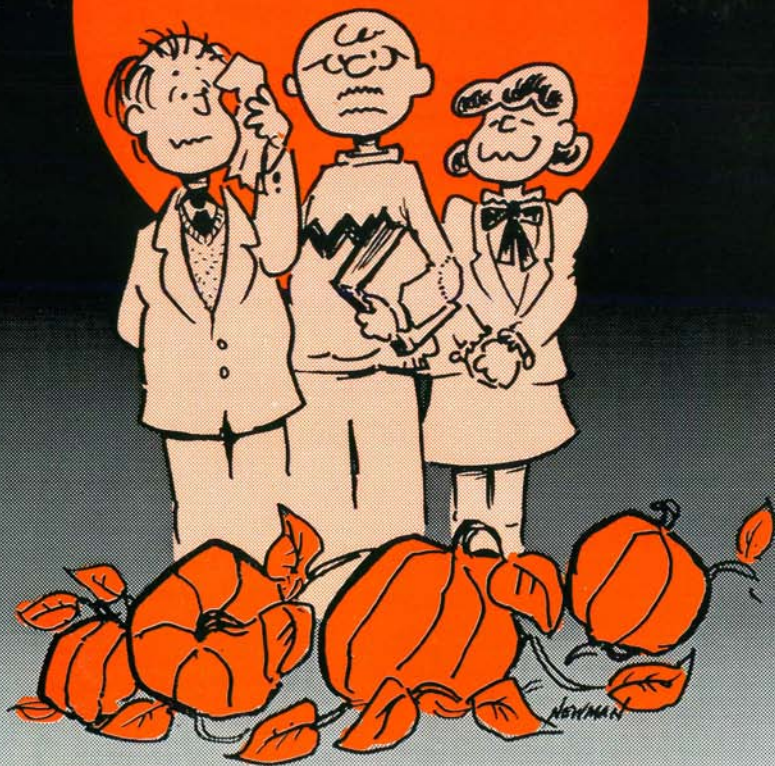


The Defeasible Pumpkin

*An Epiphany
in a
Pumpkin Patch*



David P. Hoover

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Pumpkin Patch*

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**Interdisciplinary Biblical
Research Institute**
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*The Defeasible Pumpkin:
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**IN MEMORY OF
DAVID PAUL MESLER
[1934-1995]**

. . . whose intuitiveness and
intellectual acuity I can only admire,
and whose focused and earnest feedback would
have been my greatest challenge. I
will miss him very much.

ABSTRACT

In a combination dialogue and exposition format, the presuppositionalism of Cornelius Van Til is subjected to careful scrutiny. In *An Introductory Essay* the author "collaborates with Lucy Van Pelt" to clarify the *metaphysical role* (rather than a presumed epistemological role) that the concept of analogy plays within Van Til's apologetics. The fundamental conclusion of the *Essay* is that Van Til's account of human knowledge is not a theory that explains *the acquisition of knowledge*, but a metaphysical characterization of the *status* of knowledge if one should happen to have it. Since apologetics is fundamentally concerned with *acquiring* knowledge (of God), Van Til's contribution is seen to be irrelevant to the central issues of apologetics. Moreover, in the absence of an account of *how* we come to know what we know, presupposing cannot be introduced to make a *methodological* contribution. Van Til destroys all cognitive links with the world by his doctrine of analogy, thus making any act of presupposing cognitively blind. He thus, in effect, confuses presupposing with learning.

In *The Defeasible Pumpkin*, the (now) middle-aged characters of Charles Schultz's well-known *Peanuts* comic strip are reunited at the behest of Charlie Brown for the purpose of disabusing Linus of his belief in The Great Pumpkin. While Charlie is a Christian, he finds himself in a dilemma, for his method of defending the Christian faith is essentially identical to the method that Linus uses to defend the Pumpkin. They are *both* presuppositionalists (of the Van Tillian sort), and in faithfulness to their common method they find their views equally vindicated. The setting of the dialogue is an all-night vigil in a pumpkin patch.

As with the *Essay*, an especially developed issue in *Pumpkin* is the dubious but vital role that analogical reasoning plays in Van Tillian apologetics. It is argued that although "analogicity" is *required* for presuppositional success, the very logic governing the introduction of "analogicity" into Van Til's system forbids its having any *epistemological* function at all. And this does not bode well for either the defense of Linus's

Pumpkinology or Charlie's Christian theism.

Common (biblical) sense is agreed upon toward daybreak among the Peanuts pals as they consider: (1) the knowing exhibited by Jesus himself, (2) the integrity of the causal regularity of the creation as the *ground* of evidential reasoning, (3) an important distinction between "spiritual" and "cognitive" deadness to the facts of redemptive history, and (4) the adoption of a quite reasonable account of the *finite* rationality that both *facilitates* and *limits* all our apologetic endeavors.

Along the way there is all the passion, drama, sagacity, and wit that *Peanuts* fans have come to expect in their heroes.

PREFACE

There are discussions with Cornelius Van Til that I never got to have. As a pesky graduate student in the '70s I was wont to take advantage of his hospitality and good nature to talk over issues in philosophy and apologetics. He called me, simply, "Hoover," and from him it was especially endearing. I would so love to have just one more pleasant (vigorous) chat with him, but he has gone to be with his beloved Christ. Perhaps I will chat with him later, when our apologetics will be both perfect and irrelevant.

Even after I left the heady university and seminary environment of Philadelphia to teach philosophy at Covenant College, we traded a few letters and spoke once on the phone. He still called me "Hoover" and expressed interest rather than judgment at my increasing defection from his presuppositionalism. The last message I got from him was a brief note in his aged scrawl in which he expressed concern for my son's heart condition telling me he was praying for us.

Today I treasure my memories of that white haired man—still haunted, somehow, by his ever so bold but (I am convinced) quixotic apologetics. It was he, among only a few others, who stirred up my own gifts, and I know that were he still with us, he would be delighted to tell me what is wrong with *The Defeasible Pumpkin*.

For what it is worth, *The Defeasible Pumpkin* bears some conceptual affinity to John Warwick Montgomery's essay, *Once Upon an A Priori* (published in *Jerusalem and Athens*, 1971), but there are important differences too. The chief difference is that my intent has not been merely critical (although much of it is); I have also tried to indicate the fundamental alternative to Van Til. I conceive that alternative to be the grounding of the evidential relation in the creation's *causal order*. It is lawlike and causal regularity in the observable universe that grounds the rationality of inductive investigation. And it is the causal order that grounds the *exceptional* and *extraordinary* evidential value of fulfilled

prophecy and miracle.

Here is a brief word about the *kind* of project *The Defeasible Pumpkin* is. The reader will quickly discover that it is not the sort of work, for example, that was put together by Josh McDowell in *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. There is an extensive Christian literature, of which McDowell's work is a splendid example, that advances *specific* arguments *in the field*, so to speak, which show, in as much detail as you please, why the claims of biblical Christianity are true and why various arguments against it do not succeed. Without apology, I place myself squarely within *that* tradition of apologetics. If a label is wanted, I am an *evidentialist* in apologetics. (During my years at seminary I came to evidentialism reluctantly, from a rather wholehearted commitment to Van Til's *presuppositionalism*. In those days, if there had been a card to carry as a presuppositionalist, I would have carried it!)

In essence the 20th century dispute between the evidential and presuppositional apologete is not about labels or code words. It is about how best to construe the *intellectual foundation* required for the believer "to set forth his case," "to give a reason for the hope that is within him." Discussing the intellectual foundation for arguing the truth of Christianity is a different sort of enterprise, for the most part, than providing specific evidences for specific Christian truth claims. It is different, for example, than arguing that Moses *did* write the Pentateuch, or that Jesus's disciple Peter *did* write II Peter, or that Noah's Ark is currently embedded in a glacier near the 13,000 foot level of Mt. Ararat in Turkey (a claim about which I remain unpersuaded but open), or that biblical history *is* accurate as history, or that Jesus *did in fact* rise from death, or that the narrative involving the Star of Bethlehem does *not* imply a biblical endorsement of astrology.

In contrast to these individual issues, *foundational* issues tend to be philosophical in character, which means they are more nearly *conceptual* than *factual*. I say "more nearly" because factual issues always make themselves felt in philosophical disputes. It is of crucial importance, nevertheless, to recognize that the dispute between evidentialism and presuppositionalism is primarily a conceptual dispute at the foundational level. And the conceptual differences involved have rather drastically affected how particular presuppositionalists and evidentialists perceive the

entire apologetic enterprise.

Just how important is this dispute between evidentialism and presuppositionalism? That is a hard question to answer in a short space. I approach the question of importance this way. In my estimation, presuppositionalism (of the Van Tillian sort) makes a very confused contribution to Christian apologetics; even on its own terms it can be *shown* to be incoherent, hence not a viable intellectual foundation on which to build a defense of the Christian faith. Though I do not attempt it in the pages to follow, I think it can also be *shown* that Van Til's key idea—*analogical knowledge*, which is the very *linchpin* of Van Til's presuppositionalism—is a way of solving a "problem" that was itself *shaped* by a seriously flawed conception of perception and knowledge—a conception of perception and knowledge that exercised the minds of the philosophers of the early scientific era (e.g., Hume, Kant, and Bradley). If I am right about this, Van Tillian presuppositionalism is, to put it impolitely perhaps, a tilting at 18th and 19th century windmills. Van Til, in effect, allowed his *epistemological problem space* to be defined by those who profoundly got it wrong. (If you allow your enemy to shape and formulate your basic problem, you might get stuck with a pretty bizarre solution!) Van Til was quite correct in his estimation of the enormous influence of Kant, for example, upon the rise of modern liberalism and 20th century neo-orthodoxy, but he was seriously mistaken in his *tacit acceptance* of the Hume-to-Kant problematic regarding the *perceptual discernibility* of the external world and its causal order.

To the philosopher and historian of ideas, these observations have their special interest and are worth exploring; but it seems to me that these considerations by themselves do not make the evidentialist/presuppositionalist dispute important. Its importance, rather, lies in presuppositionalism's contemporary *influence* to convince additional generations of evangelical Christian college students and seminarians that straightforward *evidential* resistance to unbelief suffers a kind of inherent impiety and that evidential reasoning is somehow philosophically unsound. Van Til is gone, however, and I am hard put to evaluate his ongoing influence. Perhaps a resounding critique of his thought has only the relevance today that a resounding critique of phlogiston theory would have. But I doubt it. At any rate, in my story Van Til's style of thought profoundly exercised the minds of Charlie Brown and Linus Van Pelt. In so

doing, Van Til has again exercised my own mind. That is surely another tribute to this remarkable Christian warrior.

David P. Hoover
April 1997

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**Man's system of knowledge
must . . . be an analogical replica
of the system of knowledge
which belongs to God.**

Cornelius Van Til

An Introductory Essay

by David P. Hoover with Lucy Van Pelt

The narrative to follow this introductory essay probably fits no known literary genre. But that is perhaps to be expected when one attempts to translate one medium into another and especially when the media involved are as diverse as a comic strip and heavy duty theological and philosophical discussion. Anyhow, being a lifelong *Peanuts* fan, I have rather liberally raided the imagination of the very gifted Charles Schultz. I must confess, however, that I have no privileged access to the middle-aged fortunes of his main characters. They have been co-opted to think through a few key issues in evangelical apologetics—issues that I have pondered for much of my adult Christian life.

Aside from copyrights and such, it is not at all clear to me *whose* imagination is the proper abode for the *Peanuts* pals in their development from adolescence and beyond. Is a "mature" Charlie Brown part of the public domain? Perhaps the passage of real time is important to this question. At any rate, my borrowing is confined to certain recurrent themes (e.g., The Great Pumpkin, Lucy's infatuation with Schroeder, Linus's attachment to his blanket, etc.) as well as a semblance of personality traits seasoned over time.

The greatest difficulty the reader may encounter is what may seem to be the development of a rather arcane in-house debate among evangelical apologetes—an historical "tempest in a teapot" among annoyingly intellectual Christians. I apologize for that, but I still think that the uninitiated will be able to follow the main threads of the discussion with a bit of patience. Where the prose is theoretically dense I think it is also introductory. (Lucy would disagree.) In any case, if at long last you find yourself beginning section VII, you're home free (or at least at less cost). The jargon thins out and the English is far more navigable. Besides, you'll

want to be there for the dramatic finish!

I need to say too, that after reading *what was supposed to be* the penultimate draft of "The Defeasible Pumpkin," Lucy stolidly withheld her blessing. She didn't challenge my fidelity to the dialogue that took place the night of Linus's conversion, but she felt less than sure that I had rendered my own position with clarity. She felt that I was, perhaps, pulling rank as Narrator to be coy about my own convictions. Her view was that if her warts showed, everyone's warts should show—fair is fair. Well, you can't argue with that.

Our bargain was that I would provide an encapsulation of what is going on at the very beginning of this write-up and she would provide a glossary at the end in order to help folks avoid her own frustration with, as she put it, "the needless jargon and weird expressions." In her haste, and in mine as well, jargon is sometimes employed in order to explain jargon. Sorry.

A word about style. If you, kind reader, are of a direct, no funny business, concrete persuasion (and that includes even the author in some of his more lucid moments), "encapsulation" may increasingly seem like a misnomer in more ways than one. For one thing, I had fun writing this piece—and a philosopher's fun can prove quite maddening to those awaiting the next concrete point to appear on the page. I suppose that's why I invited Lucy with her inimitable impatience to keep my feet to the fire.

For another thing, what may seem like a lively, down-to-earth, happening exposition to philosophical types, may seem like labyrinthine darkness to those entirely innocent of philosophy. As everyone knows, a labyrinth is long and tortuous and not particularly well lighted. But be of good cheer; I know where the bread crumbs are! And for one more thing, I have a dear friend (an astrophysicist and New Testament scholar) whose funny bone seems similar to mine, but who (alas) scratched his head a time or two after reading earlier drafts of this piece. I'm afraid that that only prompted me to pursue the clarity he wanted by tunneling yet deeper into the forbidding passages of the labyrinth. Messy. (A conceptual labyrinth is to a philosopher what a nasty brier patch is to Br'er Rabbit!). In my defense I can only say that the labyrinth I have investigated is of *another's*

construction whom I shall introduce in due course.

You have Lucy to thank, too, for prompting all the italicized and indented asides throughout the account of the pumpkin patch reunion (as it came to be called). These asides are, as it were, "stage whispers" intended to clarify, but may occasionally do the opposite. It is I, of course, who have done the whispering and provided the content, not Lucy (whispering is not a grace she intends to cultivate any time soon, and as for content—well, she's still chewing things over). Anyhow, to have done with these preliminaries, I will fly my true colors forthwith:

In a Nutshell . . .

. . . the story about to unfold is a device to focus some of the key issues in the essentially intramural 20th Century quarrel between presuppositional and evidential apologetes. Both sides have counted among their advocates gifted, agile, and deeply committed Christian minds. As in any intellectual quarrel that drags on for more than fifty years, there is bound to be the generation of specialized language—jargon; and the fray we shall consider is no exception. Although I doubt that those of Lucy's bent will ever agree, there are *good* things to be said about jargon as well as bad. In general, what is good about it is that jargon may facilitate precision of expression and provide the tools to plumb new and unexpected depths by means of an increasingly powerful shorthand; what is bad about it is that lay people cannot be benefited by the model (constructed by the shorthand) without a translation that often runs the risk of oversimplification. Lucy is big on simplification, but if you press her, she acknowledges—with Einstein—that although everything should be rendered as simply as possible, it should not be rendered any *simpler!*

But what is "The Defeasible Pumpkin" all about? Two things, really. The first thing is the logical dilemma any Christian faces (and I have chosen Charlie Brown to be my hapless dilemma facer) whenever his or her *method* of supporting Christianity may be used *with equal facility* to support the very *antithesis* of Christianity—the method declaring *both* positions to be absolutely certain! The second thing is an analysis and critique of what I take to be the fundamental weakness of Cornelius Van Til's presuppositionalism. It is a weakness whose most crippling effect is that it prevents those of Van Til's persuasion from crediting humans with

the competence to discern evidential relations, a competence that is responsive to evidential connections in terms of *degrees* of evidential salience. This is a competence patently attributed to pagans by Jesus himself.

[1]

**When the same method yields a "proof"
of two mutually exclusive positions, the
problem has got to be the method**

Here is a fanciful example to capture the logic of Charlie Brown's dilemma. (Lucy hates fanciful examples, but she grudgingly admits that logical points can be made off them).

Suppose our moon was colonized eons ago by a quite slowly reproducing group of space aliens called Uglers. What passes for their brains is (of course) silicon based, and given that silicon based brains produce utterly phlegmatic societies, Uglers never get worked up about anything except maintaining their fundamental life functions and, as per their mission instruction, precisely maintaining zero population growth. They carry on quite successfully, if drably and routinely, *below* the lunar surface about a thousand meters.

Now suppose that you the reader, as well as I, are in the habit of consulting tea leaves when it comes to firming up our convictions, one way or the other, about whether an account like the above is actually true. Keep in mind that we are both *unshakably* imbued with what we take to be the stellar epistemological value of the tea leaf test (never mind why), and that we both tend to get quite passionate whenever the subject comes up.

You probably suspect what is coming next. Suppose that on *my* tea leaf reading the existence of the "sublunar" Uglers is certified, whereas *your* test proves negative. I am, accordingly, of the *unshakable* conviction that the Uglers are real; you, however, (by parity of method!) regard my conviction as nonsense (and may suspect that I am perhaps smoking my leaves rather than reading them). Keep in mind that quite apart from the strange method that has the final say in our choices, by stipulation the story about the Uglers *is* true. Moreover, by *your* lights (leaves), it is Saturn's moon Titan that has been colonized, only the alien colonists there are not so

benign. But unlike my view of the Uglers, let's finally stipulate, your view is flat out false.

Now there's lots that may be distracting about this little analogy (Lucy would say there's lots that is irritating about it). But my very modest goal has been to clarify the *logical nature* of the dilemma I see between Linus and Charlie. I claim that the *form* of argument, and so the rules that license inferential moves, are in all *essential* respects *the same* for Linus and Charlie. That sameness, it seems to me, also results in identical *formal* criteriologies for knowledge ascription. The idea of a criteriology for ascribing knowledge is fairly important, so let me briefly explain.

[2]

Some Criteriologies for Ascribing Knowledge: The Traditional, the Hokey, & the Strange

(Lucy is scribbling furiously, trying to keep track of my comments as she works on her glossary. She is not a happy camper. "Will this hurt?" she wants to know.

"Of course," I say; "no philosophy worth its salt is painless. But trust me, it will be well worth the effort."

"And something else," she says. "You call this a 'nutshell'? More like a 'pumpkin shell,' I'd say—so either quit writing or switch metaphors!"

"Give me a break!" I say. "No one will be able to properly overhear the pumpkin patch dialogue unless we keep going.")

As far back as Plato, philosophers have attempted to formulate the conditions that are both necessary and collectively sufficient to say of some individual that he or she genuinely *knows* that some proposition or other is true. With the birth of modern science in the 17th century, philosophy became even obsessed with the quest precisely to define knowledge and the exact conditions under which it may be attributed. Scientific knowledge was of course the paradigm—and for the most part, it still is. For our purposes what matters is the brief *formula*, first outlined in Plato's *Theaetetus* some 2400 years ago, and then rather endlessly adjusted in 20th century Anglo-American philosophy. I will provide the formula (or

traditional analysis) in a moment, but first a word on what philosophers who theorize about knowledge are trying to do.

With certain notable exceptions, epistemologists (as these philosophers are called) haven't merely striven for clarification about the way we *use* the concept of knowledge. Usage is of course important and a good place to begin, but the philosophical interest in the concept of knowledge is not merely lexical. Philosophers involved in theory of knowledge (or epistemology) want clarity on two central issues: (1) the meaning of the knowledge concept, and (2) the precise conditions under which the knowledge concept is to be applied to people. That is to say, the second issue involves the provision of *criteria* for correct knowledge ascription. The perennial difficulty in epistemology has been how to provide a non-circular formulation that incorporates an answer to questions raised by (1) and (2). But that is not our present worry; our very modest concern is to get just a rough idea of how a reasonable set of criteria for correctly (or aptly) ascribing the knowledge concept might be formulated.

Before getting under way let me stress that a theory of knowledge that utterly lacks criteria for applying the knowledge concept is useless in any would-be defense of knowledge claims—and that of course includes the defense of Christian knowledge claims. That is because without the satisfaction of certain criteria we would have no basis to distinguish knowledge from ignorance. A criteriology for knowledge ascription is simply the attempt to identify what conditions (criteria) would have to be satisfied if we are (correctly or appropriately) to say of some person that he or she *knows* some matter of fact. And as I have already begun to do, we'll call the specification of a complete set of conditions an *analysis* of the knowledge concept.

One other preliminary matter is to state what happens if one's analysis of the knowledge concept stipulates conditions that afford *no* criteria, or criteria that are humanly impossible to recognize. Obviously such an analysis cannot serve in helping us to determine cases of human knowledge. While such an analysis might allege certain properties of knowledge *if* there is any, the analysis in question would be necessarily speculative—an exercise in deductions from definitions, perhaps, but affording no cognitive *link* between a human mind and an external reality. I will call this sort of "analysis" (i.e., one *without* application criteria) a

purely metaphysical analysis. And to anticipate, Van Til's contributions to theory of knowledge will be seen to be of this sort.

Since apologetics is a case of *applied epistemology* a knowledge analysis that supplies no criteria (or one that stipulates unobtainable criteria) for the application of the knowledge concept can likewise supply no criteria for the application of that concept within apologetics. In a word, without criteria, knowledge and ignorance are indistinguishable; to the extent that a theory of knowledge negates criterial links between minds and items of knowledge, it is a bad theory.

To facilitate matters I'll use the standard notation: 'S' stands for some arbitrary human subject, and 'p' stands for some arbitrary proposition. The traditional analysis is:

S knows that p if, and only if, (1) p is true, (2) S believes that p, and (3) S is justified in believing that p.

This analysis says that knowledge is *justified true belief*. For example, consider whether the proposition "humans evolved from one-celled life" should count as knowledge for the philosopher Daniel Dennett. The answer is *yes if, and only if*: (1) this proposition is true, (2) it is believed by Dennett, and (3) Dennett is justified in so believing. According to this analysis, that is what it would *mean* to ascribe such knowledge to Dennett. The analysis itself, of course, merely lists the conditions that must be satisfied; it is totally silent as to *whether* these conditions are *in fact* satisfied in any given case. Plug into this little formula your own self (in place of the subject S) and your own favorite proposition (in place of p) and see how well you do.

Keep in mind that the point of identifying the traditional analysis is neither to criticize it nor to defend it. For my part, I do find much that is intuitively right about it (as an analysis of *propositional* knowledge), but fine-tuning condition (3), the justification condition, has given philosophers

fits for decades. (For a mind-numbing tour through this recent intellectual history, see *The Analysis of Knowing: A Decade of Research* by Robert K. Shope [1983]. To regain your sanity, sit back and relax with Alvin Plantinga's *Warrant and Proper Function*. [1993])

To continue, condition (1)—the truth condition of the traditional analysis—is surely indispensable for any viable analysis of the knowledge concept, for we have the strongest of intuitions that says that if we *know* a given proposition, it has to be true. But truth cannot be discerned as in fact satisfied *independently* of knowledge, and this seems to threaten the analysis with circularity. And then there is the question of bona fide human knowledge that seems to resist propositional characterization altogether—gestaltic apprehension, as it might be called. So to keep this exercise manageable, I propose, and Lucy emphatically seconds the motion, that we tiptoe quietly past the traditional perplexities that attend the traditional analysis. (Toward the very end of "The Defeasible Pumpkin," Linus will say a few words about finitude that I think apply to these perplexities.)

Let's now give the above formula some substance and wonder whether I truly know that the Uglers have colonized the moon. 'H' stands for 'Hoover' and 'u' stands for 'The Uglers are real.' Condition (3), you will note, has been adjusted to reflect the justifying authority of the tea leaf test:

H knows that u if, and only if, (1) u is true, (2) H believes that u, and (3) H's tea leaf reading proves positive that u.

Lucy is rolling her eyes, but I have thick skin on this issue—on the value, that is, of a rational scaffolding that helps me think the issue through. Lucy prides herself in being able to *smell* a rat, even an epistemological rat; but I find that visible props help a lot. At a glance I can tell from *this* analysis that knowledge is *tea leaf certified true belief*. But of course condition (3) is a howler. As an alternative justification condition it's

simply absurd and will have very few takers. Note, however, that on the assumptions already provided within my fantasy example, I *did* satisfy two of the knowledge conditions in the traditional analysis: by stipulation, 'u' is true, and (also by stipulation) I *do* believe that 'u' is true. But because the justification for my belief is hokey, we would be very reluctant, I should think, to ascribe *knowledge* that 'u' to me. When all three conditions are *necessary* conditions, two out of three is fatal. (And calm down Lucy; I was only *pretending* to believe that the Uglers are real! We're still in illustration mode.)

We will take up the application of this procedure to the apologetic of Linus and Charlie momentarily, but let me first summarize the main points so far. First, the benefit of mocking up even a rough formal analysis offers the convenience of rendering visible and more rigorous what might otherwise remain obscure. There is, moreover, the great benefit of a means to *compare* conflicting analyses. That's better than my saying, for example, that I don't like Van Til's notion of knowledge for the reason that it's just awful or doesn't smell right. Second, my claim was that the *formal* criteriology for knowledge ascription is the same for both Linus and Charlie; they are both Presuppositionalists. I stress the word "formal" because we are comparing the two in terms of their respective epistemic *logics*, not in terms of their substantive beliefs. (To examine the *logic* of a matter is to examine its formal, structural, or purely procedural aspects. Such examination ignores substantive content to gain clarity on aspects of form.)

