

AN EDITED PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUE

TRANSCENDENTAL CRITIQUE

*A Dialogue on Stroud, Revelation,
Christian Theism, and Epistemic Certainty*

Necessitarian & bbalint

From a Discord exchange, 1–30 October

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This volume presents the supplied Discord exchange as a continuous, readable dialogue. The speakers' substantive wording and argumentative sequence have been preserved. Chapter titles, subtitles, typography, and the abbreviation guide are editorial additions. Original PDF line-wrap hyphenation and extraction artifacts have been removed; casual conversational asides have otherwise been retained.

The terminology follows the dialogue itself, supplemented only where the source paper explicitly defines an acronym left unexpanded in the exchange.

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Abbreviations and Terms

CT

Christian Theism, specifically the Van Tilian / Reformed Confessional variety under discussion.

TA

Transcendental argument.

TACT

The transcendental argument whose conclusion is CT, as the dialogue frames it.

ST

The Stroudian thesis as Balint formulates it in the exchange: "Self-stultification does not imply falsehood."

Self-stultification

A proposition is self-stultifying if its truth implies that one can never be rationally justified in affirming it.

SF

Self-falsification.

EC

Epistemic certainty. Near the end of the exchange, Necessitarian describes this in infallibilist terms: justification that guarantees the truth of the belief.

CR

Christian revelation broadly; Necessitarian later specifies a Reformed, Van Tilian, redemptive-historical conception of revelation.

DSR

Divine special revelation.

TANCT

A counter-transcendental argument toward non-CT.

NCT

The autonomous / non-Christian worldview invoked in connection with TANCT.

MIT

Minimal Idealism Thesis: Békefi's label for the claim that self-stultification implies falsehood, the negation of ST.

Opening Disagreements

1 October

Bosserman, Butler, and the scope of the Stroudian challenge

NECESSITARIAN

1ST OF OCTOBER

I have two major disagreements with the article.

First, the lesser of my two disagreements, I think Bosserman's objection-undermining strategy was a level stronger than you took it to be. I don't think Bosserman is accusing the ST proponent of selfstultification. I think Bosserman is accusing the ST proponent of incoherence, what you call self-falsification. In other words, the result of affirming ST, for Bosserman, is the indirect affirmation or the preservation (by principle) of a contradiction. Whether or not that counts as idealism seems to me more of a classification issue. I could be misrepresenting him, though.

Either way, I myself would maintain that ST is incoherent so long as the topic of dispute is transcendentals. Transcendental categories cannot, on pain of incoherence, fall under ST. Maybe other propositions do – I doubt it, but I don't think I need to defend the universal negation of ST. Just that it is categorically false whenever we're talking about transcendental matters.

Or, in short, ST implies SF (self-falsification) wherever a purported transcendental incurs ST.

But that's not my major disagreement.

My second and much stronger disagreement revolves around your interpretation of Butler. I take issue with it. I wish I was more familiar with the phrase "world-rich" where you and Riley address Butler's reply to Stroud. I am not, but it seems to me Butler doesn't mean by "world-rich" what you took it to mean. I could be very

wrong about that.

Assuming I've interpreted Butler correctly, Butler is really just pointing out that the conceptual framework "CT" is metaphysically laden. That is, to talk of some abstract "CT" that isn't fraught with metaphysical commitments is either not to address "CT" at all or it's just to accuse "CT" of incoherence from the outset – namely, CT harbors metaphysical commitments necessarily as a concept at all but those commitments are actually not necessary to its conception. That, I think, actually moves the burden of proof on the person who wants to say that a framework saying the ontological Trinity, for example, is equally metaphysically, logically, and epistemically necessary can be one or the other but not necessarily all three.

Or, in short, I take the statement, "CT could be indispensable, but untrue," to be identical with, "CT is false."

And by "CT" I'm still talking about the Van Tilian/Reformed Confessional variety you address in the paper, not Christian Theism simpliciter.

CHAPTER 2

Conceptual Necessity and the Truth of CT

1–3 October

Can a metaphysically laden framework be merely indispensable?

1ST-3RD OF OCTOBER

BBALINT

Exciting stuff, Necessitarian! Thanks a lot. So are you saying that If CT is conceptually necessary, then CT is true is implied by CT?

NECESSITARIAN

Yes, and I'm saying it strongly. I'm saying the meaning or the definition of CT includes metaphysical factors which preclude mere conceptual necessity.

BBALINT

So let's say it entails that proposition

That sounds stronger :)

NECESSITARIAN

X) That works.

BBALINT

Isn't that the same thing which I consider at the end of section 2.2? The relationship between CT and MIT?

NECESSITARIAN

As long as we understand that we're saying CT entails non-mere-indispensability in the same way we might say CT entails the hypostatic union or the Trinity or whatever doctrines we take to mean CT.

In response to your last question, I could be mistaken, but I don't think so. It seemed to me, your treatment of MIT is that it can be inferred from CT. I'm saying, it's the definition of CT.

BBALINT

I tried to formulate your argument, but as it (my interpretation) stands, it is invalid. Can you help clarify it?

Cx = x is conceptually necessary

1) $CT \rightarrow (CCT \rightarrow CT)$

2) CCT

3) $\therefore CT$

NECESSITARIAN

It seems to me CCT and CT are identical except that CCT explicitly spells out one aspect of CT.

BBALINT

I've tried to think some more about your claim since yesterday (was it yesterday?). Is it similar to the Anselmian ontological argument in that the concept somehow contains or entails its own existence?

NECESSITARIAN

No, my claim is that the conception is a metaphysical one and so cannot be considered at all apart from metaphysical ramifications.

To do so would be either to assume the conception is false (i.e. to assume it is false about its own metaphysical ramifications) or to just accuse the conception of incoherence (i.e. contrary to what it maintains about itself, it can be conceived as a mere conceptual framework).

And that, I think, is more or less Butler's point. CT is a metaphysical framework by definition. To say it could be true without being a metaphysical framework is just to deny CT outright or to deny CT on the ground that it fails to be what it pretends to be – a metaphysical framework.

BBALINT

Maybe it will help if we consider a different proposition which some TAs try to argue for: u: objects continue to exist unperceived. This clearly has metaphysical import, so if I believe that is merely conceptually indispensable, then surely I think it is at least possibly not true

Or at least the skeptic can maintain that it is possibly not

Nevertheless, I don't see how it is wrong to claim that its conceptual necessity does not imply its truth

I agree that this is Butler's point, but to my mind Riley's and Sims' rebuttals successfully undercut it, so there may be some misunderstanding between us – and it is not clear that I'm right, since BK understand it to be successful just as you do

My basic point is that anything a TA argues for has metaphysical import, otherwise it could never be a successful antiskeptical argument, even if sound! But that one must believe a metaphysical claim does not mean that that claim is true

Or at least it requires further argument to say that it does

NECESSITARIAN

I will take you up on your suggestion. I believe there is a vital similarity between TAs for realism and what you call TACTs. Borrowing your language, here is more or less the conclusion spelled for a TACT:

All objects are the Trinity or the Christocentric creation of the Trinity, predication about which invokes the revelation of the Trinity.

