***IMAGO DEI* AND THE INTELLIGIBILITY OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE:
THE SURPRIZING UTILITY OF TRANSCENDENTAL REASONING
IN APOLOGETIC DISCOURSE**

Philosophy Interest Group

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Presented at the 52nd Annual Meeting of the Society of Pentecostal Studies

Introduction

Let me begin by stating how grateful I am to share with you this morning and certainly your attendance is much appreciated. The title of my paper is "Imago Dei and the intelligibility of human experience: the surprising utility of transcendental reasoning in apologetic discourse." This paper can be easily divided into 3 main areas of focus. First, I will survey the enigmatic doctrine of *Imago Dei*. Second, I will spend some time exploring transcendental reasoning by looking at its origins, use in philosophy and theology, and unpacking its nature and basic methodology. Prior to the paper's conclusion, a final section will address the potential usefulness of discussing the intelligibility of human experience by use of transcendental reasoning, especially from within the presuppositional school of apologetics.

Imago Dei

I come from a long line of ministers. My grandpa was a Baptist minister, whose father was a minister. Apparently, there's a long line of ministers in my family tree. I came to realize this much later in life, although I knew, of course, that my grandpa was a minister. I have many fond memories of growing up in the church, and I always had a fascination with the "big black Book." I knew there was something special about the Bible and the role it played within my family. It's no wonder that this played a role in shaping who I am and what authority structures were to exist

in my life. I remember hearing at a young age that God loved humanity. Who doesn't learn about John 3:16 in Sunday school? The question, Who is God? was, and is, a question I've dedicated so much of my life trying to figure out. But equally, the question, What is humankind? is staggeringly elusive. Or at least, in many respects, it seems that we have failed to plumb the depths in answering this question *What does it mean to be human*? I recall reading passages saying things like we humans are the "apple of God's eye" (Ps. 17:8), "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14) and made "a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5). When we approach Scripture to examine God's intention for humans, we come to see, as Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest put it, that "God endowed the human race, as the pinnacle of his creative activity, with special dignity and honour."[1]

The most cursory reading of Scripture points to two main *foci* from start to finish: God and Humanity. But again, what is Man? Christian anthropology, and Jewish anthropology, for that matter, have long defined what it means to be human in terms of Genesis 1:26, namely, that humanity was created "*in the image of God*." The phrase *Imago Dei*, the Latin rendering of "image of God" is still a frequently used term, alluded to often in Christian circles today. As a child I used to think that the image being referenced was in terms of physicality, visual appearance, to be precise. I think most children do, at least initially. But the further I researched, the more I saw that it's not referring to a physical image of God, despite what Mormons might want to say on the matter. Even more, as I began to find the answer to the question What does *Imago Dei* mean, I was met by a recurring acknowledgement of scholars concerning its ambiguity. This means that, for

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[1] Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Integrative Theology* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 123.

over 2000 years, believers have been referring to a doctrine concerning which there is a glaring lack of agreement. But we shall get to this shortly.

In answer to the all-important question, "What does it mean to be human?" Breshears and Driscoll write, "That question has implications for seemingly every discipline, from theology to sociology, history, biology, psychology, and the like. It is this doctrine that answers questions regarding how mankind is different from God the creator and his creation. It also reveals why we can believe in such things as compassion and equality—truths that an evolutionary worldview simply cannot permit."[2] So what does it mean to be the image of God? Wayne Grudem tells us that "the expression refers to every way in which man is like God."[3] In J. Rodman Williams' words, it "means that his basic function is to reflect God. Man is God's reflection on earth and in the cosmos; he is the creaturely repetition of God the creator. Even as a father or mother may be imaged in a son or daughter, so is God imaged in human persons."[4] Notice here that Williams takes the image language in *functional* terms. That is, humans are meant to *do something*, namely reflect God. So taken, the nature of man is to reflect the nature of God, albeit on a finite scale. K. Scott Oliphint has described *Imago Dei* in terms of a calling: "The calling of the human race is to express the likeness and image of God."[5] Although Grudem, Williams and Oliphint provide helpful introductory definitions of what it means for a human to be image of God, things aren't that easy. That defining *Imago Dei* has been puzzling is acknowledged among scholars. For instance, Millard Erickson admits the difficulty in reaching a firm assessment regarding the nature of the image of

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[2] Gary Breshears and Mark Driscoll, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 111.

[3] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grant Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 443.

[4] J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 201.

[5] K. Scott Oliphint, *God With Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 51.

God, noting that, "the existence of a wide diversity of interpretations is an indication that there are no direct statements in scripture to resolve the issue. Our conclusions, then," he says, "must be reasonable inferences drawn from what little the Bible does say on the subject."[6] Roger Olson has echoed similar sentiments: "The specific meaning of the *Imago Dei* has been much debated among Christian theologians. Nowhere does scripture specifically define it or even identify which aspect of humanity bears the image."[7] He does not leave it at that, however. Olson is quick to maintain that the *goodness* of humanity was sustained, even after the Fall: "The extent to which the image of God is affected by the fall into sin," he tells us, "is a subject of great debate within Christianity and among Christian theologians as well, but all agree—including Calvin—that original humanity, true humanity, essential humanity is good because humanity is created in God's own image and likeness."[8] So what are the wide range of interpretations of this doctrine? To this we shall now turn.

