CHAPTER II

THE TRUTHFULNESS OF THEISTIC ASSERTIONS

How do you know what you know? How do you justify first principles? These are the types of questions that intelligent men have philosophized about for three millennia. Sadly, they have arrived at very divergent conclusions. To address these types of questions is to assume that metaphysical talk is either literally meaningful or has some deflated conception of it. Even though all philosophers would not grant this, the first chapter of this thesis provided what some philosophers would call a rational ground for accepting religious language as meaningful, though there exist unanswered questions in this field of study.

Thus, we come to the nature of a theologian or philosopher's task--that of adjudicating between conflicting truth claims. Before addressing the problem directly, we must for a moment review the significance and relevance of undertaking this problem. If we take the position that biblical Christianity were true, that is, it accurately described Reality--told us truthfully but not exhaustively some of the mysteries of the meaning and purpose of life--then what could be of more relevance? Even J. C. C. Smart in his negative essay on the justification for theism had this to say:

> First of all it may be as well to say what we hope to get out of this. Of course, if we found that any of the traditional arguments for the existence of God were sound, we should get out of our one hour this afternoon something of inestimable value, such as one never got out of one hour's work in our lives before. For we should have got out of one hour's work the answer to that question

about which, above all, we want to know the answer. (This is assuming for the moment that the question 'Does God exist?' is a proper question).[1]

Critics such as Smart have realized the importance of what could be called a very important decision. The rejection of metaphysics, a basis cited by some to by some philosophers to undermine religions claims has left a void that is not easy to fill.

Consider the problem of ethics. Because of the general rejection of especially deontological ethics, it is no longer considered the task of "modern" men to divine the will of God in matters of moral affairs. Many philosophers consider ethics as emotive--merely clarifying and persuading, but not that which incurs objective obligations. The present culture in the United States, and more thoroughly in Europe, has tended toward solipsism and nihilism. This is of particular concern historically since this is an age where the power and technology to manipulate people and things to ends is rapidly increasing while the ability to discern between what one can do and what one should do has been abandoned. Realizing the implications of philosophy should motivate a person to do their best in analysis and not easily give up on anything that is so existentially relevant. We can realize this and remain intellectually honest with ourselves. The lessons of the first half of the twentieth century from the German prison camps should alert us to the importance of the implications one's philosophy.

With this as a backdrop, theologians can seek to adjudicate between differing truth claims; in particular, this thesis will look at Norman Geisler's contribution to this process. In order to frame the kinds of diversity seen both in the types of claims made and the justification of

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[1]J. C. C. Smart, "Why the Proofs Do Not Work", in *Readings for an Introduction to Philosophy*, ed. James R. Hamilton, Charles E. Reagan, and B. R. Tilghman (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976). pp. 422-23.

these claims, it may be helpful to list some brief statements of the types that are often analyzed by philosophers:

1. God is transcendent. He exists outside the material universe, but is involved in sustaining His creation.

2. God is everything. He is you, me, the tree. God is the material world.

3. God, as is thought of in traditional theology, cannot exist. The concept of God, as such, is contradictory.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive but should help call attention to both the similarity and diversity of these types of truth claims. It should be apparent that these claims cannot literally all be true at the same time and in the same sense--they are mutually exclusive. Now Geisler's approach to adjudicating between these types of claims shall be considered.

<u>Overview of Geisler's System of Apologetics</u>

To begin with, Geisler has developed what might be called a two-step approach to Christian apologetics. This two-step approach is considered necessary by Geisler as a result of examining other tests for truth and finding them wanting in adequacy to establish one claim or world view over another. Second, Geisler sees the necessity of a two-step approach because in his view, "No meaning is inherently and inseparably attached to a given set of facts."[2] Thus, there is a need to establish a worldview before appealing to evidential facts for a worldview. This two-step approach consists of a "basis for testing the truth of an <u>overall worldview</u> such as theism or pantheism; second, the means of testing for the truth of competing truth claims <u>within</u>

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[2]Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 98.

a world view."[3] Geisler uses three tests to determine the truthfulness of a world view in step one and they are (1) internal logical consistency or what he calls definitional undeniability (a test for falsity), (2) unaffirmability or self-stultification (a test for falsity), and (3) existential undeniability (a test for truth). In his second step, an inter-model discerner, Geisler uses what he calls combinationalism to determine the truth once the general worldview is established by step one. Geisler uses consistency, empirical adequacy, and experiential relevance for his combination of tests in this second step. The concern of this thesis will be the exposition and evaluation of Geisler's first step in his approach to Christian apologetics. What Geisler hopes to show is this:

1. It is necessary to have a two-step approach to Christian apologetics because facts must have a worldview in order to interpret them.

2. All major traditional methods are inadequate to test a worldview.

3. He is able to set forth an adequate test or tests for worldviews.

4. All non-theistic views engage in unaffirmable statements germane to those views and can be rejected as false.

5. Theism is the only non-contradicting and not self-defeating world view left and is therefore true by the process of elimination.

6. Theism is existentially undeniably true on its own positive grounds.[4]

What must be done, now, is to "unpack" these claims and to do so in the same order as previously mentioned.

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[3]Ibid., p. 133.

[4]Ibid., pp 136, 139, 141, 147, 237.

