

COVENANTAL APOLOGETICS AND COMMON-SENSE REALISM: RECALIBRATING THE ARGUMENT FROM CONSCIOUSNESS AS A TEST CASE

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Cornelius Van Til argued that theistic arguments are useful so long as one formulates them “in such a way as not to compromise the doctrines of Scripture.”¹ He rejects, therefore, not the proofs in and of themselves but the foundation on which the proofs are often presented. Van Til thus argued that it is possible to construe the arguments in a manner consistent with Christian theistic principles, on the one hand, or anti-theistic principles, on the other. The former appeals to them in an indirect fashion as confirmatory of the necessary existence of the self-contained triune God while the latter comes in the form of a direct appeal, often yielding the meager result that some god probably exists. Thus many of Van Til’s intellectual descendants have attempted to show how particular theistic proofs might be appropriated into an apologetic dialogue in a manner consistent with the Reformed worldview.² I offer, in this paper, then, a Reformed, Covenantal reappropriation of a contemporary popular argument for the existence of God: the argument from consciousness.³ What is attempted in this essay is thus not originality in substance but in application and expansion.

The literature seeking to support, comprehensively formulate, or critically interact with the argument from consciousness has been growing in the past two decades.⁴ Both theists and non-theists alike have found the argument to be particularly powerful and a nuisance, respectively. Prominent atheist philosopher Thomas

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¹ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (ed. K. Scott Oliphint; 4th ed.; Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2008) 255. What he means, of course, is a Reformed doctrine of Scripture, as most cogently expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1.

² For a brief example of the use of the cosmological argument within a Reformed apologetic, see K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013) 105–22.

³ That is, one that assumes a Reformed doctrine of Scripture, which includes the belief that we were made, even from the protological order, to norm our interpretation of general revelation through special revelation. See Cornelius Van Til, “Nature and Scripture,” in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium of the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary* (ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Wooley; 2d ed.; Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1967) 263–301. It also means, at least, that it is a reappropriation that takes its cue from Oliphint’s ten tenets for a covenantal apologetic and epistemology as found in *Covenantal Apologetics* 55.

⁴ E.g. J. P. Moreland and Scott Rae, *Body and Soul: Human Nature and the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Thomas Nagle, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist, Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Charles Taliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); idem, *The Golden Cord: A Short Book on the Secular and the Sacred* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013) 15–60.

Nagle, for example, argues that if mental states exist in distinction from physical ones, then there is an “explanatory gap” between the two that “cannot be closed” by materialistic accounts.⁵ This explanatory gap exerts pressure for naturalists and points a way forward for theists, and thus a focus on this argument in particular seems fitting for our purposes. For a paper of this scope, I will focus on one version of the argument from consciousness as produced by prolific evangelical philosopher J. P. Moreland. Moreland has written extensively on this subject,⁶ but I will focus primarily on a concise summary of his argument in *The Rationality of Theism*.⁷ Thus I begin by expositing briefly Moreland’s formulation of the argument from consciousness. I then identify the main issue that a Reformed apologetic might have with that formulation, and I offer the major reasons for it. Finally, I hope to point to the proper way in which the argument might be reappropriated, yielding a transcendental, indirect use of the argument undergirded by divine revelation.

I. THE ARGUMENT FROM CONSCIOUSNESS

The argument from consciousness, in all of its permutations, seeks to show that the existence of non-physical mental states refutes the strong naturalist, on the one hand, and poses a problem for the weak naturalist, on the other. The strong naturalist argues that all that exists, exists in the physical realm alone. Everything, for the strong naturalist, can be exhausted or accounted for by an appeal to a physical explanation. According to this view, then, mental states like feelings, thoughts, emotions, or conscious decisions are illusory or are reducible to some physical state. Deny the existence of mental states, and all discourse becomes unintelligible sounds from mere physical states—an absurd, presumably undesirable, conclusion. This is a high price to pay, but it is the price strong naturalists ought to be willing to pay if they are to maintain a consistent naturalistic worldview that precludes the existence of God and other non-physical entities. Taliaferro contends that there is a deep attraction for these naturalistic philosophers to eliminate the mental state altogether because “if you recognize its existence, then you need to account for where it came from.”⁸ Soft naturalists, therefore, are those who refuse to bite the bullet, acknowledging the existence of a consciousness that is distinct from that which is physical. As Nagle admits above, however, no naturalistic explanation postulated thus far has been capable of accounting for how the mental can arise from the physical. This places the soft naturalist in an almost equally unenviable position with the strong naturalist—by admitting the existence of the mental, they fail to be able to give an account for how these things can arise from the purely

⁵ Thomas Nagle, “Conceiving the Impossible and the Mind-Body Problem,” *Philosophy* 73 (1998) 344.

⁶ J. P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument* (Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Religion; New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁷ J. P. Moreland, “The Argument from Consciousness,” in *The Rationality of Theism* (ed. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser; New York: Routledge, 2003) 204–20.