While it is not surprising that Jews long held that humans were created in the image of God, "Irenaeus [of Lyons] was the first Christian thinker to work out a relatively detailed explanation of the image of God in humanity, and all Christian writers after him who wrote about human nature added their own touches of interpretation to what he began."[9] Concerning the early

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[6] Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 531-532.

[7] Roger Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic 2016), 220.

[8] Olson, 209. Olson points out that Paul Tillich, in describing the nature of present humanity, coined a phrase that humanity is "essentially good but existentially estranged" (Olson, 210). Erickson asserts that humanity in its present state is "really human": "The Bible's depiction of the human race is that it today is actually in an abnormal condition. The real human is not what we now find in human society, but the being that came from the hand of God, unspoiled by sin and the fall. In a very real sense, the only true human beings were Adam and Eve before the fall, and Jesus. All the others are twisted, distorted, corrupted samples of humanity. It therefore is necessary to look the original human state and at Christ if we would correctly assess what it means to be human" (Erickson, 518).

[9] Olson, 208.

witness of patristic fathers on the topic, Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest offer some helpful

guidance:

> Many early fathers, influenced in part by Greek philosophy, defined *imago Dei* chiefly in terms of the natural faculties of reason and free will. Justin Martyr wrote: "When he [God] created man, he endued him with the sense of understanding, of choosing the truth, and of doing right." Athenagoras identified the distinctive of the human person as follows: ". . . Whose nature involves the possession of mind and who partakes of rational judgment." Irenaeus, the first father to discuss the imago systematically, posited a distinction between "image" and "likeness" (Genesis 1:26). He defined the former as the endowments of a rational mind and a free will retained after the fall, and the latter as the gratuitous life of the Spirit lost at Eden but restored by grace. By so arguing, Irenaeus laid the foundation for the medieval differentiation between the person's natural endowments and the superadded gift of righteousness. By implication, Irenaeus held that the unsaved person ontologically is dichotomous (consisting of body and soul), but that the believer quickened by the indwelling Spirit becomes trichotomous (consisting of body, soul, and spirit).[10]

So, what interpretation predominated the medieval period? Here, it is no surprise, the view of

Thomas Aquinas prevailed. "The image, according to Aquinas, consists chiefly in the person's

intellectual nature. Inherent in the rational mind is not only the capacity for virtue, but also the

aptitude for understanding and loving God . . . Furthermore, the 'likeness' represents a

'supernatural endowment of grace,' the content of which is actual love for and obedience to

God."[11]

In what way(s) did the Reformers view the *Imago*? Lewis and Demarest tell us that Martin

Luther identified the image of God in qualitative terms, not in terms of capacities (or functions):

> Luther insists that the imago consists of the righteousness, holiness, and wisdom God gave to Adam, but which subsequently were lost at the fall. Comments Luther, 'My understanding of the image of God is this: the Adam . . . not only knew God and believed that he was good, but that he also lived a life that was wholly godly;

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[10] Lewis & Demarest, 124. On an interesting note, "Irenaeus assumed that the *Imago Dei* refers to the reasoning capacity of human beings as well as to their souls or spirits while the likeness of God refers to their destinies of being Christ like in redemption" (Olson, 220).

[11] Lewis & Demarest, 126.

> that is, he was without the fear of death or of any other danger, and was content with God's favor.' The wisdom, moral uprightness, freedom of will, and fitness for eternity (the content of the Imago), forfeited by sin, is restored to the believer in this life by the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:48; Ephesians 4: 21-24).[12]

As we have seen up to this point, the view most commonly set forth in the first millennium of the Church associated intellectual (and volitional) capacities as defining features of what it means for a human to be "in God's image." Aquinas added that the intellect affords for the possibility of more deeply loving God, and Luther linked the image of God with moral virtues. Millard Erickson has pointed out that *Imago Dei* has been viewed in one of three primary ways.

> There are three general ways of viewing the nature of the image. Some consider the image to consist of certain characteristics within the very nature of the human, either physical or psychological/spiritual. This view we will call the *substantive* view of the image. Others regard the image not as something inherently or intrinsically present in humans, but as the experiencing of a relationship between the human and God, or between two or more humans. This is the *relational* view. Finally, some consider the image to be, not something a human is or experiences, but something a human does. This is the *functional* view.[13]

Let us explore Erickson's analysis on these "primary views" a litter deeper. "The substantive view has been dominant during most of the history of Christian theology," Erickson tells us. "The common element in the several varieties of this view is that the image is identified as some definite characteristic or quality within the makeup of the human. . . . More common substantive views of the image of God isolated in terms of some psychological or spiritual quality in human nature, especially reason. Indeed, the human species is classified biologically as *homo sapiens*, the thinking being."[14] This, we have seen, was the view espoused by the patristic fathers on through the Middle Ages. The ratiocination of man was that defining feature which set him apart from all

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[12] Ibid., 127.

[13] Erickson, 520.