1. It is necessary to have a two-step approach to Christian apologetics because facts must have a worldview in order to interpret them. Geisler addresses this problem in his preface:

> The heart of this apologetic approach is that the Christian is interested in defending the truths that Christ is the Son of God and the Bible is the Word of God. However, prior to establishing these two pillars on which the uniqueness of Christianity is built, one must establish the existence of God. For it makes no sense to speak about an act of God (i.e., a miracle) confirming that Christ is the Son of God and that the Bible is the Word of God unless of course there is a God who can have a Son and who can speak a Word. Theism, then, is a logical prerequisite to Christianity.[5]

By saying that theism is a logical prerequisite to Christianity, Geisler is saying that evidence given to show the Bible is the Word of God and that Christ is the Son of God would already assume theism and would therefore be arguing in a circle, albeit, a large circle. Geisler argues this theme in other passages:

> The Problem of an Overall World View. Those who argue against the objectivity of history apart from an overall worldview must be granted this point. Without a world view it makes no sense to talk about objective meaning.[18] Meaning is system-dependent. Within a given system a given set of facts has a given meaning, but within another system it may have a very different meaning. Without a context meaning cannot be determined, and the context is provided by the world view and not by the bare facts themselves.
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> _____   18. See Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism.* p. 150f.

and:

> In reality, neither the scientist nor the historian can attain objective meaning without the use of some worldview by which he understands the facts. Bare facts cannot even be known apart from some interpretive framework. Hence, the need for structure or a meaning-framework is crucial to the question of objectivity. Unless one can settle the question as to whether this is a theistic or non-theistic world on grounds independent of the mere facts themselves, there is no way to determine the objective meaning of history.[6]

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[5]Ibid., Preface.

[6]Ibid., pp. 296-98.

and in another place, he argues:

> 2. Second, contrary to evidentialism, meaning is not inherent in nor does it arise naturally out of bare facts or events. Nothing happens in a vacuum; meaning always demands a context.[25] And since the facts are admittedly distinct from the interpretation, it is always possible that in another context or framework of meaning the said facts would not be evidence for Christianity at all. For example, in the context of a naturalistic world the resuscitation of Jesus' corpse would not be a miracle but an unusual natural event for which there is no <u>known</u> scientific explanation but which, by virtue of its occurrence, both demands and prods scientists to find a natural explanation. Meaning, then, does not really grow out of the event by itself; meaning is given to the event from a certain perspective. The earthquake that an Old Testament theist believed was divinely instigated to swallow Korah (Num. 16:31ff.) would undoubtedly be explained by a naturalist as geological pressures within the crust of the earth. What the New Testament claims was the "voice of God" in John 12 was admittedly interpreted by someone standing nearby as "thunder". No bare fact possesses inherent meaning; every fact is an "interprafact" by virtue of a necessary combination of both its bare facticity and the meaning given to it in a given context by a specific perspective or world view.[7]

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> 25. See Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Roulledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

In each case Geisler is arguing bare facts do not have interpretations in and of themselves; they need a context or perspective to give meaning.

> In regard to "special facts" that could be said to have ultimate significance he argues:

> 3. Third, there is no way from pure facts themselves to single out some facts as having special, crucial, or ultimate significance. "Singling out", "comparing", and the like are processes of the mind based on principles or perspectives one brings to the facts and not characteristics inherent in raw data. Events simply occur in a series; only one's perspective or view of those events can determine which one is to be honored over another with special significance. Not even unusual or odd events as such have inherently more significance than usual or common ones. For if that were so, anomalies would be more important than

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[7]Ibid., p. 96.

scientific laws and more human significance would be attributed to freaks than normal people. In fact, in the context of a random universe, even series of odd events bear no more significance than unloaded dice that roll the same numbers on several successive throws. Of course, in the context of a designed or theistic universe a series of unusual events, such as the point-by-point correspondence of the life of Christ with a significant number of predictions made hundreds of years in advance, would be an entirely different matter. For if there is a God who can make a series of predictions of unusual events that come to pass as foretold, surely it is <u>not</u> unreasonable to consider them miraculous. But to return to the point, whether or not there is a God is precisely the point at issue. And it is invalid to appeal to "theistic evidence", that is, to allegedly miraculous events as a proof that this is a theistic world. That begs the whole question. <u>If</u> this is a theistic universe, of course certain odd series of events can be given special significance. However, the significance does not reside in the events as such but is attributed to them by virtue of the important overall context. But if this is a random natural world rather than a theistic world, neither the life of Christ nor any other unusual series of events has any more special religious significance than an odd series of combinations on a Las Vegas gambling table.[8]

Geisler says, then, that calling some evidence special is saying more about the observer than the observed. So much for the evidential methodologies Geisler concludes.

Geisler sees that the "real problem for the Christian apologist is to find some way apart from the mere facts themselves to establish the justifiability of interpreting facts in a theistic way."[9] If Geisler is correct in this, we are left with the following conclusions:

1. It would be necessary to have an argument for a particular worldview that did not appeal to "bare" facts alone.

2. The evidentialists <u>do</u> argue in a circle.

3. Geisler's argument for theism must not reduce to giving only evidence for theism or it, too, would be circular.

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[8]Ibid., pp. 96-97.

[9]Ibid., p. 97

These are some of the more crucial implications to the thesis of "interprafact" (Geisler's term for those facts that carry a world view or interpretation within themselves). To appeal to special revelation is to beg the question; to appeal to the evidence of historical facts alone leaves us without interpretation; and going outside the circle of facts to what philosophers have called natural theology has been historically and logically unfruitful. Unless Geisler develops a convincing argument, we are left with fideism or agnosticism and perhaps meaningless religious language. Before commenting on this particular issue, this thesis will entertain Geisler's second point since they are so closely related.

2. All major traditional methods are inadequate to test a worldview. Geisler devotes a chapter to each method evaluating the prominent views in *Christian Apologetics* such as: agnosticism, rationalism, fideism, experientialism, evidentialism, pragmatism, and what he calls combinationalism. He offers an evaluation of each to determine whether they deliver an adequate test of truth. By an adequate test of truth, Geisler means one that can adjudicate between conflicting worldview claims. The major concern will be noting Geisler's negative criticism of their methodology.

Geisler begins with agnosticism. He classifies agnosticism into two kinds--limited and unlimited. Unlimited agnosticism holds God to be unknowable and limited agnosticism claims that the existence and nature of God are not known. Geisler does not give a clear exposition of the agnostic test of truth in *Christian Apologetics*, but implicitly one can gather that, according to Geisler, the agnostics use logical tests and empirical tests only as means of discerning truth. Geisler criticized this unlimited agnosticism methodology as too restrictive and self-stultifying since their own statements cannot pass their own tests. For Geisler, limited agnosticism is

acceptable since it does not destroy the possibility of the existence of God. He is correct on this point.