⁸ Taliaferro, *Golden Chain* 28.

physical. Tersely speaking, the existence of the consciousness poses an unnatural fit within the naturalistic framework. It is in this milieu that Moreland's argument takes shape.

It is important to note that the editors of the volume in which Moreland's argument is found are clear on their advocacy of the positive use of natural theology. The arguments in the book are structured to cumulatively provide "good grounds for theistic belief, thereby offering such belief as cognitively more reasonable or plausible than its denials."⁹ The appointment of natural theological arguments for God's existence to the role of establishing the grounds for theistic belief reveals a presupposition that theological construction involves gathering data from two distinct, though assumed to be compatible, sources: natural theology, on the one hand, and special revelation, on the other. The editors argue that it might be fruitful "to examine the interrelations between the lessons of natural theology and the offerings of special revelation" and that special revelation may be brought in later to illuminate "the findings of natural theology."¹⁰ The arguments offered in the book are thus exemplifications of, to use Michael Sudduth's terminology, the pre-dogmatic model of natural theology—that is, they are arguments constructed independent of the resources of special revelation and are seen to be a justificatory preamble to theistic discourse.¹¹ The argument from consciousness, therefore, was constructed for that purpose. Moreland formulates the argument from consciousness this way:

1. Genuinely nonphysical mental states exist.
2. There is an explanation for the existence of mental states.
3. Personal explanation is different from natural scientific explanation.
4. The explanation for the existence of mental states is either a personal or natural scientific explanation.
5. The explanation is not a natural scientific one.
6. Therefore, the explanation is a personal one.
7. If the explanation is personal, then it is theistic.
8. Therefore, the explanation is theistic.¹²

Moreland offers points of clarification and defense for many of these premises. In defense of premise two, Moreland argues that there seems to be no reason to take mental states as brute fact.¹³ In relation to premise three, he explains that personal explanations intend to account for specific events or results by appealing to a free, moral agent, divine or otherwise. Moreland contends that no naturalistic, scientific explanation can be offered for the existence of mental states, for at least

⁹ Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser, "Introduction," in *The Rationality of Theism* 8.

¹⁰ Ibid. 10.

¹¹ "This pre-dogmatic function of natural theology stands in sharp contrast to the way theistic arguments were utilized in sixteenth—and many seventeenth—century dogmatic systems ... which exhibit dependence on and integration with Scripture and the Christian doctrine of God ... it prevented [the natural theological arguments] from developing into an autonomous system of rational theology prefaced to dogmatic theology." Michael Sudduth, *The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology* (Ashgate Philosophy of Religion Studies; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009) 32.

¹² Moreland, "Argument from Consciousness," 206.

¹³ Ibid. 207.

three, if not four, reasons: (1) the uniformity of nature, which implies that no amount of restructuring the primal physical stuff of the universe can produce something as distinct as mental states; (2) the contingency of the mind-body correlation, whereby there seems to be no inherent connection between the mental states to the physical state on which they depend; (3) the causal closure of physical states; and (4) the inadequacy of evolutionary explanations, for it seems that consciousness is unnecessary for survival.¹⁴ If all this is true, Moreland contends, then the explanation for the existence of consciousness is a personal one, and the personal cause of it is himself a conscious being, namely, God. The argument as it stands, I believe, is sound.

The problem, then, is not in the argument itself but in its foundation.¹⁵ Recalibrating its foundations, of course, will have implications for its conclusion and the way in which the argument ought to be utilized. In particular, how does one establish the veracity of premise one? Moreland's answer involves the assumption that *commonsense* is a valid and legislative means of discovering truth. He believes that once one consults first-person phenomenology, it will become clear and obvious that mental states do exist, and that predicates belonging to these states cannot be attached to the physical, thereby establishing that mental states are distinct from that which is physical. Moreland believes that this adoption of a first-person epistemology is in direct opposition to the epistemic attitude of the naturalistic worldview, which involves the "rejection of so-called 'first philosophy' along with an acceptance of either weak or strong scientism,"¹⁶ included within it a view of the "elevated nature of scientific knowledge [that entails] that either the only explanations that count or the ones with superior, unqualified acceptance are those employed in the hard sciences."¹⁷ Moreland, in short, thinks it possible to establish the veracity of the existence of the consciousness by arguing that such a belief enjoys the epistemic credential of being an article of commonsense—something discovered intuitively when one consults reason and experience. The naturalist's problem, in Moreland's view, is their denial that first-person phenomenology is a valid and authoritative source of knowledge, along with the beliefs that this phenomenology might produce. To put it in Reformed theological categories, Moreland rejects that third person scientific investigation ought to be our *principium cognoscendi*, and instead appoints that role to commonsense. Given this observation, I now focus attention on the foundation Moreland posits for premise one and how a reorientation of that foundation might change the way in which the concluding premises of the argument might be understood.

¹⁴ Ibid. 208–9.

¹⁵ The problem that Reformed theology would have with many classical arguments for the existence of God is "not necessarily to the *structure* of theistic arguments per se, but to their intended use and place for the Christian." K. Scott Oliphint, "Is There a Reformed Objection to Natural Theology?" *WTJ* 74 (2012) 173 (emphasis original). More on this in section IV below.

