

CHAPTER III
PILOT STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
GEISLER'S THEISTIC ARGUMENT

The previous two chapters of this thesis analyzed Geisler's philosophic apologetic with attention given to the meaningfulness of religious language in Chapter I and special attention given to Geisler's theistic argument in Chapter II. In that second chapter, Geisler's argument was analyzed in regard to its soundness and validity and found to be substantially convincing. Even though his argument is philosophically valid, the question remains as to whether this type of argument persuades non-believers to become believers, or whether it actually provides support for believers. Does it change the way theists justify their belief that God exists?

Because of some of the reservations stated in Chapter II, it is necessary to present Geisler's argument not as undeniably true at all points, but as a very good reason to believe in the existence of God. With this in mind, Geisler's argument was condensed in written form and tested as a pilot study to show that it will persuade non-believers significantly toward belief. And further, it will help theists to see that their belief that God exists, though not demonstrable in a mathematical sense, is not without "good reason." It is the objective of this part of the research to survey the beliefs of two groups of twenty people--one group theistic in belief, and the other, agnostic or atheistic. Both groups will be surveyed concerning present belief that God exists and justification for that position. Geisler's argument will be presented in condensed written form

and following discussion, both groups will be surveyed for changes in attitudes both in belief that God exists and justification for that position.

This pilot study will provide valuable evidence in assessing the practicality of this type of argument because it gives empirical evidence as to whether people's attitudes change when confronted with valid argumentation of this type. Using this research as a guideline, one could also evaluate the validity and the effectiveness of other apologetic material. This research could be helpful in the teaching of apologetics because it unites the theoretical and the practical aspects of apologetics.

The pilot study was conducted among two groups of twenty college level educated (or above) people, one agnostic or atheistic, the other, theistic. In most cases, both group studies were conducted individually or in groups of two. For the most part, the theistic group was comprised of upper class students at Kansas State University who were involved with Campus Crusade for Christ, although the theistic group did include several medical students and one physician. The agnostic group included students and faculty from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri; the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri; the University of Missouri in Kansas City, Missouri; Kansas University in Lawrence, Kansas; Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas; and Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. The group included two doctors of philosophy, one in history and the other in computer science.

The people in the agnostic and atheistic group were selected from random interviews on the various campuses. After identifying themselves as agnostic or atheistic, they were asked to participate in the study. In both the theistic and the agnostic or atheistic groups, the individuals were to fill out survey Q₁ before reading Geisler's argument. Q₁ was then collected and filed.

Next, a copy of Geisler's argument was handed to the subject and he was allowed as much time as necessary to read and study the article. A pad of paper was offered to each participant in order for him to take notes and for reference during the subsequent discussion. When each subject felt he had had sufficient time to study the argument, a discussion followed.

The researcher made clarifications and defended the paper as written. When the discussion was finished, each subject was asked to fill out survey Q₂ (which is the same as an unfilled-out Q₁).

The survey was collected and stapled to Q₁. Attention was given to making sure that Q₁ and Q₂ were correctly correlated to each individual that took part in the study.

Scores were calculated for each group for each survey and for each question on the survey. The mean scores for each group and each question were calculated and are recorded on four tables (below). The following is a copy of the article given to each participant to read.

EXHIBIT I

Geisler's Argument in Condensed and Revised Form

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

It should be said at the outset that this is not intended to be a proof for the existence of God. I think that is not possible. I also think that a proof for the existence of myself will fail but I think that I have good reasons to think that I am presently existing. Well then, there might be some good reasons to think that God exists, too. Before getting to them it might be good to reflect on the term "reasons for thinking or believing something."