To return to my fanciful illustration of the problem, presuppositionalists will take a dim view of the comparison of their apologetic with tea leaf divination; but the point of analogy between presuppositionalism and reading tea leaves is hardly the suggestion, for example, that both methods of knowledge determination are simpleminded or superstitious. (Although I am glad to let those particular shoes fit whomever they will.) What I allege is that in the case of either of these methods, contradictory results may be generated while the method *itself* is powerless to produce a verdict between them. Case in point: Charlie Brown defends Christian Theology while Linus Van Pelt defends Pumpkinology. Both positions receive (at the hands of Charlie and Linus, respectively) their maximal defense—indeed, *proof!*—by means of presuppositional methodology. Given this identity of "defense," is there a

principled way to choose between them? Not presuppositionally, for both Charlie Brown and Linus (1) eschew empirically based arguments ending in probability, (2) both "presuppose" what they are then concerned to exhibit by rational discourse, (3) both insist that their apologetic results are apodictic, or absolutely certain, and (4) available to both is the claim to "analogical reasoning" which at once, and rather mysteriously, tidies up any logical mess encountered. We will take a somewhat extensive and, I trust, fair look at Van Til's "analogical reasoning" in just a moment.

Well, glancing up I catch myself having "turned up the volume," which is hardly the whisper I had intended. But then, when the stakes are high, there is some Lucy in us all. Part of my excitement is that at the end of the present tunnel (I, of course, have already seen how the story ends) there is light that looks remarkably like common sense—biblical common sense by which believers in Jesus Christ are competent to provide good and compelling reasons for believing that the Bible is God's inerrant word and for the truth of the Gospel!

Since it is Van Til's presuppositionalism that afflicts the thought processes of Charlie Brown and Linus, we next need to ask what a *Van Tillian* criteriology for knowledge ascription might look like. And to anticipate, I will say that it looks mighty strange. But we have yet to discuss one essential ingredient for that particular "knowledge recipe": *analogicity*. To put it ever so concisely, analogicity is the certainty securing feature of Van Til's apologetic. But what, pray tell, is analogicity?

[3]

**Analogical Rationality:
A (Strong, Fair, Pale) Reflection
of God's Rationality?**

"Analogicity," for Van Til, names a vital *relation* between human knowing and divine knowing. To the best of my knowledge, Van Til never uses the noun form, "analogicity," but I think it will further the interests of clarity if we have a name for the *property* a line of reasoning has if it is analogical. The noun "analogy" really won't do for this purpose, and although "analogousness" might serve, I prefer the less standard "analogicity" to name the mysterious property we are about to consider.

Van Til often characterizes this relation as an "absolute dependence" on the part of human knowing upon God's absolute knowing. (He also attempts clarity by equating analogical knowledge with human knowledge that is "derivative" of God's "original" knowledge, and by stressing that humans know "truly" only when they succeed in "reinterpreting" God's original interpretation.) The trouble for Van Til's interpreters has been how to construe this *dependency* relation.

Here it is extremely difficult to combine brevity, clarity, and persuasiveness, for there is a profound sense in which this pivotal notion of Van Til's defies comprehension *by design!* We thus risk a necessarily futile rationalistic "raid on the ineffable," from Van Til's perspective, in order to gain so much as a drop of clarity. Gaining clarity is further discouraged, it seems to me, because in Van Til's writings discussions of analogical reasoning are invariably drenched in the vocabulary of righteousness and piety. Hence, to many of his followers what I am about to do will sound like profaning the holy. Since I am convinced that Van Til's notion of analogicity is neither holy nor coherent, I propose to eff the ineffable as follows.

(Lucy smells blood and cheers me on. "But that's not the right spirit!" I tell her. "If indeed Van Til proves to be hoist by his own petard we still need to show respect. This is a 'Peanuts' account of his problems for pity's sake, *not* 'The Perfect Squelch' rendition!" Lucy seems somewhat chastened, but I still sense her glee. Her enthusiasm, while encouraging, triggers caution in me. We are about to tread with heavy philosophical boots on Van Til's most hallowed theoretical ground.)

Van Til's highly eccentric doctrine of analogical reasoning is notoriously obscure. He has always insisted that the Christian's reasoning, and so the Christian's argumentation, must be analogical—*not* univocal. The non-Christian, he says, always reasons univocally. That is, the non-Christian presumes to reason *on a logical plane* that uniformly extends to all of intelligible reality.

Why is that so bad? For one thing, it leads to total skepticism about knowledge, according to Van Til. If there is a *single* abstract logic or rationality (constraining the thought of both God and man) to be applied to what is surely an *infinite* range of data (counting, that is, *all* that possibly

could be said about everything there is), the probability that anyone will ever know anything is zero. That is because relative to all reality, humans can at best take only tiny, local samples of data; and a tiny, local sample within a context of a possible infinity cannot yield a meaningful probability that one knows anything. A *finite* agent cannot categorize even "local reality" by adding mere logical structure to initially uninterpreted particulars. Samples have to be *representative* of larger wholes (or of *the* whole) or they don't even count as samples—certainly not *meaningful* samples at any rate. Worse than that (still according to Van Til), not even a "datum" can be univocally identified, and for the same reason. The interpretation of each datum is dynamically qualified by its logical nesting within a (possibly) infinite context as well as its unique position within the plan of God. But while humans cannot aspire to know exhaustively in order to map themselves locally, the problem is solved when they, as Christians, *presuppose* the God who created and interpreted all things.

There is a remarkable confusion involved in the supposed efficacy of "presupposing" *for the reason just given* (taken up in section [7]), but there is a second problem Van Til sees in the human attempt at "univocal reasoning" that must be identified first. For Van Til, the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God is at stake. With blinding speed we may characterize the problem as follows: the incomprehensibility doctrine is not merely the claim that humans cannot know *enough*, in the purely quantitative sense, in order intellectually to comprehend the essence of our infinite God. God's incomprehensibility is rooted, says Van Til, in the Creator-creature distinction. It is rooted, he insists, in certain necessary implications concerning the respective *levels of existence* of Creator and creature. And finally to say the same thing in philosophical parlance, the incomprehensibility of God is rooted in an absolute *ontological* difference between God and man. God's *sort* of being, that is, is radically different from, radically other than, the *sort* of being enjoyed by creatures. But on Van Til's reckoning, radical otherness in being *entails* radical otherness in knowing . . .

(Lucy has gone screaming from the room. But she'll be back; we have an agreement, and she's nothing if not a woman of her word. . . . Good, she's back. I tell her that she looks downright cartoonish when she loses it. She promises no more outbursts. Now where were we?)

Van Til is as good a Van Tillian as any, so I'll let him summarize the interconnections among the concepts of "levels of existence," "levels of knowledge," and "analogicity":

Christians [says Van Til] believe in two levels of existence, the level of God's existence as self-contained and the level of man's existence as derived from the level of God's existence. *For this reason* [emphasis mine], Christians must also believe in two levels of knowledge, the level of God's knowledge which is absolutely comprehensive and self-contained, and the level of man's knowledge which is not comprehensive but is derivative and re-interpretative. *Hence* [emphasis mine] we say that as Christians we believe that man's knowledge is analogical of God's knowledge. (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 1974, p. 12.)

I have italicized the words that indicate the inferential moves in this quotation. They are really quite important. Van Til sees a *logical* implication *from* the fact of two levels of existence (two ontological levels) *to* the additional (alleged) fact of two levels of knowledge. And the "level" on or in which humans aspire to know is a level wherein knowledge is "analogical of God's knowledge." Why should anyone fault that?

The problem has to do with the *meaning* of Van Til's analogy concept. For the implications of that concept, we go to Van Til's oft cited "no coincidence" passage of the same work:

[Although both man and God cannot help but refer to a common reality, the analogical status of human knowledge means that] . . . the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man *coincide at no point* [emphasis mine] in the sense that in his awareness of meaning of anything, in his mental grasp or understanding of anything, man is at each point dependent upon a prior act of unchangeable understanding and revelation on the part of God. [Moreover, no amount of enriching human knowledge can contribute to "semantic overlap" between human and divine knowledge; for no amount of such enrichment implies] that there is any coincidence, *that is, identity of content between what God has in his mind and what man has in his mind* [emphasis mine]

(p.165).

But why, exactly, is the theological doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God at stake? The answer for Van Til is that if there is *any point at all* where the content in man's mind is identical with the content in God's mind, then *in principle* man would be able to fathom the entire mind of God! And if that were so, God's being *would* be comprehensible to man, thus canceling the most important implication of the Creator-creature distinction: humans cannot *be* God with respect to knowledge. This progression in Van Til's thought goes far to explain why evidentialists are regularly accused of a lack of basic orthodoxy and even blasphemy by Van Til purists.

To return to the philosophical expression of Van Til's fundamental point, an absolute ontological difference between God and man is supposed to entail an absolute epistemological difference between God and man. Expressed as this high abstraction, the problem faced by Van Til is how to make sense of the possibility of *communication* between God and man—the possibility of the divine-human *sharing of information* at any level. But as impressive sounding as the compact reasoning of the foregoing paragraph might sound, there are crucial biblical data it ignores, not the least of which are those concerning the *fit* of these extremely abstract categories onto the actual earthly ministry of Jesus. Needless to say, perhaps, I disagree with the chain of inferences guiding Van Til's thought (as will become evident throughout "The Defeasible Pumpkin"). Van Til's logical jump from "levels of existence" to "levels of knowledge" strikes me as philosophically speculative and not biblically concrete, nor even a valid inference in its purely speculative character.

Linus [pp. 58-61] and Pig Pen (Harold) [pp. 80-87] will later challenge the soundness of this whole line of Van Tillian reasoning *as applied to Jesus* (Jesus is a wonderful test case for Van Til's notions because Jesus is both fully man and fully God—epistemically so, one would think), but here our only concern is an adequate handle on analogicity as a pervasive property of human reasoning *given* what Van Til says above. In passing we should note that even among the Van Tillians there has been sharp controversy on this (that is, the inference from an absolute difference in *levels of existence* between God and man to an absolute *qualitative* difference in *levels of knowledge* between God and man). Jim Halsey

(whose interpretation has had Van Til's own blessing) has vigorously challenged the interpretation of John Frame. (Cf. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, pp. 30-40, for Frame's side of things.) It has seemed to me that Halsey is quite obviously the better interpreter of Van Til's intent, and what I shall have to say will reflect Halsey's development of the issue in his review article, "A Preliminary Critique of Van Til: *The Theologian*," (*Westminster Theological Journal*, Fall 1976).

Given all the above, what then is the *meaning* of analogicity? I follow Van Til this far: our thoughts should be governed, *as much as possible*, by Scripture, as we "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (II Cor. 10:5b, NIV). I cannot imagine any devout Christian challenging Van Til on this. But Van Til has paid insufficient attention to his own view of the implications of the inherent ceiling on human rationality. There is, he reasonably claims, a fundamental limit beyond which human thought cannot go. The logic with which we are endowed, and with which we Christians seek to make all our thought captive to Christ, both limits and facilitates that glorious enterprise. We cannot transcend that ceiling for a better view (cf. Deut. 29:29 and Isa. 55:9).

Staying with the point about logic (i.e., rational structure), it is important to see that we come to Scripture *already* logico-linguistically endowed, and *all* our comprehension of, and rejoicing in, what God has revealed takes place *within* the basic enablings and constraints of that endowment. (There are, I think, affective and fundamental spiritual constraints too, and a complete account would have to acknowledge these as well.) Does Van Til have a problem with this? His dogmatic speculations about the character of the contrast between divine and human thought suggest, ironically, that he does indeed. Although no one has stressed such texts as Isaiah 55:9 as much as Van Til (God's thoughts and ways are "higher" than ours), he has introduced a technical term of *contrast and relationship* between human and divine thought that is nowhere given in Scripture.

Now if all he were up to were the substituting of the word "analogicity" for "the property of being totally dependent on an omniscient exemplar *as disclosed in Scripture*", there would be no problem—at least not that I can see. I hasten to add, however, that the notion of "total

dependency" has no tendency to imply the "no identity of content" doctrine. One can easily hold that one can be (totally) dependent on God for rational and perceptual competence, and that one's knowledge can be derivative of God's knowledge, *without* embracing Van Til's "no identity-no coincidence" theory.

But to continue, Van Til goes well beyond the above substitution when he introduces the property of analogicity as meaningfully *critical* for human reasoners—reasoners who must, per force, reason *exclusively beneath the ceiling!* Since Van Til insists that reasoning analogically is a *necessary* condition of knowing truly, it must be possible *to tell*, at least on some occasions, *whether* one has reasoned analogically. Yet according to Van Til, the ability to specify criteria would cancel the need to invoke analogicity in the first place. And why is that? Because to specify criteria entails a univocal access to at least some knowledge *as God knows it* in order to see whether one's own noetic holdings are indeed analogous of God's noetic holdings. That means we would have to have access *above* the ceiling in order judiciously to apply the analogy concept to our own thinking. But by the very nature of the case there can't be any human peeking above the ceiling, for above the ceiling (as I am using this metaphor) there is only knowledge as God knows it. The very idea of human access to the latter is an ontological impossibility on Van Til's reckoning, and things don't get more impossible than that! So Van Til has put the Christian in the impossible position of having to "reflect" God's knowledge while being systematically cut off from it.

Lucy wants to know whether I may be fussing over nothing since the Bible is surely the criterion for Van Til's analogicity. But my reply is that can't be right, for in complete independence of the Bible Van Til has *already* told us that his notion of analogicity absolutely forbids any identity of content between *anything* God has in his mind and *anything* man has in his mind. Predicated nuance is analogical across the board or not at all. That means the very rationality it takes to "rightly" exegete the Bible must be *antecedently* analogical of God's thought or else it is univocal and pagan.

Lucy is thinking: "Surely," she suggests, "Van Til allows that humans have at least a univocal handle on logical laws like that of contradiction, identity, and excluded middle. He's *got* to grant that there is

identity of content between God and humans in terms of abstract logic, doesn't he?"

But even here, in logic no less than in theology, science, and everyday knowledge, Van Til unambiguously avers that all "human categories are but analogical of God's categories" (*A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, p.205). So our very grasp of contradiction and logical principles generally must be analogical on Van Til's reckoning. Before we finally mock up a Van Tillian criteriology for knowledge ascription, let's pay some brief attention to the overall problem that has emerged.

Van Til genuinely means to address the crux concerns of epistemology by his doctrine of analogy. Central to all those concerns is the specification of *conditions* or *criteria* by which we can *attribute* knowledge to ourselves and others. But one *necessary* condition of a human knowledge-claim or of faithful Christian apologetics is whether or not either of these possesses the property of analogicity. Analogies of the relevant sort, however, surely come in strengths: strong, moderate, weak, etc. Now if, because of our level of existence, we never have epistemic access to the divine *Exemplar* by which *alone* strengths of analogy can be measured, then Van Til has proposed an essential criterion of knowledge that can never be *known* to be satisfied.

So on Van Til's own logic, either (1) knowledge is impossible because *no* human belief can be analogically validated, or (2) "analogicity" itself, contrary to Van Til's idea that he is somehow doing epistemology, is a speculative metaphysical concept which (somehow) merely *characterizes* human knowledge by contrast to divine knowledge. I say "speculative" because the only way Van Til could *know* (and hence not speculate) that there is "no identity of content" between divine and human minds is by peeking *above* the ceiling in order to confirm that this is so—and by his own principles creatures can't do that.

Well, I think (2) is the case: Van Til's theory is a speculative metaphysics of knowledge and has precious little to do with practical epistemological matters. That is to say, Van Til gives us no help at all with specifying applicable conditions by which to certify knowledge, and it is only if knowledge can be identified in total *independence* of Van Til's metaphysical doctrine, that that doctrine can have even dubious application

to the ultimate character of the knowledge thus (independently) identified. To repeat, Van Til provides not a clue about *how we acquire* ordinary knowledge, and *how to separate* ordinary knowledge from ignorance. Bottom line: Van Til's "theory of knowledge" is not a theory of how we may come to know things by examining data and evidence, *but is instead a metaphysics of the contrast he alleges between the mind of God and the mind of man.*

Here now is the long-awaited stab at Van Til's criteriology for ascribing knowledge. It doesn't look promising:

S knows that p truly if, but only if,
(1) p is an analogue of a divinely
 comprehended exemplar truth p',
(2) S presupposes that p,
and
(3) S's reasoning to p, or holding to p, is
 analogical of God's so reasoning
 to, or holding that p'.

Here is the way to read this analysis. One can know truly the proposition (say) that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh if, but only if: (1) there is a divinely comprehended *exemplar* proposition or content that *our* proposition "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" is an analogy of. In the formula above I represent God's mental content with p' (pronounced p-prime). It is vital to Van Til's analysis that p and p' share *no* univocal meaning—*no same level meaning!* (2) We must presuppose that p is so. And (3) the rationality by which we discern that p must be analogical of God's comprehending that p'. Glancing up, I am tempted to say that the *reductio ad absurdum* of Van Til's view of knowledge is simply to state it with reasonable clarity.

A Closer Look at "No Identity-No Coincidence"

If the absurdity doesn't quite leap out at you, maybe this will help. For brevity, call the proposition "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" **J**. Now if we know that-**J** truly, which is to say that we know analogically that-**J**, we must also say, in accordance with Van Til's "no identity-no coincidence" doctrine, that **J** cannot express a content that is identical to a content in God's mind. But our commitment to **J** cannot count as knowing truly for Van Til unless there is in God's mind a content that is infinitely qualified by his omniscience, and to which our **J** is related by analogy. So far so good. Let us call the content in God's mind **J'** (**J**-prime); and now to summarize the main point in our symbolism, *there is no identity of content* between **J** and **J'**. Keep in mind that the *only* thing we know about **J'** is that *if* there is a **J'** it is systematically non-coincident *in content* with our **J** (but that our **J** is nevertheless somehow analogical of **J'**).

But now notice the "if". Since we are incapable of ever entertaining **J'** (God's knowledge), we have to say that **J'** is systematically elusive and therefore radically unavailable for helping us to discern that our **J** is analogical of anything at all. **J'** is for the *human* intellect merely a hypothetical place holder expressing we know not what. It is hypothetical because our sole basis for positing it is (1) we find ourselves believing that-**J** and (2) Van Til's speculative *theory* requires that if we truly know that-**J**, **J** must be analogically anchored by **J'**. Were **J** to be false, there would of course be no divine conception "**J'**". And it is a mere place holder because given the two radically different knowledge modalities (divine and human) there is no way in principle that **J'** could ever be rendered as a content that is comprehensible to man. We are confined, that is, to employ **J'** as a mere cipher symbolizing we know not what. But above all, since the content of **J'** is not *conceivable* by the human mind, **J'** cannot help us *to come* to a knowledge of **J** nor is there a way *to enrich* our understanding of **J** by somehow attending to **J'**.

It is perhaps distracting to use the proposition that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, so let me add that Van Til's is a *general* theory of knowledge and we could substitute for 'p' any proposition at all ('This rose is red', for example). And for any proposition at all, analogicity as a

criterion of human knowing would be equally inert. Criteria are marks or discernible characteristics by which we can *test* our knowledge. An inherently indiscernible criterion is self-contradictory—no criterion at all. Analogicity, needless to say, is an inherently indiscernible property, and a Van Tillian analogy is an inherently indiscernible relation. Hence Van Til's analogy doctrine is incurably speculative and systematically unavailable to do any work in epistemology or apologetics.

[5]

**"This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased!":
Identity of Reference, Meaning, and
Truth on a Mountaintop**

The foregoing is still pretty abstract, so let me offer a concrete biblical episode. Later in the paper the status of Jesus's own thinking will be taken up. Here I offer a striking instance of God the Father's thinking—the Father's communication to three disciples of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. In II Peter 1:16-18 an aging Peter recalls the episode, many years earlier, when the Father affirmed the identity of his Son with the words: "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased!" [II Pet. 1:17, ASV]. (In the synoptic Gospels an additional content is also recorded: "Listen to him!" [Mt. 17:5, Mk.9:7, Lk. 9:15]. It is this Jesus we are to reckon with as God's supreme authority for us.)

Peter expressly states that "we ourselves *heard* this utterance made from heaven . . ." [v.18]. What, exactly, would be the force of the "no identity-no coincidence" doctrine as applied to this utterance? Keep in mind that the Father produced this utterance and therefore produced the *content* heard and remembered by Peter (as well as by James and John). The original utterance (whether spoken in Greek or Aramaic—probably Aramaic) had both syntactic and semantic features and I think it is reasonable to think that, minimally, the Father had both sets of features *in mind* when he spoke. So did the disciples, for consider: Since Peter has remembered and reproduced what the Father said (perhaps by a translation from Aramaic to Greek), must we not also say that he (Peter) had *in mind* the original syntax—the *same* syntax used by the Father?

But even more importantly, the syntax (verbal organization) of this utterance from the Father conveys its *semantic* features. Here we must be

careful to keep our footing, for we are about to take on Van Til's problem at a somewhat finer grain. Readers already convinced of my main point and who are likely to get queasy at the sight of yet more painstaking philosophy may wish to skip to section [6]. (Stay where you are, Lucy!)

Very roughly, semantics, within linguistic discourse, is concerned with whatever falls under the general idea of *meaning*—as opposed to syntax, which deals with linguistic structure and rules governing well-formed expressions in a language. Our present interest is to zero in on the exclusively semantic features of the Father's utterance.

(1) Identity of Reference

Contemporary philosophy has distinguished three quite distinct semantic features of linguistic discourse: reference, meaning, and truth. (There is no special order of importance here.) Semantic coincidence between God's mind and human minds for any *one* of these features would instantly falsify Van Til's doctrine of analogy. Take first the semantic feature of reference—that is, the function of the utterance *to be about, to have selective reference to, an intended individual*. In this case it is the visible Jesus standing there with his disciples. Is there identity of reference (as to *this* semantic feature) in the mind of the Father and in the minds of the disciples? To answer "No, there is no univocal reference communicated by the Father" lands us in total absurdity. By the linguistic means of the demonstrative pronoun (as well as by an inescapable implication) the Father *refers* to the Jesus standing with them and that is the referential meaning the disciples took from the utterance. The disciples hardly supposed, for example, that the utterance referred to one of themselves or to no one at all!

I pause here to avoid a possible confusion. Van Til does hold that humans cannot help but occupy a world (the creation) that is a shared domain of reference between God and man. But in this regard Van Til makes only a *metaphysical* point. That is to say, reality itself does not change according to an individual's epistemological standpoint. Humans cannot opt out of the one created reality by their manner of thinking about it. In II Peter 1:17-18, however, we are not presented with the mere co-presence of God and man amidst the same reality; what we have is a literal instance of a *communication* between the mind of God and the mind of

man. The character of this event, therefore, is plainly epistemological (i.e., having to do with the sharing of *knowledge*) and not just metaphysical. The Father was not merely there; *he spoke*. He did not merely make a reference meaningful to himself alone; he called the disciples' attention to Jesus *and was understood in doing so*. To labor the point, with respect to reference, the Father *meant* his words to single out Jesus and that is precisely the intended reference *understood* by Peter, James, and John.

(2) Identity of Meaning

How about identity of meaning? The special semantic property of meaning has to do with the meaning of the assertion itself—the *content* being asserted, independently of reference (or truth, for that matter). For example, the sentence "This rose is red" makes perfectly good *sense*, is *meaningful*, whether or not I intend it to refer to an actual rose. Or consider the fictional novel in which there may be four hundred pages of sense but no real-world reference at all (e.g., J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*). Bear in mind too that truth is not the issue here either; our present concern is not whether this sentence is true or false (the issue of truth will be addressed shortly), but only its meaning independently of whether or not it states a fact. The question now before us is whether the disciples' grasp of the *meaning* of "This is my beloved Son . . ." has any semantic sameness as the Father's understanding of the same sentence.

Certainly there is at least *some* such identity. While the disciples may not have had a clear grasp of the divine sonship of Jesus, they certainly took the utterance to be a declaration of Jesus's divinity. The utterance also conveys that the Father loves the Son and is well pleased with him. Their understanding would of course improve with experience and time. But I can hear the Van Tillian object that I am missing the point, for the meaning the disciples entertained in their minds was at best systematically analogical of the meaning entertained in the mind of the Father. Whatever initial understanding the disciples may have had, or later enhanced understanding they may have acquired, it was all analogical and "at no point" coincided with any content in the mind of the Father.

The Van Tillian response, however, is simply incoherent. For suppose that the "no identity-no coincidence" doctrine were true: in that case an *omniscient* God cannot entertain *in his mind* whatever the disciples

did understand by his utterance! That is because the "no identity-no coincidence" doctrine is *symmetrical*. Regarding the prospect of communication, we must hold Van Til to his words: for *both* God and man "no identity" is *no* identity and "no coincidence" is *no* coincidence. So not only can't the disciples univocally entertain any of God's meaning; God can't univocally entertain any of the disciples' meaning! (Keep in mind that "univocal" simply means "same level meaning".)