¹⁶ Moreland, "Argument from Consciousness" 210.

¹⁷ Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God* 5.

II. "COMMON" SENSE? THREE (OR FOUR) OBJECTIONS

It seems to me that one can take commonsense beliefs in at least two ways. The first is that commonsense beliefs refer to *perceptual* beliefs—beliefs that are produced by one's perceptual senses in the assumption that one's cognitive and perceptual faculties are reliable to inform us about the reality of the external world. This feature of existence is simply thought to be just the fact of the matter. This seems to be the way in which G. E. Moore uses the term.¹⁸ The second way in which this term could be understood is as referring to those propositions or intuitions that are perspicuously true, upon, or even prior to immediate reflection. When any subject S entertain these propositions, it is supposed, S will come to see the obviousness of the veracity of the proposition, and thus be lured, or even compelled, to adopt a belief in them. Hence this is why the proposition in question is an article of *common* sense. It assumes that the proposition is (or could be) held with epistemic stability in the general consensus. The obviousness of the proposition is itself, it is supposed, a positive reason to believe in it, and in fact entitles one to enjoy a positive epistemic relationship to that belief. Many philosophers, for example, appeal to this line of reasoning in defense of the libertarian view of free will, among other things. Taliaferro, to show one case, holds that "any number of examples from everyday life" suggest the plausibility of the libertarian notion and that "libertarian agency seems unintelligible *only if we rule out first-person phenomenology*."¹⁹ Perhaps, crassly speaking, it presupposes that if it *seems* true to S, then it is an article of commonsense, and thus that this is itself sufficient ground to think that the proposition in question is true.²⁰ The two ways a commonsense belief could be understood are related, but I think it is this second sense that is in view in the present discussion. Call this the CS thesis.

Such a foundation, however, is incapable of supporting the argument. I gather and offer four arguments to show why this is the case: (1) the Marsden-Oliphint objection; (2) the Bishop-Trout Objection; (3–4) two considerations from the reality of the noetic effects of sin. The former two are primarily philosophical in nature, while the latter two are theological. In my view, the arguments I pose here are interrelated, but the latter two are foundational for the former.

1. *The Marsden-Oliphint objection.* Marsden and Oliphint had propelled this argument directly against the CS thesis, and thus I will spend the least space on this

¹⁸ G. E. Moore, "A Defense of Common Sense," in *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (ed. Louis P. Pojman; 3rd ed.; Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003) 49–55.

¹⁹ Taliaferro, *Golden Chain* 115 (italics mine).

²⁰ This is the way E. J. Lowe argues for the position that agent causation is irreducible to event causation: "But it will be *evident* that matters are not so simple when we are concerned with animate agents, such as animals and human beings. When a human agent spontaneously waves his hand, thus causing motion in his hand, this *seems* not at all like the case of a boulder causing motion in a tree by rolling into it. ... Rather, what we *seem* to have in such a case is an instance of *irreducible* agent causation. ... There *seems* to be nothing unintelligible or incoherent about the notion of spontaneous self-movement." *A Survey of Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 201 (the italicization of "seem(s)" is mine, other italics original). Notice that his argument, at least thus far, merely contains the appeal to the "seeming to be true" character of the irreducibility of agent causation.

objection, since there is no need to repeat their argument in full.²¹ I will merely offer an elucidation here.

According to Marsden, Common Sense philosophy began to rise in Scotland in the 18th century—in a time where “Christian and non-Christian thought were seldom distinguished according to first principles. Only the conclusion of either faith or skepticism was thought to matter.”²² The strategy is to argue that Christianity is the worldview according to which most of our already established commonsense beliefs are preserved. This was convenient as a way to defend the Christian faith against evolution in those days for belief in the necessity of some transcendent designer was still a common belief among the people. The result, however, does not bode well for Christianity when the common consensus among the general public in the next generation no longer profess that the existence of a designer is obvious or intuitive. In what way, then, can we say that there is a common sense, when there is no consensus on what constitutes that which is “common”? How can we even call it “common” when what seems obvious to one generation can be different from previous generations? Oliphint elaborates on it this way:

Common sense beliefs were thought to function as *principia*, basic and fundamental principles of knowledge itself. But it was “common” knowledge that common sense beliefs were only *generally* common and not absolutely so. Therefore, there was no criterion by which to determine which views were and which were not “common sense.” Or, to say it another way, since these beliefs were thought to be on the level of *principia*, there was no way to give a *rationale* for such common sense beliefs.²³

An appeal to common sense, therefore, becomes counterproductive. Moreland’s strategy, of course, is to argue that Christianity is the best explanation for what we all supposedly know to be obviously the case—that consciousness exists and that that which is physical cannot account for it. Moreland might say that it is a matter of commonsense to suppose that the consciousness has properties that make it distinct from the physical, and he might even describe those properties based on what *seems* to have to be the case for him. But such a description will hardly persuade many, for all they have to do to resist the argument’s force is to deny the obviousness of these descriptions and thus deny that it seems obvious to them that mental consciousness must be distinct from the physical. Even worse, they might even contend that this distinction is simply a brute fact. Moreland is simply defining what consciousness is according to what it seems to have to be for him—but this conviction might not be shared at all by the next person, and since this is the case, Moreland would be incapable of arguing that Christianity provides

²¹ George Marsden. “The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” in *Faith and Rationality* (ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) 219–64; idem, “Scotland and Philadelphia: Common Sense Philosophy from Jefferson to Westminster,” *Reformed Journal* 29/3 (1979) 8–12; K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006) 146–66.