The rationalist, according to Geisler, holds that the rationally inescapable is the real and that God's existence can be demonstrated with logical necessity. Geisler responds by arguing that:

1. Logic is only a negative test for truth.

2. Logic can only show what is possibly real, not actually real.

3. There are no rationally inescapable arguments for the existence of God because it is always logically possible that nothing ever existed, including God.[10]

The fideists, contends Geisler, must allow at the bare minimum the principle of noncontradiction to a negative test for truth. According to Geisler, fideists believe there are no valid proofs for the existence of God. He thinks therefore, that the fideists cannot justify their beliefs and thus disqualify their claim to objective truth. What is interesting is that the fideists are in agreement with Geisler that facts are unintelligible without some interpretive framework, but to the fideist, all reasoning is circular.[11] This seems to put Geisler and the fideists in the same epistemological ball park but reaching different conclusions.

Experientialism claims that all truth is determined by experience, but this fails because according to Geisler, religious experience is a source of truth, not a basis. Experience is not self-interpreting. "Experience is merely a condition of persons; whereas truth is characteristic of

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[10]Ibid., p. 45.

[11]Ibid., p.59.

propositions."[12] This follows from Geisler's conviction that facts, whether from personal

experience within the individual or from without, have to be understood through an interpretative

framework independent of the facts themselves. Thus, experiential methodology fails in

Geisler's opinion. On the same line of reasoning, the evidentialist's approach to apologetics fails

too.

Considering the theoretical and purely factual tests for truth a failure, Geisler analyzes the

pragmatist methodology. Geisler finds pragmatism to be a refreshing contrast to the purely

abstract and a return to the concretes of life. He sees its contribution as helping to show the need

for the concrete dimensions of applications and the probable nature of much of what is called

knowledge. However, Geisler contends that pragmatism cannot adjudicate between pantheism

and Christian theism purely on pragmatic grounds because one cannot divine the distant future.

In Geisler's opinion, opposing views could work equally well and for a long time.[13]

In regard to the passional or volitional element of deciding the truth by pragmatist

methodology, Geisler says:

> Fifth, a passional and volitional basis alone for deciding truth is
> insufficient. It is subject to the same critiques leveled against fideism (see
> Chapter 3). Faith is certainly necessary for belief in God; but one must have some
> evidence or reason to believe that there is a God before he can meaningfully
> believe in him. But if the pragmatist is unable to decide the momentous religious
> issue of whether there is a God on intellectual grounds, then he must rely on
> purely passional bases. And in this case there is really no objective or public test
> for truth at all. A purely personal and private test for truth cannot meet even the
> minimal standards for truth criteria, for it is neither available to others nor can it
> really exclude other views. In short, at this point, pragmatism reduces to

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[12]Ibid., p. 80.

[13]Ibid., p. 114.

fideism.[14]

This analysis of pragmatism could be summarized as follows:

1. A purely personal and private test for truth cannot exclude all other views (and this is what Geisler is pursuing).

2. Pragmatism reduces to fideism or the recognition that neither reason nor evidence can adjudicate the problem of justifying truth claims definitively (Geisler is correct on these two matters).

Geisler turns to what he identifies as combinational methodology or what is sometimes referred to as systematic consistency.[15] Combinationalism, according to Geisler, employs various tests for truth although an individual philosopher may emphasize one or two particular tests in his system. However, Geisler points out, ". . .the fact that whatever the epistemological source of truth, each combinationalist feels that a combination of tests for truth is necessary to establish the truth of a world view."[16] As he did with the evidentialists, Geisler criticizes the combinationalists in that one cannot use the resurrection of the Jesus as proof that God exists because in order for a person to be raised miraculously from the dead, God's existence must be granted, but this is exactly the issue we are examining. Further, Geisler criticizes the combinationalist's methodology as a form of "leaky bucket" argument, that is, the inadequacy of each test is not made up for by the adequacy of all the other tests. Some falsity could slip through. The following passage is instructive of Geisler's view on this:

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[14]Ibid., p. 114.

[15]Gordon Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976. p. 121.

[16]Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 117.

Unless there is some way to correct the inadequacy of one test for truth by another, then simply adding tests will not provide an adequate test for truth. But the problem with rationalism as a test for truth is not corrected by evidentialism. Rationalism does not fail simply because it provides no factual referents for thought, but because in its strong form it provides no rationally inescapable arguments, and in the weak form it is only a test for the possibility of a system's truth. The law of noncontradiction can show only that a system is wrong if it has contradictions in its central tenets. But there may be several such systems that are internally noncontradictory. Likewise, as we have seen, there may be many world views that account for all the data of experience. Hence, once one steps inside another world view he may find that its major tenets are consistent, that it accounts for all the facts of experience as interpreted through its framework, and that it is existentially relevant to men within that life style. It is noteworthy in this regard that Ferre recognizes this very factor, admitting that other models, even non-theistic ones, may be of equal or even greater weight than the Christian model when tested by his criteria.[21] And if Western theists admit this, then surely the sophisticated Hindu or Buddhist could adequately apply a combinational test for truth and thereby avoid discarding his world view in favor of theism.[17]

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21. Bendall and Ferre, *Exploring the Logic of Faith*, pp. 153 f. Even more recently Ferre has argued for a "polymythic organicism" which allows divergent religious models to be equally adequate. See his *Shaping the Future: Resources for the Post-Modern World*.

Geisler's important point here is that the inadequacies of one test for truth are not corrected by another test for truth in the combinationalist's argument and is correct if one accepts the theory that facts from experience already carry a world view interpretation. Geisler finally concludes that combinationalism is at best a test of falsity. It could falsify a worldview but not establish a worldview as true over all opposing views. Geisler is correct on this but could be easily misunderstood to be constructing a "straw man" position of combinationalism and then destroying his own creation. Though combinationalists are not looking for a definitive test but

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[17]Ibid., p.117.

rather a degree of "sufficiency", we must remember that Geisler is looking for a definitive test.[18]
Therefore, Geisler is analyzing combinationalism as to whether or not it is definitive even though
combinationalists may not even claim that it is definitive. Some theists may see Geisler's work
as being a bit narrow here, putting too many eggs in a basket that has been traditionally
plundered.[19] However, if Geisler can make good on his claims, then he has solved many of the
theologian's problems.