Van Til's doctrine thus effectively renders divine-to-human as well as human-to-divine *communication* impossible so far as sameness of content meaning is concerned. And to boot (and ever so ironically), Van Til's doctrine of analogy implies that an omniscient God is *ignorant* of the disciples' *precise* understanding of him. But it's even worse than that, for we humans (even in Christ [!]) whatever the analogical meaning of *that* may come to) must then be as incomprehensible to God, concerning the content of our thought, as he is to us, concerning the content of his thought. Again, no coincidence is *no coincidence*; the unavoidable implication is that the symmetry of this noncoincidence cuts both ways, leaving God and man *mutually ignorant* of one another's thought.

Where are we, then, with respect to *meaning* coincidence? The relevant question all along has been whether the Father succeeded in communicating an intended content. The mere fact that the Father *knew* he accomplished this objective falsifies the necessarily symmetrical "no identity" thesis. The Father knew *precisely*, in his mind, the content the disciples took from his utterance! That in itself is full-blown semantic coincidence. The disciples, moreover, had in their minds *regarding this Jesus* that he was the Father's beloved Son with whom he was well pleased. And the moral to be drawn: one cannot deny *all* (content) meaning coincidence without absurdity.

(3) Identity with Regard to Understanding the Meaning of Mapping Language onto the World: Truth

The third semantic feature is truth. At first blush this may not seem to be a distinguishable semantic feature that is (in a logical sense) independent of reference and meaning. That this is the case will become clearer as we go, but I begin by asking the same style of question: Is there identity of understanding between the minds of the disciples and the mind

of the Father in *this* regard? Emphatically so. The semantic feature of truth involves a basic competence to appreciate the function of language to make assertions—the *competence cognitively to appreciate language-world mappings*. While language may be used in a variety of other ways (e.g., to ask questions, congratulate, confess one's faith, make a promise, utter exclamations, give commands, pronounce verdicts, etc.), the Father's utterance *makes an assertion* about Jesus and the relationship of Jesus to himself.

The Father's assertion, moreover, has what logicians call a truth-value, and there are two such values: *true* and *false*. The adjectives "true" and "false" are used rather than the nouns "truth" and "falsehood" in order to avoid the common use of the latter to incorporate all three of the semantic features we are trying to keep separate. For example, the short expression "the truth," as in "What Jones told Smith was the truth," tends to combine reference, content meaning, and language-world mapping all into one. But the occurrence of "true" in "Jones's statement [affirming of Smith that he is bald] is true" leaves our three semantic features more nearly distinguished. That is to say, with *reference* to Smith the *content meaning* of baldness is an accurate *mapping of a fact*.

To be sure, there are different philosophical *theories* of truth (e.g., the correspondence and coherence theories), but I trust that the generality of our present concern excuses us from a discussion of the details of those theories. For what it is worth, I favor the correspondence theory and believe that the coherence theory, favored by philosophers of a more rationalistic cast of mind, is hopeless as a theory of the *meaning* of truth. (Cf. David P. Hoover, "Gordon Clark's Extraordinary View of Men & Things," *IBRI Research Report* 22 [1984], pp. 12-13.)

What is of particular importance for us here is that statements have *truth conditions*, and applying truth conditions has to do with discerning states-of-affairs in the world vis-à-vis the linguistic expression used to describe or assert them. A great deal can be said about our (created) perceptual and cognitive competence to discern the satisfaction (or non-satisfaction) of truth conditions; here I only want to indicate the *relational* character of propositional truth: the relationship between a linguistic assertion and a fact (or state-of-affairs) which that assertion seeks to state. But note carefully: I am not speaking of an *infallible* human ability to tell

true statements from false; I am speaking, only, of our deep intuitive requirement for, and general competence to appreciate, language-world *correspondences* between statements and the states-of-affairs in the world which those statements affirm. More particularly, I am concerned with the divine and human understanding of what this requirement *means*.

Lucy fears that she may be getting lost in a thicket of words, so here is the vital point I wish to make: the semantic coincidence I am seeking to clarify is the *co-understanding* of the Father and the disciples concerning the use of language to make assertions. In both divine and human minds there is at least this twofold understanding: (1) there is a profound difference between saying of a linguistic assertion that it is true and saying of that same assertion that it is false, and (2) this difference is appreciated by *both* God and man to consist in whether or not a given assertion aptly maps onto the reality it seeks to assert. (By the metaphor of mapping I do not intend some kind of exact isomorphism between the structure of language and the realities language may be used to capture—as, for example, in the philosophy of the early Wittgenstein. I deliberately leave the mapping metaphor vague—as befits a metaphor, it seems to me—and I use it interchangeably with the notion of correspondence.)

Let's now bring a sharp focus to this issue in terms of Van Til's "no identity-no coincidence" doctrine. The most convenient way to do this, I think, is to see what Van Til's doctrine implies when we predicate "is true" of the Father's utterance to the disciples. Independently of the truth question, we have already established univocal reference and at least some univocal content meaning; now, with reference to Jesus, did the Father share with the disciples *a mutual regard* for the assertion made about Jesus *to be true*? Consider the following statement:

The Father's message to the disciples [that Jesus is his beloved Son with whom he is well pleased] *is true*.

The brackets are intended to clarify our single focus on the truth-value of "true" as applied to the Father's message. Now wonder with me what it could possibly mean to say that there would be *no* identity of meaning between the understanding of the Father and the understanding of the disciples concerning what is predicated in this statement. [And again, what is predicated is that the Father's message *is true*!] Keep in mind also

that the Father's message is the *Father's* use of language, not a human's use of language. Does "is true" (with regard to linguistic assertions) mean one thing for God and a radically different thing for us? Van Til's "no identity-no coincidence" doctrine entails precisely that—that there is absolutely *no* semantic coincidence between divine and human minds with regard to our understanding of what it *means* to regard an assertion *as true*. I submit that this is patently absurd, because if the doctrine were true (*analogically* true on Van Til's reckoning), all prospects of communication between God and man would be gone.

I conclude the matter about the meaning of truth discernment by returning once more to II Peter 1:16-18. *Why* does Peter recount the incident of Jesus's transfiguration on the mountaintop and the Father's identification of *this* Jesus as his beloved Son? Peter tells us why, and I cannot do better than to let Peter speak for himself:

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were *eyewitnesses* of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves *heard* this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. [NIV]

Whatever else we may draw from Peter's testimony, we must regard it as an *epistemological* reassurance—a reassurance that Peter's witness to Christ satisfies the discernment of truth conditions, a discernment grounded in *eyewitness experience*. A "cleverly invented story" often succeeds in reference and coherent meaning, but that meaning is not *true of* what has been referred to. A clever but false story does not map the reality it may seem to map. And Peter chose an utterly strategic incident involving his own firsthand experience of the *Father's* verbally explicit identification of his Son. Thus has Peter drawn a *razor sharp line* (no "analogical" qualification here) between fiction and fact, between credible fable and real life event.

And here I repeat a point previously made, this time from a slightly different angle: our present concern does not have to do with *justifying* a truth-value assignment to a statement; it has to do, rather, with *what it*

means to regard a statement to be true (or false). Our human resourcefulness to *justify* or *prove* our truth-value assignments is limited in quite familiar ways; we are fallible perceivers. What Peter's comments show, rather, is that we *understand* the truth concept versus the clever-but-false-story concept whenever we *do* regard a story to be true. Van Til's theory makes hash of this distinction. That is because (1) Van Til has made all conceptual human understanding absolutely dependent on God's prior understanding, but (2) he has made the divine exemplar (i.e., God's prior understanding) for our *conceptual contrast* between the truth-values of "true" and "false" radically unavailable to the human mind.

Let's now conclude by way of three brief comments. First, the detail we have canvassed in the past few pages is vital if we are clearly to see *what* Van Til's position implies. Van Til himself supplies no such detail, thus gaining, I think, whatever specious plausibility his view has enjoyed among his followers. We see the value, therefore, of testing out his absolute "no semantic coincidence" doctrine with regard to the more finely honed concepts of reference, meaning, and truth. (This is a better way of proceeding, it seems to me, than the vague inquiry into the meaning of "absolute qualitative difference" pursued by Van Til purists like Jim Halsey.)

Second, *no* philosophical theology that inquires into the nature of human knowledge (and that is what Van Til's contribution is) can be worth its salt if it fails to reckon with the actual data of Scripture as well as with the data of human cognition. In particular, it is imperative to *test* any philosophical claim about how divine and human semantics relate to one another *against the relevant data*. Cornelius Van Til, however, deals not at all with the data of human cognition and very little with Scripture. In fact, he almost *never* engaged in biblical exegesis! Over his career that failure, I think, had the long term effect of severely blunting his sense of the need to fit theory to data. The result, if my analysis of the implications of Van Til's analogy doctrine is anywhere near correct, is that he has defended the Incomprehensibility of God at the price of making *unintelligible* the very idea of divine-to-human and human-to-divine communication.

And third, there seems to be an ultimate irony in Van Til's analogy doctrine, for that very doctrine places a rather catastrophic limitation on what an "omnipotent" God can bring about with regard to communication

between himself and his creatures. To use a grammatical construction from Paul [Rom. 3:4], it is as though Van Til were saying, "Let God be incomprehensible and every man hopelessly ignorant!" Paul's actual comment, of course, is, "Let God be true and every man a liar!" Lying, unlike irremediable ignorance, allows some discernment of the truth which one is lying about. Paul's point, as I understand it, is that even if all men remained in unbelief through their own deception and self-deception, the truth of God and its epistemic availability would remain unaffected. If, however, God had created all men with an epistemic endowment that is *semantically blind* to divine revelation (blind, thus, merely because of human creaturehood!), then while God's truth would remain unaffected, it would be radically unavailable to man. And to provide emphasis, that is because if the ontological situation is as Van Til describes it, the Creator is *powerless* to create a being with whom he can communicate "in the same voice."

[6]

But what has Van Tillian analogicity to do with Linus's defense of The Great Pumpkin?

Lucy thinks we have utterly lost sight of the forest for the trees. "*Au contraire!*" I say. We have seen the devastating implications of Van Til's insistence that all bona fide human knowledge is analogical of an unknowable exemplar. And with respect to reference, meaning, and truth, we have seen that a co-competence of *both* God and man to use a language for communication requires three vital areas of semantic coincidence.

At the outset it was claimed that both Linus and Charlie are Van Tillian in method, though not in content. While Charlie is a straitlaced Christian theologian so far as content goes, Linus's content is informed by pumpkinology. Charlie, of course, is adamant that the Pumpkin has to go, but we are now in a position to see why Charlie's apologetics sword is incapable of doing damage to even a foe like the Pumpkin. In particular, we can now see why Van Til's doctrine of analogical knowing can serve to provide Linus's position with total immunity so far as refutation from Charlie is concerned. In a word, *analogicity provides an impenetrable haven for ideological nonsense and logical absurdity!*

Here is how to construct your *own* haven. Choose a deity. (Linus

has chosen the Great Pumpkin.) Declare that your deity is creator of all things and enjoys *absolutivity* with respect to knowledge because of his supreme level of existence. Then draw the implication that all human knowing is at best *analogical* of the deity's knowing so that there is no identity of meaning between anything in the deity's mind and anything in a human mind. Stop. At this point, analogicity is fundamentally criterial for whether or not anyone knows "truly."

This criterion, however, is inherently the abolition of all criteria. When in place, it is complete license to run religiously and spiritually amuck, for not only is substantive content noncoincident, principles governing logical coherence (the law of contradiction, for example) are as well. That is because (1) the deity is the only true knower, (2) humans are absolutely dependent on the deity's knowledge for *their analogical knowledge*, and (3) the logic of analogicity necessitates, first and foremost, *the radical severance* of cognitive linkage between divine and human minds. In effect, analogicity is Van Til's metaphysical guarantee that there cannot be a *semantic* bridge between divine and human minds. I hasten to add that once the logic of analogicity is in place, no amount of pious language can be thrown at the resulting problem to alleviate it of the catastrophic consequence we have seen.

And what of the Great Pumpkin? Since we are forever cut off from criteria *to apply* the analogicity concept to this or that claim, Linus can easily help himself to it without fear of later refutation. Linus, like Van Til, knows what he knows, and what he knows he knows *analogically!* Or to put it another way, Linus's "special knowledge," like Van Til's, enjoys an utterly inscrutable "resemblance relation" to the deity's knowledge. And since this relation is inscrutable, hence not cognitively penetrable by way of criteria, there is simply no way to test it—*no way*, that is, either to confirm it or disconfirm it. Indeed, no refutation could count without itself being blessed with *inscrutable* analogicity! In a manner of speaking, to "analogize" your position is thereby to "immunize" it from criticism. Thus (once one's system is analogized) data can never interfere with cherished beliefs, whether you're a Christian theist, a Pumpkinologist, or an Elvis worshipper. Bliss!

Investigative Competence within a Causal Order: The Biblical & Common Sense Alternative to Transcendental Speculation

We have seen that Van Til's metaphysics of knowledge introduces an inscrutable condition for all creaturely reasoning and knowing. I have also somewhat darkly suggested that Van Til's reasoning about the status of human knowing carries unwelcome implications for the epistemic situation with Jesus Christ, for he was *both* man and God. As applied to Jesus, I think the analogy doctrine implies a strictly bifurcated mind (within the thought processes of the historical Jesus) in which there would have to be *two* radically incommensurable ways of structuring knowledge (one divine and the other human) *neither of which can fathom the other*.

This question can be asked too: If our omnipotent God can become human—take on the *same flesh* as we ourselves who are saved by Jesus's sacrifice ["univocal" flesh, so to speak]—why can't God also share some *same level meaning* within the constraints of the linguistic structures that he himself created? If, however, we accept Van Til's doctrine of *absolutely* different levels of divine and human existence, then the very logic of this acceptance would seem to preclude that God could become a man. The question I raise is whether God can violate "the radically different ontological levels of divine and human existence" to literally take on *our* humanity on *our* level of existence. Given what Van Til has had to say about these levels, I don't see how he can escape this kind of difficulty regarding the Incarnation of Christ. It seems to me that both with respect to the cerebrally facilitated knowing of the earthly Jesus, and with respect to the Incarnation itself, Van Til's speculations do not bode well for orthodox Christology.

Continuing, at the foundational level on which we have been addressing the human knowledge situation, I think there is only one sound alternative to Van Til's "philosophical theology of knowledge." The section [7] title concisely indicates this alternative. To make its meaning clear it is useful to accent the emerging contrast (among the alternatives) by reviewing the problem of infinite data alluded to earlier. Harken back with me, then, to that still undischarged debt to the reader announced in section [3]. There the topic was how a finite mind could know anything within a

possible infinity of data. Van Til construes that vast arena of data as all created factuality, and it owes its coherence and meaning to the plan of God. Each datum is comprehensively qualified by that plan. That means that each datum has final and determinate meaning only as semantically integrated with all other data. Thus, in principle, partial (or local) knowledge entails exhaustive knowledge of the whole. Finite human minds, of course, are incapable of grasping the whole. What is a human to do? Van Til's solution: anchor oneself to the Creator and Arranger of all factuality by a suitable act of presupposing.

But here, I repeat, there is confusion in thinking that such presupposing can have any sort of *epistemological* efficacy. What is needed is a *cognitive* link, not a merely speculative *assumptive* link, between human minds and external data. Presupposing, as such, is inherently incapable of supplying such a (cognitive) link. Van Til's "link" between minds and data comes to no more than his own dogmatic assurance (cloaked in plenty of pious but uncashed metaphor) in the midst of an epistemological darkness of his own making. Metaphysical flashlights cast no illumination here, and presupposing in the midst of this darkness has no tendency to create the all-important cognitive access. Our situation, alas, is that we are epistemically isolated from God and his creation, fecklessly whistling in the dark; for dubbing one's believing "analogical" is merely to record a determination that one's believing has a certain metaphysical *status*. Such a dubbing can have nothing to do with the evidential integrity of one's believing, nothing to do with the degree to which that believing is actually *confirmed*. Whistling in the dark, moreover, remains whistling in the dark no matter how philosophically fancy the tune.

Consider now a few real world epistemic tasks that illustrate the complete irrelevance of Van Til's presupposing—i.e., of Van Til's *method*—for the real life *acquisition* of knowledge. (An "epistemic task" is simply the task of *learning some fact* by appropriate investigation.)

(1) Locating the Children for Dinner

You have prepared a meal for your family and must now round them up to eat. Your husband is in the living room with the paper, but where are the children? You are reasonably certain that they are either in the backyard with some neighbor children or just across the street playing

ball in the park. There are, of course, other possibilities—some of them farfetched: the children may be at the corner grocery, or they may have hitchhiked to a rock concert thirty miles away in the next town, or (dread) they might even have fallen victim to an alien abduction. The list can be extended indefinitely. How do you proceed to determine their whereabouts?

Well, you locate them the old fashioned way: *you go looking for them*. Check the backyard. Check the park. And so on. What you do *not* do is *presuppose* where they are. You do not engage in the following train of thought: "Truly to know where the children are is *analogically to know* God's infinitely qualified space-time coordinates for them; therefore I just know that . . ." There is simply no heuristic value for locating children by means of such vacuous reasoning. Instead, as I say, you go looking. Analogicity can play absolutely no *critical* role here. That is to say, determining analogicity for one of the possible locations is *methodologically* irrelevant. It is also *methodologically* impossible!

(. . . that's right, Lucy; Van Til seems to confuse epistemology with metaphysics, but we need to explain this better. See if this helps . . .)

After finding the children by means of *looking for them*, you might, as a good Van Tillian, declare your newfound knowledge of their whereabouts to be analogical of God's knowledge of their whereabouts. In so doing you would be *confessing*, in a manner of speaking, an absolute dependency of *your* knowledge of the children's whereabouts upon *God's* comprehensively qualified knowledge of their whereabouts. But there's a wee problem here, isn't there? You can't establish analogicity *in advance* of actually finding them, can you? You have to find the children *before* any putative knowledge of a location for them can be baptized as *analogical of God's knowledge of that location!* Which means, of course, that *how* you find out the children's whereabouts is *independent* of determining the analogical status of that knowledge! So *first* you determine where the children are, and only *then* might you indulge in speculating about the metaphysical character of the knowledge you have thus acquired.

What we have seen is that the *perceptual competence* that gives rise to your cognitive success (locating the children) can make no use of Van Til's characterization of human knowledge. Pagans, moreover, can locate *their* children with the same pinpoint accuracy as Christian believers.

That is because both pagans and Christians share the same created perceptual competence. Next case.

(2) Ptolemaic Geocentrism versus Copernican Heliocentrism

In encyclopedia articles and works in the history of science it is common to see Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) characterized as the last great medieval astronomer, or as the last great positional astronomer. The reason for the qualifications "medieval" and "positional" is that it would not be until Newton's universal law of gravitation was combined with Kepler's three laws of planetary motion and the Galileo-Descartes law of inertia that there would come to be a genuine celestial mechanics. With the Ptolemaic astronomers of his day, Copernicus was concerned with planetary appearances—lights in the sky—moving against a fixed background.

He was, nevertheless, the first to *systematize* heliocentrism as the dramatic contrast to Ptolemaic astronomy that, by the mid-18th century, came to be accepted by virtually everyone. While it may be argued that Ptolemaic astronomy possessed, in 1543, equal predictive power with the Copernican system for predicting the line-of-sight locations of planetary appearances, the same cannot be said about *what* the two systems implied with regard to discrete "planetary" trajectories, epicycles, and circumsolar orbits. Ptolemaic astronomy and Copernican astronomy postulate *different* earth-sun-planet systems (although "system" is a bit of a misnomer when applied to Ptolemaic astronomy), and with further development of systematic astronomy that difference would greatly affect their respective *explanatory* values. (For example, do we explain the apparent retrograde movement of Mars, in which Mars appears to move *backwards* against its "fixed" background, by a literal Ptolemaic epicycle or by the appearance caused by the earth's circumsolar movement relative to that of Mars? In hindsight, we know that in the 16th century the smart money would have been on the Copernican model.)

Suppose, now, that it is the year 1543, the year Copernicus's famous *De Revolutionibus* was first published. (It was also the year that Nicolaus Copernicus died.) In 1543—*before* the invention of the telescope and *before* the brilliant work of Galileo, Tycho Brahe, Kepler, and Newton—the heliocentrism of Copernicus looked far from obvious to many able thinkers. Let us now suppose that *you* are one of those able thinkers

and a copy of *De Revolutionibus* has found its way into your hands. Let's say that you have read it through with a fair amount of comprehension. However, Ptolemaic astronomer that you are and devout disciple of Martin Luther, your rather swift reaction is passionately to reject Copernicus's heliocentrism. (Luther came to view Copernicus's position with abhorrence.) Your reasoning is somewhat as follows: (1) Ptolemaic astronomy has the same line-of-sight predictive power as the Copernican system, (2) earthbound observation provides no visual evidence of the elaborate movements required by the Copernican model (the earth rotating on its own axis while orbiting the sun), (3) the Copernican system is contrary to common sense—the complex double movement of the earth is very hard to believe in terms of everyday experience, (4) retrograde planetary movement, on the Copernican system, is *mere appearance* and that is hard to swallow, (5) Scripture, using the language of geocentric appearance, makes the earth God's crowning creational achievement and soteriological focus, so (6) the earth, and not the sun, is surely at the cosmic center of things.

How might a disciple of Copernicus dissuade you? It would be worse than idle to resist the Copernican by an attempt to "sanctify" your Ptolemaic convictions with Van Tillian considerations. It simply won't do to *presuppose* the superiority or truth of Ptolemaic astronomy. Moreover, pronouncing Ptolemaic astronomy to be analogical of God's truth is in the end simply vacuous. Van Til's "epistemology" is here, as in locating one's children, *methodologically* irrelevant, and it is equally irrelevant whether one favors the Ptolemaic approach or the Copernican. Whatever you *do*, and whatever your *reasoning*, in order to weigh the pros and cons concerning the two competing astronomical systems, analogicity cannot offer the slightest cognitive or methodological clue to the solution. How could it? It is but the speculation of a curious metaphysical *status* of human knowledge *if* such knowledge should happen to exist. It is, moreover, speculation governed by selective attention to some theological and philosophical ideas (e.g., the definition of the Incomprehensibility of God and the abstract philosophical notion of absolute disparity between levels of existence) while ignoring others (e.g., the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ and the fundamental requirements of *linguistic* communication).

Our imagined Copernican is of course limited to considerations

available in 1543. What might he say? He might first stress that the line-of-sight data of positional astronomy are nicely accommodated on the heliocentric model. You already know that. But then, if he is astute, he might go on to show that the Copernican system is genuinely a *system* whereas Ptolemaic astronomy is not. The latter is a collection of ad hoc mathematical recipes for solving problems of heavenly movement one by one (add epicycles as needed). He would invite you to see the heavens—the wandering planetary lights among the stationary stellar background—as a *single* system within which location at any point could be calculated! That ought to get your attention.

Finally, what our Copernican will *not* do is attempt a defense of his model by a metaphysical characterization of knowledge in general. The Van Tillian might nevertheless say, "So what? I grant that my presuppositionalism offers no epistemological advantage for discrete epistemic tasks like locating children and deciding between Ptolemaic and Copernican astronomy; but God's existence is quite a different matter."

But is it? The foregoing admission, were a Van Tillian to make it, strikes me as more of a concession than Van Til's theory can bear. The reason is that Van Til's theory is *a general theory of knowledge*. The problem can be made clear, I think, by our final case—a case where Van Til's leading principles ought to find their most obvious application. By means of a general principle from Isaiah, we consider Moses at the burning bush.

(3) Isaiah and Moses on Identifying the Living God

After some four hundred years of slavery in Egypt, God is about to provide deliverance for the Israelites through the leadership of Moses. After gaining Moses's attention by means of a burning bush that is not consumed by the flames engulfing it, Moses is instructed to declare to the Israelites that the God of their fathers—Yahweh, by name—has sent him to lead them out of Egypt. (I scant the details, but the full account is in Exodus 3:1-4:17.)

Moses feels very inadequate to his task and one of his fears is that he will not be believed. Suppose that neither the elders of Israel nor the Egyptian ruler take him seriously. His message is that the God of

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has sent him, and on that authority the Israelites are to follow him and the Pharaoh is to let them go. But what if he is not believed? Exodus 4:1-17 provides Yahweh's response to Moses's concern, but before taking it up, look with me briefly at a general principle in Isaiah that gives a demarcation between genuine deity and bogus deity. The principle is epistemological in character (i.e., *how to tell* real deity from false), and what I hope to show is that the elements of Isaiah's Principle find application in Yahweh's response to Moses. On the other hand, on the supposition that Van Til's general position is correct, both Isaiah's Principle and Yahweh's response at the burning bush are epistemologically gratuitous—indeed, totally inappropriate! Consider, then, Isaiah 41:21-24:

Isaiah's Principle

*True deity is discernible by
the exhibition of time-transcending
knowledge and the public display of awesome power.*

"Present your case," says the LORD. "Set forth your arguments," says Jacob's King. "Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, *so that we may know that you are gods*. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; he who chooses you is detestable. [Isaiah 41:21-24, NIV]

Because I have drawn the above principle from this passage in Isaiah, I will continue to call it Isaiah's Principle even though, strictly speaking, it is the LORD's Principle. (For what it is worth, the Old Testament "LORD" occurs in all capitals in most English versions of the Bible wherever the Hebrew Tetragrammaton occurs. That is to say, the four consonant Hebrew name for God ["yod", "he", "vav", and "he"] is regularly rendered by the English "LORD". Since, however, "LORD" is a proper name and does not *mean* "Lord", I will continue to use "Yahweh" to serve as the transliteration of the Hebrew.)