Note that this is as strong a metaphysical claim as it gets. The proponent of TACT (insofar as we mean by CT the charitable and astute way I think you put Van Tilian Reformed Confessionalism at the beginning of your paper) is not saying mere belief in CT is required for true concepts, what might be called indispensability. He's saying the world (metaphysics) must be CT in order for us to have true concepts.

BBALINT

Right! But isn't that what the proponent of any TA says?

...

Necessitarian wrote: "The proponent of TACT (...) is not saying mere belief in CT is required for true concepts, what might be called indispensability. He's saying the world (metaphysics) must be CT in order for us to have true concepts."

This is exactly right. But Stroud would say to this that when the proponent of TACT tries to argue this point (from the self-defeating nature of CT's denial), the skeptic can reply: "OK, if I deny CT I cannot know anything, or cannot be sure that my language corresponds to reality, or that my reasoning leads to truth. OK, I realize that if I want to have all these, I cannot deny CT, so I have to affirm it. But how does showing that I have to affirm it show that it is true?"

NECESSITARIAN

bbalint, for the skeptic to ask, “How does showing that I have to affirm CT demonstrate CT?” is just for the skeptic to assume the falsity of CT (i.e. CT could just turn out to be a conceptual framework) or for the skeptic to assume the incoherence of CT (i.e. CT makes metaphysical claims which are simultaneously unmetaphysical).

BBALINT

I agree that the skeptic assumes the epistemic possibility of the falsity or incoherence of CT

NECESSITARIAN

;) But the epistemic possibility presupposes the metaphysical possibility.

NECESSITARIAN

If CT is true, then it is true that everything in reality is cached out in the Triune Yahweh, His Christocentric creation, both of which demand revelation for the sake of human predication. In other words, if CT is true, then its metaphysic entails the epistemic impossibility of non-CT.

So then, to assume the epistemic possibility of non-CT is just to assume that any metaphysic which entails otherwise, like CT, is impossible.

And that – to my knowledge – may be one of the greatest thoughts of Van Til: one cannot answer how one knows without first assessing what one knows.

To answer the how question first commits us to answering the what question surreptitiously.

BBALINT

You're making me think, Necessitarian

NECESSITARIAN

X D As you are me, bbalint

BBALINT

Do you grant that there's a difference between epistemic and psychological certainty?

If yes, then it seems that there's a difference between epistemic and psychological possibility as well. But maybe this is not a helpful distinction

I'm typing dead wrong ideas

NECESSITARIAN

Yes, I tend to make that distinction – it seems to me evident all across the stories of Scripture where people, say Thomas, doubt God.

BBALINT

What if the skeptic says that it's psychologically possible that not-CT?

is just thinking aloud

...

So let me accept your view, at least for argument's sake, Necessitarian. Suppose that if CT, then epistemically necessarily CT, so that the skeptic cannot maintain that epistemically possibly both CT and not-CT

Why should the skeptic then believe CT?

NECESSITARIAN

I think I understand your question, but just to make sure, I'll cover my bases a little. The obvious answer is that the skeptic should believe CT because he knows CT is true. Maybe though you're asking how he comes to possess a reason for believing CT in the first place? The answer is that God has revealed CT, which is just to say the skeptic should believe CT because it is transcendently necessary. But probably, I think you're asking what argument can provide inferential justification for CT on CT, and to that I believe the answer is transcendental critique, the procedure of showing how the skeptic is refuted by his own skepticism and at the same time that this skepticism presupposes and cannot be thought "selfrefuting" apart from ultimate intellectual commitments to CT.

BBALINT

Alright, Necessitarian and BK, let me get back to our conversation. So, on the face of it at least, I think you are presenting multiple arguments.

One is that since CT makes metaphysical claims, therefore if it is conceptually necessary, then it is true as well. This seems to me to be invalid, as I've indicated earlier. (You seem to say that this is not your argument, but I cannot put my finger on the difference.)

A stronger version of this argument, which you might be thinking of, is that not-CT is not just selfstultifying, but also performatively self-falsifying. (I explain this distinction in my paper.) In my view, this is a valid answer to Stroud's objection. I'm not sure though if even most VTians think this claim can be demonstrated.

Another argument is that CT implies epistemic certainty that CT, so therefore one cannot maintain the epistemic possibility of not-CT without rejecting CT. While this might be true (I actually don't think CT implies that), it is not obviously more relevant to TACT than to anything else – the conclusion seems to be that one cannot be neutral with respect to CT, not that CT is true. (This is why I asked why one should believe CT in this situation.) Could you spell out the connection between this and TACT a bit? Whaddya think, guys?

I agree with BK in that I appreciate this discussion very much. I was hoping for conversations exactly like this to result from my paper. That's mostly why I wrote it.

NECESSITARIAN

Well, you have succeeded, good sir. Unfortunately, I'm about to go to bed. Thanks for your response. Hopefully I'll be up in time to converse with you some then.

A quick preview is this: The relationship between CT and TACT is just that its conclusion is CT. In other words, the argument precludes ST from the outset. ST can only be proposed (of CT or TACT) by rejecting a premise or by rejecting TAs as inherently invalid, which Stroud does not.

Self-Falsification, Incoherence, and Stroud

6 October

From self-stultification to the stronger charge of contradiction

NECESSITARIAN

6TH OF OCTOBER

Hey, sorry for my absence, bbalint. I feel honored it was missed. ;) I will agree on the side with this note of yours: “A stronger version of this argument...is that not-CT is not just self-stultifying, but also performatively self-falsifying.” Yes, I think this is Bahnsen’s, Butler’s, and Oliphint’s positions, at least – in fact, I think this is one of the major stumbling blocks between Bahnsen and Frame.

I do think ST is incoherent, that non-CT is incoherent, not just self-stultifying. I was trying, but probably failing, to imply as much when I said a while back that I think the possibility of ST is context-dependent, and that the context of transcendentals preclude the possibility of ST holding.

Outside of worldview contests, outside of transcendental critique, I do think ST can hold. I would think several good examples might pop up from psychology.

If I remember correctly, I introduced my disagreement with your paper under two points. The former, less important point is that I don’t think ST stands coherent as long as its being applied to transcendentals. However, that is not my major concern.