It is appropriate at this point to comment on Geisler's first two proposals. In the first
proposal, that facts must have a worldview in order to be interpreted or even known, we find
Geisler curiously agreeing with the fideistic and agnostic positions that this is the case, but
disagreeing with them in their conclusion that therefore first principles cannot be justified. It
seems that Geisler is holding on the one hand that facts from experience must have a worldview
in order to be known, and on the other hand he will later assert that at least one statement is
undeniably true from experience. This seems a tall order.

Regarding Geisler's second proposal that the traditional methodologies are inadequate to
establish definitively one worldview over the other, the following seems reasonable. Geisler is
on the whole correct in his analysis of rationalism, pragmatism, and experientialism; however,
his analysis of fideism, evidentialism, and combinationalism depends on how one views the
whole problem of justifying beliefs. If all argumentation ends in infinite regress or circular
reasoning, and this would seem to be implied by the concept that facts from experience already
carry a world view interpretation, then evidentialism and combinationalism would fail as

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[18]Edward J. Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 25.

[19]Elton M. Eenigenburg, "Review of Christian Apologetics", *Reformed Review* R32 (Fall, 1978: 48-49.

definitive tests and fideism would possibly be correct methodology. What is interesting is that <u>Geisler rejects both alternatives</u>. Geisler's response to this problem is that although he thinks that facts from experience carry a worldview interpretation, the one fact that all systems must account for is the fact of one's own existence. Geisler believes that one's existence is the first principle of metaphysics. If this is true, then Geisler has avoided a self-defeating position; however, he had not published substantiation of this point to date. Geisler's apologetic system could make this work. His substantiation could be that one's experience is undeniably true because of the nonsensical unaffirmability of one's denying his own existence. By this Geisler would avoid special pleading. In a strict, logical sense, Geisler could be wrong; but it <u>is</u> nonsense to argue against one's own existence.[20]

3. <u>Geisler is able to formulate an adequate test or tests for a worldview</u>. Concluding that the previous methodologies are inadequate, Geisler moves on to construct a method that he feels can establish one view over and against all opposing worldviews. He offers unaffirmability as a test for falsity. He contends, and rightly so, that unaffirmability does not mean the particular view is unsayable or unstatable, but rather that such views are literally nonsense. These statements in general affirm one thing, but they deny that same thing in the very process of the act of affirmation! Geisler makes two distinctions with unaffirmability: one kind of statement is directly unaffirmable; the other distinction would be a kind of statement that either in process or basis is self-defeating. For Geisler the direct unaffirmability of something occurs ". . . when the

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[20]Norman Geisler, interview held just prior to Campus Crusade for Christ Staff Training Conference, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, July 15, 1983.

statement itself provides the information to defeat itself."[21] An example of a directly unaffirmable statement would be the following according to Geisler: "I cannot express myself in words." The indirectly unaffirmable, according to Geisler, may not be self-defeating in the act of expressing but rather because the process by which the statement was "put together" contradicts the idea expressed in the statement. An example of this might be, "I came to the conclusion that I know everything intuitively."

Geisler then turns to undeniability as a test of truth. This formulation includes both definitional undeniability that seems to be the same as logical entailment and what he calls existential undeniability. The existentially undeniably true statements are from experience and cannot be meaningfully denied as actual. Geisler advances at least one such truth--his own existence. He feels he cannot meaningfully deny his own existence; he would have to exist in order to deny his own existence. This is not the same conclusion that Descartes derived, "Cogito ergo sum." For Descartes it was "I think therefore I am"; for Geisler it is "I am therefore I think". Geisler would admit that it is logically possible that he does not exist but that he must <u>actually</u> exist since it makes no sense for <u>him</u> to deny his own existence. Geisler then admits the possibility that his test for truth could be unsound since it is possible that he does not exist. The strength of his argument is that for him to affirm his nonexistence makes no sense, and though another skeptic could meaningfully deny Geisler's existence, he himself cannot. This leads to the question as to whether the nonsensical is false or not. Some may claim that ultimate reality is nonsensical. Geisler would claim that those very statements are unintelligible. What sense is there in a truth claim that says there are no true truth claims? To say all is nonsense <u>is</u> nonsense.

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[21]Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 142.

Whether or not this accomplishes all Geisler claims is debatable since for some hard-boiled skeptics the *possibility* of a nonsensical ultimate reality is all they need to keep Christianity at arms length. However, Christian apologists will find using these tools very powerful with most reasonable people.[22]

4. <u>All non-theistic views engage in unaffirmable statements germane to those views and can be rejected as false</u>. After defending the correctness of his own epistemological methodology, Geisler now analyzes major ways to view the whole of reality. His analysis includes deism, pantheism, panentheism (process theology), atheism, and theism. Geisler's purpose will be to show that all the alternative world views are "self-defeating and inadequate" and that only theism stands the test for truth that he sets forth.

According to Geisler, deism believes with theism that God created the world but denies His supernatural "monkeying" with it because a world operates by natural and self-sustaining laws of the Creator.[23] Deism holds that God would and should create a perfect machine, one that He could not tinker with since it would already be perfect. Geisler points out that deists' understanding of God does not square with their view of miracles. It is self-defeating to have a mechanistic rather than a personal model of the nature of God, even though deistic doctrine would allow for a personal model. However, at this point, Geisler does not give compelling reasons why the concept of God must be personal rather than mechanistic. The way Geisler could have handled the problem is to show convincing reasons why God could create a good

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[22]It should be noted that Geisler is not the first apologist to use undeniability or unaffirmability (though others may use different terms). What is best about Geisler is his systematic use and explanation of the concepts and the "how to " of using them in philosophical discussions.