²² Marsden, “Scotland and Philadelphia” 8.

²³ Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith* 149 n. 9

the best explanation with what his interlocutor deems to be obvious, since what is obvious to one person might be radically implausible to the next. Given the pathos of today's cultural and intellectual climate, it would be easy to imagine that many might profess that it seems obvious to them that consciousness can be reducible to the physical, as technology continues to advance, making it possible, for example, that artificial intelligence can exhibit signs of consciousness, and as theistic belief is gradually no longer taken for granted. When this happens, what results is an apologetic stalemate—a definitional shouting match appealing to what seems obvious to either party. This goes nowhere. An appeal to commonsense, therefore, is insufficient to ground Moreland's argument. All it tells us, ultimately, is something about Moreland's epistemic tendencies and not about the fact of the matter.

The next objection further corroborates this contention.

2. *The Bishop-Trout objection.* In the book *Epistemology and the Psychology of Human Judgment*, Michael Bishop and J. D. Trout, professors of philosophy at Northern Illinois University and Loyola University Chicago, respectively, expressed their lamentation over the operative goals and methodology within standard analytic epistemology (SAE).²⁴ In fact, according to them, the goals and methods of SAE are “beyond repair” and therefore “SAE will never provide effective normative guidance, and so it will never achieve the positive, practical potential of epistemology.”²⁵ They remain, however, optimistic about the epistemological enterprise and suggest that instead of going about it the way SAE had traditionally prescribed, Ameliorative Psychology ought to be the foundation from which the arguments should proceed. Only then, they contend, will the enterprise enjoy the possibility of fruitfulness. In other words, Bishop and Trout note that traditional SAE begins with first-person phenomenology to construct their arguments, and think that doing so has only resulted in abysmal failure. They propose that the way to go, therefore, is to start from a third-person, naturalistic foundation.²⁶ Ironically, this is the very foundation that Moreland thinks will lead to nowhere. I discern at least two arguments from them in their attempt to establish their case.

First, they make the observation that the proponents of SAE are committed to what they call the “stasis requirement.” According to this requirement, a successful theory of justification for knowledge must account for what we already seem to believe to be justified. Bishop and Trout summarize it this way:

If an account of justification must satisfy the stasis condition in order to be successful, then such an account can be successful only if (a) for every belief B, clearly in the extension of the predicate ‘is justified’ as used by proponents of SAE, the account yields the result that B is justified, and (b) for every belief N, clearly not in the extension of the predicate ‘is justified’ as used by proponents of SAE, the account yields the result that N is not justified.²⁷

²⁴ Michael Bishop and J. D. Trout, *Epistemology and the Psychology of Human Judgment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁵ Ibid. 22.

²⁶ Ibid. 18–20. The whole book could be seen as an argument for this conclusion.

²⁷ Ibid. 105.

Perhaps an example might help. The proponents of SAE, according to Bishop and Trout, propose that we ought to start with what we intuitively know to be justified (clearly in the extension of the predicate “is justified”), such as perhaps the proposition H: I have two hands. Any subject S, one would think, would be entitled to believe in such a clear proposition and that this belief is justified for S even if he might be incapable of articulating a rationale for that belief. Now whatever theory of justification one constructs, its success will depend, at least in part, by whether or not the deployment of that theory will account for our clearly justified belief in H. So suppose that the theory of justification (J) proposed is this:

J: A belief is justified if it is indubitable.

But is H really beyond doubt? It does not seem so. Presumably, epistemologists would say, we can give reasons for H to be doubted: perhaps we are mere brains in a vat and the perception of our hands is the result of an evil genius putting false stimulation into our brains; perhaps the whole perception of our lives is part of one big dream. So if J is the theory of justification deployed, then it would render S incapable of justifying his belief in H. But, so the proponents of SAE want to say, *of course* S is justified in his belief of H. So instead of getting rid of H, which is an article of belief that enjoys the *stasis* status, we ought to instead get rid of J and find a different theory that would account for S’s justified belief in H. Propositions such as H are simply known irrespective of metaphysical convictions, and the ability to articulate a theory of justification to account for that knowledge is irrelevant.

