

**How Not to Answer the Pro-abortionist:  
A Review of Francis Beckwith's "Politically Correct Death."**

*"Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him."  
Proverbs 26:4*

The goal of Francis Beckwith in writing his book *Politically Correct Death: Answering Arguments for Abortion Rights*<sup>1</sup> is to present “a rigorous intellectual defense of the pro-life position” (p. 11). His goal is commendable. For too long Christians have been missing in action in serious intellectual debate. Thus Christians themselves have inadvertently encouraged unbelievers to despise the Christian position on moral issues as an irrational faith commitment. The pro-life movement is little more than a “disturbing” sociological phenomenon. As Beckwith indicates by his title "Politically Correct Death," the “pro-choice” position is taken for granted as the only reasonable position among intellectuals in academia as well as other major institutions in our nation. There is scarcely a one to stand with a well-reasoned defense of the life of the unborn in such powerful circles of influence.

So in such an environment, how is the pro-lifer to present his case in a rational, convincing manner? What is the common intellectual ground between the pro-life Christian and the atheist pro-abortionist? Unfortunately, the common ground that Beckwith chooses to stand on with the atheist is quicksand. The thesis of this review is that Beckwith chooses the wrong method to advance his commendable goal. For although it is apparent that Beckwith is Christian from his frequent and favorable quoting of evangelical Christians and his book being published by a Christian publisher, he does not argue his case for the rights of the unborn as a Christian. The unbeliever's worldview is grounded upon self-destructive beliefs, and Beckwith chooses to defend his view of abortion by standing on that same self-destructive ground.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the sanctity of the life of the unborn is not given an adequate intellectual defense. Until Christians

learn that ethics is impossible without God, they will continue to be held captive by the enemies of God and defeated in the fight for justice.

### **Beckwith's Fallacy of Neutrality**

Beckwith claims that in his book he will show that abortion is wrong even if one assumes that atheism is true. In the introduction he says, "First, I will *not* argue for the pro-life position by appealing to theological reasoning. The main thrust of this work is philosophical. Hence, if my arguments are sound, an atheist, agnostic, or humanist is intellectually obligated to become pro-life. Although I do address theological arguments for abortion rights in chapter 8, my arguments in that chapter stand apart from the rest of the book"<sup>3</sup> (p.14, cf. pp. 115, 245n.). (The last chapter, 9, and the appendices all give secular arguments also.) To be clear about his position, Beckwith does not mean that the atheist is obligated to become pro-life because Christian ethics is rationally compelling; rather, atheistic ethics, Beckwith claims, demands that one regard abortion as murder: He says, "the material in the first seven chapters is sufficiently devoid of any theology that any reasonable non-believer could accept the pro-life position *without sacrificing his unbelief*" (p.137, emphasis added). Obviously Beckwith believes that atheism and every other non-Christian worldview is compatible with belief in moral absolutes, in particular the absolute not to kill unborn humans.

The supposedly religiously neutral tools that he will use to demonstrate the immorality of abortion are intuition, logic, and science. That he believes these tools to be totally independent of religious assumptions he states explicitly: "[T]he arguments used to support the view that life begins at conception, . . . *or any other view on abortion* for that matter are *not even remotely religious*, since they involve the citing of scientific evidence and the use of philosophical reasoning" (p.94, emphasis added). Wow! No arguments supporting any view on abortion have

anything to do with religion? Surely Beckwith has gone over-board here. He is crying "Peace, peace," when there is no peace between him and his atheist colleagues.

Having rejected any religious connection to the morality of abortion, he then denies that morality is even really in dispute in the abortion issue. He believes the debate over the ethics of abortion is, at bottom, not really a dispute over different ethical standards at all! No matter what their philosophical or religious beliefs, everybody has the same basic ethical standards, he says. Disagreements arise because some people simply are not informed about certain facts and or make mistakes of reasoning. He says:

"It is apparent that the main dispute in the abortion debate does not involve differing values, but disagreement about both the application of these values and the truth of certain facts. The abortion-rights advocate does not deny that human beings have a fundamental right to life. He just believes that this right to life is not extended to the unborn since they are not fully human and/or their existence demands that another (the pregnant woman) is asked to make significant non-obligatory sacrifices" (pp.27-28).