[23]Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 151.

creation with potential for evil and still be a good God. If this is a fallen world and yet God is both omnipotent and good, then miracles are surely reasonable. A softer brand of deism would present a harder task for Geisler. For instance, "God does not tinker with His creation" would not be directly self-defeating. Geisler correctly criticizes this position by asking "Why doesn't He tinker with his creation?" It is here that the unaffirmability of the soft form of deism reveals itself.

Pantheism is a mixed bag. There are least five kinds of pantheism according to Geisler.[24] This makes summarizing pantheism difficult and Geisler's criticisms are more specifically directed to each form. Pantheism in its absolute form of Parmenidean monism is self-defeating in Geisler's view because he asks what sense is there in affirming that "God is but I am not"? This view does not allow for any reality status to anything other than God. A softer brand of pantheism is not self-defeating but is unconvincing since it denies the way man experiences himself. Or stated another way, to be so deceived about our own consciousness and the reality of ourselves would leave us skeptical of knowing the whole of reality as being in any certain way. Allowing some reality to man (God shares part of his being with his creatures) is a contradictory concept because then God would become less than infinite and infinite at the same time and in the same sense. Another serious charge Geisler gives is that the absolutist pantheist assumes that wherever beings exist they are identical. From this they conclude that all is ultimately One. However, they are clearly begging the question for the conclusion can be found in the first premise. According to Geisler, pantheism's stress on the unknowability or ineffability of God is also self-defeating. To admit their writing is uninformative about God is nonsense. As Geisler

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[24]Ibid., p. 173.

says, "Why write?" The only other alternative for a pantheist is to conceive of God giving being

separate from his own that would be created in the creature, but that alternative is theism.

Panentheism, according to Geisler, is the belief that "God is in the world in the way a

soul or mind is in a body."[25] This view, sometimes called finite goddism or bipolar or dipolar

theism, assigns two poles to God--an actual temporal pole and a potential eternal pole. Geisler

sees panentheism as a halfway house between pantheism and theism. He is appreciative of many

of the panentheism's insights regarding the approach to understanding the nature of God and

some of their arguments for God's existence, but he sees difficulty with their concept of God

actualizing his own potentialities. In other words, according to panentheism, God is not

complete actuality as He is in theism, but Geisler points out, "Potentialities cannot actualize

themselves any more than empty cups can fill themselves."[26] To posit a "creativity" as a ground

for this god as panentheists do is of no help since creativity could only be a potential and

potentials cannot ground actuals; only actuals ground actuals. It seems it would take the theist's

God to ground actuality of the panentheism's god! For Geisler, panentheism is a "whittling"

down of God into man's image instead of creating man in God's image. Geisler's work is very

informative here. He cites other problems of panentheism such as its solution to the problem of

evil, but here Geisler's criticisms have to do with its adequacy of explanatory powers or the

worthiness of the panentheistic god for worship. His criticism does not deal with the

unaffirmability of panentheism directly.

Geisler's analysis of atheism is, for the most part, in the context of its evidential and

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[25]Ibid., p. 193.

[26]Ibid., p. 208.

logical argument against theism.[27] Geisler does not attempt an analysis of humanism or other positive atheistic doctrine presumably because of his direct interest in atheism's truth claims. Atheistic values are built existentially on the edifice of vanquished theism anyway. While Geisler feels that atheism has provided some valuable modifications to some of the beliefs of theism, on the whole he feels that atheistic arguments are ". . .. invalid and often self-defeating."[28] He deals wholly with metaphysical atheism, leaving linguistic or semantical atheism out of the picture on the grounds that it does not deny God's existence or the possibility of experiencing Him, rather, it denies meaningful talk about God. Geisler then systematically lists arguments that atheists give to justify their position against theism and then he offers a refutation in turn to each. In what is Geisler's best chapter, he systematically shows logical errors and a number of self-defeating arguments that atheists use to justify their position. The statement, "There is no god," has the logical possibility of being true so Geisler concentrates his effort on showing the unaffirmability of that position in the following passage:

> As a world view, atheism provides an insufficient explanation for several very significant questions about reality. An atheist must assume the following meaningless or untenable positions. (1) He must assume that the personal arose from the impersonal, that matter plus time and chance gave rise to mind. It seems more reasonable to hold that Mind formed matter than that matter gave rise to mind. (2) Atheism asserts that the potential gives rise to the actual, that all the world's achievements were latent in the eternal random swirling of tiny atoms. But it seems much more reasonable to believe that something actualized the potential of the universe than to believe that the potentiality actualized itself. Potentials do not actualize themselves any more than steel forms itself into skyscrapers. Potentials must be actualized by some actualizer, and the theists claim that world potentials must be actualized by some World-Actualizer (viz., God). This claim seems eminently more reasonable than the claim of atheism.

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[27]Ibid., p. 215.

[28]Ibid., p. 234.

(3) Atheism has no adequate answer to the question, "Why is there something
rather than nothing at all?" It does not suffice to say the world is just "there" or
"given." How did it get there when it did not have to be there? Who gave it when
it did not have to be given? The nonexistence of the whole--even the universe as
a whole--is actually possible. If not, then it is an eternal necessary Being which is
more than (i. e., transcending) all the parts and changing relationships. But this is
precisely what the theists call God, namely, an eternal necessary Being that
transcends all the changing parts and relationships in the universe. If, on the other
hand, the universe is not necessary, then it follows that it might <u>not be</u>. In this
case there is no explanation in atheism as to why the universe <u>is</u> rather than <u>is not</u>.
In the final analysis atheism must hold the absurd conclusion that something
comes from nothing, that is, that non-being is the ground upon which being rests.
This seems highly unreasonable.[29]

In the first two cases Geisler uses the term "more reasonable" with regard to theism rather than

atheism. However, the first position is held to be reasonable among atheists because of

evolutionary arguments of modern science. At least, it does not seem unaffirmable to say the

personal arose from the impersonal. The impersonal is not nothing. Geisler is correct in the

third case when he says that atheists must hold the absurd position that something comes from

nothing. However, this needs to be seen with the qualification that the something is finite and

changing, rather than an infinite something. After all, theists claim God came from nothing or

was uncaused.