My major concern is your last point: “Another argument is that CT implies epistemic certainty that CT, so therefore one cannot maintain the epistemic possibility of not-CT without rejecting CT.” Yes, CT is defined as including doctrines of revelation which, if true, entail epistemic certainty. How then can ST possibly apply to CT? Granted,

“The conclusion seems to be that one cannot be [metaphysically] neutral with respect to CT, not that CT is true,” but that seems like goalpost shifting. My aim is to show that (my interpretation of) Butler’s response to Stroud is sufficient (viz. it is impossible that ST with regard to CT). My aim is not to argue TACT simpliciter.

In summary, I can’t help but think that you are committing double-jeopardy toward TACT. When an answer is given why Stroud’s objection fails, you hold the answer in contempt for not sufficiently outlining TACT per se. But that would mean Stroud’s objection is really quite irrelevant – something else is at fault with TACT whence any answer to Stroud fails to persuade you of TACT’s success.

However, that Stroud’s objection cannot apply to CT, and therefore TACT, on pain of begging the question or of maintaining a TANCT seems to me to adequately answer the crux of your paper.

X) Okay, I’m done now – I promise. Sorry for being ranty. On a totally different note, “TANCT” (tanked) sounds far more alarming than TANG.

BBALINT

6TH OF OCTOBER

My responses might be a bit rambling where I’m not sure of the connection between your comments.

So first, if you claim that not-CT is performatively self-falsifying, then the Stroudian critique doesn’t apply—your argument is sound. The problem here, however, is that how Van Tillians argue proves nothing even close to this: that knowledge, morality, or science is impossible without CT does not imply that not-CT is performatively self-falsifying. Much less that it is incoherent, which is your other claim—that is even stronger than performative self-falsification: if not-CT is incoherent, then it implies a contradiction or is meaningless; thus, according your claim, one can prove CT entirely a priori. This is similar to the ontological argument, but even more ambitious. For the record, I do not think this is how presuppositionalists regularly argue or what they regularly claim.

Your claim “that the context of transcendentals preclude the pos-

sibility of ST holding” is, frankly, suspect, given that ST was proposed specifically in the context of transcendentals. Does Strawson’s argument prove that objects continue to exist unperceived, or only that one must believe that? Either that existence or that belief is a transcendental, but still, ST seems relevant given the argument. I also am not sure what your argument is for this conclusion. Is it the one about epistemic certainty, or a different one? Would you mind spelling it out? If you were right that ST does not apply to transcendentals in general, you would have a solution to a 50-year-old philosophical problem that has had a yuge influence on the discussion of TAs.

I feel like there’s something fishy about your other point regarding EC and ST. Let’s see!

ST: Self-stultification does not imply falsehood.

Which is equivalent to:

ST’: For a given p , possibly, not- p is self-stultifying and p is false.

For CT specifically:

ST*: Possibly, not-CT is self-stultifying and CT is false.

This, however, entails (I think) that (epistemically) possibly, CT is false—which you claim is denied by CT, and thus CT implies MIT* (MIT in the case of CT). But as far as I can see, this is simply the case I deal with in my paper in section 2.2, especially at the end. You accuse me of moving the goalposts here, but I’m not sure that’s true. TACT aspires to refute the skeptic (among others). For TACT to refute the skeptic, the skeptic must be shown that not-CT is self-stultifying and that MIT* is true.

I think you have two or three routes to take here. One is to argue that MIT* is either analytically true or performatively self-falsifying. That would render TACT valid, even though it is a bit queer that one has to prove MIT*, one aspect of CT, ambitiously, while the rest only modestly. A second is to argue

that since CT is EC, and MIT* is entailed by CT, then MIT* is EC as well, so no proof is needed—the skeptic is immediately aware of MIT*. I think this is false (you also said that psychological uncertainty is consistent with EC). If it weren't, then CT would be EC to the skeptic, which would raise the question of the point of arguing with him—but this is a separate question of apologetic methodology.

But of course if you claim that not-CT is performatively self-falsifying or incoherent (two separate views), then this whole business is irrelevant to you. In that case, you would have to at least gesture at how you would establish this, but you're answering criticisms here, not proposing the argument, so more importantly you would have to answer my closing objection. Then you're fine :)

Thanks for taking the time to interact! I would certainly be interested in being tanct by your response :) For a minute or two, I thought that your response is successful, so perhaps I'm not beyond hope :P

Butler, TANCT, and the Burden of Proof

6–8 October

Whether the skeptic must answer with a counter-transcendental argument

NECESSITARIAN

6TH OF OCTOBER

X) Thanks for the response. It did not seem rambly at all.

There is a peculiar irony in framing my thoughts in steps to avoid confusion which then only exacerbates confusion about my points and their relation. That seems to be what has happened when I originally responded with a point about ST's applicability and another defending Butler's objection. Let me see if I can't recapture what I was trying to say by splitting those two up.

Here was and still is the order of my thoughts:

1.) Butler was not understood. Butler's point (and mine) is that CT by definition makes metaphysical claims to EC, not merely "world-richness." In short, MIT is CT; CT without MIT is equivalent to CT without revelation, the Christ event, the ontological Trinity, etc.

(I think the biggest procedural issue I take is with the abstracting of MIT from CT. That would be like abstracting Christ or the Trinity from CT and demanding that TACT prove each one individually. Well, at that point, we're just not respecting a Van Tilian CT in the first place. This is why I suggested early in our conversation that MIT isn't "implied" by CT – it's moreso entailed by definition. There is no Bahnsen-Til CT to speak about that's not MIT, from Butler's perspective.)

2.) Butler's response shows that Stroud is mistaken ipso facto. In principle, ST cannot be applied as a critique to any TA concluding a metaphysical framework that entails its own EC – be it Islam or Zoroastrianism or CT. This principle instantiated, ST cannot be applied to CT because CT metaphysically entails its own EC. The only options left to apply ST are to beg the question, assuming CT's metaphysical claims about revelation are false, or to offer up a counter-TA toward non-CT (TANCT), the latter making Stroud's objection an afterthought because you need a robust, metaphysically rich TANCT to justify ST of CT.

3.) Separately, I believe Bosserman was also misunderstood, but that his critique stands or falls with Butler's point. In other words, what you call the Biblical justification strategy makes possible the objection-undermining strategy. I simply think you misunderstood the nature of the form and the strength of the latter.

Again, I could be wrong about Bosserman. Maybe his response is more modest than I take it to be. However, I think by incoherence he means incoherence, in the strong sense. I believe Bosserman treats an ST strategy against CT as self-falsifying because of the metaphysical underpinnings required to posit as much. In other words, the employer of ST against TACT on the one hand treats his strategy as

equivalent to TANCT, which it isn't (a contradiction; incoherence), and on the other hand pretends to possess the (meta-epistemological) exception to ST which allows him to posit it as a problem in the first place.

