

Francis Schaeffer's Enduring Relevance: It All Comes Down to “True Truth”

GREG JESSON

Greg Jesson recently retired from teaching philosophy at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa and the University of Iowa. He was also the Director of the Center for Ethics and Public Life at Luther College. Dr. Jesson earned his MA in philosophy at the University of Southern California and his PhD in philosophy at the University of Iowa, where he focused on philosophy of mind, metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of religion. Dr. Jesson has published numerous articles and taught at several colleges. He is an editor of *Ontology and Analysis* (De Gruyter, 2007) and *Defending Realism* (De Gruyter, 2014). Greg also spent time at L'Abri where he studied with Francis Schaeffer.

Nothing is so beautiful and wonderful, nothing is so continually fresh and surprising, so full of sweet and perpetual ecstasy, as the Good. No desert is so dreary, monotonous, and boring as evil. This is the truth about authentic Good and evil. With fictional Good and evil it is the other way round. Fictional Good is boring and flat, while fictional evil is varied and intriguing, attractive, profound, and full of charm.

Simone Weil

“Morality and Literature” in *Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*

I know that there is truth opposite falsehood, and that it may be found if people will search for it, and that it is worth seeking.

John Locke, 1662

Engraved on the wall of Christ Church College, Oxford University

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

St. Peter

2 Peter 1:16 KJV

THE CRISIS DU JOUR

A culture that is concerned only with penultimate issues, such as politics, business, and entertainment, while gleefully ignoring the ultimate issues, such as the question of God, the foundation and content of ethics, and what it means to be human, is a culture that is increasingly adrift from the stabilizing landmasses of reality. Because of this, it is a culture that is quickly coming to a time of reckoning. Ours is now such a culture, and 2020 is proving to be such a time.

Who would have ever thought in the closing hours of 2019 while toasting in the New Year that things could fall apart so quickly? The Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting economic catastrophe, coupled with the unprecedented hatred on both sides of the political spectrum, along with an impossibly contentious election that will unquestionably result in half the country feeling cheated and bitter, has left many worried that we are witnessing the unraveling of our culture, and perhaps that we are on the precipice of a civil war.

The United States is now anything but united. Uncertainty, mistrust, doubt, dissatisfaction, disappointment, and rising anger characterize the country more deeply than anyone can remember. Even though the leftward drift of American politics might be somewhat slowed by bipartisan resistance to the socialist/green agenda, the secularization of culture *at every point* continues to grind on, calling into question every principle on which America was founded. The present crisis in America goes far deeper than any

simplistic explanation such as a political personage or a political ideology. As Os Guinness remarked,

The "Never Trumpers," both Democrats and his fellow Republicans, and politicians, journalists, academics, as well as celebrities, have developed such a manic obsession about the president that they cannot see straight or talk of much else. Above all, they miss a crucial fact. The president did not create America's present crisis. The crisis created the president, and the crisis is older, deeper, and more consequential than any president.¹

A clue to this crisis can be seen by asking, "What does it mean when people who are unabashedly moral relativists *morally* condemn America as being racist to the core, that democracy, free-market capitalism, and the American Constitution are profoundly unjust?" What it means is that our culture is obsessed with penultimate issues, thereby avoiding ultimate issues, which unnerve any individual who seriously confronts them. Superficial evaluations lead to superficial solutions; and superficial solutions lead to superficial results. In the words of Jeremiah: "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace" (Jer 6:14 NIV).

Albert Mohler characterizes the unraveling of the magnificent edifice of the entire western world, going all the way back to its Greek and Jewish sources, as the steady melting of a massive iceberg as it drifts into tepid southern waters. All the literature, philosophy, theology, science, political thought, art, music, and culture that brought about the greatest accomplishments and freedoms in the history of the earth are quickly melting away the stability we once took for granted. What was once unthinkable is now beyond dispute.

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH FRANCIS SCHAEFFER?

Roughly sixty years ago, in a time of turmoil not unlike the present, Francis August Schaeffer (1912-1984) burst onto the evangelical stage. The Vietnam War was raging, and provided the moral pivot point that captured the attention of the entire nation. The reaction to Schaeffer within the evangelical community was similar to the reaction of the appearance of Sputnik streaking across the autumn sky—no one had ever seen anything quite like it before

and it was difficult to discern what it all meant. There was great concern over his long hair, and why did he wear those funny knickers, knee socks, and hiking shoes? The goatee didn't inspire confidence either. I recall hearing one pastor remark that it was unnecessary. All in all, evangelicals were, for the most part, at a complete loss. When Schaeffer lectured at Wheaton College and frequently referred to the existentialist films of Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini, the students were in the midst of fighting with the administration for the right to show films like *Bambi* and *Herbie the Love Bug* on campus. When he lectured at Westmont College, he was informed that a band of dropouts had been living in the hills above the campus for several years. Schaeffer inquired what their philosophic views were but nobody had ever even thought of talking to them! Utilizing the aforementioned hiking shoes, he climbed up the steep California hills and spent several hours discussing with the counter-culture radicals their views of reality and truth. Later, Schaeffer remarked that outside of prohibitions against such things as drinking, dancing, premarital sex, and requiring chapel attendance, it was hard to see what really distinguished Christian colleges from secular colleges.

In this second decade of the twenty-first century, it is almost impossible to grasp how little serious Christian engagement with culture and ideas there was in the not-too-distant past. Much of Christianity in America was self-defined as being as separate from secular culture as possible. Dallas Willard remarked that when he was in graduate school in the late 1950's, the only popular Christian scholarship that was available was the *Phillips Translation of the New Testament*, and C. S. Lewis' *The Case for Christianity* which would later become the first part of *Mere Christianity*. To be sure, there were classic works of Christian scholarship such as Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* and B. B. Warfield's polemical and didactic essays, but these were written for the ecclesiastical professional and not the average layman. G. K. Chesterton had written serious critiques of the contemporary thought of his times, and was instrumental in Lewis's conversion to Christianity, but those works were still pretty much isolated in Europe and within Roman Catholicism.

The claim that we live in a post-Christian culture sounds so obvious today that it doesn't seem to be worth saying, but when Schaeffer first said this in the 1960's, it shocked the evangelical community to its foundation. How could this be possible? America was everywhere infused with Christian rituals and symbols, a majority of people still went to church, generic prayers

were said in most public gatherings, and Billy Graham was crisscrossing the country holding "crusades."

But, Schaeffer saw something that most evangelicals had missed. He had the unique and uncanny ability to analyze philosophy, art, music, religion, literature, film, psychology, culture, and theology together in a way that inspired a whole generation of young people who were disillusioned with their irrelevant educations, their spiritually vacuous churches, and the intellectually-bankrupt philosophical options that were in vogue.² What Schaeffer, along with the more scholarly C. S. Lewis, provided in the turbulent last half of the Twentieth Century was *an unprecedented confidence* that historic Christianity could compellingly contend in the circle of ideas at any level and fear no issue.

THE MARK OF THE MODERN PERSON

Schaeffer began his first book *The God Who Is There* (1968) by writing, "The present chasm between the generations has been brought about almost entirely by a change in the concept of truth . . . *So this change in the concept of the way we come to knowledge and truth is the most crucial problem, as I understand it, facing Christianity today.*"³ He had sensed that a cataclysmic shift had occurred in the western world. He called this intellectual, cultural, and psychological Rubicon "the line of despair," which suggested how modern thought, attempting to prove everything from human capabilities *alone*, was finally forced to drive an unbridgeable wedge between all the available evidence and the ultimate questions of life that touch every person.