What Isaiah 41:21-24 tells us, it seems to me, is that any deity

worthy of the name ought to be able to put past and future events into a unifying historical perspective, plotting the significance of past events to their future outcomes. That, after all, is what Isaiah's prophecy is all about: the final hope of Israel (as well as that of the nations) is vested in the future suffering and life of an amazing individual described in Isaiah 53!

Moreover, any deity worthy of the name ought to be able to exert awesome power among men. And that too is a part of the legacy of Israel's God. By the starkest of contrasts the "gods" of the heathen have no prophetic story to tell, and they exercise no power whatsoever (except, perhaps, a sham theatrics contributed by Satan). Hence, actually to *choose* such "gods" over Israel's Yahweh is morally condemned in the strongest language—"He who chooses you is detestable!"

So the God of Christian theism throws down the gauntlet: "*Present your case!*" But false gods have no case to present. On the other hand, the case the Christian believer in Yahweh is invited to present trades crucially on a vital epistemic competence: the ability to discern the evidential salience of prophecy against the "*background noise*" of mundane historical happenings, as well as the ability to discern the occasional display of the awesome power of God against the "*background noise*" of routine, everyday cause and effect. Because Van Til's presuppositionalism has, in effect, *confused learning with presupposing*, it has ignored the only cognitive link humans have to the relevant data: the working of our created epistemic competence. By *epistemic competence* I mean the set of sentient and rational abilities that are facilitated by the human brain and nervous system.

Later in the *Peanuts* narrative I will document the rationalistic expedient the Van Tillians piously intone to overcome their failure at not having an account of *learning* about God from data (evidence). Here it will suffice to say that Isaiah's Principle manifestly *requires* a human competence to discern *degrees* of evidential salience in those data that are supposed to authenticate deity. Van Tillians like Thom Notaro, however, follow their teacher in utterly "democratizing" all data as *equally* evident with respect to the truth of Christian theism—thus trivializing miracle! The point, however, is that the domain of data does not constitute a democracy with *each* datum laden with *equally perspicuous implications* for the God of Christian theism.

That each datum *cannot* have an equally compelling "vote" for

Christian theism can be seen for the following reasons: (1) the God who created our finite epistemic endowment with its distinctive capacities and powers does not overstep those capacities and powers in disclosing himself to us. He would not, for example, speak to us in "the tongues of angels" with no possibility of translation. Nor would he require that we deduce or infer Christian theism from such discrete and isolated data as "the grass in my yard is green" or "Andrew Jackson was once President of the United States". Even if, from the standpoint of omniscience, such discrete data have implicatory connections for the entire "plan of God," they do not wear those connections on their sleeves for the likes of us! (2) The evidential relation is necessarily a piecemeal affair for *finite* intellects—an affair involving the competence to classify similarities, to sample individuals and events that show promise of being *representative* of larger wholes, and the amazing competence—strikingly exhibited by modern physics—to *mathematically* represent physical regularities in the world about us. Those regularities ($E = mc^2$, for example) are *discovered* regularities in nature, not aprioristically derived from rationalistic first principles. Empirically speaking, they are determined piecemeal, and their character depends upon how the world is *discovered* to be. But (3), and most importantly, the evidential relation itself is profoundly wrapped up in our inhabiting *a causal order*. It is the causal order that sets up our expectations and is the foundation for partial knowledge. Moreover, that is why it is epistemically stunning whenever divine power interrupts that order by miracle.

The causal relation, like the relation of logical implication, is *primitive*. To say that a relation is primitive is to say that it is not reducible to any other relation. But if the causal relation is indeed primitive, it cannot be *reduced* to the implicatory relation of logic. A key philosophical mistake the Van Tillians make, I am convinced, is their tendency to write and speak in a way that *conflates* the causal relation with the implicatory relation. (In the history of philosophy, rationalists of all metaphysical persuasions have been prone to do this. That is because, roughly, certainty is secured for them by logical deducibility from self-evident first principles rather than by the contingent causal regularity of the world.) So while using the same causal language as their evidentialist brethren, presuppositionalists have tended to grant only the implicatory relation a decisive role in their theorizing. That is fatal for reasoning about the relationship of God to the creation and about the relationship of the creation to God. The reason is that *the implicatory relation governs coherent*

thought, while the causal relation governs spatio-temporal structures and active agency. For the most part, it is *about* spatio-temporal structures and active agency that apologetics does its thinking.

The importance the causal order has for human knowing is enormous. We can know partially without knowing exhaustively not because of a mysterious epistemic efficacy that attends an act of presupposing, but because of the lawlike and causal regularity of the world we have been designed to investigate. Presupposing within a *chaotic* or *unruly* world (were this even possible) would do us no good, and presupposing within a well-behaved world is profitable *only when that presupposing is antecedently informed by data—and hence by learning!* (More on this later.)

Moreover, *successful learning* in our well-behaved world requires that both the law structures facilitating the rational processes of the mind/brain and the law structures governing the environment *are in phase*. Causal laws are operative and evident everywhere we are able to look, and they secure *patterns* among data (including the vital neural patterns that implement our very looking). These patterns, in turn, secure the basis for *sampling* data. Having said this, return with me to the "problem" of infinite data. Let it be granted that in physics, say, our actual contact with all relevant data is quite small in relation to what an indefinitely extended scientific research might turn up. Even though we are not able to exhaust the data in a piecemeal observational fashion, the law structures of the data we *are* able to examine bring the promise that the *unexamined* universe is governed by those *same* laws! Of course, concluding that we inhabit a universal causal order is an inductive generalization; but it is a *rationally responsible* generalization in two ways: (1) it is massively evidenced in our every waking hour, and (2) it does *real work* in our apologetic foundation by accounting for our perceptual and rational success in the world.

In a word, it is the causal integrity of the creation that secures partial knowledge and not a presupposing by which *each* rationalized datum—one by one—perspicuously declares its place in the plan of God *merely be being factual*. The rational whole that constitutes the entire plan of God is simply not available to finite minds with anything like the concrete specificity that would be required by Van Til's rationalism. It is far better to say that it was God's plan to anchor our inductive and rational

efforts to and within a causal order, and that it is that causal order that grounds all rational inquiry into empirical data. But we have gotten far ahead of ourselves. Back now to the burning bush.

Briefly, Yahweh gives Moses three signs (miracles) to perform in order to authenticate his message: a rod that turns into a snake and then back again, a hand that turns leprous and then instantly heals, and Nile river water that turns to blood when poured onto dry ground. Perhaps there is a special symbolism that goes with each sign, but that will not be my focus. I want to pay attention, rather, to the elements of the dialogue between Yahweh and Moses as these signs are introduced.

First, the signs are given to aid belief—to authenticate Moses's message as genuinely from Yahweh. Second, they authenticate a message that establishes a knowledgeable continuity (on the part of Yahweh) from the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. One has only to think of the Covenant Yahweh made with Abraham in Genesis 15 and Yahweh's prediction of four hundred years of Egyptian slavery, after which Abraham's descendants would be delivered (Gen. 15:13-14). Isaiah's Principle says that a deity should be possessed of "time transcending knowledge," able, therefore, to tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome." Accordingly, God instructs Moses to tell the Israelites that he has promised to deliver them and that their deliverance is assured (Ex. 3:16-22). Third, God predicts that while the elders of Israel will listen to Moses, the king of Egypt will remain obstinate until he is overwhelmed by the wonders that God will perform (Ex. 3:19-21). This is the predictive side of time transcending knowledge. Isaiah's Principle affirms that a deity ought to be able to "tell us what the future holds." And fourth, the signs themselves are Yahweh's *doing something*: "Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear."

There is a great deal else that could be said (cf. David P. Hoover, "For the Sake of Argument: A Critique of the Logical Structure of Van Til's Presuppositionalism," *IBRI Research Report* 11 [1882]); here I conclude with a final contrast between what, on Van Tillian terms, might have been expected from God at the burning bush and what actually occurred. When Moses said, "But suppose they don't believe you sent me," God's response was *not*: "Just who do you think is speaking here? My very words are *self-*

authenticating and each and every fact in the Israelites' possession attests to my plan. I am *the transcendental sine qua non of all intelligible predication!* Now go!"

Nor did God respond with something like: "Abraham's descendants are such sign-mongers, such epistemic dunces—noetically thick, and hard of heart! So even though my mere words are self-attesting, I will accommodate the Israelite's epistemic sluggishness with these signs . . ." The response of God to Moses's concern is treated with respect and with epistemological provision befitting the limitations and character of *human* epistemic competence. In particular, God's response beautifully satisfies Isaiah's Principle.

[8]

Transcendental football anyone?
["But Charlie, there's no such thing as a
magical touchdown!"]

Lucy looks blitzed but she assures me that she has followed it all. "The illustrations helped," she says, "and maybe the two IBRI articles you shamelessly plugged will help too. But what I still don't get is why you call Van Til's speculations *transcendental*."

So I close with a final clarification and a homely analogy intended to show what happens when we commit presuppositions gratuitously—commit them when we ought to be arguing. The crucial point is that profitable and legitimate presupposing functions to afford rational elbow room—*never* as an indirect route to absolute certainty. That is because, in our quest for truth, it is simply impossible to *begin* inquiry by wondering how to make chaotic bare particularity hang together. *Prior* certainty is a necessary condition for presupposing. That is because the particularity of the world about us never greets us as chaotic and unglued (thanks to the causal order). Presupposing makes sense as a *rational* strategy only when we *already* understand a range of data and then go on to ask, "What general condition or conditions would have to obtain in order to account for this data?"

This sort of question is a *transcendental question* and is a species of hypothetical reasoning. The question asks, what hypothesis best

accounts for the data? In Van Til's language, reasoning by presupposition and transcendental reasoning are synonymous. Such reasoning, per se, is certainly above reproach. It becomes, shall we say, *magical* reasoning only when it goes berserk, providing answers that are not posed by data. A basic competence to discern data at the level of everyday living is absolutely necessary *before* transcendental questioning can take place.

If at the outset literally *everything* is unintelligible and awaiting the questioner to come up with *everything's* rational *raison d'être* (and that is how Van Til begins inquiry), then no transcendental question can even be posed. If, to use Van Til's jargon, *all intelligible predication* is initially baffling, then *no* presuppositional strategy can even commence, for then we would be doing the impossible: asking what accounts for the intelligibility of any datum whatsoever as though knowledge of anything at all awaited the answer. In short, Van Til's transcendental question is simply too general to be meaningfully put. The question, in effect, demands omniscient viewing distance to be so much as asked while simultaneously denying the questioner any viewing distance at all. To repeat, viewing distance on data requires prior discernment and the manifest exercise of cognitive competence.

In the following analogy I liken the scoring of touchdowns to successful argumentation. The field of play is the domain of empirical data, and what may be concluded from the data is represented by the End Zone. In effect, the problem for the "transcendental" football player is how to score a touchdown without touching the turf (for the turf has reality only as viewed *from* the End Zone!). The analogy, I'm afraid, is a bit of a tease; there are points of comparison that I leave inexplicit. Without further ado, let's play some bizarre football. I call it . . .

. . . *Punt!*

Imagine a football game between opposing teams of presuppositionalists. ("C'mon, Lucy, 'just do it.' You can even call the sides the 'Linus Thumbs' and the 'Brown Blockheads'.") Let a team's offensive drive across the gridiron toward the opponent's End Zone represent the fortunes or misfortunes of trying to establish some truth-claim or other: the existence of God, or the existence of the Great Pumpkin, or whatever. A touchdown amounts to proof. The gridiron itself is a

thoroughly empirical turf—none of that artificial idealized stuff!

Now let me provide two very broad assumptions plus the rules of the game. The first assumption is that advancing the ball down the field is physically doable in the familiar football way. The players genuinely possess the competence for blocking, tackling, passing, catching, and running. That's *the competence assumption*, and it means that the game is winnable (and of course losable). The second assumption is that there is a single reality connecting the turf to the End Zone. Call this *the metaphysical assumption that grounds epistemological continuity*. The two assumptions taken together mean that an offense can (rationally) only get to the End Zone from the turf or field of play. So not even a trick play can be a magical play. Scoring a touchdown, therefore, will always imply the exercise of "football" competence, from the field of play, by following the rules.

And here are the rules. As even the cheerleaders know, the offense gets four downs (four plays) to go ten yards. If ten yards are traversed, the cycle of four downs repeats, and so on. If the offense hasn't made their ten yards after *three* downs, however, the primary concern becomes field position *after* the opposing team has again handled the ball. Field position, of course, is vital, and in our analogy it represents degrees of confirmation within data space. If the Thumbs and Blockheads were *ordinary* teams, what to do on fourth down would (of course) depend on such factors as where that down occurs, the score, and the time remaining left to play. But as we will see, these two teams are hardly ordinary! Anyhow, fourth down is where *punting* comes in. Punting (which we will say is technically legal on any down), is fraught with its own special peril, but still counts *indirectly* as an offensive play, but in a farsighted way, for a good punt swiftly gets the ball forty or more yards down the field and gives the opposing team a lot of work to do.

(Lucy is laughing hysterically at a sudden reminiscence of pulling the ball away as Charlie tried to kick it. I don't think she's paying attention.)

Of major importance for our purposes is that it is impossible to score a touchdown by punting into the End Zone. When that happens the ball goes over to the other side on their own twenty yard line. Punting

always turns the ball over, and in our analogy it merely determines how much the other side must rebut or establish vis-à-vis their opponent. I perhaps needlessly stress, punting is not nothing; it covers ground that must be covered, even if it does risk the onslaught and rebuttal of the foe by turning the ball over. (I should add that there are disanalogies lurking in this logic, and no doubt you have spotted the most glaring ones. All I can say is that no analogy is perfect, so be a good sport and ignore them.)

So here we are at last at the *Transcendental Bowl* as the Thumbs and the Blockheads take the field. Thankfully, we do not need a play-by-play call of the action to know the outcome of the game. It's going to end in a tie at zero to zero. (And *please*, don't even suggest overtime!) Here's why. In the Presuppositional League, teams always, but *always*, punt on every first down! They call them transcendental kicks which, as their coaches say, loft the ball above the radically contingent turf. The players are well instructed as to the impiety of passing or running the ball. They know that grinding out empirical yardage carries with it no guarantee of success—which (to their minds) is reason enough to forswear "univocal football" altogether. What is to be avoided at all cost is even the tacit concession that there might actually be genuine logical traction on an *empirical* turf to support such play. No transcendental football player worth his cleats would ever admit that an *empirical* turf might actually constitute common ground. Mercy no!

Instead, kicking toward the glorious End Zone is at once a gesture of their confidence that *only* the End Zone bestows meaning, and, to repeat, their bold refusal to meet the enemy upon a ground that cannot afford sure-fire logical traction—upon a turf that is by definition a probabilistic swamp: *terra incognita*.

(What is it Lucy? Yes, I suppose so. There *could* be a winner if safeties are scored, or if a blocked punt were run into the End Zone, or in the event of a lucky kick-off return; or . . . if one of the teams doesn't bother to show up. It's funny but forfeits often happen in this league; transcendental football players seem to prefer to stay home and read about football rather than play it. Generally though, a zero to zero stalemate is what happens.

Can I say anything *nice* about these two teams? Uh, the thumbs on

the Linus Thumbs are opposable, and the Brown Blockheads are . . . well, blockheads. I tried.)

The moral is that it's best to go into epistemological punt formation sparingly and ever so strategically. We are *designed*, so to speak, with the competence to run and pass. The field of play is not *terra incognita*, but the world God has created—the very terrain our epistemic powers are geared for. If only the presuppositionalists could be made to see that their very competence *to be puzzled* by data—data that require, in their idiom, "transcendental explanations"—is proof of an epistemic endowment far richer in resources than their view allows. It is that ability that I think the presuppositionalists have overlooked in their zeal for apologetic certainty.

And now for my tale . . .

THE DEFEASIBLE PUMPKIN: An Epiphany in a Pumpkin Patch

by David P. Hoover

I

The Cast

A good many years have come and gone—forty-two, in fact. The old Peanuts gang now occupies middle age, and sad to say, dog- and bird-years have long since claimed Snoopy and Woodstock. The passing of Snoopy was marked by a brief reunion (thirty-three years ago), but the gang again dispersed to busy and separate lives. The present tale is but a vignette of a second and quite recent reunion. To properly tell it, I must bring you up to date on the original cast of characters.

Charlie Brown, since his graduation from the Th.D. program at Westminster Theological Seminary, is Dr. Charles Brown. He still refuses to take life with a pinch of salt, seeing mostly the gravity and profundity of things, and his friends suspect that quite a lot of social subtlety and nuance get past him. Still, all in all, he's a good man and one can always count on him for that sober, focused attention when it counts. I should mention, too, that he's ended up a seminary professor. Theology and apologetics are his specialties.

Lucy, wouldn't you know, finished her Ph.D. in psychology (at Purdue), and is a practicing psychotherapist in Youngstown, Ohio. (Her rates, of course, have gone up.) Her perhaps envious colleagues tend to regard her as lacking in sensitivity. Just last week at a banquet "Roast" in her honor she was given the first ever "Howard Cosell of Counselors Award." She didn't think it was funny.

Peppermint Patty dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade and went into construction work. She is now a private contractor. She has been quite successful and has even landed some lucrative government contracts. Reflective she's not; it's very possible that no meta-order thought

has ever occurred to her. But Patty's loyal to a fault and what she lacks in philosophical acumen she more than makes up for in dogged practicality.

Marcy graduated from The Citadel and is career military. Or was. She's retired from the army now, and supplements her pension by working as a Fed Ex courier.

Schroeder, a virtuoso pianist at six years of age, went on to several colleges of musicology and studied in Vienna for a while. He is now Conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra and on all accounts is the finest conductor at the Academy of Music since Eugene Ormandy.

Then there's Pig Pen, but I think I'll let him surprise you. For now I'll just say that he's been quite successful as a field representative for Proctor & Gamble.

Last, I will re-introduce you to Linus. He is central to the drama about to begin. Linus, in the days he inhabited the imagination of Charles Schultz, gave evidence of some pretty deep-seated security issues. With extensive therapy he managed to substitute a pipe for his thumb, but could never bring himself to part with his blanket. The compromise that came out of those sessions was the conversion of the blanket into a sweater (which he has managed to preserve impeccably). But even after an intellectual odyssey that took him through Harvard Divinity School, he never relaxed his fervent faith in *The Great Pumpkin*.

II Apologetically Perplexed

"Pumpkin, Shmumpkin," muttered Dr. Brown as he pored once again over a tome of apologetics. This time it was Van Til's *Defense of the Faith*. Last night it was Gordon Clark's *A Christian View of Men & Things*. And the night before that it was, well . . . Robert Reymond's *The Justification of Knowledge*. But what difference did it make? Brown was a deeply conscientious presuppositionalist, but the presuppositionalism on his library shelves exhibited a chronically divided camp. Dared he think that this betokened a foundational incoherence of starting point? "No," he resolved (presupposed?), even though the 'no' lacked conviction.

The irony of it all was that Linus *too* was a presuppositionalist! Linus had long been utterly sanguine about such Van Tillian themes as: (1) absolute ontological disparity entails absolute epistemological disparity; (2) there is an absolute ontological disparity between God's being and human being so God's knowledge of anything is *qualitatively* distinct from man's knowledge of ostensibly the same things; (3) the only proper reasoning on the part of the creature, therefore, is *analogical* of divine reasoning (i.e., univocal reasoning with God is metaphysically impossible and equivocal reasoning isn't reasoning); (4) probability argumentation inherently impugns divine authority as to what has been made evident; (5) one makes a fundamental beginning, therefore, by *presupposing* the truth of the divine; and (6) the potentiality of any system of thought cannot exceed its presuppositions.

"Linus and I are hip deep in the same theoretical constructs, the same jargon," said Charlie to no one, "and that seems to get us only a stalemate. But that's impossible, isn't it? The longer I struggle with feuding presuppositionalists, the more sense Robert Reymond makes to me. But still . . ."

[Reymond, apparently following Clark, had disavowed analogical reasoning, but neither Brown nor Linus could find within Reymond's The Justification of Knowledge an argumentative structure that overcomes probability. Probability, in fact, seemed to lurk beneath all that Reymond had had to say. In his book he emphatically affirms the reliability of sense perception but fails to notice the formal inseparability of sense perception and interpretation. This is a problem for him because probability is endemic to interpretation for any finite perceiver. The probability element is magnified, moreover, as more and more individual percepts must be factored into a system of thought.]

All things considered, it certainly appeared to Brown that in terms of rational scaffolding, he and Linus held identical positions. Linus's faith, however, was not in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but in The Great Pumpkin. Brown, of course, would never presume to attempt the work of the Holy Spirit in Linus's behalf; all he wanted was to be a faithful witness and apologete for the truth. While Linus dreamed of his own

impumpkination (a re-embodiment, only in the stuff that pumpkins are made of) and of enjoying eternal roots in the pumpkin patch Hereafter, Brown wanted Linus to forsake such idolatry and accept the teachings of the historic Christian faith. Brown had no problem, really, regarding the faithful witness part, but he was mightily perplexed when it came to mixing logic and truth in the apologetics part.

"Good grief!" exclaimed Brown. "From the standpoint of presuppositionalism, how does one *rationally* discredit the Pumpkin without *rationally* discrediting Christianity? The sword seems to cut both ways!"

[And indeed it does. To compress the issue insanely, the sheerly rational issue comes to a tight focus in this question: How does one know when one's believing is analogical of divine truth? Since "analogicity," on presuppositional reckoning, is a metaphysical property of apologetic discourse and not a logical feature of either an argument's structure or strategy, there is no way to answer that question. Is Linus's presupposed Great Pumpkin analogical of divine truth or is Brown's presupposed God of Christian theism? You can't approach this question from the standpoint of empirical evidence, for that would instantly mire you in the probabilistic swamp from which Van Til et al. seek to deliver us. How then do we decide between Brown's presupposition and Linus's? Answer: whichever presupposition enjoys analogicity. And which one is that?]

Well, for starters, it won't do to say that at least one of them must be analogical of divine truth, for we have absolutely no reason (no logical and no empirical reason) to suppose that either presupposition enjoys this (thus far) mysterious status. Second, analogicity by its very nature comes in degrees: X may be strongly, moderately, or only weakly analogical of Y—or X may bear no analogy to Y whatsoever. The Van Tillian analogicity relation, after all, is a species of resemblance relation (see the epigram on the very first page of the Introductory Essay where Van Til uses the word "replica" to convey his meaning), and resemblance comes in degrees. The point is this: if we rule out all a posteriori criteria by which to test strengths of analogy we

put ourselves into an impossible position when it comes to evaluating particular claims to analogicity. Third, in the complete absence of univocal criteria there is the problem of commencing an infinite regress of analogical evaluations. Evaluation itself, insofar as it is presuppositionally proper in its rationality, must be analogical, so only analogical evaluation is competent to assess the strength or merit of a putatively analogical argument. But how does one tell whether the assessment itself bears a sufficiently strong analogy to God's thought? Answer: that would take another analogical assessment of the immediately previous assessment—and so on forever; and fourth, there simply is no ana-logic and hence no structural means to assess outcomes of reasoning which "reflect" (i.e., are analogical of) divinely held truth.

But all this is to say, again, that analogicity is a metaphysical property of apologetic discourse within Van Til's writings and not epistemological instruction within that discourse. It is a property for which we have no justification theoretic access at all. What is distressing Charlie Brown, then, is this: rationally speaking Linus and Charlie may only beg the question against each other in any colorful or rhetorical way they may devise. What they cannot do as presuppositionalists (of the Van Tillian sort) is rationally impair the view of the other.

It might be thought, however, that Van Til's rule to show "the impossibility of the contrary" might be used decisively against The Great Pumpkin. In logic, this is simply the procedure of reducing one's opponent's position to absurdity by assuming the truth of its major premises and deriving a contradiction thereby. There is a decisive objection to this that Linus can make, however: it is analogicity in Van Til's scheme that secures the Christian's position, not the strict logical coherence of Christianity's doctrines or an infallible construal of evidences. Indeed, he concedes that Christianity fares poorly when it comes to assessing, by standard logic, the Trinity or the coherence of the aseity doctrine with God's having created anything. "So much the worse for standard logic," is Van Til's reply, "the analogical condition of being in the truth is what

(argumentatively) secures the Christian position. Logical laws themselves are relativized to God's epistemic absolutivity." But that response is equally available to Linus in behalf of the Pumpkin. Analogically apprehended mysteries are exempt from straight logical critique (univocal critique, Van Til would say). Van Til's line has always been that 'contradictions' at the core of the Christian faith are proper 'mysteries' while 'contradictions' at the core of opposing systems are conclusive evidence of their impossibility and falsehood. That is a darkish saying indeed.]

The hour was late so Brown packed it in for the night. Tomorrow he had to rise early to begin greeting arrivals for the first reunion of his Peanuts pals in thirty-three years.

III

The Plan: A 'Point of Contact' with Linus

What Brown decided had more to do with the time of year than any personal closure he might have felt with apologetic scruples. Halloween was only a day away and this might be the last opportunity to disabuse Linus of his (surely) cultic belief in The Great Pumpkin. He was certain he could count on everyone to participate—but there was the problem with Lucy. Would *she* come after all those years of unrequited love from Schroeder? He was delighted when she was the first to arrive.