[14] Ibid., 521.

the other animals in creation, thus, in their view, it must be *the* defining feature of *Imago Dei*. On the second view, Erickson contends that many modern theologians "do not conceive of the image of God as something resident within human nature. Indeed," he says, "they do not ordinarily ask what the human is or what sort of a nature a human may have. Rather, they think of the image of God as the experiencing of a relationship. Humans can be said to be in the image or to display the image when standing in a particular relationship, which indeed *is* the image."[15] Hence, Image-language denotes action, namely the act of relating, as well as a state of being, that is, the state of being existentially related. In fact, in Erickson's assessment, "existentialism is the philosophy underlying the relational view of the image of God."[16] It is, after all, a characteristic move in existentialism(s) to deemphasize essences or substances. Expressing their concern about reducing the *Imago Dei* to the existential domain, Lewis and Demarest point out that human worth is inextricably connected to their nature as human beings. As they put it, "Some contemporary thinkers insist that in lieu of the being and nature of persons we must speak only of their existential situation, i.e., of their self-understanding, decisions, and guilt. Traditionally, however, Christians have affirmed that the Bible levies no embargo against viewing the person ontologically. The axiological worth of man depends on man's ontological nature."[17] Now to Erickson's final type: "A third type of view of the image has had quite a long history and has recently increased in popularity," writes Erickson. "This is the idea that the image is not something present in the makeup of the human, nor the experiencing of relationship with God or with fellow humans, but the image consists in something one does. It is a human function, the most frequently mentioned

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[15] Ibid., 523-524.

[16] Ibid., 527.

[17] Lewis & Dearest, 123.

being the exercise of dominion over the creation."[18] This view can be found in the writings of Norman Snaith, when he writes, "biblically speaking, the phrase 'image of God' has nothing to do with morals or any sort of ideals; it refers only to man's dominion of the world and everything that is in it. It says nothing about the nature of God, but everything concerning the function of man."[19] Additionally, a more contemporary representative of this view is Michael Heiser, well known Old Testament scholar who wrote *The Unseen Realm*, among other things. Heiser states,

> Among the list of proposed answers to what image bearing means are a number of *abilities* or *properties*: intelligence, reasoning ability, emotions, communing with God, self-awareness, language/communication ability, and free will. The problem with defining the image by any of these qualities is that, on the one hand, nonhuman beings like animals possess *some* of these abilities, although not to the same extent as humans . . . Defining image bearing as *any* ability is a flawed approach.[20]

Heiser's argument is that being *Imago Dei* is a kind of position we hold in the order of creation. "Humankind was created *as* God's image. If we think of imaging as a verb or function, that translation makes sense. We are created to image God, to be his imagers. It is what we are by definition. The image is not an ability we have, but a *status*. We are God's representatives on earth. To be human is to image God."[21] So, for Heiser, being image of God has as much to do with man's sacred role of stewarding the "seen realm" as it does his ontology. Arguably, more so. But he doesn't stop there. He suggests that humans are not the only image-bearers of God, to the chagrin of some. As he puts it,

> God alone created humankind to function as his administrators on earth. But he has also created the other *elohim* of the unseen realm. They are also like him. They carry out his will in that realm, acting as his representatives. They are his heavenly counsel in the unseen world. We are God's counsel and administration in this realm.

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[18] Erickson, 527.

[19] Norman Snaith, "The Image of God," *Expository Times* 86.1 (October 1974), 24, cited in Erickson, 528.

[20] Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 41.

[21] Heiser, 42-43.

> Consequently, the plurals inform us that both God's families—the human and the nonhuman—share imaging status, though the realms are different. As in heaven, so on earth.[22]

It seems to me that few would question that the angelic host, the Divine Council, or *b'ne elohim*, do in fact carry out the bidding of the Almighty in the unseen realm, but calling any of them image of God seems to many to go beyond what scripture clearly affirms. They are of course God's creation, but nowhere else in scripture are they described as an image of God. Is it prudent that we should? I'm not convinced it is.

Roger Olson believes we can do better in terms of assessing the *Imago*. He advocates that instead of trying to limit our understanding of what image of God is in terms of one type or another, he promotes a both-and approach. In his words,

> The problem in these various definitions is that most of them are too narrow and limited. Why identify the image of God in humanity with one aspect or function? Why not simply regard it as personhood—that psycho-spiritual ability and function that transcends mere nature and physicality through reasoning ability, need and capacity for community and cultural creativity, development of language and communication, worship and self-transcendence, freedom and responsibility? . . . It is best to draw the truth from many, if not all of the [definitions] together, and regard the *Imago Dei* as a multifaceted, diverse collection of Godlike qualities in humanity that together may, with proper qualifications, be called personhood.[23]

As I hope you have seen thus far, many of these bright minds have highlighted the extraordinary aspects of what it means to be human. We are thinking, feeling, dreaming, desiring, worshipping, loving, relational, intentional beings endowed with rights, roles, responsibilities, and capacities. What a wonder we are. The Christian worldview has great explanatory power when it comes to making sense of human experience. We think because God thinks. We love because God loves. We make decisions because God makes decisions. We communicate because God communicates.

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[22] Ibid., 43.

[23] Olson, 220.

We serve because God serves. We have dominion because God has dominion. Every human capacity, role, and duty makes perfect sense when humans are understood as being created in the image of God. Stated another way, the Christian worldview satisfies the preconditions for the intelligibility of human experience.