It is helpful to understand that when Geisler is talking about the "world" he is usually

speaking of it in the scientific sense of a finite, changing existence that could be observed rather

than an infinite, beyond observational "world." A problem here for Geisler is the need to show

that the eternal necessary Being that he arrives at is personal. He *could be* personal, but as Hume

suggested using the teleological argument, it may lead to other than traditional theism.[30] Geisler

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[29]Ibid., p. 234.

[30]David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, edited and with Introduction by Henry D. Aiken (New

deals with this problem in his section on the cosmological argument that will be evaluated later in this thesis. This criticism will be entertained at that point.

5. <u>Theism is the only noncontradictory and not self-defeating worldview left and is true by the process of elimination</u>. In order for Geisler to make good on this claim he needs to show the following: (1) the unaffirmability of all other world views, (2) that by process of elimination or by some other convincing method he had exhaustively covered all other possible world views and they are unaffirmable, and (3) that theism, the only alternative view that is left, is neither contradictory nor self-defeating.

As expressed in the body of this thesis, Geisler's attempts at showing the unaffirmability of each position may not be completely successful. He has given good reasons for rejecting a major number of philosophic positions, but did not succeed in showing that every conceivable way of understanding the world as a whole was unaffirmable and therefore false according to his own methodology. This is an encyclopedic task, though it is possible. Though Geisler did list many of the "live" options of viewing the world as a whole, in order to make his claim stick it would be necessary to include even not so "live" religious and philosophical positions, such as polytheism. However, his system of apologetics could effectively reject polytheism. Thus far in his analysis of atheistic arguments against theism, Geisler has given grounds, but not a definitive reason, for believing that theism is non-contradicting in its primary tenets and is not self-defeating.

6. <u>Theism is existentially undeniably true on its own positive grounds</u>. Geisler outlines his overall arguments for the existence of God as follows:

York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1951), p. 18.

First, let us outline the overall structure of this argument for theism.
(1) Some things undeniably exist (e.g., I cannot deny my own existence).
(2) My nonexistence is possible.
(3) Whatever has the possibility not to exist is currently caused to exist by another.
(4) There cannot be an infinite regress of current causes of existence.
(5) Therefore, a first uncaused cause of my current existence exists.
(6) This uncaused cause must be infinite, unchanging, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-perfect.
(7) This infinitely perfect Being is appropriately called "God".
(8) Therefore, God exists.
(9) This God who exists is identical to the God described in the Christian Scriptures.
(10) Therefore, the God described in the Bible exists.[31]

Note the following from these assertions:

1. In order for Geisler to be correct in his claims, at least the first eight premises must be true and undeniably so (by his own standards).

2. The God that is shown to exist at the end of premise eight is the same God that is described in the Bible.

Next Geisler offers a detailed elaboration and justification for each step. It will be helpful to list each statement again and make some pertinent remarks concerning them.

1. <u>Some things exist</u>. Geisler argues that at least he exists and undeniably so because for him to deny his own existence is nonsense and therefore false.

2. <u>His nonexistence is possible</u>. He argues that his nonexistence is possible since his existence is not necessary. He simply feels he does not have the qualifications for what would be required of a necessary existence. It is important to note that Geisler is talking about existential necessary existence. A logically necessary existence is impossible since it is conceivable that

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[31]Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, pp. 238-39.

nothing ever existed, including God. Some contemporary philosophers miss the point of this,

most likely because theists have historically argued rationalistically resulting in a logically

necessary existence (which is a contradictory concept). So Geisler is arguing that he does not

have an existentially necessary existence primarily because his experience demands that he

conceive of himself as a changing being (at least in knowledge); he also is arguing that there is a

multiplicity in what exists. Therefore, his non-existence is possible.

In order to substantiate this conclusion on undeniable grounds, Geisler uses two strands

of argument.[32] First, he argues that his experience demands that he is a changing being and that

the use of language implies a multiplicity of being neither of which could be attributes of a

necessary being. In the first case, it is clear that Geisler is a changing being and not a necessary

being; however, it is unclear as to what he means by the multiplicity of being. Second, he argues

that he is not alone, that both the fact and use of language imply others. Does the fact that

Geisler is not alone (implied by his use of language) mean that he is not a necessary being per

se? Is Geisler saying that a necessary being could not use language to communicate? Does the

use of language mean you are a limited being? Geisler's argument is very fuzzy here. In any

case, the first reason Geisler offered was sufficient to convince one that he is not necessary.

3. <u>Whatever has the possibility not to exist is currently caused to exist by another</u>.

Geisler argues, "What is but could possibly not be is only a potential existence."[33] Potential

existence cannot be logically or existentially necessary (necessary existence must be entirely

actuality) nor could it be self-caused because that is a contradiction in terms. It cannot even be

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[32]Ibid., pp. 241-42.

[33]Ibid., p. 242.

uncaused since nothing cannot produce something. So, it must be caused by another. According to Geisler, this exhausts the possibilities for grounds of existence. He stresses that his argument is based not on a cause of becoming, but on the *continued* being. Thus, the cause of "be-ing" must be concurrent with its effect. This is important since he will argue that although a cause of becoming could be explained by an infinite regress, current causes of existence cannot be explained by an infinite regress. In order to make this work, he must further argue that the universe, too, is an effect. Geisler argues that the world might not exist and is therefore caused by another. He cannot do so because of the logical possibility of its non-existence, since God also has the logical possibility of non-existence. Although it is not always clear, Geisler is arguing that the world is actually or scientifically contingent. Perhaps the best reason he gives for why the material world is thought to be contingent is that it is referred to as a spatio-temporal limited system. What is limited cannot be the independent uncaused cause. To say that another causes it, is to say that it is contingent.

Geisler explains that some philosophers try to avoid this conclusion by arguing that the "universe as a whole", which transcends or is more than the sum of the parts, is the actually necessary being. On the other hand, Geisler argues that the "universe as a whole" is just a disguised term for what the theist calls God.[34] He further argues against this maneuver by advancing the idea that if you take the "universe as a whole" line of thinking, you must unpack what you mean by it and explain how the personal could arise from the impersonal. According to Geisler, for the non-theist this would result in something coming from nothing.