In short summary:

1.) Butler is saying CT=MIT or that MIT is entailed by CT in virtue of being one of its doctrines. Thus, TACT need not argue for MIT separately. The CT of TACT just includes MIT in the first place, no differently than it includes the Trinity, the Christ, etc.

As a result, I can't make sense of your statement that "For TACT to refute the skeptic, the skeptic must be shown that not-CT is self-stultifying and that MIT is true." No, in showing CT to be true, MIT

would have been shown to be true, and not-CT would have been shown to be impossible – the points need not be demonstrated separately – they cannot be.

(At least from the Van Tilian perspective I take Butler to be defending; the same one I would defend)

2.) That ST's don't apply to transcendentals I think can be demonstrated, but what's germane to this discussion is that ST's don't apply to any metaphysical claims to EC. To be epistemically certain of CT in virtue of its metaphysic precludes the possibility of ST-of-CT. Therefore, to even justify the claim that CT could fall under ST, one would have to reject one of the premises of TACT and thus put forth a TANCT, or one would have to reject TAs as not logically valid in the first place (Stroud does not). The only other option is to beg the question.

Since I'm already rambling way to long – short version: the only possibly valid response to TACT is TANCT. Every other response begs the question de facto.

3.) My point about ST's being incoherent with regards to transcendentals and Bosserman is a separate issue I take with your paper. That is, I think Bosserman is saying – and if so, I agree – that predicating all transcendentals as possibly ST is to assume an exception to this claim in order to make it – incoherence.

X) Kay, I'm done. Sorry for being the truly ranty one here in this conversation. Please don't leave. LOL

BBALINT

6TH OF OCTOBER

Thanks! I'll need to do some other things and think about this more, so I'll just comment briefly on two points. But I very much appreciate you taking the time to lay out your answers.

First, you said this: "As a result, I can't make sense of your statement that 'For TACT to refute the skeptic, the skeptic must be shown that not-CT is self-stultifying and that MIT is true.' No, in showing CT to be true, MIT would have been shown to be true, and not-CT

would have been shown to be impossible – the points need not be demonstrated separately – they cannot be.”

I’m just bringing this out because it might point to some deeper difference. I said that it must be shown that not-CT is self-stultifying, and your response was that in showing CT to be true, MIT is demonstrated. However, this conflation begs the question.

Second, you say that given CT implying MIT with EC, the only way to deny TACT is by begging the question. In some sense that’s true, but in the same way claiming that TACT is successful begs the question as well.

BBALINT

7TH OF OCTOBER

So here’s my response to your response. (We should start calling them referrals, responses, replies, rejoinders, surrejoinders, etc. :))

1) Fine, I’ll grant for the sake of argument that $CT \rightarrow EC(CT)$ -and- $MIT(CT)$. But how does that show to

the skeptic, pray tell, that the conceptual necessity of CT implies the truth of CT? Perhaps your response is in the second point.

2) You seem to claim the following: to question $CCT \rightarrow CT$, one needs to hold that epistemically possi-

bly, $ST(CT)$. However, $CT \rightarrow EC(MIT(CT))$, thus the objection begs the question. Granting what I did, for the sake of argument, I agree.

I had to think very hard to come to a position on what this means for the skeptic, because I was not initially sure about what you proposed. But having thought through, I agree again that the opponent of TACT has to propose TANCT. At least I think so, but it’s making my head hurt, so I’m not EC about it yet :)

So congrats, you managed to convince me, and, more importantly, to make me understand your points. However, I have to come out of the closet here. I have been granting a crucial premise of yours for the sake of argument—but I think it is extremely implausible, quite probably false (if the closing argument at the end of my

paper succeeds, that proves this as well). It consists of two layers, though the latter implies the former:

(1) CT entails MIT for CT.

(2) CT entails that (1) is epistemically certain to every human.

Some presuppositionalists, such as Riley and Anderson, deny that CT entails MIT in general. Given that a metaphysically necessary proposition is implied by everything, MIT for CT is true, if CT is that. But I think CT includes metaphysically contingent propositions as well, e.g. that God created or that the Son became incarnate. I'm not sure what you think about this given your necessitarianism. If I understood you correctly, you think that God without creation is a possible world in some sense. If I'm right about that, then (1) is not clearly true. But even if it is true, I cannot think of any reason to think that (2) is as well. (Perhaps you think that all preconditions of intelligibility are EC, but you'd need to make an argument for that.)

3) I'm interested in this as well, but perhaps it would not be very helpful to carry on two separate

conversations. Maybe we can return to this a bit later. You need to go into academia, man. You are brilliant.

BBALINT

8TH OF OCTOBER

Man, I think I was wrong about what the premise I'm granting was. It was rather this (methinks):

(3) CT entails that CT is EC to every human.

EC(CT) implies MIT(CT), but that's a secondary question. I might have forgotten this for a while in my previous answer, so sorry if it's a bit confused or overcomplicated for this reason.

Anyway, while (3) is less implausible than (1) and (2), I still object to it. If the incarnation is part of CT, and the *sensus divinitatis* doesn't convey the incarnation, then I think (3) is false.

Sure, take your time with your answer! I'll go through mine as well, as I suspect there might be some confusions there. I was rather tired when I wrote it. I'm worried if we're not conflating EC and metaphysical necessity when dealing with MIT(CT).

Revelation and Epistemic Certainty

8 October

Christian revelation, certainty, and the limits of radical skepticism

NECESSITARIAN

8TH OF OCTOBER

Let me preface, bbalint, that I apologize for any misunderstanding or vagueness here. To me, the (greatest?) difficulty of these epistemic-apologetic conversations is learning how to “speak another person’s language,” and therefore to mimic a lot of their wording for common concepts, to stick to one language game as much as possible, and to avoid adding new words. Thanks for being patient and charitable so far. This dialogue has sincerely been my favorite of late. As far as I can tell, here are our hang-ups:

1.) Revelation in our meta-epistemological framework. I take this to be at the root of comments like for example (me:), “CT is defined as including doctrines of revelation which, if true, entail epistemic certainty. How then can ST possibly apply to CT?” and (you:), “I think this is false (you also said that psychological uncertainty is consistent with EC),” and “I have been granting a crucial premise of yours for the sake of argument—but I think it is extremely implausible, quite probably false (if the closing argument at the end of my paper succeeds, that proves this as well),” and “Perhaps you think that all preconditions of intelligibility are EC, but you’d need to make an argument for that.”