This great divide affects all of life, and there is no going back to the so-called innocent good old days. It is a devastating discovery to find that reason and evidence have utterly no bearing on life's ultimate questions: What is the meaning of life? Is there an objective grounding for our ethical judgments? Are humans more than merely complex causal mechanisms? How is it possible for our sense experiences to reach beyond themselves to achieve knowledge of the external world? What reason is there to believe that thinking, as a sequence of subjective psychological states, has any connection with objective reality at all? How is transformation of one's character to what is objectively good possible? How is love possible if we are nothing more than biological machines?

Of course, philosophers had taken on these monumental questions for centuries, but what Schaeffer keenly grasped is that they had pretty much given up on reason and evidence to give an account for the way they actually live their lives. Every philosopher and scientist starts—necessarily starts—a philosophical or scientific investigation by having some trust in his or her cognitive processes. Of course, upon further reflection, one might later question the veracity of those processes, but only by relying on other cognitive processes that one has. Nobody can start from absolutely nothing. (Descartes tried, but had to assume the objectivity and truthfulness of logic to get anywhere.⁴)

The logical impossibility of starting from nothing is partly what it means to be a finite creature, and Schaeffer's apologetics was aimed at helping people, who had never really considered their finitude to face up to the ultimate issues of life, which they most conveniently and desperately try to avoid.⁵

By looking at western culture in its wonder and fragility, Schaeffer discovered the quality of hopelessness that characterizes the modern human condition more than anything else. Philosophy, beginning with Hegel's revision of logic, radically departed from all that had gone before, and drove straight into the quagmires of Existentialism, Scientism, and Logical Positivism. (Today he would add Skepticism, Relativism, and Postmodernism.) Theology, following the secular drift of philosophy was driven into the new modernism, liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, New Age thought, and Eastern religions (often westernized for ease and to make them fashionable). With respect to music, beginning with Debussy, a growing discordance and pessimism has characterized modern music, conveying that "All is relative, nothing is sure, nothing is fixed, all is in flux."⁶ (Today he would add the pessimistically mind-numbing genre of Rap music to his critique.) Similarly, art, aimed at capturing the beauty of life, has in the stunning masterpieces of Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne, Picasso, Dadaism, Duchamp, etc., been pulled increasingly towards bleakness, leaving people wondering if anything in life is truly beautiful. The serious films of Schaeffer's time, especially those of Antonioni (*Blow-up*), Fellini (*La Strada*, *La Dolce Vita*, *Satyricon*) and Bergman (*The Silence*, *The Seventh Seal*, *Winter Light*, *Cries and Whispers*) ushered in staggeringly bleak glimpses of a world without God, and without answers to the afflictions people face. It is important to note that many of the non-believers with whom Schaeffer spoke (especially those from the university) would be

somewhat familiar with these cultural icons. What they often did not see is how there could be any possible alternative.

Simone Weil also noted this shift, especially in art and literature. In her pre-war essay, "The Responsibility of Writers," she excoriated contemporary intellectuals who had stripped all truth and value from every topic of discussion. She wrote, "Writers do not have to be professors of morals, but they do have to express the human condition. And nothing concerns human life so essentially, for every man at every moment, as good and evil. When literature becomes deliberately indifferent to the opposition of good and evil it betrays its function and forfeits all claims to excellence."⁷ Not content to leave it at an abstract level, she went on to lay blame where it belonged:

Dadaism and surrealism ... represented the intoxication of total license, the intoxication in which the mind wallows when it has made a clean sweep of value and surrendered to the immediate. The good is the pole towards which the human spirit is necessarily oriented, not only in action but in every effort, including the effort of pure intelligence. The surrealists have set up non-oriented thought as a model; they have chosen the total absence of value as their supreme value. Men have always been intoxicated by license, which is why, throughout history, towns have been sacked. But there has not always been a literary equivalent for the sacking of towns. Surrealism is such an equivalent.⁸

The abandonment of truth and the resulting despair have expanded beyond the university, where they were safely cloistered for centuries, and moved out into the general culture. Much of this is due to an increasing percentage of people attending college. Consequently, in almost every quarter of our civilized world, truth and the closely related concept knowledge are ultimately considered a pointless joke. The person who claims to know something today, who claims to have genuine insight into what's true and good—especially about how people ought to live their lives—is often thought to be hopelessly naïve, simplistic, uneducated, ethnocentric, and old-fashioned.

If hopelessness and despair are the marks of the modern person, how then do people and our institutions carry on? Most, according to Schaeffer, simply live inconsistently by avoiding the consequences that their position and reason lead to. Of course, universities keep doing research and publishing, but these are often focused on minutiae that have absolutely nothing to do

with how people live their lives. For example, the films of today are nowhere nearly as serious as those of the 60's. Today, so many films are little more than mind-numbing, dialogue-sparse, cartoon-like concoctions, filled with immoral sex, non-stop explosions, and physics-defying special effects that are more aimed at prepubescent boys than adults. The ultimate questions, which every serious person is confronted with at some point, are avoided whenever possible. This is why one of the central concepts used to understand the human condition in Pascal's *Pensées* is that of distraction, or diversion.

This present life is momentary, but the state of death is eternal. How terribly important it is, then, to live in the light of the eternal, since it ultimately affects all that we do or think! Since nothing is more obvious than this observation, how absurd it is to behave differently.

Seen from this angle, how absurd it is for people to go through life without regard for their final destiny. Instead, they are led as they feel inclined and as they indulge themselves, unreflective and careless, as though they could wipe out eternity and enjoy some passing happiness merely by repressing their thoughts.⁹

Schaeffer described the human condition by saying that in the area of reason and evidence (“the lower story”), we are left with only technology and statistics, while in the area of our humanity, how we must live our daily lives (“the upper story”), there are no answers, just various leaps of faith—all equally blind and all equally unjustifiable. Perhaps no one captured such relativism as succinctly as Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy in the majority opinion of *Planned Parenthood v Casey* (1992), which involved abortion rights: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.” Under the abandonment of truth, the “answers” given in the upper story are understood as *neither true nor false*, and, therefore, beyond rational evaluation. The most one can say of someone’s adoption of a new religion or ideology is “That’s nice.”

But, reality is relentless; it keeps coming at us and testing our views. Because people simply cannot live their lives acting like impersonal machines, they center the most important part of their lives in “the upper story” to give

them some sense of meaning and purpose. For example, people, unable to live as automatons, make moral judgments and exhibit altruistic behavior: they have moral concerns over the treatment of the whales, they fall in love, they care about countless injustices (real or imagined) around the world, they weep at the abuse of animals, they long for racial justice and opportunity, etc., even if they are moral relativists or determinists.

The key to Schaeffer's enduring relevance is rooted, not in some new philosophical or theological innovation (what Lewis called "Christianity And"¹⁰), but in explaining the essence of what Christianity has always been. No concept in Schaeffer's thought is more crucial than, "True truth," and it was meant to capture what St. Paul was referring to in 1 Timothy 2:3-7 NIV:

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

TRUE TRUTH: PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

Schaeffer, coined the term "True truth," not to state a tautology, but rather to emphasize *as strongly as possible* the classical view of the objectivity of truth, which is to say that the truth or falsity of a thought (or more accurately, a proposition, which is the abstract content of a thought or sentence) is not determined by whether or not it is believed, but whether it corresponds or fails to correspond to what the thought is about. The thought, "The moon goes around the earth," which expresses the proposition that 'the moon goes around the earth' is true *only if* the actual moon actually goes around the actual earth. If the moon does not go around the earth the thought is false. Merely believing something does not make it true, and not believing something does not make it false. The truth-value of a proposition is determined only by the way things are, and merely thinking differently about things does not change those things. Consequently, the truth-value of a proposition is "absolute": in other words, it is objective (mind-independent in the way

described above), universal (the same for everyone), and any proposition that contradicts a true proposition must be false.