If I explained to you that this room was crawling with bugs and that I was experiencing delirium tremens from withdrawal, I think it unlikely you would believe the former. It may be

true, and I have certainly given you a reason why I believe bugs to be crawling about. It just does not seem to be a good reason. That is, there is no formal argument, testimony, evidence, or the like. Whenever one begins to explain his beliefs, especially in regard to the natural and supernatural possibilities of this existence, it is often attended to with the attitude that the reason or motive for such belief amounts to that of a delirium tremens. I have Freud to thank for the formal argument for that, but nonetheless, I will try to present what I think are some good reasons for believing that God exists. Further, since this is a classroom situation, I have tried to be brief and will attend to questions that arise at the end of the presentation. Here is the argument:

1. Some things undeniably exist. I accept that it is rationally possible that I do not exist since it is not a contradiction to say that I do not exist. However, it is actually nonsensical for me to affirm that I do not exist since in the process of denying my own existence I affirm it. It is self-defeating and therefore meaningless to affirm that I do not exist.
2. My non-existence is possible. Something undeniably exists. This existence must fit into one of three logical categories: impossible, possible, or necessary. And reality is subject to the law of non-contradiction; reality cannot be contradictory. I will argue that my existence is neither impossible nor necessary. First my existence is not impossible. I do exist and undeniably so. But what exists proves that its existence is actually possible. Only impossible things (like square circles) cannot exist. My actuality proves that it is possible for me to exist. Hence, my existence is not impossible.

Secondly, my existence is not necessary. A necessary existence is one that cannot not exist. The nonexistence of a necessary Being is impossible. If there is a necessary Being, then it

would be pure actuality with no potentiality whatsoever. A necessary Being would be changeless. It is obvious that I am not a necessary existence because I am a changing being. For example, I have "come to realize" different things, but I have in fact then changed in knowledge.

3. Whatever has the possibility for nonexistence is currently caused to exist by another.

Whatever has the possibility of nonexistence must be caused to exist by another because potentiality is not actuality. What is but could possibly not be is only a potential existence. It has existence but it also has the possibility of nonexistence. Now the very existence of this potential existence is either self-caused, caused by another, or uncaused; there are no other possibilities. But it cannot be self-caused since this is impossible. Neither can it be uncaused. For if it were uncaused, then mere possibility would be the ground of actuality. However, nothing cannot produce something. It must be concluded, then, that whatever has the possibility for non-existence must be caused to exist by another.

4. There cannot be an infinite regress of current causes of existence. It is not necessarily contradictory to speak of an infinite regress of causes of becoming, because no cause is simultaneously existing and not existing. Nevertheless, a chain of causes whether short or long, wherein every cause is simultaneously both actual and potential with regard to existence, is clearly impossible. If there were a series of causes wherein each cause was both causing existence and having its existence caused at the same moment, then it would follow that they were both potential and actual simultaneously. Furthermore, at least one (if not all) of the causes would be an impossible self-caused being. For in every series where causality is occurring at least one cause must be causing (and maybe all of them). But in an infinite series every cause is being caused by another. If there were found one cause that was causing but not being caused, it

would be the uncaused cause, which the infinite series seeks to avoid. Hence, the one (or more) cause that is doing the causing of the every cause must be causing itself, since it too is being caused (as are all the other causes) by the causality in the series. However, the only causality in the series is being given to the series by that cause itself. Hence, that one cause would be causing itself; that is, it would be a self-caused being, which is impossible.

5. Therefore, a first, uncaused cause of my current existence exists. This follows from the above premises. The first cause of all else that exists must itself be uncaused. It cannot be self-caused which is impossible, and it cannot be caused by another because it is necessary and a necessary Being cannot be caused by another. Whatever is caused has the potentiality for existence, but a necessary Being is pure actuality without any potentiality. Therefore, a necessary Being cannot be caused. It is literally, the not-caused cause of all that is caused. There is, then, an uncaused cause of the existence of all that is caused to exist, of which I am one undeniable example.

6. This uncaused cause must be infinite, unchanging, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-perfect. An uncaused causer of everything else must be necessary (actually necessary, not logically necessary), pure actuality since it has no potential, changeless, non-spatial, non-temporal, infinite, and as mentioned uncaused. In regard to all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-perfect, consider the following:

By power I mean that which can effect a change in another, that is, what can cause something else to be or not to be in some way. But this is precisely what the uncaused cause is, namely, that which is causing the very being of all that exists. Furthermore, this uncaused cause is infinite in its being. Hence, it has unlimited causal power in its very being which can effect anything that it is possible to effect. Of course, it does not have power to do what is impossible.

The impossible cannot be. This unlimited cause cannot not be; but, it has the power to make come to be whatever can come to be.