Beckwith's highest moral standard is whether an act is "consistent with our moral intuitions" (p.108). Intuition is the authority by which Beckwith justifies his crucial premise that "It is prima facie wrong to kill an entity that is fully human" (p.153). "*Our* moral intuitions" refers to the religiously-neutral common intuitions of Christians and non-Christians. Beckwith says, "In summary, since there is a common ground between two moral positions that are often depicted as absolutely polarized, we can coherently reason and argue about this issue. And since there is a common ground of values, the question as to which position is correct rests on which one is best established by the facts and consistent with our common values" (p.28).

But as Tonto said to the Lone Ranger, "What do you mean by 'we' kemosabe?" Do atheists and Christian really share the same values? Is Beckwith's claim valid that "The abortion-rights

advocate does not deny that human beings have a fundamental right to life” (p.27-28)? Notice that in this passage, quoted at length above, Beckwith first says that atheists do not deny that human beings have a fundamental right to life, then he immediately admits the contrary when he says that “or” the atheist may believe that the unborn baby is human and still not have a right to life -- when the mother does not want to make the sacrifice to carry the child. The pro-lifer and pro-abortionist do in fact have a conflict of values as to whether the life of the unborn is of greater value than the convenience of the mother. If a person says that the latter is of greater value, a statement by the person that he still believes in the fundamental right to life of all humans becomes rather hollow. He certainly does *not* believe in the right to life in the same sense as the opponent of abortion.

Ingrid Newkirk, national director of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, says, “I don't believe human beings have the ‘right to life.’ That is a supremacist perversion. A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy.”<sup>4</sup> Bioethicist Peter Singer has published a book, *A Declaration of War: Killing People to Save Animals and the Environment*, in which the author “Screaming Wolf” urges activists to “hunt hunters, trap trappers, butcher butchers,” and so on.<sup>5</sup> Beckwith himself quotes Peter Singer as saying, “Species membership in Homo-sapiens is not morally relevant” (p.174). Beckwith also presents pro-abortionist James Rachels' argument that “the mere fact that something has biological life . . . , whether human or non-human, is relatively unimportant” (p.109). Beckwith should know that pro-abortionists often “make a distinction between being a human and being a person” (p.105). They believe that humanness is a biological quality, whereas personhood is a moral quality, which is not achieved until a human (or dolphin or chimp) displays certain thinking abilities. Since pro-lifers claim that all innocent humans have value and a right to life, regardless of consciousness or thinking ability, pro-lifers have a different view of what constitutes moral value than pro-abortionists.

Even if an unbeliever does affirm that all humans have a fundamental right to life,<sup>6</sup> the similarity to the Christian view is *only a formal similarity* because the Christian and non-Christian

have two different foundations on which their ethical reasoning is based. For the Christian, the character of God defines goodness. God is the source and standard of all ethical reasoning. Therefore when the atheist denies the existence of God, the whole Christian view of ethics is undermined. The atheist's ultimate standard of goodness is found in nature, particularly that evolutionary product of nature - the human brain. Thus when the ultimacy of nature and man are denied, the whole atheist view of ethics is undermined. When the atheist says that "x is good" he means that x conforms to what man or nature defines as good, in independence of a transcendent God. When a Christian says that "x is good," he means that x conforms to what God has defined as good.<sup>7</sup> In short, there is no religious neutrality in ethics.

In defense of the idea of neutral ethical ground between believers and unbelievers, Beckwith claims that both pro-life Christians and pro-abortion atheists believe in liberty and justice (pp. 27, 154). Yes, both sides defend their views using these words, but each defines these words in very different ways. Liberty for the atheist means liberty from God's law. Justice for the atheist means equality without regard to religious morality (i.e. God's law). Saying that Christians and non-Christians mean the same thing when they use the same words is like saying that Jehovah's Witnesses and Christians mean the same thing when they talk about Jesus.<sup>8</sup> *Such a fallacy is called the fallacy of equivocation.* "Indeed their rock is not like our Rock" (Deut. 32:31).<sup>9</sup>