This is the classical correspondence theory of truth, which is also the common sense view. Its technical name is realism. No matter what one's sophisticated philosophical position claims, everyone must, in their daily lives, follow the common sense view. That's why it is called common sense! This classical view goes back at least to Aristotle when he defined truth by saying, "To say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true."¹¹ Not surprisingly, it is one of the most misunderstood concepts in all academia. For many, it evokes close-minded dogmatism, intolerance, fanaticism, and force.¹² To be sure, some have, in the name of truth, done the most hideous things; just as some, in the name of relativism, or in the name of love, or in the name of peace, or in the name of science, or even in the name of God, have done unspeakably evil things. Just because something is true, it does not logically follow that it will be used to promote selfish or wicked acts. Many people commit evil acts out of groundless dogmatism, but many also commit evil acts out of ignorance and complete skepticism. It all depends on the intentions of the person. If one desires to do evil, neither knowledge claims nor ignorance will get in the way.

Truth and knowledge are clearly different, but they are often confused. Only certain things, the abstract objects called propositions can be true (indirectly this would include sentences, thoughts, and beliefs). But, there are propositions that are true for which evidence is impossible; therefore, knowledge is impossible. For example, "Are there an even or odd number of electrons in the universe?" One of these possibilities must be true, but nobody has a shred of evidence for either option, therefore, knowledge for either option is impossible. So if I believe that there are an even number of electrons in the universe with no evidence whatsoever, and in fact there are an even number of electrons in the universe, my belief is true, but it most certainly is not knowledge. So, truth can exist even when knowledge does not. Similarly, suppose I randomly guess the lottery numbers, and they turn out to be the right ones. My guess was true, but a guess is not knowledge because there is no evidence for a guess. If there is relevant evidence then it is not a guess. If someone had evidence of what the correct lottery numbers were going to be, that suggests lottery fraud because their selection was based on knowledge, which, in turn, raises the question "How did he or she happen to come by that knowledge?"

Truth is a correspondence between a thought, belief, or declarative sentence (by which a proposition is communicated), and what the proposition is about. Knowledge then builds on truth. The realist definition of knowledge is justified, true, belief. In order to have knowledge, one must have a belief, the belief must be true (one can't know something that is false), and the belief must be justified by means of evidence. In *The Allure of Gentleness*, Dallas Willard defined knowledge as "*being able to deal with things as they are on an appropriate basis of thought and experience.*"¹³ Or, more formally, he said, "To know x or that p , I must be capable of representing x or the fact corresponding to 'that p ' as it is, on an appropriate basis of thought or experience." (In this formulation, "to know x " refers to knowing individual objects of thought, e.g., I know Alan, I know hardship, I know the route up Pikes Peak, I know the taste of cranberries, etc. Whereas "to know that p " refers to knowing a propositional truth, e.g., I know that Mt. Everest is the tallest mountain above sea-level on earth, I know that exercise is crucial to maintaining health, I know that knowledge is different from belief, I know that the Pythagorean Theorem only applies to right triangles, etc.)

Because evidence comes in degrees, knowledge also comes in degrees. We know all kinds of things, but in most cases we could know them better if we gained more evidence. For example, even though I have never been there, I know that Tokyo exists, simply on the evidence of books, films, from people who have been there, etc. I do, however, know many things better than this. I know that $2+2=4$ better than I know that Tokyo exists. Of course, I could get more evidence by going to Tokyo myself. Nevertheless, most of our knowledge is by means of this kind of authority, and it is sufficient for our daily needs, but, if necessary, we can often strengthen our knowledge by getting more first-hand evidence. (It is important to note that the classical view of knowledge says absolutely nothing about certainty. The feeling of certainty is psychological, not epistemic. One can feel certain and not know, but unfortunately, the world is filled with such people; further, one can know something and not feel certain.)

If the objectivity of truth is undermined, the possibility of knowledge disappears. This is why Schaeffer based his entire apologetic approach, his ministry, and his life on true truth. He sought to live in the light of God's evidence and to lovingly help people discover the truth by showing them that they cannot live consistently with their non-Christian view of reality, a view which makes knowledge of truth impossible.

There is an academic myth that claims that truth is so mysterious and so complicated that nobody can really say what it is. Philosopher Michael Dummett wrote a book entitled *Truth and Other Enigmas*, which just assumes the inscrutability of the whole matter. But, and this is a very Schaeffer-esque point, everyone has a cognitive grasp of what truth is, *even if they can't articulate anything about it*. The small child who has crumbs on his face is painfully aware of what truth is when his mother firmly asks him about the missing cookies. As Dallas Willard remarked, "You never have to teach a child how to lie. They pick that up on their own." Why? Because they know what truth is, and they know when they are trying to conceal it.

If people did not know what truth is, they would not be able to lie so easily. (No one says he or she doesn't know what lying is.) Lying, which differs from merely being mistaken, consists in intentionally concealing the truth in order to misdirect. If one did not know what truth is, one could not lie. Truth is no more of an enigma than is lying. It is common for college professors to question whether truth exists, but they never question whether lying exists.¹⁴ Just mention former President George W. Bush and the issue of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and you will be hit by a tidal wave of protests that Bush lied. This is said by the same people who say there is no such thing as truth! But, if truth doesn't exist, lies can't exist; and, if lies exist, then truth exists.¹⁵

Francis Bacon pointed out that when Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" he didn't bother to wait around for an answer. He really wasn't interested in finding an answer to his question. Too many people treat the question of God and Christianity as nothing more than momentary intellectual entertainment. Usually, after a few minutes, inevitable boredom sets in. There is a wonderful story of Dallas Willard when he was the chair of the philosophy department at University of Southern California. He had to attend an official USC cocktail party with the most powerful people on campus. Nothing could be further from Dallas Willard's character, nevertheless, he did his duty. At the party, one of the most outspoken professors on campus confronted Dallas and sternly blurted out, "I hear that you're a Christian; prove to me that God exists." Although Dallas wrote extensively on this and had just published such a proof, he wasn't willing to let the issue of God be utterly trivialized by being reduced to mere cocktail party chit-chat. He looked the man right in the face and calmly said, "If you're really interested in the question, let's get together for lunch and talk." The man never called.

TRUTH IS UPSETTING

Truth, by its very nature, is upsetting, because it uncovers the way things are, often challenging us more deeply than we might want. If the truth contradicts a prior held belief, truth challenges us to change our belief. Further, truth pushes us towards the ultimate issues that express what it means to be a human being. Some people will do everything they can to avoid these truths. As Willard used to say, "People don't like the truth because they want a little room to wiggle around in." Truth imposes itself on us and immediately reveals to us whether we are in line with it or not. In the words of Søren Kierkegaard, "The truth is a snare: you can not get it, without it getting you; you can not get it by capturing it, only by its capturing you." Of course, we can ignore the truths we discover, but only to our detriment. One of the lessons we all had to learn as children is that we needed to adjust our beliefs so that they correspond to the truth, because the truth will not adjust itself to match our beliefs. As we all know, this can be extremely uncomfortable, but ultimately it is the only sure path to reconciliation and healing.