But how do nonbelievers conceive of humankind in our contemporary Western world? Olson believes there are four prominent theological/philosophical anthropologies in Western civilization today. In addition to a Judeo-Christian position, he points out at least three alternatives to this view: (1) Secular Humanism, (2) Neognosticism, and (3) Pelagianism. Let us examine each of these in the order presented. What is Secular Humanism (SH)? The phrase is abundant in our contemporary vernacular. Appealing to the work of Paul Kurtz, Olson defines SH in terms of four criteria, which include (1) antisupernaturalism [thus, a naturalistic foundation], (2) ethics as human-centered [not God-centered], (3) commitment to the use of critical reason [as opposed to faith in divine revelation], and (4) humanitarian concerns [as opposed to interest in divine or spiritual concerns].[24] It should go without saying that in a SH outlook, the intelligibility of human experience will always be in naturalistic terms. Indeed, in an ever-increasing scientistic way. So what does Olson have in mind by "neognosticism"? He asserts that neognosticism views humanity from "a very diverse collection of esoteric, occult, mind-over-matter spiritual teachings and practices."[25] He explains:

> Neognosticism/new age philosophy tends to deny every major tenet of historic, classical Christianity by radically reinterpreting it in such a way that it is no longer recognizable. For example, most new age followers affirm belief in humanity created in God's image and tout the essential goodness of human nature, but they interpret that in terms of a "spark of God" that forms the "higher self" in each

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[24] Cf. Paul Kurtz, *In Defense of Secular Humanism* (Buffalo NY: Prometheus, 1983), 64; cited in Olson, 215.

[25] Olson, 217.

> person. They often then blend some kind of belief in reincarnation with that. New age anthropology reduces sin to spiritual ignorance of one's own "inner divinity" or "connection to God" and interprets the soul or spirit as an emanation of the divine substance.[26]

Thus, a neognostic view of humanity proffers a syncretized position, dually informed by Christian-theistic as well as pantheistic tenets. On the one hand, *Imago Dei* is affirmed, yet on the other, the "self" is simply an emanation of divine substance.

The final anthropology Olson highlights is Pelagianism. He suggests that this view "appears wherever people believe that human beings were born without flaw or fault and deny that sin is a condition into which all people are born. It appears wherever people imply that a simple act of will apart from special, supernatural grace from God can accomplish something truly spiritually good. It appears wherever the message is even subtly promoted that humans can by themselves initiate a right relationship with God."[27] He argues that the Pelagian anthropology is more prone to emphasize the well-known adage, "God helps those who help themselves," and this is due in part to its inherently moralistic paradigm. "Christian moralism comes in many disguises," he says, "some conservative and some liberal—but they all hide a basically Pelagian perspective on human action that attributes far too much power to humanity and too little dependence of the human being on God's supernatural grace."[28] If Olson is accurate in his assessment of contemporary theological anthropologies in the West, the random Joe on the street's answer to the question, "What is a human?" may be one of three basic answers: (1) Image of God, (2) advanced animal, or (3) God/God-spark. But what epistemological tools are assumed in the analysis of the

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[26] Ibid., 217.

[27] Ibid., 217.

[28] Ibid., 218.

questions. That is, how, logically speaking, do people reach their conclusions? A significant number simply haven't given it much thought, or, at least haven't given it enough thought. It's hard to overstate the importance of self-reflection and self-awareness.

TRANSCENDENTAL REASONING

As we have seen, Christians have historically taken humanity's ability to reason as an important part of what it means to be created in the image of God. Let us therefore spend some time reasoning about human reasoning. Epistemology, as you no doubt know, is that branch of philosophy which develops a theory of knowledge. Specifically, it focuses on logic, the nature of truth, and how a person comes to a place of knowledge, as opposed to mere belief or opinion. On the nature of logic, Steven B. Cowen and James S. Spiegel point out that "logic is the primary tool of philosophers. In logic, the philosopher has a set of basic rules and principles for governing his thinking, for dictating when and how to draw conclusions from other things believed, and for evaluating the views of others. Logic, in other words, constitutes a science of reasoning."[29] In fact, the laws of logic (the law of identity, excluded middle, and non-contradiction) are presupposed by a thinker in order to arrive at any conclusion whatsoever. Cowen and Spiegel add that logic is crucial in the formulation of arguments. They write, "logic is primarily about the construction and evaluation of arguments. An argument is a set of propositions or statements that purports to prove something."[30] In *The Love of Wisdom*, they point out (as most philosophers do) that the two primary forms of argumentation include deduction and induction. They define *deduction* as "a kind of reasoning by which we draw inferences (i.e., conclusions) that are guaranteed by a set of

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[29] Cohen & Spiegel, *The Love of Wisdom: A Christian Introduction to Philosophy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 17.

[30] Ibid., 19.

premises," and *induction* as "a type of reasoning by which we infer conclusions that are likely, but not guaranteed, based on the premises."[31]   D.Q. McInerny likewise highlights inference and argumentation, saying, "the basic move of reasoning, the inferential move, is that by which we go from one idea that is known to be true to a second idea, which is recognized as true on the force of the first idea. This move constitutes the heart of argumentation."[32] Somewhat surprisingly, neither abductive reasoning nor transcendental reasoning are covered in either of the two aforementioned sources (but many others omit these too). While I'm not surprised that transcendental reasoning is not addressed, it is a bit curious that abductive reasoning was omitted. What is abductive reasoning? Igor Douven informs us that

> In the philosophical literature, the term "abduction" is used in two related but different senses. In both senses, the term refers to some form of explanatory reasoning. However, in the historically first sense, it refers to the place of explanatory reasoning in *generating* hypotheses, while in the sense in which it is used most frequently in the modern literature it refers to the place of explanatory reasoning in *justifying* hypotheses. In the latter sense, abduction is also often called "Inference to the Best Explanation."[33]

Abductive reasoning is used in everyday life, just like deduction and induction. Kenneth Richard Samples provides another helpful definition:

> Unlike deduction, abduction provides no certainty in its conclusions but, like induction, yields more or less probable truth. In contrast to induction, however, abductive reasoning doesn't try to predict specific probable outcomes. Rather, this method tries to provide the best broad explanatory hypothesis. Abductive reasoning can be helpful for determining which explanation of a given event is most likely true. For example, a person may use an abductive approach in seeking the best explanation for the origin of man (naturalistic evolution versus biblical creation).