So, “philosophers accept or reject an epistemological theory on the basis of whether it accords with their considered judgments” and thus “our central worry about SAE arises from the fact that its epistemic theories are so often rejected *solely on the grounds that they violate our considered epistemic judgments*.”²⁸ In other words, in Bishop and Trout’s judgment, SAE is driven by the CS thesis. However, “why should we place so much trust in our well-considered judgments? We need some reason for thinking that our well-considered epistemic judgments are correct.”²⁹ Further worries come when, in “SAE, hypotheses are tested against the well-considered judgments of other (similarly trained) philosophers.”³⁰

Why think, however, that the well-considered judgments of these philosophers should be the normative judgments for everyone else to adopt, especially when many seem to disagree with their judgments, and, to make matters worse, the philosophers themselves fail to agree on which judgments ought to be deemed well-considered? Philosophers, after all, “are a relatively small and idiosyncratic sample of folks,”³¹ and it remains doubtful that “providing people with their epistemic autobiographies would be helpful.”³² Bishop and Trout go on:

²⁸ Ibid. 105 (italics theirs).

²⁹ Ibid. Brian Leftow registers a concern of the same genus against the confident use of intuitions to predicate things of God in *God and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 10–12.

³⁰ Bishop and Trout, *Epistemology and the Psychology of Human Judgment* 106.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

So what is SAE geared to tell us about? We suggest that it tells us about the reflective epistemic judgments of a group of idiosyncratic people who have been trained to use highly specialized epistemic concepts and patterns of thought. ... [It provides] an account of the considered epistemic judgments of (mostly) well-off Westerners with Ph.D.'s in Philosophy. This is a thoroughly descriptive endeavor. ... It is an open question whether SAE *also* provides knowledge of normative matters.³³

To prove their point, Bishop and Trout catalogue examples of different groups approaching a standard Gettier problem, showing that those groups respond to the problem in the opposite ways that the SAE philosophers have responded.³⁴ The test subjects include people from different cultures and different financial backgrounds. This diversity of judgments further corroborates their point that the project of SAE is reducible to a cataloguing of the epistemic tendencies of Western philosophers. To insist that the philosophers have the right epistemic judgments that are normative for everyone else, to Bishop and Trout, simply smells like "cultural imperialism."³⁵

At this point, Bishop and Trout anticipate an objection (among many) to their account. The proponents of SAE might say that their judgments are normative for everyone else because they are the experts on this matter and thus that they should be the ones to be consulted when anyone wants to make up their minds on epistemology. In response to this, Bishop and Trout erect their second argument: "if proponents of SAE are experts about epistemological matters, then it is reasonable to suppose that they have some kind of documented success."³⁶ Yet, in the form of *Modus Tollens*, no such success is documentable. In fact, the history of SAE has shown that there is much failure in even the attempt of capturing what the well-considered judgments of these philosophers are, so there is no evidence to suppose that their epistemic judgments are of more expertise than others. What is plausible to one group of philosophers turns out to be different from what is plausible to another group, just as what is plausible to one group from one culture might be obviously implausible to a group from another culture. The conclusion, I think, is consistent with what Oliphint states elsewhere: "Plausibility, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, and it depends on what authority we accept," and that when S claims that some argument is plausible, all he reveals is "a nice piece of biography."³⁷

Now, I agree with Moreland that we ought to refuse a naturalistic third-person approach when it comes to dealing with philosophical matters, but I think that Bishop and Trout are also right in their critique of the first-person approach.³⁸

³³ Ibid. 107, italics theirs.

³⁴ Ibid. 107–8.

³⁵ Ibid. 108.

³⁶ Ibid. 114.

³⁷ Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics* 218. See also Oliphint, "Is There a Reformed Objection to Natural Theology?" 194.

³⁸ It is beyond the scope of this paper to refute those who contend that the third-person approach ought to be the foundation on which philosophical constructions take place. My contention remains that

Granted, it is true that their arguments are launched at epistemologists, while the subject matter of this present paper is a metaphysical one. But the argument of Bishop and Trout could easily be lodged against the enterprise of standard analytic metaphysics (SAM). The stasis principle is just as operative in SAM as it is in SAE,³⁹ and the failures of SAM are arguably more serious than that of SAE.

Consider, for example, the words of Peter van Inwagen: "In the end we must confess that we have no idea why there is no established body of metaphysical results. It cannot be denied that this is a fact, however, and the beginning student of metaphysics should keep this fact and its implications in mind."⁴⁰ One of those implications is that the readers of philosophy ought to be told that they are "perfectly free to disagree with anything the acknowledged experts say—other than their assertions about what philosophers have said in the past or are saying at present."⁴¹ A cursory look at any introductory metaphysics textbook will indicate to the reader that there are a plethora of debates in the field of SAM, between eternalism and presentism, determinism and indeterminism, realism and nominalism, and many more that are argued from the basis of the stasis requirement. No progress or consensus, however, seems to be forthcoming. The Bishop-Trout objection to SAE thus applies to the enterprise of SAM—its goal is merely to provide the theory of ontology that best fits with the already well-established metaphysical judgments of philosophers, and many of those philosophers fail to even agree on what those well-considered judgments ought to be.

All of this provides good evidence that the stasis principle, or an appeal to commonsense, as the foundation for an argument ought to be abandoned or is at least insufficient. Starting with the first person, it turns out, will only lead to relativism. We need another foundation.