". . . and that's the idea, Lucy," Brown concluded. "I want all of us to stand vigil with Linus in the pumpkin patch Halloween night. If seeing is believing, then maybe the failure to see is disbelieving. What do you think?"

"Will Schroeder be coming?" Lucy asked absently.

"Lucy!" Brown blurted with perceptible asperity. "What about the *plan*?"

"You mean the lot of us squatting in a pumpkin patch all night? Pul-leeze! I've never met anyone with an imagination like yours, Charlie Brown!"

"But don't you think," persisted Brown, "that just from the psychological point of view—and from your own practice—that a group confrontation would be really effective?"

"That's not his problem, Charlie. Uh . . . where should I put my stuff? Which room is Schroeder's, by the way?"

"Good grief!" sighed Brown, whose asperity was even more perceptible. "Can't you stay focused for even a minute? What do you mean 'that isn't Linus's problem'?"

"I mean," began Lucy, "that the approach is too subtle. Linus would use all his sophistication and tie you in rational knots—Harvard guys are nothing if not intellectually convoluted. From what you've told me, Linus would be able to spot a logical loophole a mile away. *Deprogram* dear bro, I say! Blitz him with the absurdity of that pumpkin fetish. Wear him down. After a week without meals he will be ready to soak up whatever you like, maybe sign the Communist Manifesto. This coffee still hot?"

"Yeah," replied Brown weakly.

After a few minutes of silence Brown spoke again, perhaps half to himself: "Conversion isn't like that, Lucy. The right solution can't violate a person's own will. I grant you that Linus's fixation on The Great Pumpkin involves an overall psychological set that is very resistant to change. But you can't facilitate the kind of change I have in mind by reverse brainwashing . . . by prying his head open with a psychological crowbar and stuffing in new content."

"A pity," said Lucy as she gulped down the last of her coffee. "You know, you haven't changed a bit, Charlie Brown. Theories, you know, always get you stuck—you want them to be true, but that's just it; there's no way on earth to verify a theory. The problem is that the world screams for action while you are immobilized in an intellectual dither! Practice and workability are where it's at. And *technique* is what it all boils down to. I suppose some theory or other might explain why a technique works, but the problem is, lots of *different* theories might explain the very *same* technique just as well. In the end there's only the technique, only the 'how-to,' and the

best technique is the one that works! Theories be damned, and theology too, if they don't get us off our duffs with sensible 'how-tos'."

Brown was about to recount a litany of practices and techniques that would have been impossible without theoretical breakthroughs when the rest of his guests began to arrive.

IV

Discussion: Peanuts Anyone?

"Sir, Dr. Brown said it would only be for this afternoon."

"Get out of my face, Marcy," said Peppermint Patty truculently. "I don't need a name tag to tell who's who!"

"But Sir . . ."

"Chuck! Over here. It's me, Patty. Will you call off Marcy? And what's with the dog house? Snoopy's dea__ . . ."

"Leave it alone, Patty," urged Linus who was standing nearby.

On the patio Brown made a brief welcoming speech and announced that Linus had agreed to their company that night in the pumpkin patch. Schroeder would put in a modest sound system to play a few CDs apropos of the occasion. By now it was three in the afternoon and the Peanuts friends were off in pairs, mostly, getting caught up with each other. Brown listened to Schroeder and Linus talk about proof and the existence of God .

"Empirical proof of ultimate things is impossible;" Linus was saying. "personal proof, yes; empirical argumentative proof, no."

Just then Lucy shouldered her way into the conversation. "Hey, Linus, we're talking *real* pumpkin here aren't we? I mean seeds, rind, and all of that."

"Sort of," Linus said with some annoyance. "But I was just saying to Schroeder that it's unfair to require proof—empirical, or observation-based, proof. No religious system does that, and none can."

"I don't think that's true of Christianity," offered Schroeder, "I mean, if you count historical evidence and eyewitness testimony. Tell me again why you think 'real world' proof is out."

"Charlie could tell you pretty much the same thing on that as I could," began Linus, "although I don't think Charlie quite faces the existential dilemma that the answer poses for his own beliefs."

"Meaning what?" Schroeder prodded.

"Meaning that in terms of finding 'the truth' we face what might be called an 'internalist/externalist' dilemma. The *internalist* prong of the dilemma goes something like this. In any matter of reasoning to some mind-independent truth (whether there is such a thing as gravity, e.g.), each of us must begin from the vantage point of his or her own mind. Descartes is famous for his attempt to come to grips with that, but Kant—at least in general outline—is definitive. Maybe I can summarize it this way: the mind is not like, say, an intellectual Geiger Counter that operates automatically by the laws of physics to give us infallible percepts depending on which way we point our heads and bodies. A *pure* causal theory of knowledge acquisition would have to maintain something like this if it stayed consistent. Rather, the human mind is an *interpreter*. That's a bottom line fact. And the problem is that lots of things can mess up interpretation."

"Such as . . .," invited Schroeder.

"Such as any physical malfunction in the working of one's cognitive architecture. Such as any normative mistake involving logic or the weighting of evidence. Such as unfamiliarity with context. Such as cultural or religious conditioning. Such as observational carelessness. Such as environmentally poor conditions for making crucial observations. Such as . . ."

"Okay, point made. So you're saying that the internalist prong of the dilemma is that knowledge begins from the inside out and that no

interpretation—for all the reasons you gave—comes with its own guarantee."

"Yes, but the problem is even more radical than your way of putting it. The mind has no way to *compare* outside reality with its own interpretations of it. Strictly speaking, we have no way of knowing whether there's a mind-independent reality that corresponds with how we take things to be. There is no way—even in principle—to climb over, or to outflank, our interpretations to check their *real* fit against a reality that remains unaffected by our interpretative efforts. To use the jargon, there are no presupposition-free, theory-neutral, or value-independent interpretations. Ironically, I think, Van Til's own work in Christian apologetics makes this rather Kantian point his theoretical centerpiece; contemporary philosophy of science does so as well—for example, in the writings of Thomas Kuhn."

"Why do you say there's irony in Van Til's position?" asked Schroeder.

"Oh, because so very much of his polemical writing against adversaries of Christianity is framed in terms of what he sees as disastrous in Kant. Van Til doesn't *call* his presuppositions 'categories of the understanding,' but clearly a Van Tillian presupposition has the same *epistemological function*. To wit: presuppositions bring noetic structure to what would otherwise be incomprehensible and unknowable. That's exactly what Kant's mental categories do."

"And the *externalist* horn of the dilemma?" pressed Schroeder.

"Well, we've really already covered that. The ideal for knowledge of others and scientific knowledge is for the knower to be in reliable cognitive touch with whomever and whatever is *actually* out there. Negatively put, the ideal is to avoid getting cognitively short-changed in this regard by brain function, silly or false presuppositions, or just bad lighting, bad acoustics, etc. But we can't embrace pure externalism, it would seem, unless we can somehow eliminate the problematic "buffer zone" of interpretation between our minds and what's out there. A purely causal theory of knowledge might do that but that has looked impossible to anyone who has considered it."

"I'm not sure I follow you about the benefit of a causal theory of knowledge," said Schroeder. "Everything has causes, right? Surely interpretation itself has causes too."

"That's right," continued Linus, "interpretation has causes too, but in neurologically embodied thought processes the causal (all that's physically interactive) is curiously linked with what, conceptually speaking, cannot be causal in the simple mechanical or physical sense. Logical relations, for example, are not physically causal; neither is the discernment of evidential relations; neither are the heuristic strategies by which we solve practical problems. The list goes on. What is nice about physical causes (in our world) is that they are infallible. No one violates a physical law; physical laws always get their way. That includes statistical laws of science too. Applied to a case of simple perception, for example, the infallibility of laws getting their way would mean that *if* my brain's optical system is affected in lawlike ways by light reflected by a tree, and my brain causally produces the belief in me that there is a tree nearby, *then* it would be *true* that there is a tree nearby. No ifs, ands, or buts. Interpretation could not introduce a wedge of doubt or uncertainty. Misperception there could well be, but it could not come about through misinterpretation, only through mechanism malfunction.

"The problem, of course," Linus went on, "is that human minds *are* interpreters so knowledge can't be a simple causal function of environment/brain interaction. That means that presuppositions are logically basic, not brute causes. I presuppose The Great Pumpkin while Charlie presupposes the God of Christian theism. That's where the matter begins and ends. Unless there's a way to *non-presuppositionally* test a presupposition, we just have to agree to disagree."

"And this is what justifies your adherence to The Great Pumpkin?" asked Schroeder.

"Well, it doesn't *justify* me in the sense that with these epistemological insights I can *prove* the existence of The Great Pumpkin. All that I have said, rather, *entitles* me to give an ultimately 'Pumpkinish' construal of life. It is epistemic entitlement, on my view, that defending one's faith is all about."

"Sounds pretty relativistic," said Brown.

"No more relativistic than your own deepest commitments," replied Linus. "Keep in mind that your own hero (and mine), Van Til, insists on *ontological* grounds—ontological, *not* moral grounds—that there is an absolute chasm between God's knowing and the best of human knowing. He does not root the basic human epistemological problem in the Fall, but in a rather speculative philosophical ontology of Creator versus creature . . .

[Ontological grounds are grounds that involve the sort of ultimate being that one is. Van Til's notion is that God's sort of being is radically different from (wholly other than) the sort of being enjoyed by humans. The Creator/creature distinction, in other words, marks an 'infinitely' profound difference between the being of God and the being of man. Such a difference in being, according to Van Til, entails also that any two beings that differ in this way are radically different in their fundamental mode of knowing. Thus Van Til has insisted that human and divine knowledge do not coincide at any point. Nevertheless, humans, in Christ, may know analogically what God knows; what is impossible is for humans to know univocally what God knows—to know, that is, on the very same level. Linus uses this abstract principle in a curious way as we again pick up the discussion . . .]

. . . so I think that Van Til's notion of analogicity wreaks havoc, for example, with historic Christianity's doctrine of the Incarnation; for if he were consistent, there could be no overlap of meaning—*no coincidence*—between what Jesus had in his mind according to his human nature vis-à-vis what Jesus had in his mind according to his divine nature. If Jesus's own cognitive nature was at all constrained by human cognitive architecture, there's a formidable problem here. Of course I don't have to worry about that because I'm not a Christian."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Schroeder. "I must have missed something. Jesus is both fully God and fully man, right? That means he could know *both* analogically, as do humans, *and* univocally, as does God. Where's the havoc?"

"Patience, dear Schroeder," continued Linus. "You're not dealing with the issue of ontology raised by Van Til. Keep in mind that radically distinct ontologies entail radically distinct epistemic modalities. Hang on to that. Now, would you say that it is the person that can be said to know, or is it the person's nature?"

"I think I see where this is going," said Schroeder. "It's the person, of course; it's the agent."

Linus pressed on: "And how many persons is Jesus?"

"One person."

"And that *one* person is fully God?"

"Anything less would be heresy," replied Schroeder. "But he's fully man as well."

"Perfect," said Linus. "As a cognitive agent Jesus is a *single* 'integrated' perceiver, believer, and knower, and this must be held as being logically consistent with Jesus being both divine and human. The problem is that these elements *cannot* logically coexist on Van Til's ontological doctrine—his 'theology of knowledge' so to speak. That's because, as we've already seen, there is an infinite, or shall we say ontologically unbridgeable, gap between divinely structured knowing and humanly structured knowing. In a nutshell, if persons individuate knowers, Jesus, on Van Til's ontological doctrine, would have to be *two* persons, not one. That's the ancient Nestorian heresy, isn't it Charles?"

"And to come full circle, Schroeder, you weren't seeing the difficulty when you said, 'He, Jesus, could know both analogically, because he's a man, and univocally, because he's God.' Do you see the contradiction in that statement? When you say 'he' you can refer to only *one* knower. Van Til's ontological principle absolutely forbids mixing, melding, or somehow homogenizing divine and human knowing. Or, if you like, it is fundamentally incoherent to say of an ontically unified knower that he knows an item of knowledge both analogically and univocally at one and the same time. So if the 'he' refers to a single and fully integrated epistemic

agent (personhood requires this), then Van Til's analogicity/univocity distinction cannot be applied to Jesus."

[It has always been vital to historic Christianity to hold that although Jesus is both fully God and fully man, he is one person. Nestorianism taught, roughly, that Christ was two persons. Docetism, on the other hand, taught that Jesus's humanity was only apparent (making him divine only) and so his manlike qualities and especially his sufferings were illusory. Historic Christianity wisely rejected both Nestorianism and Docetism. And so, in fact, does Van Til in his strictly theological frame of mind. What Linus is saying, apparently, is that Van Til—were he to think it through—has a dilemma going at the heart of his own Christology. The 'no coincidence' doctrine coupled with the 'analogicity' doctrine seem to require either a Nestorian or a Docetic epistemology for the historical Jesus. Either of these, however, would be abhorrent to Van Til's biblical faith, for in that case, residing in the mind(s) of the historical Jesus were two incommensurable ways of structuring knowledge neither of which has points of coincidence with the other. Something must give.]

"It gets worse," Linus went on. "Given Van Til's doctrine of the radical otherness of God's knowledge, it follows that we are *systematically* removed from any epistemic gold standard, and that, Charles, spells relativism for you. Maybe I can illustrate the point this way:

"In 1971 Nixon floated the dollar on the sea of world economy, and so its international monetary value is *relativized to* (made dependent on) the fluctuations of that economy. Van Til floated knowledge claims, in effect, on the sea of presuppositional currencies (of which there are many), and strictly speaking, the truth-value of a presupposition is *relativized to* the system in which it occurs. Maybe a better way to put it, though Van Til would not, is that truth itself is *system relative*. There can be no *external test* of any system. And it's no good saying that the Christian's presuppositions are secured to God by an analogical tether. Logically speaking, some version of that move is available to any system with a declared absolute and transcendent deity. Any system that uses it, however, would be making an equally lame set of claims. Analogicity, to change metaphors, cannot serve as an epistemic *anchor* since, on Van Tillian

assumptions, there can be no epistemological criteria *to tell* whether any belief is actually anchored. Van Til's 'analogicity' is merely a word that does no genuine theoretical work. The difference between me and the Van Tillians (Charlie, for example) is that I cheerfully accept this result. So far as the *logic* of presuppositionalism is concerned, presuppositions are basic and cognitively primitive. Within that logic, Charlie, I enjoy *along with you* a complete immunity from criticism."

"The sword cuts both ways," muttered Brown for the second time in the past twenty-four hours.

Marcy built a fire at the west end of the pumpkin patch as the dim light of dusk deepened into evening. Schroeder put on a Beethoven sonata and the gang settled in for a Great Pumpkin watch.

V

"Vertical" versus "Horizontal" Epistemology

"I don't see what all the fuss is about," said Patty as she blew out her marshmallow. "If pumpkins are Linus's thing who are we to say he's wrong? Live and let live, I say."

"That's exactly the point, Patty," said someone leaning against a stump to her right. "All of this is about living and letting live—promoting life rather than its opposite. It's Charlie's conviction—and mine too, for that matter—that the Pumpkin does not promote life. It is not a benign 'thing' that Linus is into."

"Pig Pen? Is that you?" asked Patty taking a careful look at the fellow on her right. "I didn't recognize you."

"Uh, yeah, but I prefer 'Harold'; that was a long time ago."

"Sure Pig P__ . . . , I mean Harold. I thought you were one of Chuck's friends from the seminary."

"Well, actually I did go to seminary for a couple years but then

drifted into business and sales," replied Harold. "Listening to Charlie and Linus here brings some of that back—my time in seminary, I mean. I think I follow what they're hung up on, but I'm really amazed at how their theoretical point of departure stalemates them."

"Yeah," said Patty. "I think I catch about every third word. Who cares if someone's thinking is ana- . . . analgesic."

"That's 'analogical'," corrected Harold.

"Whatever," yawned Patty.

Overhearing Harold's comments, Schroeder, Linus, and Brown stopped talking and drew closer. "Do you think there's a way of breaking the stalemate?" Schroeder asked Harold.

"Yes," said Harold, adding a log to the fire. "But I think we need to begin with a demystified epistemology."

"What's epistemology?" asked Patty.

"That's just the name for theory of knowledge," replied Harold. "It's the study of the conditions under which someone may be said to really *know* whatever it is he or she claims to know. It's ironic, I think, but the vigorous debate within Christian apologetics—roughly from the mid-thirties to the mid-seventies—had precious little to do with epistemology."

"Apologetics?" asked Lucy drowsily.

"That's the formal study of the methods and principles of defending one's faith," said Harold. "Anyhow, you'd think that apologetic theory during Van Til's career would have been accompanied by the development of a biblically consistent epistemology. After all, apologetics is a kind of *applied* epistemology."

"That isn't fair to Van Til," Brown spoke up. "If there's one thing Van Til *did* contribute it was a distinctively Christian epistemology."

"I don't think so," replied Harold. "In my opinion what Van Til has attempted is most appropriately regarded as a theology of knowledge—or better, a theological metaphysics of knowledge."

"*Mercy!*" exclaimed Lucy. "Haven't you guys ever heard of *commonsense* and *everyday words*? It's no wonder Charlie's a mess and Linus is a pumpkinhead!"

"The commonsense is coming, Lucy, but first we have to at least identify what the commonsense is supposed to be a response to. The fact is that both Charlie and Linus are Van Tillian in method, though not in content, and unless they deal with that they'll just continue to talk past each other. This is where I think the matter lies: the voluminous writings of Van Til in which we find discussions of human knowledge have nothing to do with *how* one is justified in his or her knowledge claims, but have to do, rather, with the *metaphysical status* of one's knowledge *if* one truly knows something. Although the matter of 'how one is justified in a certain belief' has always been a core concern of traditional epistemology, Van Til is breathtakingly silent on that score. Put another way, Van Til does not theorize about how one comes to know that a proposition is true from the *horizontal* level of considering data and evidence; his is a theory of the *vertical status* of a humanly held belief *if* that belief, *on entirely independent grounds*, should be counted as knowledge. And he theorizes, it seems to me, about epistemic status in an incurably speculative way.

"Anyhow, even if we were to grant that Van Til's 'vertical theory' has merit, what it tells you is how to contrast your mode of knowing with God's absolute knowing; it cannot tell you in any given case *whether* you know—only that *if* you do, the *status* of that knowledge is analogical of divine knowledge—and, of course, that its logical sanction is by way of presupposition. I propose that we try to make sense of knowledge and its acquisition in a very different way . . ."

"Uh, wake Lucy; I think she'll relate to this," said Harold to Marcy.

"What?" moaned Lucy groggily. "Is it time to go? The Pumpkin didn't show, right?"

"O ye of little faith," said Linus with a certain smug repose. "The Great Pumpkin *always* shows, but his Halloween advents occur, as the German theologians would put it, in *Geschichte*—spiritual history, not in *Historie*."

"What's *that* supposed to mean?" growled Lucy, suspecting now that the 'Great Pumpkin Watch' was something less than the empirical test it was advertised to be.

"He means," explained Harold, "that The Great Pumpkin need not have a physical manifestation; it will rise over the pumpkin patch *in spirit*."

"Holy impumpkination!" blurted Patty (whom no one had suspected of a sense of humor).

VI

Immunity to Empirical Critique: A False Start

The night wore on but somehow time flew. There was something fresh and engaging in Harold's way of talking. We rejoin the discussion as Harold attempts to identify both what is commendable about the presuppositionalists' motivation as well as what he regards as their theoretical Achilles Heel . . .

". . . and so I think it's important to acknowledge something worthy in what motivates the presuppositionalists before moving on. First and foremost, it seems to me, all of them (Van Til, Gordon Clark, Greg Bahnsen, Gary North, Rousas Rushdoony, Robert Reymond, et al.) want a method of defending the Christian faith that does not generate conclusions qualified by *probability*. Each of these writers feels to his depths that any reasoning from evidence on behalf of Christian truth that is less than *certain* is unworthy of the Gospel. To admit that one's conclusion is only *probable*, say these apologetes, is also to admit that your conclusion may be *mistaken*. Moreover, to say that, given the evidence, it is only probable that there is a God, or it is only probable that Jesus rose from death, or it is only probable that Scripture is God's word, is to pay insult to God's authority and the clarity of the manifold witness God has provided.

Granting legitimacy to probabilistic argumentation, say the Van Tillians, exacts a very high price, for to put biblical claims on an open field of possibility and probability tacitly exalts human reason above the very revelation of God. Presuppositionalists thus regularly accuse evidentialists of assuming an abstract intellectual autonomy which deploys a method that cannot possibly conclude with certainty.

"I hasten to add that Gordon Clark was not a Van Tillian, but his presuppositionalism is even more extreme than Van Til's. Whereas Van Til allows that sense perception can have a kind of dubious probative integrity under the umbrella of analogicity, Clark emphatically denies the possibility of empirically acquired knowledge. But that is another story.

[Gordon H. Clark held that knowledge for human beings was to be found exclusively in the Bible and in whatever propositions could be logically deduced from biblical propositions by deductive rules of inference. Thus, if a proposition is neither contained in the Bible nor logically deducible therefrom, then that proposition is unknowable. So, for example, the proposition that there are television sets in New Jersey is unknowable—not a part of knowledge—because it neither receives biblical mention nor is it logically deducible from anything that does receive biblical mention. And I dare say, dear reader, that you are neither biblically mentioned nor logically deducible from anything that is biblically mentioned. Hence, on this bizarrely restrictive criteriology of knowledge ascription, you are unknowable as well!]

There is a danger here of seeming to have made only a cheap point against Clark. Can he have actually held such a limiting view of knowledge? What one must keep in mind are the following key principles of Clark's epistemology: (1) the scope of human knowledge is to be conceived as an axiomatic system; thus (2) knowledge and deductive proof are coextensive (i.e., any proposition that is not deductively provable from one's initial axiom or axioms is not a part of knowledge); (3) the Christian begins (presuppositionally) with the single axiom: 'The Bible is the Word of God'; (4) since all empirically acquired beliefs fail this deducibility requirement, the acquisition of knowledge by

empirical means is logically impossible; so (5) knowledge is confined to the propositions of the Bible and to what is strictly entailed by those propositions.

For Clark's critique of empirical knowledge cf. his Language & Theology, (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1980). For a clear statement of the Bible as an axiom and its entailments as the exclusive scope of human knowledge, cf. Clark's "Wheaton Lectures," in The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, ed. by Ronald Nash (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1968). Cf. also my own essay, "Gordon Clark's Extraordinary View of Men & Things," IBRI Research Report 22, distributed by the Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, P.O. Box 423, Hatfield, PA 19440.]

"Anyhow," continued Harold, "I began to say that the presuppositionalists are commendably worked up about certainty and a method that they believe achieves certainty."

"That's right," said Linus. "The beauty of our certainty is that it does not run the risk of falsification by observation; nor are our conclusions vulnerable to the open-ended process of scientific verification. Presuppositions operate logically as absolutes."

"But don't you see," replied Harold, "that the immunity to empirical refutation you prize is really the kiss of death?"

"I'm not following you, Harold."

"Well," Harold went on, "you say that The Great Pumpkin will rise over *this* pumpkin patch tonight—indeed, I suppose you will say that the Pumpkin is here already!"

"Yes, he *is* here already," said a solemn Linus gazing into the darkness.

"Where?" asked Patty.

"Yeah, where?" echoed Marcy.

To this Linus said, "He is there for you if you believe."

"Otherwise not?" joined in Schroeder.

Linus scratched his head. "Well, if you don't believe, he's still *there*, but not for you."

Lucy said, "Why should we believe you?"

"Because it's true," said Linus patiently.

"Okay, Linus," said Harold; "how can we know that The Great Pumpkin isn't just a *product of your belief*? What, exactly, is the difference between the Pumpkin being out there and his *not* being out there. Does the *difference* this makes *make a difference*? You say yourself that observation can neither verify nor falsify his presence over the pumpkin patch."

"Right on!" exclaimed Lucy, nearly spilling her coffee. "Since evidence of *any* kind is irrelevant, we might as well say the Great Potato or the Great Rhubarb or the Great Turnip is out there!"

"Very cute," sulked Linus. "Your problem, Lucy, is that you lack the intuitive sophistication to deal with a *geschichtlich* phenomenon —analogically apprehended, of course. Presupposing The Great Pumpkin is cognitively primitive; it is the *ground* of intelligibility itself; hence it cannot be a candidate for proof or disproof. Tell them, Charlie."

"My head hurts," said Brown.

"Let me have a try at it, Linus," said Schroeder. "I think what Harold's point amounts to is that if you put all testing and evidence off-limits, you trivialize the claims you are making. If nothing could count against the Pumpkin, then there's no possible experience that your position rules out. It's all the same whether or not the Pumpkin shows. But . . . any

factual claim that rules nothing out, rules nothing *in* either! Putting a fact-claim beyond evidence is thus not a claim to fact at all. That's why Harold asked what the difference is between the Pumpkin's being out there and the Pumpkin's not being out there. *There is no difference!* So your claim is empty, Linus. Or to put it another way, the 'vertical' has to be integrated with the 'horizontal.' The vertical is the mere presupposition along with its alleged status of being *certain* (as with Linus), *axiomatic* (as with Gordon Clark), or *analogical* (as with Van Til). The horizontal has to do with the noetic *accessibility* of the vertical—how we humans with our created epistemic endowments *may come to know* whatever it is that is being claimed."