The necessity of God for the possibility of ethics is what we find taught in the Bible.<sup>10</sup> Since God is the sovereign Creator and ruler of all things, there is no area of life where we can be neutral toward God. "All things were created by Him *and for Him*" (Col. 1:16, cf. Rom. 11:36). We are obligated to obey God in the mundane areas of life as much as we are on Sunday in church. Whatever we do, even our eating and drinking, is to be done for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). God's wisdom "raises her voice in the public squares" (Prov. 1:10). Civil government (Rom. 13:1-7), philosophy (Col. 2:8), education (Psa. 119:99, Prov. 1:7), and economics (Matt.25:14-30, Deut. 8:18) are all to submit to Him. Indeed, our every thought is to submit to Him (2 Cor. 10:5).

As God's creatures we are never morally justified in questioning our Creator (Isa. 45:9; Matt. 20:1ff.; Job 38-42; Rom. 3:4,19; Heb. 11:17). The Bible defines sin as transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). If a person does not practice righteousness or love his neighbor, it is because he does not love God (v.10, cf. 3 John 11). Good and evil cannot be defined apart from God. God is the standard of moral perfection (Deut. 32:4, Ps. 18:30, Rom. 12:12); God's law to man reflects His perfect character (1 Tim. 1:8, Rom. 7:12,16; Ps. 19:7; 2 Tim. 3:16-17); thus we must be perfect as God is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Beckwith believes that a person can practice righteousness in independence of God, but John says that "he that practices truth comes to the Light, that his deeds may be manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:21).

There can be no neutrality in our commitment to Christ versus other ethical authorities. Jesus says that we cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). We must obey one or the other. If we are not for Him, we are against Him (Matt. 12:30). Christ is the stone despised by men but approved by God. The spiritually enlightened worship at Christ's feet, but the wisdom of the natural man drives him to crucify the "Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:6-16). The two groups of people have very different views of moral value. Indeed, their rock is not like our Rock.

Paul clearly teaches in Romans that when men reject God, they also reject true ethics: "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not appropriate" (Rom. 2:28), including, of course, murder (v.29). When pagans who have never read God's law in the Bible nevertheless do the "work of the law," it is because they are created in the image of God, having the knowledge of God and His law implanted within them (Rom. 2:15; cf. 1:19), and because their sinful nature is restrained by God's grace (Rom. 1:24,26,28).

Christians like Beckwith have often used this passage about the unbeliever performing the work of God's law to justify "natural law" as an ethically neutral common ground with the unbeliever. But this common ground is not neutral at all; the common ground is *God's ground*. The

unbeliever's outward conformity to God's law is evidence that he does know God in his heart of hearts, despite his attempts to "suppress" this knowledge (Rom. 1:18).

The grace given to unbelievers to restrain their acting in total consistency in their rebellion against God is often called "common grace" and obviously differs from saving grace. When the pagan conforms to God's law, it is said that the "work" of God's law is written on his heart. But when a person is regenerated, Hebrews 8:10 says that "law of God" is written on his heart, without the qualification of the word "work." "Work" refers to outward conformity to God's law, but only the Christian obeys God's law in motive and goal as well. For even if a deed outwardly conforms to the right standard of God's law, if the deed is performed without the motive of love for God and the goal of glorifying God, it is not truly a righteous deed (cf. Matt. 6:1-6). Without the right motive and goal, the righteous deed is like "filthy rags" in God's sight (Isa. 64:6). Consequently, Paul can say, despite the fact that the pagans do the "work of the law" that "there is none that does good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12), and the carnal mind "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).

We must recognize that the unbeliever is both God's creation and a sinner. As a sinner he will attempt to suppress the knowledge of God. But because he 1) is created in God's image 2) and is restrained in his sinfulness by God's common grace, 3) he therefore acts inconsistently at times with his atheistic assumptions. The proverbial virtuous pagan is operating on *borrowed capital* from his Creator. The good things in his life, including his good works, are scraps from the Master's table (Matt. 15:24-28); yet in his wickedness he bites the hand that feeds him. He refuses to give God the glory due His name. As a sinner he will attempt to find the ultimate source of meaning in this world, including the meaning of ethics. But since his immanistic interpretive principle is false, such attempts will end in futility.