3. *Divine revelation and the noetic effects of sin.* How do we account for this diversity of intuitive judgments? If we begin⁴² instead with divine special revelation, we learn many things about our epistemic situation. In Rom 1:18–32, for example, we learn that our cognitive faculties no longer function properly and that we suppress the truth of God from creation. The results are disastrous. The text says that the sinner's *thinking* is futile (v. 21) and that their claims to be wise were empty (v. 22). Sin has caused the human mind to be worthless (v. 28). Sinners willingly exchange the truth of God for a lie (v. 25). They know the truth, but they refuse to acknowledge it—in a sense, therefore, the truth is unobvious to them, and in their suppression of the truth they perceive a lie to be more attractive. Likewise, 1 Cor. 2:6–16 pronounces the same judgment on the mind. Sin has rendered it impossible to gain true and proper wisdom apart from the sovereign revelatory work of the

neither first-person phenomenology nor third-person empirical investigation could take the place of the foundational starting-point. See Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1998), chapter 5.

³⁹ For example, see n. 19, and Taliaferro, *Golden Chain* 114–17.

⁴⁰ Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics* (Dimensions of Philosophy Series; 2d ed.; Boulder, CO: Westview, 2002) 12.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 12.

⁴² I am assuming, of course, that reason is always operative as a *proximate* starting point.

Spirit. Human wisdom that is characteristic of the present sinful age is doomed to pass away (v. 6). It is wisdom antithetical to the wisdom revealed by the Spirit of God. The wisdom and knowledge from the Spirit, in turn, are comprehensive in scope, enabling the believer to pronounce truly on all things (the *πάντα* in v. 15).⁴³ Without the Spirit, the beliefs produced by the moral, metaphysical, and epistemic judgments of the unbeliever will be unreliable, chaotic, and inconsistent. Individuals, without the restraint of God's common grace, therefore, will do what is right according to their own eyes (Judg 17:6; 21:25),⁴⁴ such that cities like Nineveh, though externally perceived to be great (Jonah 1:2), actually fail to even distinguish between right and left (Jonah 4:11).

It is tempting at this point to argue that the kind of knowledge to which the above texts refer is knowledge that is limited to moral or religious matters. Such an evasion is questionable at best, rendering impotent the many references to cognitive faculties in the texts above, leaving the faulty impression that our epistemic situation remains unharmed by the catastrophic effects of the fall. Richard Gaffin's comment on all of such efforts is, I think, decisive:

Every attempt to read [1 Cor 2:6–16] in partial terms or to restrict its scope by categorical distinctions, of whatever kind, clashes with the sweeping totality of Paul's vision. The antithesis in view leaves no room for an amicable division of territory or a neutral terrain. ... Especially popular but damaging has been the notion that the passage is limited to the "religious" sphere, as if Paul's concern is "spiritual" truth in distinction from other kinds ("secular"), which are beyond his purview. The pernicious consequences of this view are nowhere more palpable than in its highly influential Kantian version. The noumenal-phenomenal disjunction supposedly functions to circumscribe (pure) reason and limit its autonomous exercise, thus making room for faith and its free exercise. But the effect, as Western culture of the past 200 years makes all too evident, has been exactly the opposite. Increasingly, faith, especially faith in Christ and the Scriptures, has been marginalized and banished into irrelevance. The lesson is plain: give "secular" (= autonomous) reason an inch and it will not rest content until it controls everything (which, by the way, simply demonstrates the truth of our passage).⁴⁵

The noetic effects of sin as delineated in the above two classic Pauline texts account for the diversity in epistemic and metaphysical judgments professed by philosophers and non-philosophers alike. It is important to note that such a pronouncement on the truth of the matter would be inaccessible to us who are ourselves sinners. Finite, sinful, human beings would have no way of knowing the uni-

⁴³ For a full exegesis of this passage as it pertains to epistemology, see Richard B. Gaffin, "Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor. 2:6–16," *WTJ* 57 (1995) 103–24.

⁴⁴ The sense of the 17:6 and 21:25 refers to individuals, primarily. This is what causes the anarchy that characterizes Israel's end by the end of the book. Thus, the sense is not that Israel as a whole agreed upon what seemed to be right for them, and acted in unity against the Lord, but that each individual had different judgments of what seemed right for them. Chaos was the result that ensued as each individual carried out mutually conflicting convictions. See Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 508, 510, 512.

⁴⁵ Gaffin, "Epistemological Reflections" 118.

versal predicament that they are in.⁴⁶ Their knowledge is limited in scope by their own temporal existence. If the reality of sin so pervades the human epistemic situation, no one would know in any definite manner that his or her epistemic faculties suffer from a major dysfunction. When everyone that a one-eyed man meets is also a one-eyed man, he will come to believe that being one-eyed is a normal situation. The universality of the predicament implies its normalcy.⁴⁷ What was needed for this to be known was a perspective from one who transcends the human predicament, and one who possesses comprehensive knowledge of human ontology and human history. What was needed was divine special revelation. Special revelation reminds us of the predicament we are in.