This simple undeniable feature of truth is at the heart of Schaeffer's approach to communicating Christianity to those who reject the concept of objective truth, and are therefore not open to examining the evidence for theism and Christianity. According to Schaeffer,

What I try to do in *The God Who is There* is to show that when we get to those holding the concept that there is no such thing as objective (or universal) truth, we can still keep talking. We can move further back and keep talking in the way they need. I do not believe that there is any one system of apologetics that meets the need of all people, any more than I think there is any one form of evangelism that meets the need of all people. It is to be shaped on the basis of love for the person as a person.¹⁶

TRUE TRUTH AND HOLDING "THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS"

Most people who live in the modern mindset, which holds that truth about ultimate issues requires the abandonment of reason and evidence (Schaeffer's "leap into the upper story"), have not reached this position by reading Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Lyotard, or Derrida. They have simply absorbed

it from the surrounding culture. For the very same reason, most who reject Christianity do so, not because of philosophical or scientific arguments, but because it is now just part of the *Zeitgeist* of the age. Of course, there are powerful personal psychological factors involved in people not bothering to look at the evidence. In *Surprised by Joy*, C. S. Lewis described how the mere possibility of God existing was sufficient to avoid the most obvious inferences.

It is astonishing (at this time of the day) that I could regard this position [Idealism] as something quite distinct from Theism. I suspect there was some willful blindness. But there were in those days all sorts of blankets, insulators, and insurances which enabled one to get all the conveniences of Theism, without believing in God. The English Hegelians ... dealt in such wares ... The emotion that went with all this was certainly religious. But this was a religion that cost nothing. We could talk religiously about the Absolute: but there was no danger of Its doing anything about us. It was “there”; safely and immovably “there.” It would never come “here,” never (to be blunt) make a nuisance of Itself. This quasi-religion was all a one-way street; all *eros* ... steaming up, but no *agape* darting down. There was nothing to fear; better still, nothing to obey.¹⁷

Again, Lewis described how he avoided taking the question of the biblical God seriously for years, not for lack of evidence, but because of his self-centered disposition:

But, of course, what mattered most of all was my deep-seated hatred of authority, my monstrous individualism, my lawlessness. No word in my vocabulary expressed deeper hatred than the word *Interference*. But Christianity placed at the centre what then seemed to me a transcendental Interferer. If its picture were true then no sort of “treaty with reality” could ever be possible ... I wanted some area, however small, of which I could say to all other beings, “This is my business and mine only.”¹⁸

Similarly, an increasing number of people who become Christians exhibit their modern “upper story” mindset by having a purely emotional conversion. Of course, we are happy that they are Christians, but faith founded on feelings alone, will almost certainly face a devastating crisis of faith when life gets hard. We have all been brokenhearted to see people abandon their

faith, and who are unreachable by any kind of love and relevant evidence.

Feelings are an important, and even astounding component of our conscious lives; but, as we know from our own lives as well as the lives of others, basing decisions predominantly on feelings leads to disaster. Why? Because feelings are not faultless indicators of the way reality is. Feelings can seamlessly percolate on and on independently of what is true, good, and beautiful. In almost every area of life, we rely primarily on reason and evidence, since they are open to examination and correction. To the extent that our feelings are not founded on reason and evidence, they are not open to rational scrutiny, and, therefore, they can easily lead us away from the truth. The discovery that our feelings have led us astray is always surprising, and often devastating. Such insight cannot be acquired merely by consulting another set of feelings, since no feeling, *by itself*, is necessarily sensitive to truth and evidence. Only feelings that exist in the context of a careful weighing of the evidence can be trusted to track reality accurately.

Schaeffer's apologetic approach—he would have rejected the designation of "apologetic method"—was meant to help both the non-believer and believer understand that considering the ultimate issues only from an upper story (non-rational, evidence-free) perspective is disastrous. Once reason and evidence are abandoned, there is nothing to guide or compel belief; consequently, any non-rational viewpoint will follow. How does all of this come together?

What few have really grasped is how entrenched non-believers are with respect to God. Because non-believers do not see that they are biased against God, the entire subject can be approached with only mild intellectual curiosity. The question of the existence of the biblical God, who requires precedence over all else, is not like the question "How much does a carton of milk cost?" It is not a simple question that can be considered in an open-minded or disinterested manner. Nor is it like the philosophical question of whether a vague undefined God exists. If one approaches the question of the biblical God as irrelevant to oneself, then that question and all possible evidence will never be taken with the seriousness necessary to grasp the truth. Why? There simply is so much at stake that one's personal agenda will override any argument or evidence.

Because the non-believer *a priori* deems the question of the biblical God as irrelevant or easily postponed, evidence sails right by him or her. This is

Jesus' point in Luke 16:31: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." Questions that are not seen as personally relevant will be dismissed as little more than inconsequential intellectual entertainment (Jer 29:13; Isa 55:6-7; Matt 7:7-8). As Guinness noted:

We should never view unbelief as flatly theoretical, loftily neutral or merely as a worldview that people just happen to have. However suave and cool its attitudes, and however rational its arguments many sometimes appear to be, unbelief is different in its heart. Deep down, the unbelieving heart is active, willful, deliberate, egoistic, devious, scheming and unrelenting in its open refusal, its deliberate rebellion and its total resistance to God and the full truth of his reality—and it can never be countered by purely intellectual arguments that ignore the power of the dark secret in his heart. *The heart of apologetics is the apologetics of the heart.*¹⁹

For this reason, Schaeffer saw that merely presenting philosophical, scientific, or historical arguments falls far short of touching the heart of the lost person who rejects the message of divine involvement in human life. He thought that apologetics separated from the possibility of radical reorientation of one's entire life, must be, in the words of Guinness, more than "all about 'arguments,' and in particular about winning arguments rather than winning the hearts and minds and people."²⁰

More than any other apologist that comes to mind, Schaeffer can only be understood if one grasps his crisis of faith and his recovered belief in the winter of 1951-52. His faith finally buckled and he was forced to rethink why he was a Christian as opposed to anything else. He had endured decades of denominational infighting that treated the love of Christ as irrelevant, and the inconsistency between what was being professed and what was being lived was something Schaeffer could no longer endure. In the preface to *True Spirituality*, composed twenty years later, he wrote:

We were living in Champéry at that time, and I told Edith [his wife] that for the sake of honesty I had to go all the way back to my agnosticism and think through the whole matter. I'm sure that this was a difficult time for her, and I'm sure that she prayed much for me in those days. I walked in the mountains when

it was clear, and when it was rainy I walked back and forth in the hayloft of the old chalet in which we lived. I walked, prayed, and thought what the Scriptures taught, as well as reviewing my own reasons for being a Christian.²¹

His dominant question during this time was, "How is it possible to communicate God's holiness, and to stand for truth and purity in our lives without ugliness and harshness?" It is the question that would frame the rest of Schaeffer's life. Part of his break from the past was that he apologized to every old acquaintance he could find for being so denominationally judgmental.²²

Since every pilgrimage is as unique as every person, rigid apologetic formulas seem to be inconsistent with the biblical message of God's love for each person wherever he or she might be. Schaeffer thought, however, that a general framework could be given which would be helpful to communicating Christianity to a post-Christian generation. For similar reasons, he found debates not just unhelpful, but deceptively counterproductive. He remarked that,

You are not trying to win an argument. You are seeking to win a person, a person made in the image of God. This is not about your winning; it is not about your ego. If that is your approach, all you will do is arouse their pride and make it more difficult for them to hear what you have to say.²³

The problem is that most debates over Christianity rarely result in people seriously considering the possibility that they are wrong. Schaeffer also avoided controversies concerning the correct apologetic method, because they are simply a defense of oneself and one's apologetic method, while leaving out the plight of the non-believer.