It is my view, and I think Bahnsen’s and Butlers – and I’ll venture to say Van Til’s himself – that God’s revelation qua revelation provides infallible belief in said revelation. Shortened, $CR \rightarrow EC(CR)$, where by CR I mean Christian revelation broadly, but strictly, I mean a Reformed, Van Tilian holistic conception of God’s revelation in re-

demptive history. (Perhaps this explains why, say, Bahnsen used TAG instead of TACT: everyone possesses EC of general revelation, not everyone EC of special revelation.) What does this have to do with our conversation?

Here's a brief argument:

P1. If possibly ST(CT), then necessarily not CT.

P2. If not CT, not CR.

C: If possibly ST(CT), necessarily not CR.

Unpacked, if Van Tilian Christian Theism, with its emphasis on an epistemically certain revelation from the Triune God, universally in the case of general revelation, particularly for those who have encountered the Gospel in the case of special revelation, is possibly merely conceptually-necessary-but-nottrue (ST*), then neither special nor general revelation can be EC (by metaphysics, as Van Til has it).

My point here (1) then aims to note that I spoke loosely before the backdrop of Van Til's notion of revelation, spoke with that in mind when I said CT is EC. Technically, CR is EC, not CT simpliciter; and so CT is EC for S iff S has encountered the Gospel, where "encountered" means their perceptual and/or conceptual faculties have grasped the essential teachings of mere Christianity. (That last point is just avoid confusion: a person need not encountered Reformed CT, as defined in our conversation, to bear epistemic certainty of even Reformed doctrines – at least, that is my view, and I think of Van Til's/Bahnsen's/Butler's.)

The ramification for your paper, in my humble opinion, is just that in order to abstract MIT from CT as something to be argued separately arises from a more fundamental disagreement with Van Til's Vosian notion of revelation in redemptive history. This brings me to point (2) and why I keep – like a broken record – accusing you of double-jeopardy.

2.) Why Does TACT Fail? Let us grant for the sake of argument that TACT is unsound or, at least, unsuccessful and that you have established as much in your paper (and here). But let us grant this on top of your granting me that Butler's response to Stroud is conclusive: Stroud must beg the question or commit himself to a TANCT (thus rendering the Stroudian objection irrelevant anyway) in order to claim ST(CT). Actually, that's sort of the rhyme of my previous reasoning: if Butler's Biblical justification strategy (Biblical metaphysic strategy, to me) succeeds, and if TACT still fails under one of your adjudications, how does that fail to imply that your argument really points to a deeper structural or epistemological error in TAs themselves? I am straining to see a way around this, but I am admittedly coming up short or shortsighted.

You said earlier, about EC(CT): "While this might be true (I actually don't think CT implies that), it is not obviously more relevant to TACT than to anything else – the conclusion seems to be that one cannot be neutral with respect to CT, not that CT is true." Granted, but neither does that seem to be the purpose of pointing out EC(CT). EC(CT) does not establish the soundness of TACT; it establishes the falseness of Stroud's Objection. The question remains, what reason is there to think TACT is (possibly) unsound?

You said earlier as well: "[I]f you claim that not-CT is performatively self-falsifying, then the Stroudian critique doesn't apply—your argument is sound. The problem here, however, is that how Van Tillians argue proves nothing even close to this: that knowledge, morality, or science is impossible without CT does not imply that not-CT is performatively self-falsifying." Ah! Now maybe I understand you here.

Your thought is that the skeptic can turn to the proponent of TACT and say, "Well, who cares about knowledge, morality, or science! Who's to say they're right? Do away with their claims, and the same for Christianity too!" That is, the skeptic can still "hide," so to speak, in a deeper skepticism free from epistemic, ethical, and scientific commitments untouched by TACT. If so, then TACT would not apply to global/radical skepticism, only to softer forms of skepticism (and potentially other worldviews). (Another implication from this thought, if I have represented you accurately, is that Van Tilian

apologetics require neutral common ground – e.g., science – which might be far more alarming to some Reformed apologists than that TACT is false!)

However, if this is your critique, then it seems your critique of TACT is really a critique of TAs and it is committed to the underlying assumption that (rational) skepticism is possible sans epistemic, axiological, and metaphysical commitments. Honestly, I do not think this assumption is tenable. In fact, I think this was more or less Bosserman's point, though I could be wrong: skepticism of this radical sort is selfrefuting (derives a contradiction; incoherence), since the skeptic of CT needs a TANCT funded by a robust metaphysic, epistemology, and axiology just to rationally deny CT. Or, put short as I can, skepticism of any variety presupposes metaphysics, epistemology, axiology.

To clarify, I do think psychological doubt can accrue for any proposition whatsoever. Irrational forms of skepticism are undefeatable in the sense that the skeptic will only be persuaded on pain of giving up his obstinate disregard for truth, reason, et al. At the same time, irrational skepticism is just that: irrational. Moreover, I don't think it's the job of the apologist or of TACT to answer or psychologically heal people who revert to levels of "animal skepticism" – I do take it to be a psychological issue more than a philosophical one.

Admittedly, my point can be summed up in a very unsatisfying way, but one I consider nevertheless true: TACT's inability to persuade says nothing about its inability to prove.

(On the side, this is also why I almost never employ a formalized TACT and why I agree with Anderson on the family-of-arguments or with Grayling and Strawson on the (strictly, at least) formless nature of TA/CTs. I think they're relatively useless in conversation, and I'm interested in evangelism, not fruitless debate – although, I say that on pain of sounding like a hypocrite or an anti-academician.)

You said, "Fine, I'll grant for the sake of argument that $CT \rightarrow EC(CT)$ -and- $MIT(CT)$. But how does that show to the skeptic, pray tell, that the conceptual necessity of CT implies the truth of CT?" This seems, also, to compliment my former interpretation. That $CT \rightarrow$

EC(CT)-and-MIT(CT) or that $CT \rightarrow CR[EC(CT)]$ or however we ought to put is on the table for the sake of answering Stroud, not for the sake of answering challenges to the (necessary) soundness of TACT.

But that seems to imply, as above, that there is something more deeply problematic with TAs. Maybe that they do not answer radical skepticism because they cannot answer radical skepticism because radical skepticism is free of commitments to anything about which to TA?

So, in summary, and ending – somewhat half-hazardly because I should already be gone – here are my two points.

1.) Our fundamental disagreements about revelation seems to be the most fundamental point of departure and cause of disagreement about TACTs. That means, I suggest, your disagreement with Butler (and Bahnsen and Van Til and Bosserman?) is exegetical long before TAs come into the picture.