Beckwith identifies his neutral common ground ethic as an appeal to natural law and natural rights. As we saw in the case of Romans 1-2, the Bible certainly does teach that nature "speaks" of

God and His law, but only when nature is considered as a creation of God (cf. Ps. 19:1-7, 69:34, 96:11-12, 98:7-8, 148:1-13; Isa. 44:23, 49:13; Rom.). To seek guidance from nature in independence of God is defined as idolatry, and the result is either silence, a voice created by one's imagination, or the voice of a demon (1 Kings 18:26,29; Isa. 41:21-29; Jer. 10:1-16; Hab. 2:18-20). God scornfully laughs at "stupid and foolish" (Jer. 10:14) idolaters for trusting in speechless nature, and He pronounces the judgment that "those who make them will become like them" (Ps. 115:1-8, 135:15-18; cf. Hos. 8:4).<sup>11</sup>

Jesus Christ is "the true Light, which gives light to every man" (John 1:9). God does not have a double standard of ethics, a supernatural one for Christians and a natural one for non-Christians. The source for both, the source of nature and Scripture, is the supernatural light of Christ. Natural law is known rightly only as it is seen as merely conveying the directives of the personal Creator, as stone or paper conveys the thoughts of an author. On the assumption that nature is autonomous from God, nature can provide no ethical guidance. A Godless universe is a nihilistic concept - a meaningless, silent void.

To appeal to supposedly universal human intuition as the highest moral standard is not only idolatrous, it assumes that humans are inherently good. Thus Beckwith's intuitionism contradicts another major tenet of Christianity, that human nature is depraved. The moral intuitions of a redeemed, godly man will differ from those of an ungodly man, whose "mind and conscience is defiled" (Titus 1:15). Since everybody agrees about basic ethical values, Beckwith says that people disagree over abortion because they make logical and factual mistakes (pp. 27-28). Thus Beckwith is logically committed to the position of Socrates, that sin is the result of ignorance of the good. All who know the good do it. However, Scripture teaches that sin is not sin unless it is a choice against our better knowledge (cf. Rom. 1:20, 21, 32; Jam. 4:17). The primary cause of ethical shortfall is not lack of knowledge or poor reasoning ability; it is moral depravity. God has inescapably revealed the good, but men love darkness rather than light (John 3:19).

Beckwith finds neutral common ground with the unbeliever only because he implicitly rejects the Christian view of ethics and sides with the foolish atheist. He assumes that the atheist's ultimate standard of ethical reasoning is valid, and that the Bible is wrong.

### **Reductio of Intuitionism**

In what way is unbelieving thought self-destructive? Beckwith himself indicates one way when he argues that relativism undermines the possibility of moral reasoning. He argues correctly that "in order to remain consistent the ethical relativist cannot criticize intolerable moral practices, believe in real moral progress, or acknowledge the existence of real moral reformers. For these three forms of moral judgment presuppose the existence of real transcultural nonrelative objective values" (p.24). However, Beckwith does not realize that relativism is an inescapable aspect of unbelieving thought. It cannot provide "real transcultural nonrelative objective values."

Beckwith claims to find the grounds for absolute moral standards in human intuition. The problems with this are many. For one, it falls to Beckwith's criticism of relativism: Human intuition provides no basis for universal moral laws. As shown above, despite Beckwith's claim, there are no universally agreed intuitions of what is right and wrong. And I just quoted respected philosophers! One could go through the prisons and find many other people that do not believe that such things as murder, theft, and lying are wrong. What is in accord with peoples' intuition often changes from person to person, culture to culture, and age to age. What a single person intuits as morally right and wrong can even change over time. Rather than universal absolutes, intuition provides arbitrary, changing, and subjective moral guidelines.