Moreover, this infinite cause of all that is must be all-knowing. It must be knowing because knowing beings exist. I am a knowing being, and I know it. I cannot meaningfully deny that I can know without engaging in an act of knowledge. Total agnosticism is impossible. But whatever I am, I have been caused to be. I cause my own becoming (this is what freedom is), but only the necessary Being is the cause of my being. Therefore, the actual ability to know (which I possess) is caused to be by the cause of all finite beings. Nevertheless, a cause can communicate to its effect only what it has to communicate. If the effect actually possesses some characteristic, then this characteristic is properly attributed to its cause. The cause cannot give what it does not have to give. The cause of knowing, however, is infinite. Therefore, it must know infinitely. It is also simple, eternal, and unchanging. Hence, whatever it knows--and it knows anything that is possible to know--it must know simply, eternally, and in an unchanging way.

For the same reason that the cause of knowing must be all-knowing, the cause of goodness must be all-good. Let me define good as that which is desired for its own sake. It is undeniable that some things are desired for their own sake. Persons are an end and not a means; they have intrinsic value and not merely extrinsic value. Now 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. (It must be remembered that we are the cause of the becoming of the good acts via our free choice, but the Creator is the cause of the being of all-good). All actualities actualized in the effect must preexist in the cause. But since the cause of all goodness is infinite, it follows that he must be

infinitely good. For whatever the infinite cause has, he must be in the infinity of his being. Since He is simple and has not parts, he cannot be partly anything. Whatever He is, He is entirely and completely. Therefore, the infinite and necessary cause of all good must be infinitely and necessarily good. The unchanging cause of all changing things must be unchangingly good. The cause of personhood cannot be less than personal himself. He may be more than is meant by finite person, but he cannot be less; he may be superpersonal but he is not subpersonal.

7. This infinitely perfect being is appropriately called "God". By God I mean what is worthy of worship, that is, what has ultimate “worthship.” In other words, "God" is the Ultimate who is deserving of an ultimate commitment. For what is infinitely good (and personal) and is the ground and creator of all finite goods and persons, is certainly worthy of worship. Nothing has more intrinsic value than the ultimate ground and source of all value. Hence, nothing is more worthy of worship than the infinitely perfect uncaused cause of all else that exists. Therefore, it is appropriate to call this infinitely perfect cause "God."

8. Therefore, God exists. I think we have good reason to believe that the God that is often intuitively felt, really does exist.

Well, that concludes the argument. Of course, I want to give credit to Norman Geisler who developed this argument in his two books, *Philosophy of Religion* and *Christian Apologetics*. I think he has a good argument, one that he expands upon in his books. What I would like to do is discuss some of the features of his argument that you feel would be helpful and attend to some of the problems it raises.

EXHIBIT II

Survey Designated as Q₁ and Q₂

Survey of Religious Thinking

1. I believe that there is a God that exists.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

yes unsure no

2. The existence of God can be proved.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

yes unsure no

3. The non-existence of God can be proved.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

yes unsure no

4. There are good reasons (arguments, evidence, etc.) to believe that God exists.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

yes unsure no

5. There are good reasons (arguments, evidence, etc.) to believe that God does not exist.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

no unsure no

6. Whenever the Bible makes an assertion of fact my level of trust in that assertion is:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

yes unsure no

EXHIBIT III

Tables Depicting Cumulative Scores of Survey

Theist Q ₁			Theist Q ₂		
Question	Total	Mean	Question	Total	Mean
1	20	1	1	20	1
2	111	5.55	2	173	8.65
3	197	9.8	3	192	9.6
4	20	1	4	21	1.05
5	175	8.75	5	163	8.15
6	25	1.25	6	23	1.15

Agnostic or Atheist
Q₁

Question Total Mean

1	149	7.45
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2	158	7.9
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3	153	7.65
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4	119	5.95
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5	90	4.5
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6	150	7.5
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Agnostic or Atheist
Q₂

Question Total Mean

1	137	6.85
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2	147	7
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3	150	7.5
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4	92	4.6
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5	107	5.35
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6	138	6.9
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EXHIBIT IV

Theistic Group

Graph of Survey Results

Solid line indicates mean scores of Q_1 taken prior to reading Geisler's argument.

Broken line indicates mean scores of Q_2 taken after the reading and discussion of Geisler's argument.