2.) Your critique of TAs seems to me to begin with a more fundamental issue than Stroud touches on – radical skepticism – so that answering Stroud doesn't save TAs at all for you. Hence, double-jeopardy: TAs are bad whether Stroud is answered or not – they get damned once for skeptics, twice for Stroud.

X) Okay, I'm done.

Radical Skepticism and Double Jeopardy

9–23 October

What remains once the Stroudian objection is conceded?

BBALINT

9TH OF OCTOBER

Necessitarian, I'm writing somewhat late and tired again, but I want to make some comments on your yuge response from earlier today (or perhaps it was yesterday for you). I shall reply to your two points, to wit:

1) If I understand you correctly, you say the following: according to CT, whatever is revealed to S (call

it CR) by God is EC to S, therefore it begs the question for S to reject TACR as merely establishing CR's conceptual necessity but not its truth. If this is what you are saying, I have three comments.

a) I've been into this stuff for some years, but this is the first time someone successfully explained to me how Vosian BT is relevant to TACT. So congrats, you got it through my thick head. :) Though I haven't been reading much from the Vosian wing of Van Til scholarship. (Dennison's critique of Frame still gives me hives.)

b) Your model raises the issue, which you do mention, that some have only encountered God's general revelation, while others have been confronted with his special revelation as well. Does this result in the queer situation that only "TAG" is sound for those who have not heard the gospel, but "TACT" is for those who have? I question whether this is faithful to Van Til & co. They seem to say, for example, that God's triunity, or at least his uniplurality, can be proven with the transcendental argument. However, I think it is the mainstream

view that the Trinity is not contained in general revelation. Or do you think Van Til would say that it can only be proven to those who have heard the gospel?

c) This gets to my main concern/objection with this strategy. Frankly, I think this making-TACT-workthrough-EC-revelation business does not fit obviously well with how Van Til and Bahnsen said CT is

demonstrated: through the impossibility of the contrary. So what's the relation between the two? Does the apologist show through the impossibility of the contrary that CT is conceptually necessary, and then show with an appeal to EC(CR) that the Stroudian objection begs the question? I'm not saying this cannot be true, it just seems funny on first sight. (It is also notable that this is my first sight of it, after plenty of time spent in presuppositionalist circles.) You can take my paper to be exploring the limits of establishing CT through the impossibility of the contrary – which leads me to your second point.

2) I am less clear about what you are saying here – but take comfort, this seems to be mutual :) I

tried to distinguish three separate points that you might be making. (For the record, while I acknowledged that your EC(CR) point, if true, shows that ST begs the question against TACT, I have not conceded that this is what Butler meant. I still think he probably meant something closer to how I interpret him.)

a) The first is your “double jeopardy” criticism: you ask why, having accepted the Necessitarian-Butler response to Stroud, do I still claim, as I do in my paper, that TACT is unsound. I think my answer to this is that I don't. At least not on that point. Your response seems to be to justify a premise revelationally – but not (C2'), the stronger second premise, as I took Butler (a bit arbitrarily) to do, but rather (C1), the weaker first premise, denying ST. Your solution might have other problems, and I'm not sure how you would response to my closing argument on pp. 21-22., but it does succeed in answering the initial problem. Did I say or imply otherwise? Perhaps I did, but the last time I think I conceded this.

b) You quote me as saying the following: “Fine, I’ll grant for the sake of argument that $CT \rightarrow EC(CT)$ and $MIT(CT)$. But how does that show to the skeptic, pray tell, that the conceptual necessity of CT implies the truth of CT ?” And then you point out that your intention was rather to answer Stroud, not prove TACT. But this is the next sentence after the one you quoted: “Perhaps your response is in the second point.” And then I went on to expound on your comments regarding $EC(CT)$ and so on, and conceded that those are successful in rendering ST an instance of begging the question against TACT (given $CT \rightarrow EC(CT)$, or something like that), and that the objector needs to propose TANCT. So I think here again I have actually come to agree with your point, but maybe I haven’t communicated this clearly enough.

c) You also write, trying to make sense of my point that performative self-falsification is not implied by an inability to “account for” epistemological, moral, or scientific realism, the following: “If so, then TACT would not apply to global/radical skepticism, only to softer forms of skepticism (...) However, if this is your critique, then it seems your critique of TACT is really a critique of TAs (...)” Aren’t we just talking about the Stroudian critique of ambitious TAs itself? I don’t see yet how radical skepticism entails a contradiction, but I agree that it is self-stultifying – this is, I think, what Adrian Bardon meant with saying that it reduces to “animal skepticism”. But again I’m not sure if this is fully to the point if the question is whether TACT is valid/sound. What you’re hinting at, I think, is what both Bosserman and Fluhrer attempted, and that is a TA against ST -in-general – but I think that only succeeded modestly. Anyway, radical skepticism is always difficult to see through, and I’m really sleepy by now, so I’ll end here with some risk of facilitating further misunderstandings due to my inaccurate interpretation of your comments. Thanks for your patience and charity, too. Also for learning my “language” (believe me, this is easier than learning Hungarian itself! :P).

NECESSITARIAN

23RD OF OCTOBER

Okay, so this time I need to preface by apologizing for taking so long! Thank you for being patient, bbalint. As well, I apologize for length; verbosity is one of my chiefest sins. Sorry for taking so many

hours to write this up, and again, for any lack of clarity imposed on how cross-eyed I've become at this

point. For the record, I do not agree with your thick-skull diagnosis and I know, though maybe not for certain (wink), that I'm not, by far, the clearest writer.

My plan is to work somewhat backward through your last post. Thus, I will first address TACT's soundness and the double-jeopardy problem, which covers most of your point (2). I will then attempt to answer your questions about the relationship between general and special revelation (1b) from my view. Third, I will go back to the final argument you enlist in your paper. Finally I will try to give an answer to what I take to be an ultimately methodological question (1c).

It appears my last response's point (2) covered ground where we had already come to stand in agreement. To summarize, these agreements are that (Van Tilian) CT includes EC(CR) conceptually; that therefore, Stroud's objection, ST(CT), is not a valid response to TACT; finally, that the only valid counter to TACT is TANCT. It appears to me this last agreement about the necessity of TANCT harbors any remaining disagreement.

I maintained in my point (2) ambiguity surrounding our agreement about the invalidity of ST(CT), the fallaciousness of Stroud's objection to TACT. Unfortunately, it seems that ambiguity remains. Our agreement is unclear because you say on the one hand, Your solution...does succeed in answering the initial problem (2a), as well as concede that my comments regarding EC(CT) and so on...are successful in rendering ST an instance of begging the question against TACT...and that the objector needs to propose TANCT (2b). I take this to mean that I have successfully refuted Stroud's objection. On the other hand, you follow-up clarifying your point that performative self-falsification is not implied by an inability to "account for" epistemological, moral, or scientific realism... That begs the question how one proposes TANCT without such an "account for" epistemology, morality, metaphysics, etc.? The ambiguity here seems to be the connection I have assumed between TANCT and the autonomous worldview NCT it requires.