This absurdity leads Geisler to believe that the "universe as a whole" ends up being a

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[34]Ibid., p. 255.

personal God, just what the non-theist sought to avoid. However, this is not accurate since the non-theist is arguing that the personal arose from the impersonal. The impersonal is not nothing; it is something. So the non-theist could meaningfully say that the personal did arise from the impersonal.

Also, in this section Geisler handles the objection that there is a change in the use of the term cause in the premise and in the conclusion of the argument. In the premise, the cause is finite but in the conclusion, it becomes an infinite cause. Geisler responds to this objection as follows:

> Some non-theists have insisted that the argument for theism equivocates on the term cause. They insist that the word cause in the premises means "finite cause" but in the conclusion it means "infinite cause."[20] But the meaning of the same term may not be broader or different in the conclusion than in the premises. Therefore, the conclusion of an infinite God is invalidly drawn from the premises of the argument. However, this objection misses the meaning of "cause" in the premises. "Cause" in the premises simply means "that actuality (whether finite or infinite) which produces an effect." In other words, in the premises it is an open question as to whether it is an infinite or finite cause. But as it turns out, the conclusion demands a not-finite kind of cause which is causing everything else that exists (see p. 247). For every finite thing needs a cause; hence, the first cause must be not-finite. If it were finite, then it too would need a cause. But since it does not have a cause it must be a not-finite (i.e., in-finite) cause of all finite things. Therefore, an infinite cause is possible in the premise but necessitated by the conclusion of the argument.[35]

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20. See Allan P. Wolter, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus*, p. 44.

Geisler is correct here because he says that the cause used in the premise is "open" to being either infinite (not finite) or finite, but that in the conclusion it is necessitated that the cause be infinite. There is no four-term fallacy here.

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[35]Ibid., p. 255.

4. <u>There cannot be an infinite regress of my current cause of existence</u>. To begin with, this is the hardest to understand of Geisler's arguments. It runs like this. Either the infinite series of current causes of contingent beings is sufficient grounds for all contingent beings or it is not. If not, the grounds must come from outside the series. But that alternative does not avoid the theistic conclusion. If the grounds come from within the series, there must be a self-caused being (which is impossible) within the series since adding up effects does not provide a cause or grounds for the effects by the very nature of effects. To say that the series is ungrounded or uncaused cannot be meaningfully asserted because the chain is not necessary; the chain is contingent and contingents need grounding by their very nature. This last point rests on the principle that something cannot come from nothing. Obviously, Geisler places great importance on, "If the parts are contingent then the whole is contingent."[36] However, it could be argued that an infinite regress does not need a cause because only finite, contingent things need causes. The infinite regress could be uncaused. It may be helpful to explain it this way: An individual contingent (oneself, for example) may need a ground or cause, but this *could* be explained by an infinite regress of finite things or beings which does not need a cause outside itself (it could be uncaused). So while each finite being needs to be caused by another, the whole may not. Further, each member of the infinite regress is itself caused by an infinite regress no matter where you would choose to start. Since this *could* be the case, then Geisler has not produced a contradiction which would be necessary to prove his thesis that an infinite regress of causes of existence cannot be.

Geisler would respond to that criticism by arguing that whenever you add finite things to

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[36]Ibid., p. 245.

finite things you still end up with a thing or being that is composed or made up of actuality and potentiality. Since this would not change even if one added up contingent beings to infinity, one would always have a composed being with potentiality and actuality. Therefore, an infinite regress is not pure actuality and thus could not be the necessary being that grounds the contingent. The fallacy of composition would indicate that this would not be necessarily so; however, Geisler's assertion does seem reasonable since no matter how long one could make the series (short of infinity), it could always be observed as having potentiality. All observed regresses need grounding and by the nature of the parts it seems reasonable that an infinite regress would need grounding, too.

Other philosophers have argued along different lines that an actual infinite regress cannot be. Their point is that an infinite series could not actually be spanned because there would always be at least one more member of the regress to cover in order to account for the actuality at the end of the chain.[37]

5. <u>Therefore, a first uncaused cause of my current existence exists</u>. This would follow logically from the previous conclusion; however, since his previous conclusion is not necessarily true, the best that could be said is that this premise is probably true or reasonable.

6. <u>This uncaused cause must be infinite, unchanging, all-powerful, all knowing, and all-perfect</u>. Here Geisler uses the teleological and moral arguments which he previously criticized as inadequate to prove the existence of God, but which he feels could be used now since that

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[37]William Lane Craig, Ph.D., *The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe.* (San Bernardino, Ca.: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1979), pp.37-51.

matter is at rest.[38] Using extensively the principle of from nothing comes nothing, he begins to

draw conclusions concerning the uncaused causer's characteristics. This principle could be put

another way, such as, the characteristics of the effects can be predicated to the cause only in an

infinite way. This cannot be done exhaustively as Geisler explicates in the following passage:

> Therefore, whatever implies limitations in the world cannot be attributed to the cause of the world. Likewise, since the cause is pure actuality, whatever potentials it causes in other things must not be attributed to the cause which has no potentialities in its being. The cause is like the effect only in the actuality it communicates.[12] For example, hot eggs are like the hot water in which they boil, but the hardness in the eggs caused by boiling is not in the water that causes it (the water is mobile or soft). Heat communicates heat but the hot water does not communicate hardness to the egg. Hot water melts other things (e.g., wax). The hardness (or softness) is due not to the actuality communicated by the cause but to the condition or potentiality of the effect to receive causal efficacy. Likewise, not everything in the creature's knowledge can be attributed to the Creator. Some things are due to the infinite and limiting potentials in which the causal power is received. It is for this reason that ignorance and other imperfections found in our knowledge cannot be attributed to the Cause of the world.[39]

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12. See my *Philosophy of Religion*, chap. 12.