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[31] Ibid., 19.

[32] D.Q. McInerny, *Being Logical: A Guide to Good Thinking* (New York: Random House, 2004), 47.

[33] Igor Douven, "Abduction", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/abduction/>.

An abductive approach may also be used in determining the best explanation for the life of Jesus of Nazareth (divine Messiah versus legendary figure).[34]

So abductive reasoning is the sort of thinking used in crime-solving, history writing, adjudication, and whenever a doctor makes a diagnosis. In fact, "Philosophers as well as psychologists tend to agree that abduction is frequently employed in everyday reasoning. Sometimes our reliance on abductive reasoning is quite obvious and explicit. But in some daily practices, it may be so routine and automatic that it easily goes unnoticed."[35]

Where does transcendental reasoning fall into the grand scheme of argumentation? Who is most noted for its utilization and why is it rarely discussed today? What is it and how have Christians attempted to utilize it in theology and philosophy? John Frame informs us that "Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is responsible for introducing the term 'transcendental' to philosophical discussion."[36] He explains Kant's rationale:

Seeking to repel the skepticism of David Hume, but unable to accept the methods of his rationalist teacher Christian Wolff, Kant came to advocate transcendental argument as a new means of grounding the certainty of mathematics, science, and philosophy. All of us, he argued, must concede that knowledge is possible. Else there is no point to any discussion or inquiry. Now, given that knowledge is possible, said Kant, we should ask what the conditions are that make knowledge possible. What must the world be like, and what must the workings of our minds be like, if human knowledge is to be possible? Kant argued that among the conditions of knowledge are the transcendental aesthetic, in which the mind orders sense experience into a spatio-temporal sequence, and the transcendental analytic, in which the mind imposes categories such as substance and cause upon experience. So we know by transcendental argument that the world (more precisely, the world of appearances, the phenomena, not the world 'in itself') is a collection of substances located in space and time, with causal relationships to one another. We

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[34] Kenneth Richard Samples, *A World of Difference: Putting Christian Truth-Claims to the Worldview Test* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 52.

[35] Ibid.

[36] John M. Frame, "Transcendental Arguments: An Essay." *Reformed Perspectives* (n.d.) http://reformed perspectives.org/files/reformedperspectives/hall_of_frame/Frame.Apologetics2004.TranscendentalArguments.pdf (accessed March 14, 2023), 1.

> do not get this knowledge from sense-experience alone (Hume) or from rational deduction alone (Leibniz, Wolff), but from an argument assuming the reality of knowledge and showing the necessary presuppositions of that assumption. Transcendental argument became a staple of the writings of the idealist school that followed Kant, and from there it made its way into Christian apologetics. James Orr (1844-1913) employed it. But the twentieth century apologist who placed the most weight on the transcendental argument (which he sometimes called "reasoning by presupposition") was Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987).[37]

As Norman Geisler points out, transcendental arguments are rightly kept in a class of their own. In his words, "A transcendental argument is neither deductive nor inductive. It is more reductive, arguing back to the necessary preconditions of something being the case . . ." Elsewhere, Frame offers additional insight into Kant's justification for employing such a method. "Kant's rationalist and empiricist predecessors," writes Frame, "saw philosophy essentially as an exploration of discovery: starting with one landmark and following a trail to the next. The starting point, the foundation was self-evident axioms (rationalism) or sense experience (empiricism). The method was to follow the axioms or the sense data wherever they seemed to lead."[38] But Kant had a serious problem with this approach to reasoning. He saw neither rationalism nor empiricism as supreme.

> Kant (and again, this is typical of greater philosophers) backs away from both of these methods to ask a larger question: granted that knowledge is possible (and if it isn't, why be a philosopher at all?), what are the conditions that make it possible? That is, if we are capable of knowing the world, what must the world (including ourselves) be like? This is what Kant called the transcendental method: not following the impressions of the senses or the steps of a deduction, but asking what such activities presuppose.[39]

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[37] Ibid., 1.

[38] John Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology: Spiritual Warfare in the Life of the Mind* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 254.

[39] Ibid., 254.

Thus, Kant was the first to readily employ the transcendental method. Some, like Michael R. Butler, have claimed that Aristotle utilized the same kind of method on occasion.[40] Although his view of God is somewhat enigmatic, "Kant himself concluded that it was necessary to posit God and immortality in order to make sense out of moral obligations."[41] He's in good company. Many theistic philosophers have done the same.

Two scholars noted for their work on transcendental arguments include Ross Harrison and Anthony C. Grayling. Harrison has pointed out that TAs have a utility for undermining the skepticism of a given skeptic by pointing out their presuppositions. About this Harrison writes, "Transcendental arguments seek to answer skepticism by showing that the things doubted by the skeptic are in fact preconditions for the skepticism to make sense. Hence the skepticism is either meaningless or false. A transcendental argument works by finding the preconditions of meaningful thought or judgment."[42] Grayling has argued that what makes TAs distinctive is not their structure or method, but what they seek to achieve. Put plainly, "to argue, or reason, or proceed transcendentally, or to employ standard philosophical techniques transcendentally, is just to argue or proceed, etcetera, with a certain aim in mind and a certain subject-matter to hand . . . there is nothing distinctive about the form of transcendental arguments, and that what is distinctive about them is their aim and subject-matter."[43] Grayling further links the attention of transcendental arguments upon *experience* and how such experiences can be understood. "The aim of

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[40] Michael R. Butler, "The Transcendental Argument for God's Existence," *The Standard Bearer: A Festschrift for Greg L. Bahnsen* ed. Steven M. Schlissel (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2002), 90. In footnote 41 he states: "In *Metaphysics* (v. 1061a 5-1062b) Aristotle demonstrates the transcendental necessity of the law of noncontradiction."