Two implications of the noetic effects of sin are particularly relevant for our present purposes. First, as seen from Romans 1 above, what was supposed to be professedly common—indubitable knowledge—becomes something that is highly uncommon. Thus, an appeal to commonsense could be an appeal to a faulty sense. It might be that which was supposed to be obvious to every subject *S* fails to be obvious due to the noetic effects of sin. The particular example given in Romans is the knowledge of God. The situation is complex: the unbeliever truly does know God, for God ensures that he is perceived and understood clearly such that the unbeliever is rendered without excuse. Yet, in a paradoxical fashion, the unbeliever suppresses that truth and thus fails to know God as he ought. This suppression results in a conflict of profession: Christians are those who admit that the knowledge of God is clear to them, while unbelievers are those who refuse to admit that this is the case.

The second point is connected to the first. In the post-lapsarian order what is claimed to be a matter of common sense could be deeply erroneous. Consider the popularly quoted proposition: “To err is human.” The proposition, as we know from divine revelation, is false. Admittedly, though, the unbeliever can claim that the truth of the proposition seems perfectly obvious to him—the proposition could

⁴⁶ Yet, as in Romans 1, unbelievers *do* know that they are sinners and that they deserve the wrath of God. This dialectical epistemological tension in unbelievers reflects again the effects that sin has on the mind.

⁴⁷ Van Til’s blind men analogy captures the sense I have in mind: “If the God of Christianity does exist, the evidence for Him must be plain. And the reason, therefore, why ‘everybody’ does not believe in Him must be that ‘everybody’ is blinded by sin. Everybody wears colored glasses. You have heard the story of the valley of the blind. A young man who was out hunting fell over a precipice into the valley of the blind. There was no escape. The blind men did not understand him when he spoke of seeing the sun and the colors of the rainbow, but a fine young lady did understand him when he spoke the language of love. The father of the girl would not consent to the marriage of his daughter to a lunatic who spoke so often of things that did not exist. But the great psychologists of the blind men’s university offered to cure him of his lunacy by sewing up his eyelids. Then, they assured him, he would be normal like ‘everybody’ else. But the simple seer went on protesting that he did see the sun.

“So, as we have our tea, I propose not only to operate on your heart so as to change your will, but also on your eyes so as to change your outlook. But wait a minute. No, I do not propose to operate at all. I myself cannot do anything of the sort. I am just mildly suggesting that you are perhaps dead, and perhaps blind, leaving you to think the matter over for yourself. If an operation is to be performed it must be performed by God Himself.” *Why I Believe in God* (Chestnut Hill, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1977) 6.

be claimed to be a matter of common sense. Daily experience does indeed tell us that human beings err often. From voluntary self-deception to the involuntary lie, to a mistake that failed to communicate the good intentions from which it came, human beings are incessant error-makers. The obvious inference from this, many would think, is to conclude that error is just natural to the human constitution. For the unbeliever, then, an admission that no one is perfect is not an admission of guilt but a declaration of innocence. To repeat the point above, without divine revelation there seems to be no basis to say that all error and human sin came as an intrusion to an otherwise good creation. More than an appeal to commonsense, therefore, is required. And in the case of this example, we cannot appeal to the unbeliever's commonsense, because to do so would be to appeal to a wrong intuition. What is obvious to the unbeliever is obviousness resulting from the noetic effects of sin. Only by divine revelation, then, can we learn to root out all our prior faulty articles of knowledge—things that, perhaps prior to conversion, we had always taken for granted. Any Christian, I think, could easily recall all the many things that she had to rethink upon further reading of the Scriptures.⁴⁸

There is more. Without divine revelation, an appeal to what seems obvious to one person over another, again, will lead to an apologetic stalemate, and will once again bring into view the 'cultural imperialism' that Bishop and Trout so rightly detest. It will be impossible to determine with any persuasive or authoritative force which metaphysical judgment should be worth preserving as part of the stasis principle and thus be the norm by which we determine the cogency of other judgments.

Consider another example: one of C. S. Lewis's arguments for the doctrine of the Trinity in *Mere Christianity*. The essence of his attempt at persuasion is an appeal to what he thinks is obviously the case, namely, that the true religion is the one that is more complex, while the false religions are those that are simple. He says: "It is simple religions that are the made up ones. ... If Christianity was something we were making up, of course we could make it easier. But it is not. We cannot compete, in simplicity, with people who are inventing religions."⁴⁹ But why believe that the complexity of a religion is correlative to its veracity? C. S. Lewis simply assumes that this principle ought to be obvious enough. He believes, admittedly, that the Trinity defies reason, and that this is exactly what we should expect when we are seeking for the right one. Interestingly enough, though, Muhammad Abduh, an Islamic apologist, also appeals to supposedly obvious rational principles to establish his case in denial of the Trinity.⁵⁰ According to him, the true religion is one that does not defy reason, but rather expresses the most consistent use of it. Islam, with its emphasis on the absolute unity of God, for him, fulfills that criterion. At this

⁴⁸ From a Reformed perspective, those who claim that libertarian free will ought to be preserved as an article of commonsense, therefore, are mistaken. Libertarian freedom might be an article of commonsense (for some), but then it would serve as an example of an article of knowledge that ought to be abandoned upon the further reading of the clear teaching of Scripture (e.g. Eph 1:11; Lam 3:37–38).