Beckwith's appeal to intuition amounts to saying that morality is determined by majority vote. It is what "most people think" (p.130). Beckwith says that relativism claims that "ethical judgments are merely subjective or relative and that all such judgments have equal validity. For to claim the latter logically leads to the judgment that Mother Teresa is no more and no less virtuous

than Adolph Hitler. I believe that this example is sufficient to show ethical relativism to be bankrupt” (p.25). In our sinful world, it is possible that "most people" could decide that Hitler was as virtuous as Mother Teresa; that is what happened within Germany during Hitler’s reign (cf. Rev. 13:8). Thus intuitionism is bankrupt by Beckwith’s own criterion. Morality determined by majority vote is certainly contrary to Scripture, which declares, "Let God be true and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

Beckwith argues correctly that if we say that the only rights are positive rights, that is rights granted society, then we have no “objective moral basis” which allows us to condemn the Holocaust (p.113). But he errs by trying to equate intuitionism, which he in turn equates with natural rights, as that objective moral basis which transcends what society defines as right and wrong. It is he who regards morally valid intuition as what “most people think.” Furthermore, it is people who have intuitions, not nature. Nature in independence of God is a dumb idol, both ignorant and silent.

The difference between the relativism that Beckwith rejects and his own position is actually very minor. The relativism that he rejects is an egotistical subjectivism: each individual’s intuition determines right and wrong; while the intuitionism that he accepts is a societal subjectivism: the collective intuitions of people determine right and wrong.

By claiming that human intuition is the highest moral standard, Beckwith capitulates to the humanist’s irresolvable tension between anarchy and totalitarianism. If each individual’s intuition is said to be the highest standard, anarchy follows. If the intuition of the collective is the highest standard (usually embodied in the State), totalitarian oppression follows. There can be no protest that the individual or collective intuition is wrong, because a higher authority than man has been denied. Only the transcendent authority of God, establishing the limits of individuals and the collective, makes possible a society where freedom and order can exist in harmony.

When Beckwith equates "universal intuitions" with natural rights, he may be thinking that human intuitions are determined by nature, and thus a part of universal human nature. But

attributing the ultimate source of morality to nature undermines the possibility of morality because nature is amoral. Morality properly applies only to volitional creatures, not inanimate objects. Rocks cannot be called evil, because they have no will. Lacking that quality necessary for morality, nature cannot serve as a self-sufficient source of moral law.

On the naturalistic worldview, humans themselves cannot be held ethically responsible because amoral atoms determine human choices. If an atheist does want to free the human will from its slavery to amoral, naturalistic determinism, he can only do so by placing it in amoral, lawless spontaneity (e.g. Democritus, Sartre). But randomness has no moral significance. Both ethical law and free will, which together are necessary for the possibility of ethics, are incompatible with the atheistic worldview.

Since naturalism rejects moral absolutes, it cannot make an absolute claim that anything is good or evil. Atheists may rail about the right of freedom of choice and the evils of religious oppression and environmental destruction, but their worldview provides no basis for making such absolute judgments. They have no absolute source of knowledge, for they say that seeing is believing, and sense impressions are in constant flux. Even if they have a rationalistic bent, they have no ethical standard higher than the changing, subjective judgment of humans. They can say something is right or wrong "for me," but they cannot make interpersonal judgments, that something is right or wrong "for you." Slaughtering six million people may be wrong for me, but apparently not for Hitler.

But even if atheists were to make Nature, as the totality of existence, the absolute ethical standard, they would still not have a basis for ethical judgments. Making the distinction between what *is* the case and what *ought* to be the case is necessary for the possibility of morality, and naturalism has two problems here.

First, since naturalism denies a reality that transcends the natural world, there is no standard which could bring the natural world into judgment. There is no higher standard by which the way

the world *is* can be judged to be not what *ought* to be. Since everything is part of Nature, and Nature is the absolute good, everything must be judged to be good. Whether Hitler slaughters millions or Mother Teresa heals millions, both acts must be judged as absolutely good. Pantheist and mass-murderer Charles Manson got one thing right when he said, "If all is One, what is bad?"<sup>12</sup>

Second, *oughtness* is not a physical object. The naturalist says that seeing is believing, but have you ever seen an ought? One can only see what is. The naturalist claims that only concrete particulars exist, thus abstract universals like moral laws cannot be accounted for in the naturalistic worldview. In this regard, we should note the problem of Beckwith designating intuition as an atheistic moral standard: Intuition is not a material entity. As non-material, an atheist who says that all that exists is matter cannot consistently subscribe to intuitionism.<sup>13</sup> Morality makes no sense in the naturalistic worldview. By trusting in the assumptions of atheism, Beckwith again shares in its foolishness.