[Much else was contributed—though not altogether on one track, so summarizing it all would be difficult. The primary point, however, which reached a near consensus, proved disquieting for both Charlie and Linus.

There is a profound sense in which a fact-claim—and this includes any religious fact-claim—must "risk" falsification in order to achieve verification. That means that both Pumpkin fact-claims and Christian fact-claims are vulnerable to standard evidential cross-examination. A good example of religious fact-claims that have not stood up to such cross-examination is the alleged ancient sites mentioned in The Book of Mormon. Archaeology has never corroborated Joseph Smith's imagined ancient America. By contrast the Old Testament world has been extensively corroborated by archaeology (e.g., the existence of the Hittite nation, the town of Jericho, the warfaring of the Assyrians and then the Babylonians against Israel, etc.).

*To repeat, "risking falsification" concerning public events means only that a claim that such and such an event occurred entails that the truth of the claim is open to cross-examination. One point that Harold made in this regard is worth repeating. The Apostle Paul tacitly invokes the logic of falsifiability in I Corinthians 15:1-9 when he lists the eyewitnesses of the **risen** Christ. In addition to appearances to the Apostles, Paul states*

that more than 500 people saw the resurrected Jesus on one occasion, most of whom were still living at the time he wrote. What is crucial here is the logic of Paul's fact-claim about the resurrection. It is the nature of his claim that is important to the point here: there is a tacit invitation to the Corinthians (though not, of course, a very practicable invitation) to cross-examine those who could yet corroborate his own eyewitness testimony. In a manner of speaking, Paul is sticking his neck out in order to lay great stress on the kind of claim he is making. He has absolutely no interest in a "geschichtlich" resurrection (or a "geschichtlich" Second Coming, for that matter); post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ were space and time public events—realities quite independent of anyone's mind or personal belief system. So in the sharpest of contrast to Linus's kind of fact-claim, Paul slams the door on any mystification or mere spiritualization of the resurrection event. "Ask any of the remaining 500," says Paul, "and they will confirm my account many times over!"

*Here is an up-to-date way of putting it: if honest reporters from The New York Times had been present that first Easter morning, they would have reported that a dead man had come to life again with the same factual confidence they might exhibit in reporting a Los Angeles earthquake. The resurrection of Christ, like his promised return to earth, **must** be considered an **empirical event** or one fails to understand the Gospel. Ascertaining its factuality, moreover, does not require some exotic and courageous 'X-File' derring-do. Still less is the resurrection a piece of tabloid fodder. If the claim is true that Jesus rose from the dead, it is true not because the resurrection is believed in, **but because it happened!**]*

VII

"For we know in part . . ."

Epistemic Activity 'Under Heaven'

It was 3:30 a.m. and the fire was comfortably down to a heap of glowing embers. Following a long silence, Schroeder put on a requiem—a symbolic gesture to indicate that The Great Pumpkin was finished business,

or at least that it ought to be. There was no protest from Linus.

Another half an hour. Then Harold spoke again . . .

". . . there are several Scripture texts that have been bouncing around in my head for a while now. I'd like to share them for the light they may shed on the problems we've been discussing. The first three have to do with what seems to me to be an epistemological ceiling, or an absolute constraint, on human knowing. The fourth text [pp. 79-80], I think, has to do with the dynamic of human knowing *beneath* that ceiling. So the consideration of the first three texts in the language we've been using is *vertical*; the consideration of the fourth text is *horizontal*. I'll do my best, Lucy, not to sound like I swallowed a dictionary.

"Deuteronomy 29:29 says:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. (NIV)

Isaiah 55:9 says:

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (NIV)

And Acts 4:12, I believe, is importantly tangent to the Deuteronomy and Isaiah texts. It goes:

*Salvation is found in no one else [other than Jesus Christ], for there is no other name **under heaven** given to men by which we must be saved. (NIV)*

"We live 'under heaven' and as humans we live by our created ability to acquire knowledge 'under heaven.' Knowledge is a distinctively interpretative enterprise and Linus has already commented on the variety of ways in which that enterprise may be frustrated or compromised. But Linus, I think, gives us a counsel of despair about the prospect of *acquiring*

knowledge. Ironically, perhaps, so do the presuppositionalists of Charlie's persuasion because the core of their apologetics is constituted by a speculative contrast between knowing *above* heaven and knowing *under* heaven. At best, that way leads to a purely vertical characterization of the *status* of our knowledge *if* we should happen to have any. At worst, it may be just speculative incoherence. Apologetics, however, is nothing if not about actual epistemic *access* to items of knowledge, and that's a horizontal *under heaven* affair.

"'Under heaven' is of course a metaphor, so let's consider it in a more fine grained and practical way. Presuppositionalism is not wrong for its bare act of presupposing things, but rather for its gratuitous transcendental flight over all that is epistemologically interesting and important about the human *acquisition* of knowledge *within* the domain 'under heaven.' 'Under heaven' is the created continuum we are designed to be knowers in. 'Heaven' and 'above heaven', I suggest, are designations of an omniscient perspective to which our slim but genuine access is the 'things revealed' of Deuteronomy 29:29. This being so, the most profitable initial assumption we can make in epistemology and apologetics is *that we have been epistemically suited by God to the environment we have been created to inhabit*. Within and for this environment we have been created *competent to learn*. How like philosophy to find this baffling!

"The 'horizontal,' with the help of the 'revealed things,' is the arena in which our epistemic competence is designed to work. That competence is remarkably functional *beneath* the ceiling, which is to say that it works finitely within the constraints and lawlike dynamics of creation. Within this created state-of-affairs, *and precisely because of its lawlike structure*, we can and do know partially without knowing exhaustively."

[I will add the following note for the more philosophically inclined. Central to Van Til's concerns is the relation of partial knowledge to comprehensive knowledge. In the short space I can give the problem I can do little more than acknowledge this as a historical concern and then, with a brief consideration, come down, contra Van Til, on the side of the integrity of partial knowledge in the absence of its humanly comprehended nesting within ideally exhaustive knowledge. The little bit I have to say is this.

*The British Idealists, during the last quarter of the 19th century expounded the doctrine that all would-be assertions of fact are holistically qualified as to their meanings and truth-values by the entirety of reality. Van Til's 'theology of knowledge' is profoundly influenced by this notion. To sum it up in a catch-phrase: **Partial knowledge entails exhaustive knowledge.** Only God (the Idealists referred to the **Absolute**) knows the whole, so only God actually knows the parts—the particulars within the whole. Obviously humans cannot comprehend an infinitely qualifying context by which to be assured of their grasp of particulars. That would take omniscience. The problem of merely partial knowledge is remedied, on Van Til's reckoning, when we suitably presuppose the God and Creator of all particulars.*

*The point we are now enabled to see is of the utmost importance. What does it **mean** to "suitably presuppose?" How does Van Tillian presupposing **help** with the problem of partial knowledge within an infinitely qualifying context? Should Van Til even have been impressed with the problem of knowledge **as posed by the British Idealists**? I don't think so, for accepting the problem of infinity as a problem of **an infinity of predication** locks one into the quest for a **rationalistic solution**. That is because predications, unlike planets orbiting the sun or human anatomy, are **rational and mental** particulars—governed by intentionality and logic. Predications, moreover, are rationalistic because the **sort of system** in which they have a role to play is a **complete rational system of predication** (on Van Til's reckoning), a complete propositional system to which human access may be only marginal. If the system is God's omniscient understanding of all things, and if the object of presupposing is to affirm only those propositions that "replicate" **without duplicating** God's understanding, then there is no hope of knowing anything. What Van Til needs, then, is an **epistemological connection** (a cognitive link) between the finite human perceiver and the infinite **system** of predication known by God alone. The problem is that presupposing is not the **sort of mind activity** that could supply the essential cognitive link. In all empirical learning about the world, productive presupposing **itself** requires, and so*

cannot constitute, that basic cognitive link. Put in the context of our discussion of Van Til, our point is that learning theory is logically prior to an account of logically sophisticated presupposing. And that is to say that an account of how we humans stock our very premises and presuppositions with factual content is logically prior to Van Til's account of presuppositional reasoning. In short, presuppositional reasoning must operate with factual content if it is to advance our knowledge, and Van Til leaves the acquisition of that content a total mystery!

Here is an extremely telling, but typical, declaration that exhibits Van Til's rationalism. Citing the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck approvingly, Van Til insists that "without the concept of God [emphasis mine] as self-conscious, as self-existent, we could not know anything" (An Introduction to Systematic Theology, p.9).

It is the role of the concept of God that betrays Van Til's rationalism in this quotation. Van Til strenuously holds throughout his writings that our knowing anything at all radically depends on a concept! But there is monumental confusion here. Human knowing depends on a created, embodied (physically realized), competence that is systematically and interactively engaged with the environment. To say that we could not know anything without the concept of God, or the presupposition of God, is like saying we would be unable to tell (and hence have knowledge of) colors without the concept of electromagnetic radiation in its interaction with the brain. Electromagnetic radiation, coupled with the dynamics of the human optical system and brain, help explain what makes telling colors possible, but a child of five can very well get his colors right without so much as a clue about the structures and causal dynamics that facilitate this cognitive feat.

Van Til regularly confuses causal and structural issues of cognitive ability and cognitive competence with logical issues concerning systematic implication. To put Van Til's wording aright, his wording would have to be something like: 'Without God's designing our brains and nervous systems as he has, and

then placing us in a lawlike environment that is epistemically accessible to that endowment, we could know nothing.' But that wording spoils Van Til's point about the way humans are dependent on God for knowledge.

*How, then, is **partial knowledge** possible in the spatio-temporal universe we actually inhabit? We have just seen that the partial knowledge we patently live by is **not** facilitated in each of us by a **concept**, or by a **super-concept**, or by a **presupposition**. Van Til confuses active, everyday perceiving, believing, and knowing with rational deduction from ultimate principles or concepts. The confusion is exacerbated because the "rational deduction" isn't standardly rational, but instead bestows the metaphysical status of analogicity on whatever is "deduced." In contrast to Van Til, I account for the legitimacy of partial knowledge by drawing attention to the causal cohesion of the world. By virtue of that cohesion the future resembles the past—both in terms of the physical brain and in terms of the environment. Humans have been created with a mind/brain design whose causally cohesive **embodiment** facilitates the all-important epistemic interactions with the environment. What grounds the perception of evidential saliences is the integrity of the system of 'secondary' causes in the observable creation. 'Under heaven' it is this pervasive character of creation that makes knowledge-extending activity possible. And it is this character of creation that secures the reliability of induction, and so the reliability of the applied rationality (abduction, induction, and deduction) in scientific investigation. Otherwise put, it is the integrity of **what** God has created (their structures and lawlike behaviors), rather than an inaccessible and ideally rationalized system, that secures the human pursuit of knowledge.]*

Harold then adds his own summary . . .

" . . . so the primary difficulty I have with Van Til and the presuppositionalists," continued Harold, "is this one-dimensional construal of theirs which encompasses on the one hand, *spatio-temporal things* (in

all their external relations and cultural nuances), and on the other hand, *rational predication about those things*. I don't think Van Til is either a Rationalist or an Idealist—not if we model Rationalism on the sort of philosophy produced by Spinoza, or if we model Idealism on the sort of philosophy produced by Berkeley. But his persistent running together of "predication" and "what predication is *about*" shows heavy rationalistic and idealistic strains in his thought."

Then Lucy interrupted: "I think I have maybe a faint sense for the problem you are talking about, Harold, and I don't want to say that it doesn't have importance for philosophy types; but if we *must* consider what you just said, isn't there a more down to earth way of saying it?"

"Try this," joined in Schroeder; "I'll play it for you on my little piano here! Just kidding, Lucy. I really do sympathize. As I've been listening to Harold, my own mind has been serving up images to help me make sense of presupposing, analogicity, no identity of content, and systems of predication. Want to hear what an aesthete's mind came up with as Harold made his last point? It really has a Halloween flavor to it."

"Yeah, why not?" Lucy managed in her best deadpan, while her heart leaped for . . . joy? "Stifle it, Van Pelt!" she told herself, "you're just setting yourself up again. Schroeder wants to explain something, not get romantic with you!"

"Well," began Schroeder, "Harold has just thrown out for our consideration that Van Til seems to be one-dimensional about the reality that apologetics ought to be making sense of. I don't need to tell you that that approach will be less than enlightening if there is *more* than one dimension involved."

"I could tell *you* a thing or two about missing dimensions!" pouted Lucy inwardly as her face exhibited sweet and rapt attention.

". . . Van Til tends to run together rational predication *about* mind-independent things with the mind-independent things *themselves*," Schroeder went on.

"Wake me when it's over," drawled Peppermint Patty.

"Stay with me, Patty," said Schroeder. "It occurs to me that Van Til has Dracula's famous problem with mirrors—only in reverse!"

Peppermint Patty is all ears now.

"Francis Bacon is famous for likening the human mind to a mirror that requires to be cleaned now and then of prejudicial splatter, and Shakespeare referred to the mind as our 'glassy essence.' Well, the analogy of the mind as a mirror, reflecting what is around one, is far from perfect and has even been trounced in recent years as utterly misleading. The philosopher Richard Rorty wrote a book—*Philosophy & the Mirror of Nature* [1979]—which exhibits all of his considerable talent to smash the mirror (the representational mind) once and for all, but Rorty, I think, has had more than seven years of exceptionally bad luck with that thesis. Anyhow, the analogy of the mind as a 'mirror of nature' isn't really that bad as long as we keep in mind that mentally reflecting the environment has fidelity problems. Rorty's problem is with a mind that *represents*—that is re-presents—anything at all. But about the 'mirror,' we also need to keep in mind that mental reflection is very much more than having sensory images or sensory feelings: *language* is a 'reflective' medium too. The strength of the mirror metaphor is that it emphasizes the mind as, among other things, a representational processor of realities *independent* of itself. The mirror is not the same thing as the subject matter that is mirrored.

"And that," intoned Schroeder in his spookiest Transylvanian accent, "brings us to my twisted idea of Count Drrrac-u-l-a. As everyone knows, Dracula casts no reflection in a mirror. Suppose, however, that Dracula's problem were reversed. He is no longer standing before the mirror casting no reflection; he is now, as it were, *inside* the mirror—a mere reflection of his former self, a reflection busily reflecting. He has, in fact, no longer any reality *outside* the mirror. But sad to say, 'he' now reflects absolutely nothing!

"Well, we all know that reflections have their special kind of existence only as reflections *of something*."

"Duh!" smirked Lucy. "Next you'll be breaking the news that water quenches thirst."

"Be nice, Lucy," said Schroeder without breaking stride. "I'm explaining the moral of my story. As I was saying, reflections have their special kind of existence only as reflections *of something not themselves*. Likewise with what Van Til calls *predication*: predication has *its* special kind of existence in our minds only as predication *of or about* something. If I predicate *of* Marcy that she's wearing glasses, it's quite a confusion to say that the actual Marcy-wearing-glasses (sitting beside me here) *is the very same thing* as my predication that she's wearing glasses. When I make the predication about Marcy, I am *representing* her in a certain way. Predication is a kind of representation. Now imagine what we get if we subtract the real life bespectacled Marcy and treat only my predication *about* her as real."

"Pretty bizarre, sir," spoke up Marcy.

"Exactly," said Schroeder. "If I understand Harold, Van Til tries to solve the problem of how created reality evidences its Creator not in terms of the characteristics of that reality, but in terms of *the medium of understanding it!*

"The problem is that the characteristics of the 'mirroring' (i.e., the characteristics of our linguistically mediated understanding) are quite unlike the characteristics of the realities that are 'mirrored.' Rational mirroring (predicating), for example, is pervasively characterized by linguistic structure and logical relations while the spatio-temporal environment is pervasively characterized by material structure and causal relations.

"So the problem, to sum it up, is that Van Til's 'predication', like Dracula's 'reflection', has taken on a bizarre life of its own. At one fell swoop, Van Til has no messy data to interfere with the one system of rational predication he wants to establish by presupposition. Does Van Til's system of predication have fidelity problems? How could it if the question of its *empirical fit* cannot even be raised? Van Til's theological predications can have no more of a fidelity problem with data than Dracula in pure reflection mode. Moreover, without the bother of interference from data, the logic of presupposing can fly anywhere it will. The heavy price the Van Tillian pays for this luxury, however, is the irrelevance of this 'method' for establishing and corroborating space and time events—and that includes the historic events that are vital to the Gospel."

"Thanks," said Harold. "That was a lot better than I was doing. Van Til simply never speaks of created structural abilities and competencies as the ground of partial knowledge. Causal integrity is no part of his understanding of quotidian perception and belief—whether in contemporary everyday life or as recorded in the Bible. Invariably he hooks the content of perception, belief, and knowledge to a supreme *concept* as though the supreme concept *facilitates* our epistemic activity! And that's just crazy."

Then Charlie spoke up: "I grant that if you have put your finger on the way a Van Tillian presupposition works, his system *is* one-dimensional and exhibits the confusion you point out. But still, you speak as though human beings are not fallen—that they are somehow neutral with regard to God and what he has revealed. There is a great deal in Scripture that states that *the natural man* is anything but neutral and that he uses his 'epistemic competence' exclusively to rebel against God."

"But it is on that issue too, Charlie, that an evidentialist model proves superior," replied Harold. "I think the fourth text I had in mind will show this . . ."

[From here on our friends will increasingly explore the biblical alternative to all that we have considered of Van Til so far. And it is a nice point to break for an intermission. You, the reader, have patiently slogged through a great deal! For reassurance that the verbal thickets we have pushed through have not been empty exercises and that we are actually going someplace very important, you might peek ahead to the EPILOGUE. Feel free too to peruse LUCY'S GUIDE. She is especially proud of her "logic" entry and hopes you will look at it during the break.

*Our destination is an apologetic foundation that rests in biblical commonsense and the example of Jesus who is both our Lord and Savior. In **him** are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and by him the amazing universe and our very capacity for exploring it hold together. For the believer, therefore, data are never a threat; they need not be analogized or somehow denatured on account of a Babel of secular*

philosophies (e.g., those of Hume, Kant, and Bradley).

Data—even difficult data—are rather God's good gifts and a constant invitation to an ever greater understanding of God's creation, his working in history, and how, especially in light of Holy Scripture, all of this declares his glory.

The greatest wonder, however, is Linus's ultimate discovery: how Halloween must give way to Christmas and how all of humankind who will yet listen may finally triumph at Easter.

Well, Charlie is distributing Bibles around the fire, so it is time to rejoin the discussion . . .]

VIII

A Christological Approach to Apologetic Commonsense: "Why the *Evidential Threshold* of the Sodomites was so much lower than that of Jesus's contemporaries"

" . . . consider now Jesus's denunciation of the unrepentant cities in Matthew 11:20-24. Keep in mind that my interest in this passage concerns the capacity of the unconverted to find evidence salient in behalf of God's truth:

v.20 Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles were performed, because they did not repent.

v.21 "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

v.22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.

v.23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.

v.24 *But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.*" [NIV]

"First," said Harold, "I think it is important to notice who is talking here. It is Jesus Christ. He is not an *analogue* of God; while he is man, he is God as well. And whatever may be mysterious about his mental processes and his status as an epistemic agent (and I grant that much is), I think we need to agree that such mysteriousness cannot encompass a radically divided mind in terms of what Van Til and his followers mark off by the analogicity/univocity distinction. What he speaks to his contemporaries of Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum is meant for human understanding; it is firmly among the 'things revealed' of the Deuteronomy text.

"Second, he speaks the truth—an angrily delivered truth of considerable importance both to those who first heard him and to those of us who have the benefit of reading Matthew's Gospel. That truth has to do with rational accountability to *evidence* on the part of the wicked and unconverted. And dramatically it has to do with an operational epistemic competence of the wicked and unconverted to find God's evidence compelling and even convincing.

"Third, Jesus's words make sense only if it is granted that evidence comes in *degrees of salience* in support of whatever the evidence is evidence for. This is in stark contrast to the presuppositionalists' democratization of evidence. The latter insist that *every* fact proves that God exists, proves that the Christian message is true, because *every* fact is rationally implicated in the one complete system of truth. Thus the presuppositionalists democratize the evidential worth of each and every fact because of their rationalistic epistemological holism. Since, in their view, each fact is interpretable only as God-created and God-interpreted, each fact is *equally probative* with respect to God's existence and the truth of Christian theism.

[I pause here to allow two presuppositionalists to speak for themselves on this point—Thom Notaro and Van Til himself. First Notaro:

"... the uniqueness of Van Til's system is highlighted by his

claim that all facts are revelational. It is not only a selected body of unusual phenomena that defies naturalistic explanation. All facts, whether natural or supernatural, defy naturalistic explanation. Every fact signifies that it is controlled by God. Otherwise, it signifies nothing. Either God is proven by every fact or we are left with meaninglessness.

*The implication of this point should be clear. We are now able to answer the question as to what qualifies as evidence. For Van Til, **everything** is evidence—every fact, every object, every event properly understood is evidence for Christianity. Furthermore, every bit of evidence, as he sees it, **proves with absolute validity the truth of God's Word.**" (Van Til & the Use of Evidence, 1980, pp.58-9)*

And here is Van Til:

"... surely the Reformed believer should stress with Calvin that every fact of history, here and now actually is a revelation of God. Hence any fact and every fact proves the existence of God and therefore the truth of Scriptures. If this is not the case, no fact ever will." (Introduction to Systematic Theology, 1974, p.17)

Most of what is pertinent to say here would be a repeat of what has already gone before. I will draw attention only to what this view of "fact" implies for miracle.

*(1) The probative value of miracle (the **evidential** value of miracle) is at stake here. Thus, the probative value of the miracles of Jesus that were performed in Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, but which were **not** performed in ancient Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, is utterly trivialized by the view stated above! The evidential value of the fact that Jesus raised Jairus's daughter from death, for example, is leveled to the evidential value of the fact that the average Galilean fishing boat was worth more than a shekel. Or suppose, what is surely a fact, that Jesus knew what to look for in a good pair of sandals. Can **that** little fact be ranked in revelatory or probative value **equal** to the facts about the mighty miracles Jesus had performed? Which of these*

facts would you rather have if what concerns you is the identity of the Messiah?

*Perhaps from the standpoint of omniscience each fact wears an infinite implicatory richness upon its sleeve, but evidential salience does not come about that way for human cognitive competence. The truth is, neither Van Til nor Notaro produce the slightest clue as to **how** to "properly understand" such a fact as "Galilean fishing boats are worth more than a shekel" as **providing absolute proof of God's existence!** For what it is worth, it is a **fact** that in certain of my moods I think the Van Til-Notaro view is just plain silly. Now does **this** fact prove the existence of God with absolute validity? The Van Tillian response is: If it does not, "**no fact ever will.**" Notaro (Van Til) owes us an account—an **epistemological account**—of the reasoning process by which a finite human intellect may **arrive** at the all-important "proper understanding" of such facts, and **this** they cannot do. All we get are remarkable generalizations about facts in general.*

*(2) Putting aside the pious sounding rhetoric of Notaro and Van Til, the doctrine that every fact is equally evidential (for Christian theism) is a strange doctrine indeed. It is precisely because the creature indwells a **causally stable and causally uniform** spatio-temporal environment that certain extraordinary and unusual phenomena have a **greater** evidential value (with regard to God and his working) than ordinary happenings. This is not to say that "ordinary happenings" cannot also be remarkable and importantly evidential, but ordinary happenings provide a setting, a kind of epistemic **background noise**, so to speak, against which extraordinary happenings (miracles), in their striking salience, are set off in relief to serve as evidence *par excellence*.*

"Fourth," Harold went on, "note the actual content of Jesus's words in this passage. He says that *if* the inhabitants of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom had had the miracles to witness that the inhabitants of Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were privileged to witness, *then* the former would have repented—indeed, Sodom would not have been destroyed but would yet

remain. Given what Scripture says about the spiritual deadness of the natural man, what are we to make of this?"

"I think it's hard to make anything of it in a literal sense," said Brown. "I think Jesus is speaking hyperbolically—figuratively, exaggerating for effect. Otherwise . . ."

"Otherwise there would seem to be something like an *evidential threshold* involved?" interrupted Schroeder.

"Yeah, an evidential threshold," returned Brown. "That implies that if you pile on enough evidence, at a certain point you cross over the line of resistance and the person is converted. But that doesn't make sense given the spiritual blindness of the natural man. I think I have to agree with Harold about evidence coming in *degrees*, but surely the spiritually dead are cognitively dead to evidence for God *regardless* of how objectively compelling."

"I'm not going to disagree with you about spiritual deadness," resumed Harold, "but *cognitive deadness* might be quite a different issue. It was, I believe, the fact of the spiritual deadness of the unconverted that grounds some of Jesus's remarks to those in Capernaum in John 6. He told them that no one is able to come to him—receive him and accept his claims—unless the Father *draws him* (v.44)."

"I'm not sure I understand your distinction between 'spiritual' and 'cognitive' deadness," said Schroeder.

"Well," began Harold, "spiritual deadness I think of as *personal estrangement* from God. It is a condition of estrangement not unlike the personal estrangement of former spouses that can make the resumption of intimacy unthinkable. Salvation, or rebirth in Christ, involves an uninhibited fellowship with, enjoyment of, and thirst for God—his presence and truth. What *separates* the lost from God is sin and a preference for sin over obedience to him. The analogy to estranged couples may not be perfect, but I think it's instructive. Recall that the Old Testament image of the union of God with his chosen people is husband and wife, and in the New Testament the image is Christ and bride. Marriage is the context of the greatest human intimacy there is. Full-blown estrangement involves an

affective and cognitive *set* the consequences of which involve the cessation of communication, thoroughgoing avoidance, and emotional alienation the one from the other. The state of personal estrangement, in short, involves a spiritual *inability* for mutual understanding and fellowship. That is what I think 'spiritual deadness' in trespasses and sins is most like. There is the huge difference, of course, that it is Adam's race that is estranged from God; it is not like billions of marriages gone bad with one divorce as an occurrence in each life. Adamic estrangement is a condition *we are born to*, and that is why we all must be born again."