Francis Schaeffer's integrity is revealed in his refusal to be constrained by either pure presuppositionalism or pure evidentialism. (The presuppositionalist claims that the noetic effects of sin so deeply affect non-believers that they are incapable of seeing any truths of God prior God's work of conversion. Consequently, there are no neutral facts or common ground that can help non-believers discover God. In contrast, the evidentialist thinks that non-believers can be reached, to some extent, by arguments and evidence, prior to conversion.) In a nice illustration, which slightly understates the

evidentialist position, George Marsden wrote, “Calvinists [holding presuppositionalism] had maintained that the human mind was blinded in mankind’s Fall from innocence, in the Common Sense version [holding evidentialism], the intellect seemed to suffer from slight astigmatism only.”²⁴

Schaeffer was trained in apologetics at Westminster Seminary (before he transferred to Faith Seminary in Wilmington, Delaware) by Cornelius Van Til who was the paradigm of presuppositional apologetics, and by J. Gresham Machen who was more in line with the Old Princeton evidential approach of Charles Hodge and Benjamin Warfield. As Van Til’s presuppositionalist approach taught, Schaeffer was convinced that non-Christians do not come to the ultimate issues from a neutral place. They suppress the truth by automatically interpreting everything in the context of a universe without the biblical God. But, as Machen’s evidentialism claimed, stressing God’s common grace and universal drawing (John 1:9; 12:32), he thought that the apologist owes the non-believer “honest answers to honest questions.”

In face-to-face discussions, Schaeffer incorporated these two approaches in his apologetics. Following Van Til’s insights, Schaeffer’s “pre-evangelism” is aimed at showing non-Christians the deficiencies of their views. It is necessary for those with a secularized worldview, who presuppose that God does not exist and that everything can be explained without referring to God. The point of pre-evangelism is to help non-believers see that they cannot live consistently with their non-Christian views. He did this by showing non-believers that the values and ideals by which they actually live—as opposed to what they profess—are appropriated from the Christian worldview. He remarked:

*The truth that we let in first is not a dogmatic statement of the truth of the Scriptures but the truth of the external world and the truth of what man himself is. This is what shows him his need. The Scriptures then show him the nature of his lostness and the answer to it. This, I am convinced, is the true order for our apologetics in the second half of the twentieth century for man living under the line of despair.*²⁵

Schaeffer thought that until non-believers see that they cannot live with what they think is true, presenting arguments and evidence to them is often futile in helping them see the truth of Christianity.

DISCOVERING THE CENTER OF THE NON-BELIEVER'S LIFE

Like many, Schaeffer found Romans 1:18-21 to be the key to communicating with non-believers. St. Paul claims that non-believers have some knowledge of God and of the things only he can provide, but they suppress that knowledge in their dishonesty. This "holding of the truth in unrighteousness" allows them to make their way through life by ungratefully enjoying realities that only God can bestow. Just as non-believers' rejection of God is sustained by the oxygen that God provides, so they live, and even argue against God's existence, utilizing the reason and knowledge that comes from God—even though their non-Christian worldview provides no basis for these things. Non-believers live as guests in God's universe without bothering to thank him. Consequently, they are living in tension between what they profess and how they live. In Schaeffer's words:

I personally believe this very inconsistency is the result of common grace. The sun shines on the just and on the unjust, and illogically the unsaved man accepts some of the world as it really is, just as Christian Scientists own good restaurants and have funeral directors.²⁶

Above all, Schaeffer, following Van Til, was convinced that if Christianity is true then no other view will fit the way reality actually is. Only biblical Christianity can provide an adequate metaphysical ground for the existence and nature of the physical universe, ethics, knowledge, logic, love, and meaning, in which all people must participate. In 1948 Schaeffer wrote:

As I remember Dr. Van Til's practical approach, it was to show the non-Christian that his world view, *in toto*, and in all its parts, must logically lead back to full irrationalism and then show him that the Christian system provides the universal which gives avowed explanation of the universe. It is Christianity or nothing.²⁷

Both Van Til and Schaeffer thought that evidentialism alone fails because the non-Christian first needs to be shown how he is living off the "borrowed capital" of truths about the world and humans that only Christianity can impart.²⁸ Simply bombarding non-Christians with arguments and evidences that are robotically and summarily rejected *a priori* is utterly ineffectual. Van

Til, however, thought that allowing non-Christians to evaluate arguments and evidence for God is a misguided exercise in elevating non-believers' self-interested agendas and rationalizations above God's revealed truth. According to him, the correct apologetic is not to argue *to* God but only *from* God. This means that every argument for the existence of the biblical God must be circular, with both the premises and conclusion affirming His existence.²⁹

Differing from Van Til, Schaeffer thought that presuppositionalism alone fails to connect adequately with non-believers by requiring that they begin their search into Christianity by adopting the Christian worldview. Schaeffer thought that one can still help non-believers see their errors because they are living inconsistently with their non-Christian views. He thought that God graciously allows us to examine the world and to ask questions (Ps 34:8; Prov 8:17; Isa 55:6). He said:

It is impossible for any non-Christian individual or group to be consistent to their system in logic or practice. Thus, when you face twentieth-century man, whether he is brilliant or an ordinary man on the street, a man of the university or the docks, you are facing a man in tension; and it is this tension which works on your behalf as you speak to him ... A man may try to bury the tension and you may have to help him find it, but somewhere there is a point of inconsistency. He stands in a position which he cannot pursue to the end.³⁰

For example, ethical subjectivists, who often hold this view in order to justify a chosen lifestyle, revile injustices done to them as more than simply things they dislike. So much in this world screams out for absolute objective condemnation. Few are able to stand before the gas chambers of Auschwitz, or hear of the sexual abuse and murder of children, or read about the gruesome history of the American slave ships with nothing more than a subjectivistic shrug of indifference. In these cases, and millions of others, even those who claim that ethics are nothing but reports of subjectivistic feelings are rightly sickened and outraged far beyond their subjectivism. But, to be an ethical subjectivist and have absolute moral outrage, condemning another's subjective ethics, is obviously irrational. No one can live consistently as an ethical subjectivist.

Similarly, philosophical skeptics *live as if* they know that they have a body, that other people exist, that oncoming cars on the highway are dangerous,

that death is real, etc. Again, there is a tension between what skeptics claim and how they live. Even though the conclusion of skepticism always depends on some knowledge claim (I know that sensations can be non-veridical, etc.), and that any argument for complete skepticism must always be invalid, the complete skeptic holds a view that claims knowledge of the external world is impossible. Yet, Schaeffer's point is that skeptics' philosophical claims are utterly betrayed by how they live. Even skeptics look both ways before they cross the street.

Again, determinists believe that people, including themselves, are merely immensely complex biological machines, but to the extent they actually live consistently with this philosophy the more unbearable their lives become. Finally, non-believers simply assume that the dictates of logic are the correct basis on which all arguments should be evaluated. Proposing arguments and evidence assumes an objective order in which logic is decisive in discovering the relevant facts. But in a chance universe what reason could there be that a particular sequence of psychological states is relevant to discovering the truth? What could possibly justify logic? Schaeffer's point here is that non-believers simply assume the absolute authority of logic, but this is at odds with their view that we live in an uncreated chance universe. In all of these cases, and many more, non-Christians do not grasp that they have no basis for the most important parts of their lives. They simply assume that their worldview is irrelevant to how they actually live.

Although Schaeffer never rejected the soundness of the traditional arguments for God, he found them to be initially irrelevant, because of the default secular interpretation non-believers bring to every situation. In such a condition, arguments and evidence are easily dismissed. Many who have not spent five minutes examining the philosophical arguments for God often have a near endless string of reasons why they should be immediately rejected. The problem is not necessarily the arguments themselves, but in the viewpoint that non-believers bring to every situation.