Finally, one must ask how one would determine what people's common intuitions are. A naturalistic atheist would have to turn to empirical, statistical research to determine such a fact. However, Beckwith forswears the use of statistics to establish his ethical position (p.14). Also, such an inductive scientific study requires that one presupposes the truth of the Bible, not a religiously neutral scientific method, since the regularity of nature can only be justified on the assumption that God exists (see below). And since there are no truly universal intuitions, any finding of apparent universal agreement would necessarily be defined so vaguely that it would be subject to conflicting applications. Consequently, religiously neutral intuition cannot serve as a sound basis for social policy.

Beckwith presents two imaginary debates in which Socrates defends Operation Rescue and the sanctity of human life against the arguments of modern personalities. This is consistent with the rest of Beckwith's book, because Socrates did appeal to human intuition of the Ideas as the highest moral standard. But Beckwith depicts Socrates as one of those "Moral Majority types" (p.178) who appeals to the commands of God in the Bible as his ultimate authority in moral reasoning (p.159). But it should be remembered that Socrates was a homosexual,<sup>15</sup> demon-possessed,<sup>16</sup> communist,<sup>17</sup> pro-abortionist.<sup>18</sup> And these were not inconsistencies in his otherwise sound moral reasoning, for he clearly refused to identify goodness with any god. In the actual dialogue of *Euthyphro* Socrates confronted and confounded a priest who justified the morality of his actions by appealing to the command of a god. If the Socrates of the *Euthyphro* would have argued with someone who declares that "the Bible is my normative guide for faith and practice" (p.158), he would not have accepted that premise and then argued his moral position on the basis of its truth, as Beckwith's Socrates does. The real Socrates would have challenged that premise.

Socrates believed that the human mind is eternal and uncorrupted. It is metaphysically one with the Good. The mind would operate infallibly if only it could be separated from the material body. As Beckwith's intuitionism implies, Socrates believed that when ethical mistakes are made, it is only because the person lacked knowledge of the Good. A person cannot know the good and not do it. Socrates is no Christian ethicist.

Beckwith acknowledges that Socrates railed against civil disobedience, but he says that Socrates has now had twenty-five hundred years to think about it (p.155). Beckwith does not understand that if Socrates is still thinking in accordance with his atheistic assumptions, any change in his views would be rationally arbitrary. The change would not be based on good reasons, since God-centered reasoning is the only basis for good reasoning. Only repentance and faith in Christ would produce the sanctified method of reasoning in which Socrates engages in

Beckwith's dialogues.<sup>19</sup> Thinking about a subject and gaining knowledge, even for over two millennia, will not produce a fundamental change in one's ethical conclusions, unless the presuppositions of one's thinking change. (Consider that the devil has had about six millennia to refine his thinking and gather facts).

### **No Neutrality in Logic or Science**

Beckwith does an effective job in his book showing that abortion rights advocates often commit the logical fallacy of begging the question when defending their position. He also does a good job of exposing scientific fallacies that pro-abortionists often proclaim as fact. However, he concedes ground to the opposition that he should not when he says that by engaging in philosophical and scientific reasoning that his arguments are in no way dependent on religion. Just as naturalistic ethics reduces to absurdity, so do naturalistic attempts at justifying logic and science.

The two main theories of knowledge in the history of philosophy are rationalism and empiricism.<sup>20</sup> In our age empiricism, or "seeing is believing," has been the dominant view of knowledge. That empiricism can provide no basis for knowledge of the facts of the world or knowledge of laws of logic was demonstrated over 200 years ago by David Hume.<sup>21</sup> He noted that we may see a variety of events with our eyes, but we never see *necessary* connections between those events. Necessary connections between events are assumed when we talk of cause and effect relationships and the regularity of nature. Or to put Hume's argument another way, if all knowledge is contingent on sense experience, which is *limited*, we can never come to know *universals*, like the laws of science, the laws of logic, or moral laws. Sense experience reduces to nothing but the flux of chaos when it depends on nothing beyond itself. Hume showed that the one who declares that seeing is believing cannot claim that he knows that the world exists or that even he himself exists!<sup>22</sup>

