

Apologetic Taxonomy: Methodological Approaches

The matrix that follows is a snapshot intended to highlight key features that are generally true of each apologetic methodology addressed. Although not mentioned, the *modus operandi* of classical apologists (e.g., Norman Geisler, William Lane Craig, R. C. Sproul) is first to establish the existence of God before demonstrating the truth of particulars in Christianity.¹

Presuppositional Apologetics (Adherents: R. J. Rushdoony; Cornelius Van Til; Gordon Clark; Carl Henry; Greg Bhansen; John Frame)			
Knowing	Method of Reasoning	Key Aspects	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a priori; deductive; biblical authoritarianism; rationalism • Faith <i>in</i> rather than faith <i>that</i>. • "It's necessary to assume Christianity is true." 	View of humanity	Imago Dei is wholly marred and cannot apprehend truth of the Christian worldview
		Common ground	None present with unbelievers; circular reasoning (every worldview rests on unprovable first principles ¹)
		Conditions to evaluate the world	Only a commitment to Christianity supplies the means to accurately and sufficiently evaluate the world morally, logically, and scientifically
		Use of logic	(Van Til) To use logic for proof of Christianity is to take a position above God who transcends logic
Implication	Reason from the truth of Christian theism rather than argue to its truth. Natural theology is assumed.		
Evidential Apologetics (Adherents: Josh McDowell; Gary Habermas; Clark Pinnock; John W. Montgomery; Mike Licona)			
Showing	Method of Reasoning	Key Aspects	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a posteriori; inductive; empiricism • Faith <i>that</i> rather than faith <i>in</i> • "The evidence shows <i>that</i> Christianity is true." 	View of humanity	Imago Dei is not so marred as to apprehend some truth of the Christian worldview
		Common ground	Present with unbelievers; the methods of classical disciplines (history, forensics, biology, et al.) used to "close the gap" of unbelief
		Conditions to evaluate the world	Empirical evidence is available and sufficient to evaluate the world morally, logically, and scientifically. Uses of historical evidences are primary.
		Use of logic	The laws of logic are necessary for showing Christianity to be true
Implication	Must reason from the evidence to the truth of Christian theism. History is primary over natural theology.		
Verificational Apologetics (Adherents: E. J. Carnell; Gordon Lewis; Francis Schaeffer ² ; Nancy Pearcey; Douglas Groothuis)			
Knowing & Showing	Method of Reasoning	Key Aspects	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific; abductive • Evidence used to form hypothesis; criteria established to test; conclusion drawn from results • Inference to best explanation • "Given the evidence and results, it's reasonable to believe <i>in</i> Christianity." 	View of humanity	Imago Dei is not so marred as to apprehend some truth of the Christian worldview
		Common ground	Cultural and intellectual fecundity; cognitive and existential dissonance
		Conditions to evaluate the world	Plausibility (intellectual) and credibility (ethical) categories are present in all humans thus providing necessary and sufficient grounds for worldview evaluation.
		Use of logic	The laws of logic are necessary for showing Christianity to be true
Implication	Christian theism is shown to be reasonably true when under the scrutiny of: 1) logical consistency, 2) empirical adequacy, 3) existential viability. Christianity makes the best case for and most sense of sound reasoning, the facts of history and objective reality, and can be consistently applied to all areas of life.		
Reformed Epistemology Apologetics (Adherents: Alvin Plantinga; William Alston; Kelly James Clark; Nicolas Wolterstorff)			
Knowing	Method of Reasoning	Key Aspects	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existential; We move from experience to belief • Christian theism is neither logically necessary, self-evident, nor evident to the senses. Appeal to argument or evidence is not required for "properly basic" belief in God. • "Belief in God is warranted <i>without</i> (not <i>against</i>) evidence or argument." 	View of humanity	Imago Dei facilitates significant truth to be embraced thus grounding experience for the Christian worldview
		Common ground	<i>Sensus divinitatis</i> ; sense of awe, wonder; need for forgiveness; encounter with beauty
		Conditions to evaluate the world	<i>Sensus divinitatis</i> provides the necessary disposition to ground certain religious beliefs and evaluate the world morally, logically, and scientifically. Moreover, the <i>sensus divinitatis</i> and the external witness of the empirical world are two sides of the same coin by which humans may accept truth about God as creator.
		Use of logic	Though the noetic effects of sin result in epistemic deficiency, the laws of logic are not altogether disabled. It is rational to trust our cognitive faculties, believe in other minds, the reality of the past, and God's existence. ⁱⁱ
Implication	All are endowed with capacity to produce belief in God without the burden of evidence (Calvin's <i>Institutes</i> ⁱⁱⁱ). While arguments may persuade, they are not necessary for a "properly basic" belief <i>that</i> God exists. Experience is valued over natural theology, since most do not have access to complex arguments.		

¹ I'm aware other methods exist (e.g., cumulative, fideism). See *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan and Doug Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*.

² Francis Schaeffer is typically categorized as a presuppositionalist. However, others have argued otherwise (Doug Groothuis, see his *Christian Apologetics*, p. 181, note 28; Nancy Pearcey in personal correspondence and referenced article "A Review Of A Review", 1948, by the Francis A. Schaeffer at <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/schaefferreview.html>; also Pearcey's *Total Truth*, pp. 313-314, n68).

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Question for discussion and further consideration include:

1. Why is it important to define a method in apologetics?
2. Can you identify some similarities and some differences between the methods?
3. How would you classify Pascal's Wager from one of the apologetic methods? Why?
4. Which method do you prefer and why?
5. Does natural theology play any role in apologetics?
6. What weight might each of the methods put on negative and positive apologetics?
7. What are some strengths of a method which you do not prefer?
8. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in apologetics?
9. Can you identify any weaknesses of the method you do prefer?
10. Do you see any value in knowing 2-3 methods and selectively applying them based upon your audience? Explain.
11. Which of the methods best fits the teleological argument for the existence of God? The moral argument? The historical reliability of the New Testament documents?
12. How might one who is committed to Presuppositional or Reformed Epistemology method defend the resurrection?

ⁱ Note: Even Christianity cannot be "proven" until it is accepted as true. This starting point is in accord with Augustine's famous dictum (echoed in Anselm's *Proslogion*, chapter 1) "Therefore, seek not to understand so that you may believe, but believe so that you may understand; for 'unless you believe, you will not understand.'" The quote is from Is 7:9, LXX. (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 29.6; see <http://books.google.com/books?id=ZP3DDNxt2EEC&lpg=PA14&pg=PA18#v=onepage&q&f=false>, accessed July 8, 2012).

ⁱⁱ Reformed Epistemology follows Thomas Reid and is a response to classical Foundationalism, which insists that all true beliefs must be either a) logically necessary (incorrigible), b) evident to the senses, or c) self-evident. For a basic overview of Reformed Epistemology, see <http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/theistic-proofs/reformed-epistemology/>, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/relig-ep/#SH3d>, and <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religion-epistemology/#Ref> (accessed 7/7/2012).

ⁱⁱⁱ "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an 'awareness of divinity.' This we take to beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty . . . Therefore, since from the beginning of the world there has been no region, no city, in short, no household, that could do without religion, there lies in this a tacit confession of a sense of deity inscribed in the hearts of all." *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, 1960. Bk. 1, Chap. III, pp. 43-44.