Proofs and evidence alone are immensely overrated, simply because they do not necessarily reorient one's mind towards the truth. *Anything* can be argued, and philosophical arguments are often so abstract and theoretical that they are safely isolated from most people's actual lives. Pascal was on to something important, when he noted in the *Pensées* an inherent limitation of proofs in isolation from the rest of life:

The metaphysical proofs for the existence of God are so far removed from human reasoning, and so complicated, that they have little force. When they do help some people it is only for the moment when they see the demonstration. An hour later they are afraid of having made a mistake.³¹

Pascal's point was that arguments and evidence do not get deep enough into the human psyche to make a deep impact if one is looking for every possible way to avoid the religious conclusion. Each person is the final arbiter of what he or she will take seriously, and consequently, what he or she will believe. Therefore, people are not necessarily won over by evidence and argument *alone*. Unless one clearly grasps that everything is at stake, and is courageously committed to discovering the truth—no matter what the personal cost—argument alone rarely rises above the level of intellectual curiosity and diversion. Of course, one can deflect any conclusion by claiming that this question is too important to decide at the moment!

Finally, arguments alone are never enough to compel belief because every informative premise can be rejected at whim. Since any premise can be denied, any conclusion can be avoided. However, all forms of *reasoned* skepticism, as opposed to dogmatic skepticism, require premises which are known to be true; consequently, complete reasoned skepticism is self-contradictory.³² Philosophical nirvana, in which a deductive argument with an informative conclusion can be derived from only analytic premises, is logically impossible.

Serious apologists aspire to represent God faithfully in their theology and apologetics (1 Cor 10:31), but they often have different conceptions of how that should be done. Schaeffer's impulse was to incorporate the best of his former teachers, Machen and Van Til, while departing from them in vitally important ways.

PUSHING NON-BELIEVERS TOWARD DESPAIR

Once Schaeffer found what was most important to a non-believer, he would gently and lovingly push that person to give up what his or her non-Christian view could not account for. If non-Christians lived consistently with the logical implications of their views, they would be dead, either by suicide (which Camus argued in "The Myth of Sisyphus" is the central philosophical question), or because they simply refused to conform to reality. At some

point, as Schaeffer pleaded with the person to be honest, he or she would reach intellectual and/or emotional despair, and discover for the first time that non-Christian worldviews cannot be lived. Guinness described this approach in *Fool's Talk*:

Francis Schaeffer was quite simply the most brilliant and compassionate face-to-face apologist I have ever met. I often watched him when I was younger, but his modeling the art was always far greater than his teaching on it. Many of those who did not know him but look to his books alone have been wooden in their application or have become so engrossed in discussions about the theory of apologetics that they rarely get round to doing what he did so well—actually leading people to faith, some starting a long, long way from faith.³³

Schaeffer referred to this second step as “taking the roof off,” which allows non-believers to grasp the consequences of their views as they attempt to live consistently with what they claim is true. Since the Gospel is good news only to a person in a bad situation, Schaeffer followed Luther’s dictum to always preach the law before preaching the Gospel. He often remarked,

If I have only an hour with someone, I will spend the first 55 minutes asking questions and finding out what is troubling their heart and mind, and then in the last 5 minutes I will share something of the truth.³⁴

Like the prodigal son who could only see clearly once he reached the reality of having to eat out of the pig trough (Luke 15:11-32), what many discovered for the first time in these apologetic discussions was how hopeless life is apart from the infinite-personal God. Sometimes the evidence that convinces someone of error is not an argument but life itself. Although Schaeffer stressed that apologetics must never lose sight of the irreducible uniqueness of each person and become formulaic, he articulated two general principles that sum up his apologetic approach.

*The more logical a [non-Christian] man is to his own presuppositions, the further he is from the real world [and thus, increasingly despairing]; and the nearer he is to the real world, the more illogical he is to [i.e., inconsistent with] his own presuppositions [and thus happier, but without adequate justification].*³⁵

People who engaged in this discussion with Schaeffer often remarked that he had tears in his eyes as he spoke with them. They sensed that he actually cared about them and that he felt their desperation as they painfully had everything they cared about stripped away. Schaeffer felt heartbroken affinity for the atheistic existentialist artists, poets, filmmakers, and philosophers such as Fellini, Bergmann, Camus, Sartre, and Nietzsche who were courageous enough to look into the abyss and see the logical consequences of their non-Christian views. They saw that in a godless universe everything is utterly absurd and hopeless. Just like his rejection of public debates, Schaeffer had no interest in private debates. His purpose was not to set himself against people who were seeking, but to help set their inadequate philosophy against the way they actually live their lives. Similarly, by asking questions rather than making statements, Schaeffer would considerably inquire what the searcher thought of the insights of these thinkers whose lives were precariously perched on the razor edge of hopelessness.

For some people the despair they reached was so profound that they actually contemplated taking their own lives. Once a person reached despair by seeing in the impossibility of actual living a non-Christian view, Schaeffer would quickly show that person specifically how Christianity would account for the very thing that had just been stripped away (e.g., a basis for objective morality, the reason why human life is immeasurably valuable, why love is more than mere biological impulse, why people are not simply biological entities, why life is meaningful, why death is not the final word, etc.). From there, Schaeffer was open to giving the despairing searcher relevant evidence.

In that situation, if he or she had questions on the historicity of Christ's resurrection and so on, we would deal with those. There are good and sufficient reasons to know that these things are true. We have already dealt with the fact of reality and everybody having to deal with reality: (1) the existence of the universe and its form; (2) the distinctiveness of man; and (3) you can relate these to a third thing, and that is the examination of the historicity of Scripture.³⁶

Finally, the last step is actually becoming a Christian. Since Christianity is an invitation to live one's life with God on the basis of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, one cannot enter into that new life without "doing

business" with God. As Martin Luther said, "To believe in God means that you go down on your knees."

Schaeffer's enduring relevance is due primarily to his understanding of historic Christianity as "true truth" addressing the ultimate questions which all people face. Schaeffer's entire life—all his writings, all his lectures, all his correspondence, all his work at the L'Abri community in Switzerland, and all his personal relationships come down to this single point—if Christianity is not objectively true, then nothing in life makes any sense. Consequently, he said:

Knowledge precedes faith. This is crucial in understanding the Bible. *To say, as a Christian should, that only the faith which believes God on the basis of knowledge is true faith, is to say something which causes an explosion in the twentieth-century world.*³⁷

APPENDIX: WAS SCHAEFFER A POSTMODERN PRESUPPOSITIONALIST?

In the last few years some respected Christian thinkers have claimed that Schaeffer is better seen as a postmodern presuppositionalist with respect to truth and knowledge than a classical, realist thinker. In *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, James K. A. Smith suggests that it is possible to see Schaeffer this way. He writes:

I am, in some sense, carrying on the Schaefferian legacy ... I want to demonstrate that, perhaps to Schaeffer's surprise (and chagrin), the claims of postmodernists such as Derrida and Foucault have something in common with his own account of knowledge and truth (insofar as Schaeffer recognized the role of presuppositions).³⁸

Of course, there are different ways to conceive of the role presuppositions play in our cognitive processes. Are they provisional hypotheses to be tested against our knowledge of the world, or are they starting points that cannot be challenged by reason and evidence—and therefore unassailable? The evidentialist holds the former and the presuppositionalist the latter. As Smith points out, Schaeffer often "remained ambiguous on this score." When asked at conferences if he was a presuppositionalist or evidentialist,

he always replied “Neither.”³⁹ Partly due to the denominational disputes of his past, Schaeffer wanted to avoid theological controversies concerning how his apologetics should best be classified. For Schaeffer, the plight of the non-believer, who was struggling to make sense out of life, took precedence over everything else.