If the only things that we can believe exist are things that can be seen, we cannot believe in the laws of logic or the intelligibility experience. The laws of logic are not physical, observable objects. They do not grow on trees; they cannot be put on a test tube. They are *concepts*. Even the simplest observation statement assumes knowledge of non-material, universal concepts. If I say, "Here is a glass of water," the word "glass" does not refer only to my present sense experience. I am saying that this glass is an instance of a universal class of objects that we designate as "glass."<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, on the naturalistic worldview there can be no mind, only gray matter. The brain secretes thoughts like the liver secretes bile. As C.S. Lewis observed, "If...I swallow the scientific cosmology as a whole then not only can I not fit in Christianity, but I cannot even fit in science. If minds are wholly dependent on brains and brains on biochemistry, and biochemistry (in the long run) on the meaningless flux of atoms, I cannot understand how the thought of those minds should have any more significance than the sound of wind in the trees."<sup>24</sup> Obviously, the naturalistic, empiricist worldview is intellectually bankrupt. It cannot account for the possibility of science or human reason.

The Christian worldview, in contrast, can account for the intelligibility of experience. The ultimate foundation of knowledge is not limited sense experience but the universal Creator (Prov. 1:7, 2:6, 3:5, 9:10; Ps. 94:10; 1 Sam. 2:3; Isa. 28:26; Col. 2:3). Immaterial, universal, and unchanging concepts like laws of logic, ethics, and nature make sense in the Christian worldview because their source is an immaterial, universal, unchanging God. Rational, universal concepts can apply to the particular facts of the world because the facts were created by an absolutely rational God. The Christian can make a distinction between "is" and "ought" and between "logical" and "illogical" because there is a standard that transcends the world and man which can bring them into judgment. By separating logic from God, Beckwith assumes that the laws of logic are impersonal abstractions.<sup>25</sup> However, the Bible teaches that logic and truth are a Person,

the *Logos* (John 1:1-14; cf.14:6). To think logically means to think God's thoughts after Him. Human beings can gain knowledge of the world and order sense experience according to rational concepts because we are created in the image of God, with the divine mission to subdue the material world (Gen 1:26 - 2:20).

Thinking not based on Christian faith is “science falsely so called” (1 Tim. 6:20-21). Although those who reject God call themselves wise, their thinking is actually foolish, futile, and darkened (Romans 1:21-22).<sup>26</sup> God has made foolish the wisdom of the Greek philosophers (1Cor. 1:20-27). But in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). Paul tells us this that we may not be “robbed” of those treasures “through philosophy” (Col. 2:8). As Beckwith relies on humanistic philosophy, he has robbed himself and the readers whom he persuades of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge found in Christ.

The Bible forbids neutrality toward God in any area of life because the God we serve rules over all of life. We are to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5; cf. Matt. 6:24; Jam. 1:5-8, 4:4). We do not use the natural weapons of the world; only in the power of God do we find our strength to defeat the enemies of God (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Neutrality toward God is impossible. The attempt to be neutral is unavoidably a negation of God.<sup>27</sup> Neutrality is *irrational and immoral*.

### **Clarifying Common Ground**

Beckwith has based his own position on the assumptions of the fools that he intends to refute. As predicted by Proverbs, his own position has been shown to be foolish (26:4). As predicted by Jesus, his house foolishly built on sand rather than the rock of Christ’s word has been destroyed (Matthew 7:24-27). One should answer a fool according to his folly, Proverbs says, only to demonstrate the foolishness of the position, not to base your own beliefs on it (26:5).

The point of contact we have with the atheist is not religiously neutral common ground; it is the fact that the atheist is, despite his denials, created in the image of God. Because he is God's creature, he is always accessible to God. We show that the atheist is wrong in his denial of God and God's condemnation of abortion by showing that atheism undermines the very possibility of reason and ethics. Atheism reduces to absurdity. We show that when the atheist attempts to reason and act ethically, it is because he is operating on borrowed capital from the Christian worldview. We show that the only rational option in ethics is obedience to God's law, which clearly condemns abortion. If they do not like God's commandments, tough cookies! There are no other legitimate options! All other ground is sinking sand.