[41] Norman Geisler, *The Big Book of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 551.

[42] Ross Harrison, "Transcendental Arguments," *Rutledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (New York: Rutledge, 1998), 9:452.

[43] Anthony C. Grayling, *The Refutation of Skepticism* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 94; cited in Butler, 91.

transcendental arguments," Grayling argues, "is to establish the conditions necessary for experience, or experience of a certain kind, in general; and, at their most controversial, to establish conclusions about the nature and existence of an external world, or other minds, derived from paying attention to what has to be the case for there to be experience, or for experience to be as it is."[44] That transcendental arguments focus on experience is helpful for the evangelist and apologist to begin bridge-building in terms of discussion of people's experience. And because the nature of transcendental arguments focus on the *intelligibility* of experience, it would appear to be a natural (and advantageous) onramp for apologetic discourse.

While Harrison and Grayling's commentary on TAs are insightful, Michael Butler's work on transcendental arguments is erudite and exceptional. He has made the case that some contemporary philosophers have simply misunderstood the nature and sophistication of Kant's TAs. He tells us that ". . . a number of philosophers have accused contemporary advocates of TAs, such as Strassen, of denuding Kant's TAs of their distinctiveness."[45] Some scholars claim his arguments are not transcendental at all. To this Butler strongly objects. "[S]ome go so far as to claim that the contemporary reformulations do not deserve the title of transcendental argument at all . . . Kant is, among other things, the father of TAs. Thus it would be a rather odd conclusion to state that his arguments were not TAs. Indeed, one is tempted to say that whatever Kant is doing in the first *Critique*, he is arguing transcendentally."[46] It may be one thing to question the overall effectiveness or cogency of transcendental arguments, but it's another thing entirely to question consistently whether or not his arguments warrant the term.

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[44] Anthony Grayling, "Transcendental Arguments," *A Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Limited, 1992), 507.

[45] Butler, 95.

[46] Ibid., 95

What form does a TA take? "Transcendental arguments typically have the following form. For X (some aspect of human experience) to be the case, Y must also be the case since Y is the precondition of X. Since X is the case, Y is the case."[47] So Butler tells us that "the transcendental argument . . . attempts to demonstrate that we could not account for the world, causation, or whatever human experience we wish to speak about, without presupposing the existence of God. Without this presupposition, the world would be, in this other sense, unintelligible."[48]

So why did transcendental arguments fall out of the limelight and why are they so rarely talked about today. There are a number of reasons why transcendental arguments (TAs) fell out of usage in the centuries following Kant. For one thing, Kant is notoriously difficult to follow in his writings, both in English translations and in the German originals. Furthermore, as philosopher moved on, German Idealism waned in influence. It's not that transcendental reasoning has disappeared completely. It has, however, primarily seemed to live on in Christian presuppositional apologetics more than any other academic discipline. Let us now consider how *Imago Dei* and TA might come together.

TRANSCENDENTAL REASONING IN APOLOGETIC DISCOURSE

Evangelistic and apologetic discourse both have a history of diversity in terms of method and tactics. For instance, in different evangelism training strategies, take *Evangelism Explosion* for example, one of the goals is to help elucidate to the hearer that they are a sinner and have violated God's perfect standard. No doubt the goal here is to then move to the place of showing (and offering) a solution to this apparent problem, which of course is found in the Gospel. So, the

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[47] Butler, 79.

[48] Ibid., 81

approach in *Evangelism Explosion* is direct, with the aim of getting the hearer to confront him/herself as he/she is, a sinner in need of redemption. Other approaches in evangelism may focus on the fact that we all have something within us that is seemingly impossible to satisfy. This is the proverbial Pascalian approach. There's a void, a lack, something that no earthly relationship or possession can fill, and we're desperately trying to fill it. In this approach, one may attempt to help the hearers to identify they are already aware of an existential emptiness within them. Apologetic discourse is similar in some ways, because the nature of the conversation may take the form of answering objections, demonstrating the integrity of the Christian truth claims, or exploiting the inconsistencies in an unbelieving worldview. John Frame has suggested three lines of apologetic discourse, what he called "aspects" of apologetics. These include, (1) apologetics as *proof*, (2) apologetics as *defense*, and (3) apologetics as *offense*. By apologetics as "proof" he means "presenting a rational basis for faith or 'proving Christianity to be true.'"[49] By apologetics as "defense" he means "answering the objections of unbelief," and by apologetics as "offense" he means "attacking the foolishness of unbelieving thought."[50] This is helpful as a starting point for us to consider the kinds of conversations one can have when discussing and commending the Good News. Certainly, apologetic discourse is anything but monolithic. Like most forms of communication, it is situation-specific. Any apologist with common sense would attempt to meet her audience "where they're at." It is doubtful there is merely one goal an apologist seeks to accomplish in apologetic discourse. In fact, I can think of a number of different goals one should seek to uphold. Speak the truth in love, for instance, along with treating one's audience with love and

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[49] John M. Frame, *Christian Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* ed. Joseph E Torres, 2nd edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 1-2.