"But how does the Matthew passage relate to that?" asked Charlie. "The natural man, as the Apostle Paul makes clear, cannot respond to the Gospel by his own cognitive resources. It's doubtful anyway that Jesus means that Korazin's, Bethsaida's, and Capernaum's refusal to repent was a refusal of the Gospel. Isn't the repentance at issue in Matthew 11:20-24 just a Ninevite repentance? Simply a turning from previous wickedness, but not necessarily *to* a saving relationship with Israel's covenant God?"

"Let me take the second question first," said Harold. "Is the repentance merely Ninevite? I don't know, partly because I'm not sure we can ever know what the Ninevite repentance really consisted in, but what we do know is that in the synagogue in Capernaum Jesus proclaimed that *he* was the Bread of Life, that *his* flesh and blood were essential to his listeners' salvation, and that anyone believing in *him* would have everlasting life (Jn 6:24-59). It is reasonable to think that Capernaum's failure to repent involved the refusal of a considerable Gospel content in addition to the failure to be impressed by Jesus's miracles. I think it's also reasonable to think that Jesus intended a like exposure to *himself* in both word and miraculous deed in the hypothetical revelation to the ancient cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. But again, I don't know how to be certain of this. My central point, however, doesn't depend on settling the issue whether or not Capernaum's failure to repent was a failure to do what the population of Nineveh did when Jonah preached there. Suffice it to say that it was the *Son of God* whom Jesus's contemporaries refused. The people, moreover, were *Jews*—the recipients and stewards of a unique two thousand year legacy of revelation from the one true God. All things considered, there is certainly a huge contrast between Jesus's extended ministry in Capernaum and Jonah's brief message to pagan Nineveh.

"That brings us to your first question, Charlie. Let me approach it this way: A problem I have always had with the presuppositionalists—though not with them exclusively—is their constant reference to *the natural man* as though there were a single *static* and *non-developmental* generic description of the unsaved intellect—that the unsaved intellect, outside of special divine intervention, is a rational and cognitive *zero* when it comes to entertaining the Gospel message. Keep in mind that I have already granted that spiritual deadness *is* a generic condition of the unsaved. But this deadness, I believe, is a deadness *with a temporal dynamic*: the dynamic of relational estrangement. There can hardly be a better reference to the estranged response to God than that given in Romans 1:28: ' . . . they did not *like* to retain a knowledge of God.' That's the language of estrangement, not incomprehension. Another clear verse to this effect is Romans 8:7: ' . . . the fleshly mind is *hostile* toward God.' And this too speaks of estrangement rather than literal cognitive deadness to God. Let me illustrate what I mean by means of some current neurophysiology.

"Perhaps you have read Oliver Sacks's book, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* [1970]. In this and a more recent book (*An Anthropologist on Mars*, [1995]), Sacks tells the stories of people suffering from a variety of neurological deficits. One such deficit is *agnosia*—the partial or total inability to recognize a specified class of familiar objects by a sensory modality (e.g., vision). Agnosia is selective for certain common objects, and the type of agnosia most discussed these days is the inability to find faces familiar. Facial agnosia is called *prosopagnosia*, joining the Greek word *prosopon*, meaning 'face,' to agnosia. Anyhow, people who are quite bright and with otherwise normal vision may suffer from prosopagnosia. When they do, they cannot find even their own spouses and family members familiar by the sense of sight. Although they may *see* objects perfectly well, and while they can find voices and smells perfectly familiar, their sense of sight cannot deliver a *familiar* face. They see their significant others without being able to *see* who they are! The part of the brain that handles emotional and personal nuance of facial gestalts is impaired for whatever reason, and so they are informationally blind in this one area.

"Well, does Scripture mean a similar informational blindness in the case of the unconverted? Did the inhabitants of Capernaum, let us say, have *theosagnosia*—an utter blindness to the significance of divine working

in their midst? Did their spiritual unresponsiveness to the works of Jesus amount to the failure to cognitively register miracles *as* miracles as in the manner of a neurological deficit? I don't think so. Spiritual blindness is importantly different, and operates in a very different way. *Its* cognitive intransigence is that of personal estrangement. To see that this is so, and that my point is fully biblical, we need only consider the phenomenon of *hardening of the heart* among the unregenerate."

"I think you're right," said Schroeder. "Hardening is a *process*; neurological deficits are pathological *conditions*. And what makes your point so telling is that heart hardening is a process with major cognitive complications in the natural man. In Scripture it is the natural man who is said to harden against God's truth. If the natural man were a cognitive *zero* with respect to the Gospel and God's claims upon him, there would be no capacity to harden. It just doesn't make sense to say that a cognitive *zero increases* its resistance to a given message! If one is at zero, one's hardness to that message would be max."

"Precisely," said Harold. "And to return to the Matthew text, we are now able to see the key difference between the two groups of cities. For simplicity let's keep the comparison to just Capernaum and Sodom. Forcefully, Jesus says that it will be more bearable for Sodom than for Capernaum on judgment day. Why? Sodom was such a perverse stench to God that he destroyed it with the power of a nuclear blast. Are we to think of Capernaum as yet *more* wicked than Sodom?"

"Since I am taking Jesus literally," Harold went on, "I take it as *true* that Sodom would have repented. So what is the difference between Capernaum and Sodom in virtue of which we may take Jesus literally? The difference has to be in the hardness of heart among the inhabitants of the two cities."

"Not so fast, Harold," said Lucy. "'Heart hardening' isn't exactly a psychologically precise term. Can you cinch up its meaning a bit?"

"Yeah . . . look at it this way," said Harold. "It's a desensitization process. Maybe immunization would provide a good analogy. If one is inoculated against a disease, one is infected with a very mild form of the disease itself and the body builds an immunity to that disease's virulent

form. Consider now that immunization is a *process* requiring repeated inoculations to build to the proper immunity. Well similarly in hardening against truths (rather than germs) that we find inhospitable to our natural bent, we might take bits and snatches of those truths and acclimate our minds, over time, to a *distorted* or *greatly qualified and edited* construal of their main import. *Gradually* we no longer see the truth for what it is—even if our continuing ability to see it is vital to our survival.

"In my analogy I've reversed what is pathological, though. I've likened Christianity to a disease and then asked why Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom *would have* caught it, whereas Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum did not. Or if you prefer, why the former cities, in spite of their legendary wickedness, *would have* repented, while the latter did not. What we see here is a conspicuous difference between the two groups of cities in terms of the kind of immunity I've been talking about. Going back to just Capernaum and Sodom, Sodom was not practiced at reconstruing, distorting, and conceptually editing the *special* revelation of God. At best, Sodom had perhaps several years of awareness of Lot's commitment to a strange God named Yahweh. By contrast, at the time of Jesus's earthly ministry, Capernaum's Jewish population was the living perpetuation of a legacy of *centuries* of fine-grained biblical distortion with regard to the character and mission of the Messiah. They had studiously and strenuously dimmed the light of prophetic and soteriological Scripture. From the mindset of that legacy, they could not (were unwilling to) recognize their own Messiah! It was, for them, 'biblical' to reject him. A truly horrifying immunity to have."

IX

A Final Reflection from Linus: We are *only* knowers.

"And that is why the Sodomites' evidential threshold was so much lower than the evidential threshold of the apparent heirs of Abraham," spoke Linus to no one in particular. "'Real world' hope, it's becoming plain to me now, is fastened to 'real world' evidence. Isn't it curious how we find ways to squander that evidence?"

"How is that?" asked Schroeder, overhearing Linus.

"I'm not yet sure how to put it," began Linus. "Maybe it's *better felt than telt*, as the saying goes. What I think I mean is there seems to be something in human beings that prefers elaborate intellectual detours to commonsense and the face value of experience. After listening to Harold and Schroeder it has suddenly dawned on me that Christian apologetes as well as the secular philosophical giants of our time have a very hard time with epistemological finitude. Forgive me if I seem to ramble, but I'm trying verbally to focus what I'm only beginning to see.

"The wall I have been knocking my head against—as surely as the orthodox presuppositionalists—is a wall of *finitude*. Harold called it an epistemological ceiling. Encased as we are within epistemological finitude, it's impossible to provide certain kinds of guarantee for even the most mundane of truths, let alone transcendent truth. Please don't get me wrong; I think we are well supplied with both levels of truth. But finitude, coupled with whatever scientific advance there may be to work with, typically sends humans into historically powerful philosophical detours. These detours—the *Kantian detour*, for example—are easy to interpret as the attempt to have "perfect" knowledge within a carefully delineated domain. While supposedly setting forth the structure of any possible *scientific* knowledge, it put knowledge of the supernatural off limits *in principle* for our kind of mind. It's too long a story to tell right now, but I think Van Til allowed Kant to formulate the 'knowledge problem' that Christian apologetics must somehow overcome concerning the knowledge of God. As I'm coming to see it now, however, Kant simply did not formulate a problem that ought to have been accepted by Christians."

"Could you back up," said Harold; "I'm curious about how you construe the finiteness of human knowing. What's the quarrel supposed to be?"

Taking a moment to respond, Linus continued: "It is so often thought that apologetics—whether in behalf of God or as in my case, in behalf of the Great Pumpkin—is about *proof* rather than *defense*. If it's proof we demand, our intuitions seem to require a technical logical *guarantee*. But once that is even your tacit ambition, you're sunk; and you're sunk whether you're a college freshman or an Albert Einstein. *Finite* perceivers, believers, and knowers have no way to transcend their quite limited epistemic powers in order to guarantee the beliefs that these powers

yield. A finite knower cannot logically guarantee that he has considered *all* the relevant data with regard to even a mundane truth-claim. Moreover, a finite knower cannot logically guarantee that he has correctly *interpreted* the data that have been considered.

"So Harold, here are two finitudes. Call the first, *the finitude of partial perspective*, and the second, *hermeneutic finitude*. Both are simply creaturely limitations. What is vital to recognize, it seems to me, is that 'reasonable doubt' about religious claims (or any other kind of truth-claim) must be cast in a context of finite knowing. Finite knowing *is* reasonable knowing for our species.

"The alternative, which is utterly self-defeating, is to pursue apologetics under the maxim: 'Knowing entails knowing that you know,' or, 'First-order knowledge entails second-order knowledge'. Humans, it seems to me, are inherently *first-order knowers*, and can defend first-order knowledge claims only with the assistance of other first-order knowledge claims. But the caveat is always that second-order *guarantees* either that we have sampled *enough* data, or that we have *infallibly* construed the data we *have* sampled, are impossible."

"Then you're saying that nobody *really* knows anything," said Charlie.

"Not at all," replied Linus. "I'm insisting that we are *first-order knowers*; within our epistemic skins we *do* know quite a lot. We often sample all the relevant data, and we often interpret that data very well. What I'm denying is that it makes sense to say that we can go on *from there* by means of some philosophical esoterica in order to *logically guarantee* either accomplishment. We are only knowers; not in that rarefied sense, knowers that we know. Is that so disappointing?"

"Okay," said Lucy, "but what becomes of Charlie's Gospel once we concede that we are *only* knowers?"

"Make that my Gospel too, Lucy," said Linus. "First let me say that the Great Pumpkin fares very poorly without the transcendental skyhook I had been using. To repeat what Harold said earlier, we have been epistemically suited to *this* environment. To hang on to the Pumpkin, I had

to adopt both a bizarre supra-history and a very dubious logic—*analogic*—in order to give me the 'epistemic right' to ignore my epistemic status in this world. In this world, pumpkins don't rise over pumpkin patches. And you're right, Lucy; the line of reasoning I was using has no way to distinguish a Great Pumpkin from a Great Squash or even the Tooth Fairy. I can now travel so much lighter. I recommend it, Charlie!"

Then Charlie Brown said, "But we *still* have to presuppose things! For example we have to presuppose the truth of Harold's statement that we have been epistemically suited to the environment we inhabit. And can you really mean that we can *never* know that we know? If that's true, it's too sad for words!"

"Concerning your first comment," said Linus, "that's right; we *do* have to presuppose Harold's maxim. But in so doing we are *not* securing a second-order (or ultimate-order) guarantee; nor is there a special logic—*analogic*, let's say—to guarantee argumentative success. Once we lay down the needless and confused conceptual baggage of presuppositionalism we leave behind esoteric structural guarantees and find ourselves, 'alas,' in the land of mere good reasons. Presupposing cannot buy you apodicticity; what it does buy you is, at best, rational elbow room. That's what any good hypothesis buys you.

"And concerning the question whether I really mean that we can never know that we know, I really mean it, but don't get too hung up on the wording. All I mean by that expression is that we are *finite* knowers. If 'knowing that you know' is dear to you, try substituting: You can't ever know that you know that you know. I'm not fussy as long as it's recognized that both the finitude of partial perspective and hermeneutic finitude place an absolute limit on constructing proofs for factual claims."

"Oh." And then there was light for Charlie too.

*The secret things belong to the Lord our God,
but the things revealed belong to us
and to our children forever.*

X

'Real World' Security and Farewell

The Gray light of a cloudless dawn now bathed the pumpkin patch and a light frost coated the tops of the pumpkins. Patty and Marcy built the fire to blazing again, while Lucy and Schroeder went to the cars to bring back something to eat. Charlie seemed to be deep in thought on a stump near the fire.

And Linus . . . he had walked slowly off by himself to the far north end of the pumpkin patch, some thirty yards away. He approached a slightly leaning scarecrow with a tattered hat cocked to one side of its head. With ritual-like solemnity Linus removed his sweater and carefully fitted it onto the scarecrow—one arm and then the other. Then he proceeded to button the buttons from top to bottom. Stepping back a few feet he paused, still gazing up at the scarecrow, and breathed "Amen." Then he returned to the warmth of the fire.

The Peanuts pals, soon to re-enter their separate lives, were fast approaching their good-byes. Lucy served up steaming hot coffee and generous helpings of pumpkin pie.

EPILOGUE

Those who are "philosophically correct" in our era do not necessarily find the idea that God exists to be absurd; on average, however, that is all they allow a God to do—*exist*. Moreover, a good many philosophers who grant the intelligibility of God's bare existence find the idea of a God who has *physically intervened* in the midst of human history to be intellectually scandalous. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, however, is the story of Almighty God's historical intervention to salvage as many human beings as possible for life and glorification before a final judgment.

If this is true, it might even be *provable*. And in a certain technical sense it surely is provable, for all one needs in a proof is a collection of true propositions (the premises) which collectively *entail* that such a God exists. How hard could that be? Well, there is the sticky business of choosing which premises to use. But that isn't quite the point of all this. A part of the biblical story is that humans are by nature estranged from God; they do not approach the Christian story as mechanical and neutral intellects. So even while the Christian might satisfy the conditions of factual truth and correct logic, we are really seeking "proof" of a more complex order.

So let me begin again: Is it possible to prove the existence of God? Of course it is! Just ask Linus. But to prove God *for yourself*, which is really the only worthwhile proof a person can have, you must meet his Son. C. S. Lewis did that, and was surprised by joy. The Apostle Paul met him in the attempt to destroy him. He too was transformed by joy—and a *living* hope. The religious sophisticates of Capernaum met him but they tried to find him too ordinary to follow, and in their spiritual jadedness and collective arrogance they could not recognize him as the fulfillment of all their Scriptures.

The signal danger that motivated the New Testament letter to the Hebrews was the growing prospect of a heart-hardening born of distorted familiarity. That letter's recurrent theme is so very timely for western "Christendom": cognitive and spiritual drift *away* from the Gospel can be arrested only by looking to the actual Christ of Scripture. Although such

drift is spiritually lethal, those caught in its wide and lazy current seldom catch on that their total cognitive set is becoming increasingly impaired. (Such drift is not noticeable inside one's own boat!) And at long last the very cognitive tolerance required to entertain even the Gospel outline is gone. The good news is that there is grace for such cognitive and spiritual drift whenever we set before ourselves our risen and reigning Lord.

LUCY'S GUIDE to the Jargon & Big Words

abduction: the rationality of conjecture, or hypothesis formation. It was C. S. Peirce who first elaborated abduction as hypothesizing according to distinct conditions.

agnosia: neurological deficit resulting in the inability to recognize familiar objects by the senses.

affective: pertaining to emotion, mood, or feeling.

algorithmic: pertaining to a rational decision procedure whose every step is utterly obvious and obviously follows from the immediately preceding step. The outcome of any algorithm is thus guaranteed.

"ana-logic": coinage for a non-existent logic, or logical technique, in contrast to deductive and inductive logic. "Ana-logic", if it could be developed, would have to contain a semantics and syntax for reasoning whose only specifiable structural characteristic is that the well-formed expressions it allows somehow *resemble*, rather than *duplicate*, an inaccessible exemplar mode of thought and rationality (e.g., God's). Even if the structure of the resemblance relation could be exactly specified, the semantics and syntax of such a would-be logic could never be formulated without *univocal* access to the exemplar.

analogicity: the characteristic or property one's reasoning has if it is in conformity to "ana-logic". Or (in Van Til's thought), the characteristic one's knowledge, reasoning, or arguing has if it is radically dependent on the concept of God as absolute. However, this all-important *dependency* is not logical dependency, and in the strictest sense there can be no criteria for determining actual cases of such dependency. The bare admission of determining criteria for Van Til instantly collapses the dependency relation.

analogize: verb coinage for declaring an ostensible datum or an entire system of thought to be somehow the canonical *reflection* of an epistemically inaccessible exemplar. To "analogize," therefore, secures certainty at the price of an utter mystification of one's claims.

analysis of knowledge: provision of the conditions by which the concept of knowledge is appropriately assigned. Each condition in the analysis must be *necessary*, and taken together they must be *sufficient*, for the application of the knowledge concept to this or that person. In western philosophy, the primary analysis of knowledge is that knowledge is *justified true belief*.

apologetics: the formal study of the principles and methods of defending the (Christian or any other) faith.

a posteriori: it is traditional to say of knowledge that it is either "a priori" or "a posteriori". A priori knowledge is a knowing that is independent of experience. A posteriori knowledge is any knowledge that must be acquired from experience.

aseity: aseity is God's status as utterly and absolutely self-existent and self-contained—logically complete and the principle of his own existence. The logical problem this has traditionally posed for theology is how such a being could (or would) create anything, for such a being has *absolutely* no need to create and would not be fulfilled in *anything* external to himself.

categories of the understanding: in Kant's philosophy, the contribution of the mind to knowledge. See also "interpretation" and "Kantianism".

causality: a primitive relation—one that cannot be explained in terms of, or reduced to, other relations. For example, the causal relation cannot be reduced to the logical relation of *implication*. Nor can it be reduced (as in Hume's philosophy) to relations of *constant succession*. For this reason it is hard to define causality without simply multiplying synonyms that turn out to be primitive as well: e.g., power, force, influence, and the like. Causality is the principle of temporal regularity and cohesion in the universe. In physics it is instanced in four basic forms of interaction: gravity, electromagnetism, and strong and weak nuclear interaction. Spiritual causes, on the other hand, account, just as primitively, for invariances in the spiritual and mental domain.

An active area of inquiry for decades has been whether *reasons* can be causes. New impetus has been given this old debate by artificial intelligence research and so-called "naturalized epistemology". Cognitive

science, to be ultimately successful, needs to provide a deterministic account of a *mechanics of thought*—that is to say, an account of a thought process as a strictly mechanistic causal process. To provide such an account would be the intimate joining of *thinking* with the physical system (neocortex) that *implements* that thinking. This seems to require the mind to be computerlike, and there is strong scientific dissent on this matter (cf. Roger Penrose's two recent books *The Emperor's New Mind* [1989] and *Shadows of the Mind*, as well as Jack Copeland's excellent introductory work *Artificial Intelligence: A Philosophical Introduction* [1993]). This debate is certainly worth the Christian's watching and participation. Thus far it is safe to say there is no such thing as the procreation of a thinking machine—no such thing as *artificial* intelligence, but work in this area sharply focuses attention on human nature and the nature of rationality as a cause of behavior.

causal theory of knowledge: any theory of knowledge acquisition that focuses on the entire etiology or causal origin of the ideas we take for knowledge. According to causal theories it is the environment's causal interaction with the brain that produces whatever genuine knowledge we have. At present, we are very far from a successful formulation of a strictly causal theory of knowledge. One primary problem with pure causal theories remains the irreducibility of the mental to the physical.

cognitive: pertaining to cognition (sensory or verbal), or in general, telling truth from falsehood by some degree of rational attention.

cognitive architecture: the actual neural organization responsible for the flow of information in the brain. Artificial intelligence has put forth two such architectures: classical computational architecture and connectionist architecture (also called parallel distributed processing).

cognitive competence/ability: the ability to perceive, believe, and know by virtue of one's cognitive architecture.

cognitive link: the idea here is an actual *connection* between the structures of the mind-brain and the extra mental reality that impinges upon it, resulting in cognition. For example, in visual cognition light energy is converted by the optical system into electro-chemical energy which the brain "synthesizes" as a phenomenal visual manifold. A similar story holds

for each sense.

cognitive science: contemporary research program(s) spanning several interrelated disciplines: philosophy of mind, artificial intelligence, neuropsychology, linguistics, psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology, etc. There is a cluster of issues that engage researchers in this general field, and participants don't necessarily integrate their work with the field, or read each other's technical journals. Roughly speaking, cognitive science is an offspring of the computer revolution and its core concern is to be *scientific* about cognition—not, for example, "folk psychological" about it. (Folk psychology is the label often given to our ordinary imprecise language of belief, hope, love, fear, desire, etc., and the psychology that builds from this terminology.)

Narrow cognitive science, as we might call it, is a materialism that banks on the brain's turning out to be an algorithmic system in its information processing; broad cognitive science, on the other hand, doesn't prejudge this issue and is far more impressed with the utter lack of a mechanical model that can account for phenomenal consciousness. As an approach to the human mind, cognitive science has completely eclipsed Behaviorism, and its (CS's) fundamental problem is formulating a model of cognitive architecture that is subject to rigorous testing.

criterion: a condition, or mark, of some phenomenon that is subject to *public* recognition—that can (at least in principle) be publicly verified.

defeasible: capable of being refuted; vulnerable to falsifying cross-examination.

democratization of evidence: the rationalist (and perhaps mystical) notion that each and every fact is equal in evidential value because each and every fact is necessarily implied by the entirety of all the determinate facts there are. In Van Til's approach: each fact is endowed with (an analogically perceptible) significance pointing to God owing to its unique place in God's plan.

empirical: having to do with what can be *experientially* observed.

empiricism: very roughly, the philosophical approach that begins with

sensory experience as the basis of knowledge.

endemic: native to; finding its natural home in . . .

entailment (logical): the deductive logical relation that holds if, and only if, it would be impossible for the conclusion of an argument to be false when its premises are (all) true. We often use the word "entailment" colloquially to mean "involve". *Logical* entailment is a far more precise and powerful connection than that. The entailment relation, moreover, is utterly truth-conserving; entailment, that is, is exclusively analytic and secures *only* what is already implicit in the premises. When the premises are (all) true, truth in the conclusion is guaranteed. When a premise (even a *single* premise) is false, the guarantee is gone. Contrast "entailed by" with "supported by". The latter is a characteristic of good inductive arguments.

epistemic: having to do with the activity of perceiving, believing, and knowing. Contrast with "epistemological" whose meaning, roughly, is "pertaining to theory of knowledge and issues arising within epistemology."

exemplar: a term of convenience for the primary *analogue* in the kind of analogy pertinent to theology.

epistemic background noise: metaphor to stress the necessity of an experienced *causal order* against which *miracle* is set off in relief. Also, a metaphor to indicate data that have special or striking salience over against a mundane background of what usually happens.

epistemic gold standard: the idea of a standard measure of all knowledge (and truth). Opposed to relativism.

epistemology: theory of knowledge. Attempts to specify the necessary and sufficient conditions under which an individual can be said to *know* that something is the case. By contrast, *metaphysics* is theorizing about the character of what there is and the essential conceptual categories that are required to do this. A metaphysics of knowledge, for example, might involve a *characterization* of the *status* of knowledge. Thus in a metaphysics of knowledge one might want to inquire whether all knowledge is *propositional*, or whether some knowledge is *gestaltic*. One might also (as in the case of Van Til) inquire into the nature of the contrast between

God's knowledge and creaturely knowledge. Van Til strenuously insists that creaturely knowledge is rooted in an essentially inscrutable *resemblance* relation that he calls analogy.