Although Postmodernism as a movement did not emerge in Schaeffer’s lifetime, he anticipated much of it in his study of cultural trends. He thoroughly rejected it, as he saw how it left people trapped in the “upper story” of despair. In many of his lectures and sermons he was moved to the point of tears as he describes the hellish worlds that various artists, musicians, poets, philosophers, and writers faced, often on the edge of suicide—all equally without any hope of rational answers.

In *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism*, Smith claims that, “What characterizes the postmodern condition, then, is not a rejection of grand stories in terms of scope or in the sense of epic claims, but rather an unveiling of the fact that all knowledge is rooted in *some* narrative or myth—an insight earlier made by Schaeffer and Van Til.”⁴⁰ This is absolutely false, and I challenge Smith to produce a single passage in Schaeffer that even hints at such a thing. The irony of Smith’s claim here is that it contradicts Schaeffer’s entire life’s work, which was to communicate that the true truth of ultimate issues *is* knowable. Smith’s claim that “all knowledge is rooted in *some* narrative or myth” just means that narratives and myths themselves can never rise to the level of knowledge. This is *exactly* what Schaeffer meant by the upper story of irrationality, which he utterly repudiated.

Notice also how Smith’s quotation above is self-refuting. The quotation itself is a knowledge claim; specifically about “the fact that all knowledge is rooted in *some* narrative or myth.” But if this is true then the knowledge expressed in this quotation is rooted in some narrative or myth. However, according to Smith, knowledge of how a particular narrative or myth is connected to reality is impossible.

All postmodern philosophies require two levels of statements. On the one hand, there are statements rooted in the context of their particular narratives, myths, and presuppositions. They can only be justified by means of their place within the narratives, myths, and presuppositions in which they are grounded. On the other hand, there are the narratives, myths, and presuppositions themselves which are not grounded in narratives, myths,

and presuppositions, and, therefore *must* be non-rational. Since these can never be knowledge, we are left with no possible reason or evidence to choose any one over any others. Many people, adopting a postmodern approach, conveniently accept the narratives, myths, and presuppositions with which they were raised; but without the benefit of reason and evidence, they have no way to know if their view is grounded in reality or not.

Smith admits that postmodernism struggles with the problem of how "to adjudicate the competing claims" of different narratives, myths, and presuppositions, but he never proposes an adequate solution. For Schaeffer, not having a way to rationally adjudicate between Christianity, the Norse Religion, Hinduism, Satanism, Scientology, Christian Science—it's neither Christian nor science—atheism, etc. would be utterly catastrophic because one is forever trapped in the upper story of non-rationality.

In analytic philosophy, Harvard professor Hilary Putnam came to many of the same conclusions as Schaeffer. Putnam, wanted to avoid both classical realism for technical issues concerning an adequate theory of reference, and relativism, but over decades of work, he kept failing to find a third option. He wanted to hold a classical realist view with respect to ethics, "Are not our ethics better than Nazi ethics?"—but his view of the mind and reference kept him from being a realist. On the other hand, relativism collapses in on itself because there are no objective standards at all. He claimed:

Wittgenstein's seems to me to be an excellent argument against relativism in general. The argument is that the relativist cannot, in the end, make any sense of the distinction between *being right* and *thinking he is right*; and that means that there is, in the end, no difference between *asserting* or *thinking*, on the one hand, and *making noises* (or *producing mental images*) on the other. But this means that (on this conception) I am not a *thinker* at all but a *mere animal*. To hold such a view is to commit a sort of mental suicide.⁴¹

Putnam was concerned (the way a postmodern philosopher is) that perception and cognition always arise from a particular perspective or viewpoint. He initially thought this was incompatible with the classical realist view of truth and reason. In his words, we don't have a "God's-Eye View" of things. But, he found that this inference drives us right into relativism, the denial of truth.

The correct moral to draw is not that nothing is right or wrong, rational or irrational, true or false, and so on, but ... that there is no neutral place to stand, no external vantage point from which to judge what is right or wrong, rational or irrational, true or false. But is this not relativism after all?⁴²

In each of Putnam's major works he goes back and forth between realism and relativism, unable to land on either. (His problems with the realist view of truth are due to his prior commitment to physicalism in philosophy of mind and reference.) What Putnam found is that even the claim "We do not have a 'God's-Eye View'" can only be made from a God's-Eye View perspective! In other words, every time someone claims that all our knowledge is rooted in our presuppositions, narratives, conceptual schemes, etc., this claim itself purports to be telling us how things actually are—independently of all presuppositions, narratives, conceptual schemes, etc. In fact, every knowledge claim purports to tell us how things really are.

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The claim of objectivity for the realist is founded on the existence of a mind-independent world. Whether or not the world is known, or perceived, or thought of, has no bearing whatsoever on its existence or nature. Truth is the goal that is aimed at, but is not necessarily reached. According to the classical realist view of truth and knowledge, correction is often possible if the mind has not grasped the world the way it actually is.

We think we can consider things; we believe we are actually exploring and evaluating different philosophical and theological views. But, if postmodernism is "true," then we are confined within a narrative, or myth, or set of presuppositions. But, if this is so, how can we *really* be evaluating opposing perspectives?

It seems like the possibility of actually considering the merits of any view, including postmodernism, requires that we must take a God's-Eye View. This means that realism is a necessary prerequisite of actually doing philosophy and theology. The only other alternative is that everything is just story-telling, and each individual has his or her own story—but that *can't* be a story.

A classical realist, such as Schaeffer, need not accept that there are no presuppositions, narratives, myths, conceptual frameworks, or cultures, and that

these do not affect what people often think about things. Realism, further, need not be identified with some kind of naïve realism where everything that is perceived is actually the way the world is. We have all, at times, viewed the world incorrectly; and we all have the experience of needing to "go back" and check our prior perceptions to see if they matches reality or not.⁴³

Schaeffer was most certainly not postmodern. He thought that we are able to rationally consider and check our views and presuppositions to see "which of these fits the facts of what is."⁴⁴ Finally, Schaeffer would point out that no matter what postmodern philosophers claim are their views, they live their normal, everyday lives as realists, by forming and correcting their views against the objective world that God has made.

¹ Os Guinness, *Last Call for Liberty* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 5.

² Even though Schaeffer frequently said he was simply an "evangelist," and not a philosopher or theologian or intellectual, he was often, and unfairly, criticized for not being any of these.

³ Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 13. Emphasis in the original.

⁴ See, Greg Jesson, "The Impossibility of Philosophical Skepticism" in *Defending Realism: Ontological and Epistemological Investigations* (Boston/Berlin/Munich: De Gruyter Publishing, 2014).

⁵ Schaeffer was intent on not creating a grand system or method that was automatically applicable to every unique person. He thought that such systems ignore the individual non-believer who is struggling to make sense of his or her life.

⁶ Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 38.

⁷ Simone Weil, "The Responsibility of Writers," in *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God* (London: Oxford University Press), 168.

⁸ Weil, "The Responsibility of Writers," 167.

⁹ Blaise Pascal, *The Mind on Fire: An Anthology of Blaise Pascal Including the Pensées* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1989), 45.

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York, Macmillan Company, 1943), Twenty-fifth letter, 126. Lewis writes: "My Dear Wormwood, The real trouble about the set your patient is living in is that it is *merely* Christian. They all have individual interests, of course, but the bond remains mere Christianity. What we want, if men become Christians at all, is to keep them in the state of mind I call "Christianity And." You know—Christianity and the Crisis, Christianity and the New Psychology, Christianity and the New Order, Christianity and Faith Healing, Christianity and Psychical Research, Christianity and Vegetarianism, Christianity and Spelling Reform. If they must be Christians let them at least be Christians with a difference. Substitute for the faith itself some Fashion with a Christian colouring. Work on their horror of the Same Old Thing."