[50] Ibid.

respect, articulating the importance of truth, the need for the Gospel, as well as, for that matter, making sense of human experience altogether. Here's where transcendental reasoning might help to serve as a useful bridge in apologetic discourse.

As Frame mentioned earlier in this paper, it was James Orr who was the first Christian to consistently use transcendental reasoning in his philosophical and theological work. However, it was Cornelius Van Til who is best known for incorporating a kind of transcendental argument into apologetics. In the words of Brian K. Morley, author of *Mapping Apologetics*, "Van Til considered his overall approach a transcendental case for Christianity, or an 'indirect' proof."[51] Morley continues, highlighting that Van Til not only used the transcendental strategy, but began to consistently couch apologetic discourse in terms of worldview, influenced by Abraham Kuyper, and the need for worldview analysis within apologetic discourse.

> Van Til embraced the basic transcendental strategy while rejecting what he saw as constant failure to include God as a precondition of knowledge. He regarded Kant as an example of autonomous, non-Christian thinking. While Kant left the knower agnostic about reality, Hegel wrote that reality can be known because, as an expression of God, it is visible for everyone to see, even through events of history. As a German idealist, he emphasized the whole of reality. Since reality is a whole, we cannot prove our worldview with traditional premises and a conclusion, because the very premises, the reasoning process—virtually everything—is included in the worldview . . . For Van Til, the whole of Christianity constitutes a transcendental proof because only its worldview can interpret the world; specifically, only it can provide the foundation of thought and experience.[52]

It is, in some respects, a stroke of irony that Van Til, who would eventually be called the "father of presuppositional apologetics," initially did not prefer to call his apologetic method presuppositional. Frame contends that, although "the most common name given to Van Til's

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[51] Brian K. Morley, *Mapping Apologetics: Comparing Contemporary Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 69.

[52] Morley, 70-71.

apologetic is 'presuppositionalist' . . . Van Til himself used the concept rather sparingly. For one thing, he did not voluntarily characterize his apologetic as 'presuppositionalist,' although he did sometimes accommodate the use of that term by others."[53] Nevertheless, the description stuck and Van Til used the term more and more throughout his writings. Early on, when describing the transcendental method, he occasionally referred to it as "reasoning by presupposition."[54] Now, a presupposition has been variously defined in the past few decades, but how Van Til used the term designated an ultimate intellectual starting place or a fundamental commitment of heart or mind. To be fundamental is therefore to be unprovable by direct proof. Hence, the "indirect proof" was the only real "game in town."

So how can Imago Dei rhetoric be incorporated into apologetic discourse, specifically with the transcendental method in mind? I'm not sure about you, but I tend to enjoy people. Well, most of the time. I'm a conversationalist and enjoy getting to see what people care about, how they think, what their skills and aptitudes are. Frankly, in my evangelistic and apologetic conversations, I'm always keeping the *Imago Dei* in the back of my mind. Here, before me, is someone created the image of God. They have traits which reflect the Almighty and his goodness. I'm looking to see them with the eyes of Christ, and as I do, I am asking myself how I can go about helping them to see that they too are image of God. The way I see it, this is one of the goals in apologetics. Yes, we're to contend for the truth of the gospel, but part of that includes the centrality of this person before me as image Imago Dei. So, when I'm asking questions concerning what they like, what governs their life, how they view things, for whom they are living, etc., I'm trying to take an avenue

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[53] John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1995), 131.

[54] Frame, "Transcendental Arguments," 1.

which leads them to confront themselves as *Imago*. In a kind of Socratic method, I'm asking

leading questions which may help them to see what they may take for granted: certain assumptions

(presuppositions) about the nature of the world, themselves, and everything they hold dear. One

of Van Til's most well-known successors was Greg Bahnsen, who died prematurely. He wrote a

number of books on Van Til's method, seeking to illustrate how transcendental reasoning can take

place in everyday life. He commends the following approach in *Pushing the Antithesis*:

> [One must] understand that the Christian outlook is the only reasonable worldview. It is the only worldview that makes human experience understandable and whose principles do not annihilate human understanding. On the unbelievers own principles "autonomous" man can never give an intelligible, coherent, or meaning-ful account of how he is able to know anything or accomplish anything culturally. The unbeliever's failure is a rational or philosophical failure to make sense out of knowledge, morality, beauty, etc. Consequently, your twin apologetic strategy boils down to this: you are challenging the unbeliever in one form or another to answer the question as to which worldview makes human experience intelligible. This is crucial for biblical apologetics. You're requiring the unbeliever to think about and declare the final reference point in his system which makes all facts and laws intelligible . . . Because of the worldview nature of biblical apologetics, it does not focus on particular facts. It is not a direct argument dealing with individual facts, but an indirect one dealing with the nature of facts. It does not defensively construct atomistic answers to an endless variety of criticisms. . . This [transcendental] method digs down beneath the facts to the foundation, to uncover more basic and broader questions regarding the fundamental character that give meaning to facts. To put it another way, you do not want to trim the unbeliever's tree; you want to dig it up by its roots . . . Ultimately then, apologetics must ask whether facts are random events in a chance universe, as per the unbeliever's worldview, or are they elements of an all-organizing, rational plan of God who created, governs, and gives meaning, value, and purpose to the universe and all of its facts? For you see, once God is denied, the only explanation possible for the original creation of the universe is by chance. Consequently, the unbeliever's worldview is ultimately rooted in chance. Facts in themselves can't settle anything because they need a worldview to provide their interpretation.[55]