In my first post I asserted that (my interpretation of) Butler's response to Stroud makes way for (my interpretation of) Bosserman's response to global skepticism. My thought, Bosserman-from-Butler, could be formalized as follows:

P1. If global skepticism, not CT.

P2. If not CT, TANCT (per Butler).

P3. If global skepticism, not TANCT.

P4. If global skepticism, TANCT and not TANCT (per impossible).

C: Global skepticism is incoherent.

The above argument is, in my view, Bosserman's critique of ST, wherefore I said Butler's response makes way for Bosserman's. My interpretation of Butler gives us justification for P2: that CT claims EC(CR). The very concept of CT demands a robust TANCT to disagree with CT at any point – for example, about EC(CR). Yet, TANCT cannot be proposed, defended, or even warranted on global skepticism. Global skepticism, after all, refuses to construct NCT, an autonomous worldview, an epistemological framework for such warrant. Inferences from P2, therefore, defeat both Stroud's objection and global skepticism, which was my original claim.

Coming full circle then, it is unclear to me how we can agree on (first above:) P2 and still fail to reach C. I am straining to see otherwise, but P2 entails that one be in a position to make TANCT, thus demands NCT, which is just to say P2 requires a fully-fleshed-out cosmological, non-Christian worldview accounting for our experiential horizon in order to reject TACT. Inversely, we could equally say that since global skepticism stands or falls with Stroud's objection and Stroud's objection is agreed fallacious, global skepticism is no more rational.

General and Special Revelation

23 October

The Adamic TAG and the noetic effects of sin

From this standpoint, I think I can answer your two fascinating and important questions (1b) and (1c). These are, Does this [model of revelation] result in the queer situation that only “TAG” is sound for those who have not heard the gospel, but “TACT” is for those who have? including whether things like the Trinity are contained in/arguable from general revelation, and, This gets to my main concern/objection...this making-TACT-work-through-EC-revelation business does not fit obviously well with how Van Til and Bahnsen said CT is demonstrated: through the impossibility of the contrary. So what’s the relation between the two? Does the apologist show...that CT is conceptually necessary, and then show with an appeal to EC(CR) that the Stroudian objection begs the question?

To (1b), I’ll say yes, I would bite the bullet that unbelievers without the Gospel would stand in a position to make an Adamic TAG, thus an argument for the Trinity, were it not for their sin. In the garden, Adam knew God, knew not sin, and so was in a position to make TAG, though I suppose then it was rather irrelevant. Adam’s sin, its effects on mankind and our relation to God and the world, causes default ignorance and the idolatrous heart keeping people uninterested in acknowledging the Trinity or formulating TAG, as Adam otherwise could in the first place. In a round about way, this is to say the reason you don’t see TAG without TACT is because Adamic TAG is not immediately relevant without sin whereas TACT is immediately relevant because of the very sin that restrains people from formulating Adamic TAG. Sin’s noetic effects, its hampering of the state of creation, resulting in both God’s general revelation turning into one of judgment (communicating, now, the need for a Savior) as well as

man's (mis-) interpretation of said revelation together ruin any attempt at natural theology without CT. Of course, once we have CT, we're in a position to propose TACT instead of an Adamic TAG anyway. At least, that's my fallible interpretation of Vos. Hopefully this explanation reduces the *prima-facie* queerness.

To (1c), I am admittedly confused, unable to see why the apologist has not already trapped the king. Suppose this were a chess match. Once the apologist moves to TACT: check. Now the only valid move becomes TANCT, and since Stroud cannot protect the king, skepticism cannot displace him, which is to say neither accomplish TANCT, those moves have already been precluded. Furthermore, if those are the only possible maneuvers – say, because the unbeliever doesn't have a worldview piece on the board: check mate.

At this point, we really only have two options toward rejecting TACT. We could defy chess because we think it's rules are somehow irrational, but your paper doesn't critique the form of TAs that way. Or we could put forth TANCT, but your paper does not propose the truth of an NCT worldview, and obviously! since you're a brother in Christ. I feel really bad taking this turn, and if I'm failing to miss something, boy I am sorry for being so incredibly myopic. However, I honestly don't see how to avoid asking how you have avoided my double-jeopardy accusation. What room has been left to disagree with TACT outside of a the one you didn't make or the one you already agree impossible: a worldview response of TANCT?

Externalism and the Methodological Gap

23 October

Known versus argued, reductio, and TACT as a way of argumentation

Finally, my reason for bringing up our models of revelation, Vos' redemptive historical view, and Van Til's philosophic transcription was in part to take issue with two notes at the end of your paper: the MIT-CT conjunction thesis and the internalist argument in your conclusion. Bear with me, because I may be repeating some ground where we already agree.

In light of CR, as before defined, I think it is minimally a confusing maneuver to abstract MIT from CT as if ST demands separate argument, as anticipated in your paper: The entirety of TACT would thus consist of a modest TA for CT in conjunction with an ambitious TA for MIT. In fact, I am suggesting we replace MIT with (Vosian-Van Tilian) CR, since the latter sufficiently revokes ST(CT) without either requiring idealism outside of CT or resorting to ST(ST). If we have already defined CT as Van Tilian, to

use the language of your paper, EC(CR) is entailed in, or at least plausibly implied by CT. As much as the Trinity and the Incarnation are part of CT, so is CR, including EC(CR), rendering MIT unnecessary or redefined (I'm happy with either), and removing the need for a two-part argument (one for MIT, one for CT).

Not irrelevant to CR, I believe your internalist argument concerning appeals to perception equivocates argument (i.e. inferential justification) with justification simpliciter, such as the sort provided by CR. Accordingly, (6) equivocates "known" with "argued." It is true, if TACT is sound, CT can be argued without invoking perceptual knowledge as a premise. It is false to say TACT implies CT can be known simpliciter without perceptual knowledge. In fact, I think TACT just

entails perceptual knowledge broadly and specifically if sound.

After all, TACT is not intended to be an argument in a vacuum. It is an argument about what we all already know, not an argument to put new ideas in the recipients mind. TACT cannot be understood by someone who is not familiar with CT. For someone who understands CT, and thus already has knowledge via CR, TACT cannot fail to provide inferential justification.

Here, then, is my counter-argument formalized, where DSR means divine special revelation, CR meaning divine revelation broadly, internalism meaning the thesis that justification for belief is contingent on faculties of the knower, and were (6) maintains internalism about DSR.

