesis"
- apologetics requires a healthy notion of antithesis or apologetics makes no sense
- belief and unbelief must call each other to account as though the stakes are eternal
- faithful Christian ministry depends upon the biblical understanding of antithesis—especially in the age of relativism and theological compromise
- some false conceptions of antithesis can undermine biblical antithesis and hamper apologetics—this is the case with Schaeffer
- Schaeffer defines antithesis as "direct contrast or opposition between two things"; also loosely using the word to refer to opposites; but relying on the broad definition in relation to his apologetic themes:
 - 1. knowledge precedes faith (pre-evangelism)
 - 2. theories must be non-contradictory, explain the phenomena, and lived out consistently
 - 3. presuppositions (Christian and non-Christian) are judged on the basis of fitting to the facts
 - 4. the non-Christian cannot live consistently with his beliefs
 - 5. the cultural crisis and crossing the line of despair
- Hegel as the one opening the door to the line of despair (loss of antithesis)
- "Can we eagerly list the works of Schaeffer in our project of restoring a consciousness of 'the antithesis' to contemporary Christian scholarship? Sadly, we cannot do so at all."
- Schaeffer's view of antithesis is evidence for the disregard for biblical antithesis—he does not demand a Christian concept of rationality
- "Schaeffer does not press a choice between apostate and regenerate philosophy, but rather a choice between Hegel and the Greeks"; his antithesis draws no antithesis between Christianity and the world
- in so doing, he is substituting an older version of humanistic thought for a newer one—which is not true to the biblical antithesis
- Paul challenged those same Greek philosophers and concluded that none were wise

- “The despair of unbelieving philosophy was just as clear in the days of ancient Greek speculation.”
- Schaeffer has distorted Hegel’s philosophy “on a massive scale”; his “largest mistake of all” is the belief that Hegelian synthesis means the loss of rationality
- Hegel argued for a coherence view of truth; the categories we use in our logical thinking are provisional; both views contain something rational, but both prove to be inadequate; synthesis is intended to preserve what is rational to both sides and to remove what is non-rational; all contradictions will be worked out when the system of thinking is complete
- Hegel’s dialectic “encourages us to understand reality as an evolving process”; stages in the process are not fully adequate
- Hegel’s view is “miles” from Schaeffer’s characterization of it as a renunciation of logic
- unbelievers cannot justify the most elementary laws of thought
- Schaeffer repudiates the nature/grace dichotomy but his apologetic method creates a dichotomy of its own; unregenerate man can make sense of nature, but not the supernatural; his knowledge is correct but incomplete
- Schaeffer describes the difference as an antithesis that can never be brought into synthesis; but his view of the difference is quantitative not qualitative—the unbeliever only needs the other “half” of the orange
- “This sort of ‘mistake’ is *not* a minor matter for apologetics.”
- “There is apparently no antithesis for Schaeffer when it comes to regenerate and unregenerate minds understanding the facts.”
- “True antithesis is of [an] entirely different order than Schaeffer thought.”
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- *Barbara* is a syllogism whose two premises and conclusion are all **a**-propositions, e.g. ‘Every swan is a bird; every bird is an animal; therefore every swan is an animal’.