1. I believe that there is a God that exists.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
yes				unsure					no

2. The existence of God can be proved.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
yes				unsure					no

3. The non-existence of God can be proved.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
yes				unsure					no

4. There are good reasons (arguments, evidence, etc.) to believe that God exists.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
yes				unsure					no

5. There are good reasons (arguments, evidence, etc.) to believe that God does not exist.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
no				unsure					no

6. Whenever the Bible makes an assertion of fact my level of trust in that assertion is:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
yes				unsure					no

EXHIBIT V

Agnostic or Atheistic Group

Graph of Survey Results

Solid line indicates mean scores of Q₁ taken prior to reading Geisler's argument.

Broken line indicates mean scores of Q₂ taken after the reading and discussion of Geisler's argument.

1. I believe that there is a God that exists.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
yes				unsure					no

2. The existence of God can be proved.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
yes				unsure					no

3. The non-existence of God can be proved.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
yes				unsure					no

4. There are good reasons (arguments, evidence, etc.) to believe that God exists.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
yes				unsure					no

5. There are good reasons (arguments, evidence, etc.) to believe that God does not exist.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
no				unsure					no

6. Whenever the Bible makes an assertion of fact my level of trust in that assertion is:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
yes				unsure					no

Summary of Results of Pilot Study

The statistics for the theistic group indicate the following:

1. Prior to reading Geisler's argument the theistic group as a whole indicated a high level of confidence in the belief that God does exist. This belief remained essentially the same after reading and discussing Geisler's argument.
2. The significant change in attitude for the theistic group occurred in the second question. Before reading Geisler's argument, the theistic group was unsure whether or not God's existence could be demonstrated using logic alone. Following the reading and discussion of the argument, the group as a whole moved significantly (3.15 points) toward rejecting that idea.
3. Geisler's argument did not add significantly to the theistic group's conviction that there are good reasons to believe that God exists (they already thought they had good reasons rooted in historical apologetics), nor did Geisler's argument significantly change their opinion that there is a lack of good reasons to believe that God does not exist.

The statistics for the agnostic and atheistic group indicate the following:

1. Prior to Geisler's argument, the agnostic and atheistic group was leaning toward unbelief in God (7.45 mean score); had low confidence in proofs or demonstrations for the existence of God (7.9) mean score); and believed that there are good reasons to believe that God does not exist (4.5 mean score).
2. Following the reading and discussion of Geisler's argument, there was a significant pattern of movement toward belief in God. The agnostics and atheists moved .6 of a point closer to being sure that God exists; they came 1.35 points toward confidence in thinking that there are good reasons to believe that God exists; and their conviction that there are good reasons to believe that

God does not exist decreased by .75 of a point. Remarkably, even though there was not direct discussion of biblical authority, trust in the assertions of the Bible went up .6 of a point.

3. In the atheistic and agnostic group, three participants indicated less belief in the existence of God after reading and discussion, twelve remained the same in belief and five increased in belief in God. Of the five who increased in belief that God exists, three made dramatic changes in opinion as reflected by scores of three or more points.

4. During the discussion subsequent to reading the article, one participant indicated that he would put his trust in Christ as his personal Savior.

The results of this pilot study--the movement closer to belief in God by the atheistic and agnostic group and the conversion of one of the participants--indicate that Geisler's argument is an effective pre-evangelistic tool among atheistic and agnostic thinkers who have a college education or more, and thereby confirm the hypothesis of this thesis. The results among the theistic group are less dramatic for the theistic group already had strong convictions that there are good reasons to believe that God exists, and their confidence was not shaken when they realized that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated by logical arguments alone.

The conclusions of this study cannot be extrapolated too broadly as to include all college age students. This is because the study was done on Midwestern United States college students that have generally been exposed to various forms of theistic evidences which may have biased their thinking more favorably toward theism. This research also may be affected by the skill of the researcher in answering questions posed by individuals in the study group. This is because in personal interaction and persuasion, the clarity of speech and demeanor of the apologist can affect the participant's response. Furthermore, the research groups of twenty people may not be

large enough to eliminate the possibility of error incurred by statistical chance. However, the positive results of the pilot study were conclusive enough to lead the researcher to propose further testing of the effectiveness of Geisler's argument among a greater number of participants and among a broader spectrum of students in the United States and around the world.