There can be no moral progress apart from God's word and God's Spirit. Christians will only make progress in the fight for justice for the unborn if we persuade opponents in a manner that honors God. "To the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

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<sup>1</sup> Francis J. Beckwith, *Politically Correct Death: Answering the Arguments for Abortion Rights*, (Grand Rapids: Mich.: Baker Books, 1993). Although the book was published a few years ago, it is still influential. It is now in its fifth printing and selling well. Beckwith and his book have recently been promoted by prominent apologist Hank Hanegraaff of the Christian Research Institute. On his April 8, 1997 radio show, in which Beckwith was a guest, Hanegraaff called *Politically Correct Death* a "must read" and other accolades.

<sup>2</sup> My approach to apologetics is that of Cornelius Van Til and Greg Bahnsen. For an introduction to this view see Dr. Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Atlanta, GA: American Vision, and Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Foundation, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Despite my disagreements with the rest of the book, I can recommend chapter 8 as a good exegetical response to supposedly "pro-choice" passages in the Bible.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Conniff, "Fuzzy-Wuzzy Thinking About Animal Rights," *Audubon*, November 1990, p.126. Cited in Kathleen Marquardt, *Animal Scam*, (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1993), p. 175.

<sup>5</sup> "Screaming Wolf" (pseudonym), *A Declaration of War: Killing People to Save Animals and the Environment* (Grass Valley, California: Patrick Henry Press, 1991), p.16. Quoted in Marquardt, *Animal Scam*, op. cit., p.129.

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<sup>6</sup> Bernard Nathanson is a good example (at least until his reported conversion). Beckwith quotes his argument that implantation is the moment of personhood because the chemical changes then triggered in the mother begin communication with the human community, which "is the essential element that produces life" (p.95). This is naturalistic humanism. Personhood is dependent on one's relationship with God, not man; for God is the source of value. (Is a man lost at sea, alone, with no means of communication still a person?)

<sup>7</sup> Greg Bahnsen, *Ethics*, tape 2.

<sup>8</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus is a created angel and not God.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Pratt, *Every Thought Captive*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), pp. 32-35.

<sup>10</sup> See Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), especially Chapter 14, "Theonomy vs. Autonomy," pp. 279-306.

<sup>11</sup> See Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and its Confrontation with American Society* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> Gary DeMar, *Surviving College Successfully* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1989), p.85. Whether nature is called "matter" (the materialist) or "God" (the pantheist) is irrelevant here. Either way transcendence is denied.

<sup>13</sup> Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p.175n.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> *Charmides* 154c, 155c-e; *Phaedrus* 241d.

<sup>16</sup> *Apology*

<sup>17</sup> *Republic*, Book V

<sup>18</sup> *Republic*, Book V, 460c and 461c

<sup>19</sup> Greg Bahnsen, "The Reformation of Christian Apologetics," in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1979).

<sup>20</sup> See Bahnsen's debate with Gordon Stein, "The Great Debate". One problem with rationalism, where human reasoning is the ultimate source of knowledge, is that it cannot explain why the ideas in the mind should have any connection to external reality.

<sup>21</sup> David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (London: Oxford University Press, 1888).

<sup>22</sup> David Hume says "If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable." *Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 635.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Popper, "Three Views Concerning Human Knowledge," in James H. Fetzer, ed., *Foundations of Philosophy of Science: Recent Developments* (New York: Paragon House, 1993), p. 436. Also see in the same volume Robert Almeder's excellent paper critiquing naturalistic epistemology, "On Naturalizing Epistemology," pp. 451-73.

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<sup>24.</sup> C.S. Lewis, *They Asked for a Paper*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), pp.164ff.

<sup>25.</sup> Bahnsen, "A Critique of Natural Theology," cassette tape.

<sup>26.</sup> Because "philosopher" means "lover of wisdom," science historian Stanley Jaki translates Romans 1:22 as "Although they called themselves philosophers, they became stupid." *Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press [1974] 1980). This book is well worth reading to further understand the Christian foundation of science.

<sup>27.</sup> "Neutrality is negation," says Van Til, (*A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, Ch. 2).