This is the same basic argument he communicated in chapter 12 of his *Philosophy of*

Religion in the context of the use of analogy in religious language. It is important to note that to

draw out certain features of this world and predicate them to an uncaused cause and not to

predicate other features <u>seems</u> to require a prior conception of the uncaused causer before the

selection is made. Christians or theists with a biblical view of god see attributes in nature which

they apply analogically to God, and rule out others. However, those who do not have this special

revelation or who reject it do not know what attributes of this present world to rule out using

[38]Norman Geisler, personal interview, July 15, 1983.

[39]Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 248.

reason and their limited experience alone. This is Hume's basic objection.[40]

Geisler feels he has circumvented this criticism because the necessary existence is pure actuality. He refers to this problem in the following passage:

> In fact, "since every perfection of creatures is to be found in God, albeit in another and more eminent way, whatever terms denote perfections absolutely and without any defect whatever, are predicated of God and other things; for instance, goodness, wisdom, and so forth." On the other hand, "any term that denotes such like perfections together with a mode proper to creatures, cannot be said of god except by similitude and metaphor. . ."[27] For example, some terms by their very denotation cannot be applied to an unlimited being, such as "rock" or "arm." For an "infinite rock" is contradictory, as is an "infinite arm." Other terms, however, do not necessarily denote what is limited, even though they are conceived in finite concepts. For instance, there is nothing essentially limited about being ("that which is") or beauty ("that which, being seen, pleases"), physically (i.e. actually) and not merely metaphorically (i.e., symbolically). These terms do not lose their content, because they retain the same univocal definition; neither do these terms carry with them the necessary implications of finitude, because they are not applied to God univocally (i.e., in the <u>same</u> way they are applied to creatures). They are predicated analogically, meaning not identically nor in a totally different way. How is it known that God must be (in an infinitely perfect way) what these terms denote? Because God is the cause of these perfections and causes communicate according to their own perfections in a mode appropriate to the effects they cause.[41]

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27 Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 29.

Therefore, according to Geisler, Hume is wrong to attribute every finite thing or characteristic by analogy back to a first cause. Further, Geisler argues that evil is a privation of a good thing. Armed with this concept, Geisler is able to deal with metaphysical and moral problems of evil. This is important because since the God that exists earlier in his proof is pure actuality, he can have no privations. Therefore, Geisler reasons, he must be omnibenevolent. As pointed out,

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[40]Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, pp. 37-39.

[41]Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 282.

Geisler uses attributes in the world or creation to unpack what God must be like, being careful to avoid privations or limited concepts. Geisler concludes that he is infinite, unchanging, all-powerful, all knowing, and all-perfect. The biggest problem here is that Geisler admits ". . .if there is such a thing as good or that which is desired for its own sake, then it must be caused by the creator of all that is." That is a big "if." Geisler's statement that it is undeniable that some things are desired for their own sake (for example, personhood) is another fact taken from experience again. Is this special pleading? Is this a new second principle of metaphysics? Geisler's justification for this move is inadequate if he wants to maintain a definitive argument.[42]

7. <u>This infinitely perfect Being is appropriately called "God."</u> If one grants Geisler the point that the uncaused cause that exists does have the qualities of perfection predicated to him from nature, and not the imperfections and ugliness of this universe predicated to him analogically, then he is truly worthy of worship and of ultimate value. This would follow reasonably.

8. <u>Therefore, God exists</u>. This is a summary statement of what Geisler has already concluded.

9. <u>This God who exists is identical to the God described in the Christian Scriptures</u>. Geisler hold this view for the following reasons: (1) the God of the Bible and the God of "reason" have identical attributes, and (2) there cannot be two infinitely perfect, changeless, eternal beings in the universe at the same time and in the same sense. The problem in this presentation is not in the second premise listed but in the first. Geisler does not show that the Biblical God has the same attributes listed; presumably, he assumes that this is obvious. Though

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[42]Ibid., p. 249.

he does list some Scriptures, it is far short of a theology proper.

10. <u>Therefore, the God described in the Bible exists</u>. This would follow if one accepts Geisler's previous tenets as undeniably true. Additionally, Geisler wisely points out that, "This does not mean that everything the Bible <u>claims</u> that this God said or did, he actually said or did."[43]

Let us summarize Geisler's contributions to the discipline of theistic apologetics.

1. Geisler's evaluation of the differing methodology of apologetics is very helpful, especially for a student. This is because Geisler's approach is systematic, broad in its scope, and it attempts to give a balanced analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. He includes selected readings for each chapter in *Christian Apologetics*. However, Geisler finds each methodological position inadequate to provide definitive defense for theism. Geisler's main point in dealing with evidential and combinational methodology is that the concept of "interprafact" forces them to argue in a large circle. Geisler makes a convincing argument for steering clear of using facts from experience to argue for a world view but then uses the same kind of evidence himself in his case for an undeniable argument for theism. Geisler may answer this serious criticism of his method in the future and the outcome of this criticism may not be as grave as it seems. Geisler needs to publish material that will fully answer this objection.

2. Geisler's methodology of undeniability and unaffirmability is a uniquely powerful tool for theistic apologists. It may not be able to "force" someone to believe certain "ways," but those who would wish to escape this line of argumentation pay a very high price (possibly intelligibility) to try to maneuver away from Geisler's position.

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[43]Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 250.

3. Geisler's critique of a large number of world view schemes is a valuable contribution. This is because of the clarity of Geisler's systematic approach to the broad range of possible philosophical positions. Geisler's critiques are often devastating, even though brief, and indicate his awareness of the subtlety of the non-theistic web of presuppositional problems.

4. Geisler's defense of the cosmological argument is very strong. Overall, it contains defendable elements but it fails to be undeniably true (by his own standards) at each point. Some points could be made stronger by expanding on the information given. For example, his connection between the God of "reason" and the Biblical God could have been made much stronger by including a much deeper analysis of the problem and by including something of a theology proper. Geisler should be credited with making a strong argument that uses existential causality rather than the principle of sufficient reason and having an argument that makes distinctions between logical and existentially undeniable categories.