P1. If TACT, then CR.

P2. If CR, then DSR through perceptions sans internalism.

P3. If TACT, then DSR through perception sans internalism.

C: (6) is false.

What is particularly interesting to me is that you anticipate something of this objection in a footnote. You say, One might claim that maybe TACT is sound but it cannot be known to be sound—that would mean that (6) is false. This, however, is inconsistent with the Van Tillian principle that CT can be demonstrated through TACT. However, I think this is best reversed: one might claim that TACT is sound but it cannot be argued without CR, contra (6). This is consistent with the Van Tillian principle that CT can be demonstrated through TACT, but need not be demonstrated through TACT to be known through CR.

We might call this latter distinction: externalism.

However, it is my turn to come out of the closet! I do think I see an issue, maybe it is the one you've been pointing out thus far and

I simply fail to understand. The problem I do (think I) see I will put this way:

Suppose the unbeliever does attempt TANCT; suppose they lay down their cards, and the apologist faces a concrete example of autonomous worldview. Methodologically speaking, the apologist isn't going to repeat TACT. No, he's going to move to something else, another argument: *reductio ad absurdum*. In jumping from TACT to a *reductio*, a gap appears. This methodological gap could be construed as a problem.

At best, this gap implies the *reductio* is a mere extension of TACT (Vincent the fake Greg Bahnsen's view, and BK's if I'm not mistaken). It could imply, in the opinion of this mere laymen, that TACT and the *reductio* live under the same roof as one family of argumentation known for content and intent, not form (my view). Instead, maybe the gap implies a methodological distinction, the difference between proof and persuasion (Oliphint's view, I think). Still stronger, one could take this gap to imply

TACT stands as a sufficient positive case, or a type of many individual positive cases, but further negative arguments are needed wherever TANCT rears its head (rather Framean). Worse, though, maybe this methodological gap implies that TACT is not really a case for CT at all but only a case for the necessity of an autonomous worldview (NCT) from the unbeliever! That certainly reduces the odds – especially in our age of rational cowardice – but it doesn't actually succeed in proving CT. (I find this last interpretation reminiscent of Clark, though not identical to him.)

To me, there is some kind of functional substance to these stronger interpretations. That is, I think TAs tend to lose all apologetic potency once formalized, and not just because of the unbeliever's daftness, as I predict BK and Vincent the fake Greg Bahnsen shall argue (and perhaps throw me in the dungeon with you now). TACT really only works, in my view, as a *tao* or way of argumentation to be employed against unbelievers, not a singular knock-down formal proof. To be sure, I do hold, with Bahnsen and Butler and Van Til, that there exists apodictic proof of God; but on the wisdom of transcendental reasoning, not through the inference of a singular formal proof. I just don't think TACT can be singularly formalized

– in fact, I believe it defies formalization at all, not because it can't be, but because it shouldn't be. By analogy, TACT is not some magical punch that wins the fight; it's more like a style that can move through and enlist any stance, any maneuver, and which actually turns your defenses into simultaneous attacks, and your opponent's attacks and defenses against himself.

The weakness I perceive, then, I do not think is the fault of TAs or TACT per se, but rather of trying to compact the non-discreet form of TACT into an archetypal proof of singular form.

What Is Epistemic Certainty?

29–30 October

Infallible justification and the character of revelational epistemology

29TH–30TH OCTOBER

BBALINT

I'm working through your latest extended response to me on TACT. One preliminary question: what do you mean by epistemic certainty? (I know we've touched on this before, but it's not fully clear to me yet.)

Through the last few weeks it has become my studied opinion that I have no idea what that term is supposed to mean :D

NECESSITARIAN

I would say epistemic certainty is synonymous with certitude, as it is used in some contexts, infallible belief or an infallibilist model of justification, and it means that the warrant or sufficient reason for the belief in question guarantees its truth. To say I possess epistemic certainty that Yahweh exists is to say my belief in Yahweh bears justification that rules out absolutely any chance of being wrong.

There are two necessary conditions of epistemic certainty and they are jointly sufficient: 1. Belief x 2. Infallible justification for belief x where, as above, infallible means the justification provides closure, rules out any chance of being wrong whatsoever.

Well, okay, I suppose you might want to add 3. Truth of x to that equation, but I'm just trying to fill-in for justification on a JTB model.

BBALINT

So what is this justification like with CR? How does it work, what does it consist in? I know these are big questions, and if there are good resources on it, feel free to direct me to them. But I suspect that (at least in part) the meat of the current stage of our discussion on TACT hangs on the character of revelational epistemology.

NECESSITARIAN

Glad we agree talking about the justification for CR is difficult, bbalint. With Augustine and Edwards, I have construed it as illuminating in all its subsets, bringing something to light, removing darkness of ignorance.

But in less poetic terms, I believe CR in its very nature facilitates to cause belief in its recipient in a manner that (1) utilizes human cognition according to its original and most basic design, (2) defines or changes the very noetic structure of its recipient by providing either the essential content of said noetic structure (viz. implanted revelation) or essential content of man's place in the universe (viz. special revelation; as Adam's garden mandate, Abram's calling, Job's answer, the Old Covenant, or the Gospel), and (3) possesses divine uniqueness and authority inherited from its Author, which is its unmistakability, its self-authentication, which is another way to call it self-evident.

Point (1) means God has preprogrammed all human beings to recognize his revelation. Point (2) means human nature and consciousness is determined in part by revelation, minimally implanted and general, but also special if witnessed. Point (3) means the divine origin of God's word leaves no room for any skepticism except the self-defeating sort for any who witness it.

It occurs to me that I have set this up in a way that anticipates common objections. For example, one of the atheists in our Philosophy server likes to make a human nature objection, which he calls "the bottlenecking problem." The problem is how to get the infinite thoughts of God into a finite being or how revelation can be infallible given fallible recipients or how it can be unmistakable given

the fallibility or moral imperfection of its recipients. (1), I believe, answer this.

(2) raises anyone at the table who wants to play hands against CR. Now they have to not only argue

epistemology to disagree, but anthropology and ethics also, since I am defining human life in DKG terms.

(3) is probably at the forefront of our conversation and can be subdivided a hundred times over in its

own right. It might be worth pointing out that I think implanted revelation is both the first conscious act/state of human life as well as indispensable to human life. It might also be worth pointing out that I think general revelation is in some sense analytical to its objects: in the same way I get a look at Tolkien through Lord of the Rings, so also we get a look at God through his art. This might be called an expressivist approach to general revelation, since it holds that analytical to any fact in creation is its nature as the expression of God.

END OF DIALOGUE

“TACT’s inability to persuade says nothing about its inability to prove.”