¹¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1011b25

¹² For example, James K. A. Smith asserts in *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 51: "To assert that our interpretation is not an interpretation but objectively true often translates into the worst kinds of imperial and colonial agendas, even within a pluralistic culture." There is, however, no necessary connection between interpretations, claiming one's interpretation is objectively true, and "the worst kinds of imperial and colonial agendas." Smith glosses over this *non-sequitur* by claiming this view "often translates" into abhorrent agendas. To avoid the charge of leveling a straw man argument, it would be helpful here if Smith could give us some examples of people who assert that their interpretations are not interpretations, but nevertheless, objectively true, and that this has caused their imperial and colonial

agendas. I do not see how being an interpretation and being objectively true are incompatible. It seems to me that every view is an interpretation of the available evidence, and is objectively true if it matches, or corresponds, to reality.

- ¹³ Dallas Willard, *The Allure of Gentleness* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 13. Emphasis in the original.
- ¹⁴ Of course, just because one believes something is true, does not mean that it is true. Lying still occurs even if it turns out that the deceiver is wrong about what is true and happens to say a truth. Lying is about the intention to deceive.
- ¹⁵ One may have some knowledge of something without having an *analysis* of that thing. Most people, for example, have some knowledge of gravity—that it exists and what it does—but few can provide a conceptual analysis of gravity on the level of Newton’s *Principia Mathematica*.

The same holds for matter, time, space, and truth. Only certain things (propositions) can be truth-bearers because only they have the appropriate properties to have logical relations. We often work very hard to make sure that the propositions represented by our beliefs are true, i.e., that they correctly depict how the world actually is. And how the world actually is, how much money we have in the bank, or whether Mount Everest is the tallest mountain above sea-level, has nothing whatsoever to do with what anyone believes. We cannot change the world merely by believing something “real hard.” As Dr. Samuel Johnson said, “Truth, Sir, is a cow that will yield such people [such as Hume and other skeptics] no more milk, so they have gone to milk the bull.” If one goes out to milk the bull, there are objective truths—whether they are believed or not—that will become painfully evident very quickly. Similarly, there are a set of true beliefs about gravity, and whether one believes them or not makes absolutely no difference how fast one falls after jumping out of a skyscraper.

Every proposition must be true or false—must match reality or not—and this holds whether anyone has any evidence to determine its truth-value or not. Truth is one thing; evidence is another. There may be some beliefs whose truth-value can never be determined, but this does not affect their truth-value. If this is correct, then the recent statement by United States Defense Department spokesman Bryan Whitman, “As you learn more information, sometimes the truth can change,” is literally nonsensical. Information about what? The truth, if adequately specified by time, place, etc., does not change. What changes—and what should change as we grasp reality better—is our beliefs. We want beliefs that match reality. One should want to live in the luminescence of the truth, unless one has some other self-centered, and ultimately destructive, agenda.

- ¹⁶ *The Collected Works of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1982), vol. 1, App. A, 177.
- ¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of my Early Life* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1955), 209-210.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.
- ¹⁹ Os Guinness, *Fool’s Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 93.
- ²⁰ Guinness, *Fool’s Talk*, 18.
- ²¹ Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1971), preface.
- ²² Colin Duriez, *Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 39.
- ²³ <https://wpcgo.com/files/8515/3660/2832/the-dead-theologians--society---schaeffer.pdf> accessed October 10, 2020.
- ²⁴ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 16.
- ²⁵ Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 129.
- ²⁶ Francis Schaeffer, “A Review of a Review,” May 1948, <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/schaefferreview.html>, 2. Accessed October 24, 2020.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-3.
- ²⁸ William Edgar, “Two Christian Warriors: Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer Compared,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 57 (1995): 57-80. Van Til’s insightful phrase, “borrowed capital” aptly captures the heart of his apologetics. Edgar, following Van Til, carries this view to perplexing extremes. “Thus, in Van Til’s view, God is self-contained. There is no test of God’s truth that can be somehow behind him or above him. He is self-defining. This means, among other things, that one cannot know anything at all unless one knows God. [We can’t know that blue is a color, that $2 + 2 = 4$, and the meanings of any words, etc.? Is Edgar implying that the non-Christian cardiologist doesn’t know anything about the heart?] This is because only God can define what he has sovereignly created. [Edgar now backs off a bit from the unbelievable claim above.] Naturally, unbelievers can know some of the truth, but only on “borrowed capital.” In arguing with an unbeliever, then, one may never leave his own platform for the sake of reaching out ... Therefore, when we reason with the unbeliever, we do not appeal to a commonly held standard. We either confront him with the inadequacy of his own, or we seek to persuade him of the validity of ours.” [But, how can this be

- done except by using the "commonly held standard[s]" of logic, reason, and evidence?] (p. 74).
- ²⁹ In *Faith Has Its Reasons* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman point out that John Calvin was not entirely opposed to using evidence to help the non-Christian. "Ironically, in a sense Calvin seems to practice a kind of 'natural theology' in book 1 of the *Institutes*. His argument—that human beings know there is a God from the sense of divinity and from the created works of nature—is drawn heavily from Cicero and other classical writers. The argument is a 'way of seeking God (that is common both to strangers and to those of his household' (1.5.6), that is, to both non-Christians and Christians," p. 223, see also, 221-231.
- ³⁰ Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 122.
- ³¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. by Honor Levi, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), #190/222, 63.
- ³² Jesson, "The Impossibility of Philosophical Skepticism."
- ³³ Guinness, *Fools Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*, 37.
- ³⁴ Jerram Barrs, "Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message," <https://www.covenantseminary.edu/francis-schaeffer-the-man-and-his-message/>. Accessed on October 4, 2020.
- ³⁵ Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 123. Emphasis in the original.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*, 182.
- ³⁷ *Ibid*, 142. Compare this to Dallas Willard in *Knowing Christ Today* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 20, "An act of faith in the biblical tradition is always undertaken in an environment of knowledge and is inseparable from it."
- ³⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 27, cf. 50.
- ³⁹ On this point it is important to note that Schaeffer changed the text concerning presuppositional apologetics in *The God Who is There* (1968) when it was included in his *Collected Works* (1982) shortly before his death. In the earlier version (15) it reads, "This side of the line [of despair] all is changed. Man thinks differently concerning truth, and so now for us, more than ever, a presuppositional apologetic is imperative. (Emphasis in the original.) In the later version of 1982, Schaeffer removed everything after "truth."
- ⁴⁰ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, 69.
- ⁴¹ Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 122. Emphasis in the original.
- ⁴² Hilary Putnam, "Philosophers and Human Understanding" in *Scientific Explanation*, ed. A. F. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 117.
- ⁴³ In our everyday lives we often know what to do it we are not able to get to the truth of something. If I can't get to the balance in my checking account, because I forgot to write in the check register, I know how to get it. If I can't see across my yard in the night, I know how to extend my vision by using a flashlight. If I know my memory is hazy on a particular recall, I am often able to check my memory against other things, such as receipts, emails, other people, letters, etc.
- As I argue in "The Impossibility of Philosophical Skepticism," (cited above) that skepticism presupposes an ontology of the mind which makes knowledge impossible. In other words, philosophical skepticism presupposes a view in which the mind is incapable of "reaching out" beyond itself to the external world. Skepticism immediately follows. Logic is most certainly not a subjective. Logic is as much outside of our minds as a tree is. If our minds cannot "reach out" beyond themselves, then we cannot "grasp" objective logic. Skepticism just means that we are trapped in the subjectivity of our experiences.
- ⁴⁴ Francis Schaeffer, *He is There and Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1972), 48.