A metaphysical interest in knowledge, however, can have only a tangential bearing, if any bearing at all, on the epistemological issue of *acquiring* knowledge by the process of reasoning to conclusions from data.

evidentialism: school of apologetics that stresses the nonbeliever's rational accountability to the evidences for the truth of Christianity. Involved in this accountability is the legitimacy of the (inductive) logic of learning.

evidential threshold: an inherently person-variable line which marks the point where, *for an individual*, the evidence for a truth-claim is completely convincing. The individual in question would not be able to *honestly* deny that truth-claim. Below the line the subjective force of the evidence is regarded (by that same individual) as inconclusive. The evidential threshold might also be called "the credulity threshold". With regard to the Gospel, hardening one's heart *raises* this threshold, while humility before the data and before God's revelation *lowers* it.

evidential salience: salience is simply perceived relevance, perceived supportiveness, for some state of affairs. Billowing black smoke is evidentially salient for the presence of a fire, for example. Salience, moreover, comes in degrees of strength.

falsifiability: a technical term introduced into the philosophy of science by Karl Popper. A given claim is falsifiable if and only if it rules something out—something that can be tested for. This doctrine says that if you are making a genuine fact-claim (a claim about how the world is in some respect), then this claim must also be inconsistent with other things that can be tested for. For example, if you say that it is raining hard outdoors, this claim possesses Popper's falsifiability because it is *inconsistent* with my going outdoors and staying dry without some protection from the rain. If I go outdoors and stay dry, your claim is falsified. The idea is that no claim to fact can be consistent with just *anything that could possibly happen*; so claims to fact must be vulnerable to cross-examination with regard to what they *rule out*; otherwise they are *factually* empty.

finitude of partial perspective: with respect to rational investigation, human beings are limited by the dimensions they inhabit, by time constraints on sampling data, by mobility (including prosthetic mobility) in getting *to* data, by the sheer physics of examining the ultra small, by astronomical distances, and by the bluntness of human sensory modalities and data-gathering tools. For local and middle-sized concerns we are extraordinarily clever and epistemically resourceful—by far and away the smartest animals on the planet. But given our perspectival limits—some absolute and others only relatively limiting—there is a type of *guarantee* for our considered opinions that is impossible: we cannot provide a logical guarantee that the sample of data for any given empirical truth-claim is *extensive enough* to rule out our being wrong about that truth-claim. That sounds far more serious than it is. This finitude does *not* rule out knowledge! What it does is rule out an absolute *meta-order* guarantee—an absolute proof run from the perspective of omniscience.

first- and second-order knowledge: first-order knowledge, as Linus introduced this concept, is *mere knowledge*—justified true belief consistent with human epistemic competence. Second-order knowledge, were it possible, would be *justified* justified true belief, where the italicized "justified" would be a proof constructed from the perspective of omniscience.

formal (in)conclusiveness: formal conclusiveness may be thought of as the elimination of probability by the completeness of the data offered in support of a belief, verdict, or conviction. Formal *inconclusiveness*, on the other hand, is the case when there are *gaps*—sometimes trivial technical gaps—between logical completeness of the data *as stated* and the conclusion drawn therefrom. On Hoover's reckoning (though not on the rationalist's reckoning), the existence of a gap is *not* a necessary indication of ignorance of one's conclusion. The *technically* incomplete data may yet *demand a verdict*.

gestaltic comprehension: the discernment of wholes—e.g., faces, landscapes, music, spiritual blessing, etc. In a *gestalt* the nuance of the part is curiously *distributed*. Imagine painting a mustache and goatee on the Mona Lisa! Her entire visage is changed, not just the affected parts. Here is a better illustration: just add a prominent mole to her face; even that special touch is *distributed* thus changing the look of the whole. Or . . .

delete the little dog from the foreground in Constable's *Hay Wain*. Again, there is redistribution, as it were, and with the redistribution, a new gestalt. Gestaltic objectivity seems to be, indeed, a distinctive and special *kind* of objectivity—"better felt than telt." Gestaltic objectivity, on Hoover's reckoning, factors heavily into inductive objectivity in general, but is extremely resistant to complete verbal translation. Indeed, "a picture is worth a thousand words" is a wild understatement! The facts of gestaltic apprehension by themselves account for at least some cases of "formal inconclusiveness," thus again messing up rationalistic approaches to knowledge.

general theory of knowledge: a general, as opposed to a special, theory of knowledge, is a theory that characterizes *all* instances of human knowledge, not just everyday perception, or just scientific knowledge, or just knowledge of God. Van Til's theory is *general* in that it begins comprehensively with an alleged fundamental *contrast* between all God's knowledge and all of human knowledge. Thus it is even essential that one's knowledge of one's phone number be analogical in the same sense that one's knowledge of God is analogical.

geschichtlich: in German Neo-orthodoxy, pertaining to a level of history that is supramundane and spiritual rather than empirical in character. The adjective itself does not carry this meaning in ordinary German; it is rather a special use and is to be contrasted with the mundane history of *Historie*.

hardening of the heart: biblical expression for a *process* of increasing desensitization to God and his truth. A "seared conscience" would seem to be the end of the line in this process. The interesting question this poses for apologetics is how cognitive tolerance for the facts of redemptive history—i.e., their *import*—is eroded over time. [cf. Ps. 95:8; Heb. 3:8,15; 4:17; Pr. 21:29; Eph. 4:17-19.]

hermeneutic finitude: this is the ugly complement to the finitude of partial perspective. The latter states that it is impossible to provide a final-order logical *guarantee* that one has sampled *enough* data for one's conclusion (belief); hermeneutic finitude, on the other hand, consists in a person's inability to provide a final-order logical *guarantee* that the data he *has* sampled have been rightly interpreted or rightly construed. And again, this is not nearly as serious as it sounds. It does *not* mean that we seldom

interpret the data in our possession appropriately for our purposes. For one thing, if it were quite serious, dead is what we would be. Think of the amazingly intricate and complex situations in which one must provide constant split-second decisions: driving the car, crossing a busy street, finding one's way in a strange town, climbing the stairs so as to avoid the banana peel on the third step, etc. Humans are incredibly good interpreters for thousands of purposes. What they can't do, however, is provide omniscient guarantees of a propositionally logical kind for their first-order interpretations. What they are is hermeneutically *competent*, thanks to their created epistemic endowment.

heuristic: pertaining to principles which provide guidance for research and problem solving. In a word, cognitive shortcuts and time-savers. In chess, for example, "Get your queen out early," would be a heuristic rule of thumb. Heuristic principles keep research and problem solving tactics relevant. Opposed to blind trial and error, or blind brute force process of elimination.

holistic: pertaining to the *whole* in the following way: the whole determines the meaning of the parts so that a part must be *systemically* understood if it is to be understood at all. This is of course a problem to the extent that the whole is complex. The greater the complexity of the whole (*if holistic understanding is required*) the less is the prospect for a *finite* intellect to comprehend a particular within that whole. Needless to say, infinitely complex wholes put partial knowledge out of reach. **Holism** names the general approach that takes a holistic approach to understanding the meaning of particulars. For the contrary view, see "horizontal epistemology".

horizontal epistemology: Harold's coinage for an epistemology that makes *created cause-and-effect structures* the basis for the integrity of our partial knowledge. "Local" and "functional" knowledge is secured by the integrity of causal patterns rather than by exhaustive implicatory relations among all the facts there are. See "holistic" for the opposite view.

Howard Cosell: late sportscaster of Monday Night Football fame who "called it like he saw it"—sometimes crude and insensitive to the feelings of others.

ineffable: inexpressible in words.

interpretation: this is at once the most fascinating and most frustrating of concepts in apologetics. Humans do not robotically read off the facts of their world as though facts were mechanically registered on the brain. Instead, humans "interpret" their world. To use Linus's terminology, *internalists* stress what the mind brings to experience. The thoroughgoing internalist (Kant, e.g.) insists that the subjective mind supplies *all* the structure to an essentially unstructured raw experience. Internalist considerations these days have to do with determining the paradigms, values, theories, and presuppositions which are said to subjectively structure what is "out there."

Externalists stress the mind/brain's causal fittingness to whatever is "out there." For the latter, it is the overall *causal structure* of mind/environment interaction that keeps interpretation and objective reality in phase. Contemporary cognitive science, as one might expect, is far more externalist than internalist, for otherwise there could not be a *science* of cognition. Van Til, it would certainly appear, is a thoroughgoing internalist. The position favored in *The Defeasible Pumpkin* is the desire for balance on this issue, but leans toward externalism. At any rate, confidence about objectivity *is* possible simply because we share *common* epistemic endowments, a *common* language, and a *common* world.

justification theoretic access: this is just a fancy way of saying "epistemic access which operates upon worked out, or specified, criteria."

Kantianism: this is not so easily defined in such a short space. Immanuel Kant [1724-1804] developed a grand system that attempted to explain how it is possible to have knowledge over against the skepticism of David Hume [1711-1776]. Kant was extremely impressed by the science of his day—that of Sir Isaac Newton, so his project was to exhibit what the human mind *must* bring to experience in order to think Newtonianly. His famous and still enormously influential *Critique of Pure Reason* is in essence an inventory of the requisite mental equipment—the formal and intuitive contribution of the mind that gives scientific knowledge its character. Kant insisted that the only way to avoid Hume's skepticism, is to exhibit by rational (transcendental) deduction that the *mind*, and *not* external reality, supplies space, time, and even the causal category itself!

The mind *constructs* its knowledge, according to Kant, and the constructed (Newtonian and Euclidean) reality thus constructed is phenomenal only; it is *never* of things in themselves, things that exist independently of the mind.

Van Til's presuppositions bear more than a superficial resemblance to Kantian categories of mind, because presuppositions (1) are mentally supplied, and (2) are conditions of intelligibility rather than rationally arrived at by means of evidential learning. Van Til too is a constructivist of sorts. By Kantianism, then, one should think generally of mental constructivism.

lawlike regularity: although philosophers often make a distinction between "lawlike" and "causal" regularity, Hoover has treated the two concepts interchangeably. While causal regularity is a metaphysical category applied to *forces* in nature (associated with causal *mechanisms*), lawlike regularity is sheer temporal invariance that can profitably be represented mathematically. Lawlike regularity, strictly speaking, dispenses with metaphysical causation and primitive mechanism, making use of the concept of *regularity* alone [e.g., Newton's universal law of gravitation; Newton's law makes no use of "cause" in the philosophical sense].

levels of existence: philosophically, this is an *ontological* issue. It is an issue, that is, that involves the *sort of being* enjoyed by individuals in this or that domain (e.g., the mental and the physical). For Van Til's purposes, what matters is the sheer radical *difference* between the level of existence of the Creator and the level of existence of the creature. His view is that if two beings differ utterly in level of existence (if they have radically differing ontologies), then they have radically different ways of structuring knowledge.

A crucial problem with this idea is whether we really know what we are talking about when we speak, in the required *utterly abstract terms*, of radical differences of essences, beings, or existence levels. It seems that we could "prove" the impossibility of the Incarnation of Christ, for example, if such abstractions were to be given free reign. Or, to take an example from everyday experience, we might "prove" on ontological grounds that consciousness *cannot* be facilitated by physical brain processes since

consciousness seems radically different *in kind of being* from anything physical.

logic: the science of correct reasoning—the study of inference, implication, and the *patterns of thought* that either *conserve* truth (strict deduction), or reliably *extend* our knowledge *given that* statements expressing the evidence are established (induction). Deductive logic is absolutely conservative, while good inductive logic facilitates the *extension* of knowledge, going from what *is* known to what was *formerly* unknown. Since there is an element of epistemic "risk" involved in all induction, and since strict rationalists (e.g., Gordon H. Clark) are utterly paranoid about such risk, the rationalistic temperament in apologetics either forswears all induction or incorporates it only after saying exceedingly strange things about it.

Think, for example, of induction and ordinary vision. On the strict rationalist approach it is as if we must leave off incorporating visual data because the human optical system sometimes suffers visual misconstrual: illusion, hallucination, or lack of visual acuity due to sickness or poor viewing conditions! Or because human eyes are, *in their visual finitude*, somehow epistemically unworthy. God *could* have wired our brains with sonar, Doppler radar, field detectors, and all sorts of other fancy receptors. Why didn't he? Maybe it just takes humility to be grateful for the apparatus we *are* endowed with. It's such a pity that *epistemological perfectionism* has taken such a toll on Christian "rationalists".

Notice, however, that humans are not second-order seers! If one *sees* the charging grizzly bear in one's path, one does not *simultaneously* see (in the conscious optical sense) one's seeing of this awful sight in order to correct it for errors or to free such perception from pagan "univocation." (Cf. Linus's discussion of "knowing that one knows".) One only *sees* it. Such is our "woefully impoverished" state of seeing and of sensing in general. (I speak sarcastically here.) Rationalists, though, are a notoriously unhappy bunch when it comes to our *created* sensory endowment. But Hoover has convinced me that merely seeing isn't so bad; praise God for simple visual *competence*, I say! Isn't it grand that a meta-order presupposition is *not* required to cognitively make out the bear I see by ordinary "first-order" vision? For then, *mauled* and *eaten* is what I'd be! (Van Til declares that cognizing such a *fact* about the bear [or any other

fact, for that matter] is impossible without the presupposition of God, for without that presupposition, he tells us, "no fact has any distinguishable character at all" (IST, p. 17). But hmm, I think to myself, if that were true, wouldn't there be a lot more bear-attack fatalities among atheists? And . . . I'm afraid that by the time a Van Tillian woodsman had disentangled his epistemology from his metaphysics he'd be bear food!)

Uh oh, Hoover is telling me I'm getting carried away— editorializing in the name of defining terms. This glossary entry is *logic* for goodness sake; so where do I get off talking about grizzly attacks? Sorry, it's just that one thing leads to another. "Free-associate on your own time," he says. [LVP]

meaning: in linguistics, logic, and the philosophy of language the meaning of a term or a statement is its *sense*, as opposed to its *reference* or *truth*. Take, for example, the two terms: "the evening star" and "the morning star". Both terms have the same reference, for they both refer to the planet Venus. But they do not have the same *sense*.

metaphysics: the study of the most basic categories by which we make sense of experience and the world. (E.g., mind, matter, time, fact, substance, fact, etc.) Regarded by some as the same as ontology.

'Ninevite' repentance: a repentance that does not involve saving grace. Ancient Nineveh repented from its wickedness at the preaching of Jonah, but it is usually held that the repentance was spiritually superficial because of the considerable doubt that Nineveh thereby connected themselves to God's covenant of redemption with Israel.

noetic accessibility: pertaining to what is accessible to our ability to know. Equivalent to epistemic accessibility.

omniscience: the state of knowing absolutely everything.

ontic: pertaining to the being or essence of a thing.

ontology: philosophical study of essences or being-as-being; sometimes used interchangeably with metaphysics.

partial knowledge: can you know your colors if you have no knowledge of the nature of light? Can you recognize a maple tree even if you know very little botany? Can you know the lay of the land on your property if you can't locate Afghanistan on a world globe? A "yes" answer to these questions is at least a naive commitment to being able to know partially without knowing exhaustively. The more technical way to go at this issue is to consider the possibility that the universe might be a system that importantly qualifies each of its parts so that true understanding of any part is somehow to see that the entire system implies it. *In principle*, that is roughly Van Til's position. The vital point to notice is that Van Til's holism essentially trades the causal relation for the implicatory relation.

The "problem" of partial knowledge is perhaps the most convenient issue clearly to see the enormous philosophical difference between Van Til and the evidentialists. The position taken in *Defeasible Pumpkin* is that causal regularity in the creation, and *not* holistic rational entailment, is the ground of evidential salience, and hence also of partial knowledge.

personal estrangement: a spiritual affective-cognitive condition in which the capacity for empathy and mutual understanding with another is blocked. If not interrupted, personal estrangement is a condition whose *dynamic* is progressive cognitive distortion of the other.

personal proof: the having of personal proof is the cognitive state in which one has reached a *moral* (as opposed to a formal logical) certainty; personal proof results in *existential undeniability* regardless of abstract or technical probability.

point of contact: the area of common ground—or at least *cognitive* common ground—from which genuine communication may proceed. Common *cognitive* ground is often possible even when *spiritual* common ground is lacking.

predication: an assertion *of* or *about* something. The importance of this term is the very central role it plays in Van Til's thought. A key claim for Van Til is that only the God of Christian theism can account for intelligible predication. Here are three problems this poses: (1) Given that *intelligible* predication encompasses both true and false predication, Van Til has spread his net impossibly wide. Without laboring the point, actually *to*

argue such an argumentative objective (or conclusion) would require omniscience. (2) Van Til states in *Defense of the Faith* (p.121) that "man's system of knowledge [set of true predications] must ... be an analogical replica of the system of knowledge which belongs to God." But given his "no identity-no coincidence" doctrine, any human system of predication—i.e., any would-be "analogical replica" of God's system of predication—is systematically cut off from the system it is supposed to replicate. And (3), the very notion of predication itself within Van Til's vocabulary is often conflated with factuality itself.

This (latter issue) is a serious matter, since Van Til repeatedly speaks of facts as the very spatio-temporal particulars that make up the world and its history [e.g., God is said to *create* and to *control* facts]. But given that facts themselves are *of* or *about* things [i.e., it is *about* things—spatio-temporal objects, agencies, structures, as well as nonmaterial subjects of predication—that there are facts], it is inviting confusion to make the fundamental problem of apologetics the accounting for all intelligible predication. The structures of predication constitute the *medium* by which we investigate the world, the *medium* by which our resulting understanding is represented. In a subtle way (and often not so subtle) Van Tillian trains of thought spring from a running together of predication and what predication is about.

What must be kept in mind, is that predication is *logically governed* and *linguistically structured*, while spatio-temporal reality is sustained by causal cohesion and governed by lawlike regularity. Van Til, like rationalists in general, tends to assimilate the causal relation to the relation of logical implication. It's easy to do that when the reality domain you're attempting to account for is *treated as* a domain of sheer predication.

presuppositionalism: apologetic approach that (1) proceeds on the assumption of zero cognitive and spiritual common ground, (2) assumes the truth of the *entirety* of the position to be exhibited, (3) uses a *reductio ad absurdum* strategy on opposing views, and (4) holds that to concede probability (of less than 1.0) is to concede that God's revelation lacks both authority and clarity.

probability argumentation: *Informal:* any argumentation whose force is conceded as less than 100% conclusive—that, given the evidence, the

conclusion still might be false. *Formal*: simply the characteristic that the evidence is not connected to the conclusion by way of a *deductive entailment* relationship. On this latter construal, the evidential apologete need *not* concede that there is *reasonable* doubt about the conclusion. *Formal probability* indicates a *formal* gap between evidence (*as stated*) and conclusion, *not* necessarily a *material* gap that remains distressingly open to intuitive discernment. To put it another way (to use Josh MacDowell's expression) a *formally probabilistic* argument in behalf of some claim may nevertheless involve "evidence that demands a verdict" in favor of that claim!

probative: affording proof or evidence.

prosopagnosia: neurological deficit resulting in inability to recognize faces.

radically contingent (turf): facts that are utterly (or radically) contingent in Van Til's parlance, are facts (generously so called) without any principle of connection among them. An empirical domain (e.g., the turf at the *Transcendental Bowl*) that is radically contingent, therefore, lacks any principle by which it can be understood. Its "particulars" cohere neither by causal forces nor by implicatory connections. There are no principles of relatedness by which to make sense of such a domain. Therefore, in *Transcendental Football* (section [8] of the Introductory Essay) one must first "score a touchdown" in order to epistemically credit the existence of a field of play.

qualitative distinction: this is in contrast to a *quantitative* distinction. Van Til insists that God's knowing differs from human knowing not only in quantity, but also in its finest grain nuance—that is to say, *qualitatively* as well. Overlap of divinely and humanly discerned *meaning* is thus rendered conceptually impossible. So, for example, what God understands by our proposition, "Jesus is coming again," is *qualitatively (hence unspecifiably) distinct from what we understand it to mean*.

"real world" evidence: a coined expression to indicate evidence that does not overstep, or go beyond the reach of, a human being's created competence to discern evidential connections and evidential salience.

reductio ad absurdum: refutation technique of showing how an opponent's position is contradictory on its own terms—or that one's opponent's position leads to absurdity when its logical implications are made clear.

relativism/relativistic: in the broadest sense, relativism in epistemology is the view that truth itself is relativized to an individual's thinking or to that of a group. Truth becomes the hyphenated concept "truth-for". For example, that the Great Pumpkin exists might be said to be *true-for* Linus, but not *true-for* me; or Christianity might be said to be *true-for* Christians, but fail to be *true-for* non-Christians. When one is relativistic about knowledge and truth, there is no absolute truth.

semantics: logical and linguistic study encompassing meaning, reference, and truth.

"show the impossibility of the contrary": Van Til's expression for applying a *reductio ad absurdum* procedure to non-Christian positions—showing, that is, that they entail a contradiction and so collapse of their own weight. This technique, however, is not nearly as powerful as Van Til seems to think. He seems to think that it's somehow possible to defeat *all logically possible contraries at once!* It really isn't possible. A religious system might, in principle, be flat out false but still be logically coherent. Or, the paradoxes and logical dissonances of a false religion may bear a formal family resemblance to certain conceptual impasses in the Christian faith. But whereas Christianity is true (is not done in by our intellectual difficulty in systematizing its truth), the non-Christian view is false notwithstanding its conceptually similar insolubilia.

The answer, I think, is rather than attempting to wield an argument that all "contraries to Christianity" are *impossible*, it's far better to show that the Bible has *the* factual account of human history on the planet, *the* factual account of the human condition, and *the* factual account of God's intervention in history for human salvation. Showing the *impossibility* of false religions is a very tall order; far better to show that they are *false*, that their models of human and divine interactions on the planet are *factually wrong*.

soteriological: pertaining to salvation, or to the doctrine of salvation.

the natural man: the state of men and women as spiritual descendants of Adam, apart from the saving grace of God. The natural man, Scriptures teach, comes into the world in need of a Savior. Though personally estranged from God (hence spiritually dead), such an individual is cognitively and rationally responsible for the facts of redemptive history but has a natural bent to build increasing resistance to those facts and to whatever general revelation he or she is shown. The natural man is not, therefore, a cognitive zero as a matter of theological definition. The natural man (woman) is not cognitively impervious to redemptive facts but an enemy of them.

theology of knowledge: characterization of human knowledge by way of comparison and contrast with God's knowledge.

theosagnosia: coined name for a radical informational blindness to God and his works as though this condition were caused by a neurological deficit. The problem with hypothesizing such a condition for non-believers is that the blindness would have to be so complete that it would exclude the possibility that non-believers have the *capacity* to harden their hearts against God. *Theosagnosia* is a coinage Hoover gets by combining "theos" = "God" and "agnosia" = "inability to recognize _____".

transcendental reasoning: transcendental reasoning is really synonymous, in Van Til's language, with reasoning by presupposition. And like presupposing in general, there is certainly nothing wrong with it. Perhaps the easiest way to describe it is to say that it is the generation of hypotheses. In science, for hypothesis construction to be responsible there has to be a way of pursuing the verification of the hypothesis—a way of testing it. In philosophy, however, hypothetical overviews are seldom testable in the manner of scientific experiment. Transcendental answers or "solutions" to problems differ with the scientific pursuit of hypothesis confirmation in that they are far more speculative and more conceptual than empirical in nature.

Having said all that, it's important to add that transcendental reasoning always involves what might be called a *transcendental question*, and that question, if the transcendental exercise is to be worthwhile, must always be an attempt to better understand a certain range of data. That is, transcendental reasoning must *begin* with data that are themselves *not*

utterly baffling. The transcendental question cannot be raised, that is, within a vacuum!

This is precisely where evidentialists begin having serious problems with presuppositionalists. To see the problem clearly, here is the general form of a transcendental question. (The same holds for generating a scientific hypothesis.): "*What sort of thing would have to hold true if the (specific) data are as I have discovered them to be?*" Whenever data are left behind the transcendental question is *bound* to be ill-formed. That is because, by the very nature of the case, transcendental reasoning has to be data-governed or it has simply left the real world. When Van Til makes *all intelligible predication* a transcendental problem, he has made *datahood itself* a problem. It is impossible to gain any intellectual traction with this high abstraction as the fundamental problem.

Put still another way, human beings with their set of characteristics and interactions begin their puzzlement over the meaning of data *in the middle*, so to speak, not from the vantage of omniscience (that's unattainably high), and not from radical scratch (that's unattainably low). For what it is worth, in the *Transcendental Bowl* (section [8] of the Introductory Essay), the Thumbs and the Blockheads couldn't really play actual football because the turf itself (i.e., the field of play which should have been *taken for granted*) was a transcendental problem for them. The moral of that story is that if literally *everything* is a transcendental problem *ab initio*, inquiry and problem solving cannot even take place. Data have disappeared and only intellectual abstractions remain.

transcendental sine qua non of all intelligible predication: (cf. also "predication") this is just a fancy way of summarizing the way Van Til's apologetic treats God: as the transcendental solution to the problem of intelligible predication. That is, the insistence that *unless* God is presupposed, all intelligible predication collapses instantly.

univocal reasoning: reasoning on the same plane as, with the same terms and logical constraints as. "Univocal" is literally "with one voice".

vertical epistemology: a metaphysics of knowledge as opposed to a (horizontal) criteriology of knowledge.

The Defeasible Pumpkin

An Epiphany in a Pumpkin Patch

David P. Hoover

In this delightful story, the now middle-aged characters of Charles Schultz's well-known *Peanuts* comic strip are reunited at the behest of Charlie Brown for the purpose of disabusing Linus of his belief in The Great Pumpkin. While Charlie is a Christian, he finds himself in a dilemma, for his method of defending the Christian faith is essentially identical to the method that Linus uses to defend the Pumpkin. They are *both* presuppositionalists of the Van Tilian sort, and in faithfulness to their common method they find their views equally vindicated. The setting of the dialogue is an all-night vigil in a pumpkin patch.

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