Here we can see the thrust of transcendental method at work and we can see how Bahnsen is trying

to get the unbeliever to account for his or her explanation for the way things are. But perhaps more

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[55] Greg Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis* (Powder Springs GA: American Vision Press 2010), 145-147.

importantly, it provides an opportunity for the unbeliever to see that the Christian answer is at least coherent, if not compelling. sure, there will be plenty of people who will outright state that they don't care that they don't have it figured out and that is a separate matter. Part of the responsibility of an apologist is to simply articulate truth as it is in Jesus Christ, both the truth of the gospel but also the truth about the nature, the true nature, of humanity. It's precisely at this point that the evangelist/apologist can affirm that the listener should be valued and respected because they are created in the image of God. In fact, they have the ability to understand the world around them because they are image of God. They're able to think, say, and do as they do, because the Bible is accurate in its assessment. This is in part what led David K. Clark to promote what he calls "dialogical apologetics." In his book by that name, he explains his approach in the follow words:

> Dialogical apologetics . . . attempts to be both rational and personal. It is a rational enterprise in that it seeks to build a reasoned, probabilistic, holistic, cumulative case for Christianity. But it is personal in that it recognizes at the same time the road-blocks to faith thrown up by the audience's culture, psychology, attitudes, intellect, morality, *ad infinitum*. Dialogical apologetics encourages a strategy of dialogue with unique persons in which an apologist uses all the tools in the toolbox to move particular individuals toward an intellectual acknowledgement of the Christian worldview and a heartfelt commitment of life and soul to the savior that this worldview declares. Dialogical apologetics is apologetics reconceived. It refocuses the attention of apologetic study, teaching, and practice on the relationship between the rational/philosophical dimensions of apologetic thinking and the dialogical context of that thinking. Traditionally, *apologetics* has been defined as the *art of the reasoned defense of the Christian faith*. This is the rational side of apologetics. To this rational dimension, dialogical apologetics adds the personal: apologetics is the art of the reasoned defense of the Christian faith *in the context of personal dialogue*.[56]

Clark's description of dialogical apologetics is extremely helpful, for oftentimes in apologetic discourse what gets lost in the minutiae of the details being discussed is the personal factor of each individual doing the discussing. What I'm contending in this paper is that increased discussion

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[56] David K. Clark, *Dialogical Apologetics: A Person-Centered Approach to Christian Defense* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 113-114.

about the implications of the doctrine of the image of God and how they make sense from a Christian worldview provides enormous potential for fertile ground toward fruitful bridge-building, and clarification not only of what it is we believe as Christians, but further, that what we believe is grounded on the rock, not on sinking sand.

CONCLUSION

Virtually everyone loves something. And the more you begin to get in touch with people's passions, the more you can seek to find a bridge to talk more about that topic and potentially press them as to why they think that's the case. One could think of this in terms of a two-question method: (1) What do you care about? and (2) Which worldview makes the best sense of these interests? Remarkably, the consistent categories which ground most of our interests and passions include matters of morality, logic, truth, human dignity, pleasure, and discovery/science (which depend on the uniformity and regularity of the cosmos). Therefore, the trajectory of the conversation can satisfy two beneficial objectives. First, one can get to know their audience much better and, for the most part, people like to talk about themselves and what they believe about things. Second, it may afford an opportunity for the Christian to validate much of what is affirmed and believed by the unbeliever, while simultaneously providing a Christian outlook on those very matters which the unbeliever cares about, offering his/her perspective on how the Christian worldview ultimately makes those things intelligible. This, I must underscore, can be done in a very non-confrontational and unoffensive way. I've had numerous occasions of utilizing this transcendental method, if you will, and find that most people have never really thought deeply about what they take to be true, nor have they thought much about how they can justify their own thoughts on those matters. They often find that given their espoused worldview, they simply do not know how they can make sense of or justify their beliefs in such things. Some may object to this as falling short of what is needed

in evangelism or apologetics, but I'm inclined to think that part of the goal of evangelization is to help people to understand the Christian way of viewing life, the world, and humanity in a way that is consistent, is coherent and corresponds to reality. if that is the only thing accomplished in an evangelistic or apologetic conversation, I'm perfectly fine with that, and we can trust that the Holy Spirit is at work helping the unbeliever to see themselves as they are, yes a sinner in need of redemption, but also a glorious creature created in the image of God. John Stott provides a pertinent reminder for all of us: "Dialogue must include concern both for the gospel and for the other person. If only the gospel is important, arrogance results. If only the person is, merely pleasant conversation results. Unless both ends are kept in view, dialogue becomes irrelevant."[57] Without question, apologetic discourse is a potentially hazardous endeavor, but it is needed, nonetheless. Apologetics itself is helpful, it's something believers in general can benefit from. In the words of Greg Bahnsen "the believer must learn apologetics for his or her own spiritual well-being, as well as for becoming an agent of reform for the untrained Christian."[58]

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[57] John Stott, "The Biblical Basis for Evangelism," *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* ed. J.D. Douglas *International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland* (Minneapolis: worldwide, 1975), 72; cited in Clark, 114, footnote 9.

[58] Bahnsen, 17.

Jeremy M. Wallace, "*Imago Dei* and the Intelligibility of Human Experience: The Surprising Utility of Transcendental Reasoning in Apologetic Discourse"

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