⁴⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperCollins ed.; New York: HarperCollins, 2001) 164–65.

⁵⁰ Muhammad Abduh, *The Theology of Unity* (trans. Kenneth Cragg; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966). I draw these insights, however, from K. Scott Oliphint's interaction with Abduh in *Covenantal Apologetics*, chapter 8.

point there seems to be no way to adjudicate which well-considered judgments ought to be the norm for the other. An appeal to something other than commonsense is required.

The above considerations capture the impetus of Cornelius Van Til's contention when he denied that there is such a thing as a universal sense of reason in abstraction from the men that wield it. For Van Til, "we cannot speak of human reason in general, or of the human consciousness in general. ... It is a concept that should never be employed to do duty by itself."⁵¹ Reason is a tool, and the way it is used reflects the covenantal position of the man who wields it. It was never meant to function as an autonomous arbitrator: "No such abstraction exists in the universe of men. We always deal with concrete individual men. These men are sinners. They have an 'axe to grind.' They want to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They will employ their reason for that purpose."⁵² Whenever reason is posited, then, one must qualify it with whether it is the reason of the Adamic, pre-fall consciousness, or of the post-fall consciousness, or of the regenerated consciousness, or of the glorified consciousness.⁵³ Tethering human reason to the covenantal estates of man is basic to the construction of Christian epistemology, and it accounts for the diversity of professed intuitions.⁵⁴

Divine revelation is therefore necessary for us to be informed of which articles of knowledge ought to be a matter of common sense, namely, the *sensus divinitatus* and all which that implies.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Christian has a point of reference, a firm *principium*, from One who is omniscient and fully authoritative, and it is that upon which he stands when he enters into a dialogue with the unbeliever. When the Christian points to the existence of the Trinity, then, or to why true religion would defy human reason, he grounds these appeals not in the shaky foundation of his own cognitive tendencies but to the very Word of God.

With these objections we have shown that an appeal to commonsense to ground an argument is insufficient at best or simply wrongheaded at worst, especially when we live in the post-lapsarian order. Divine revelation ought to undergird any appeal the apologist might make to commonsense.

⁵¹ Van Til, *Defense of the Faith* 300.

⁵² *Ibid.* 107.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 72.

⁵⁴ It was this specific insight that stimulated Stoker's high regard for Van Til's epistemological formulations: "You rightly start with the order of creation, when you so penetratingly investigate and differentiate between what you call the Adamic consciousness—the consciousness of fallen man—and the consciousness of regenerate man. With all this you gave us a very significant contribution to a Christian theory of knowledge." Hendrik G. Stoker, "Reconnoitering the Theory of Knowledge of Prof. Dr. Cornelius Van Til," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (ed. E. R. Geehan; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1971) 33.

⁵⁵ It is important to keep in mind that the sense of the divine is constituted of both the capacity to possess the knowledge of God and the actual possession of that knowledge as effectually actualized universally by the sovereign revelatory work of God.

IV. A FIRM FOUNDATION

There *is* truth to the stasis principle held by the proponents of SAE (and SAM). The difference between the Covenantal apologist and SAE proponents is that the basis on which theories are accepted or rejected does not stem from the products of an abstract notion of commonsense or reason but from the divine authority of special revelation. God's Word becomes that which is preserved by the stasis principle. Christians know that the world is not constituted by a collection of brute facts. The world is the manifestation and historical unfolding of the decree of God. Man comes into the world with it having been pre-interpreted, therefore, by God's mind, and man is covenantally obligated to think God's thoughts after him. Reality is therefore defined not by any definitions given of it by man, nor is the meaning of the universe inherent within it irrespective of the existence of God. Rather, the plan and Word of God defines reality. This is why, as Scott Oliphint argues, the tenth tenet of a covenantal (Reformed) apologetic is stated the way it is:

10. Every fact and experience is what it is by virtue of the covenantal, all-controlling plan and purpose of God.⁵⁶

Man is thus dependent also on the continual work of God for him to know the world. Indeed by God's light do we see light (Ps 36:9); his light is the light that enlightens all men (John 1:1–14), and insofar as unbelievers do possess knowledge or profess accurate intuitions they are living on borrowed capital from the Christian worldview, for they too are metaphysically made in the image of God, living in the world that is created by and reflective of the triune God. Always and everywhere man is dependent upon the Logos as both the operative causal and epistemic principle, as Bavinck contends: "the same Logos who created both the reality outside of us and the laws of thought within us ... produced an organic connection and correspondence between the two."⁵⁷

If all of this is the case, then the pronouncement of the existence of the mental states cannot find its basis in our own rational efforts, for that would be to articulate a mere expression of our own cognitive biographies. Establishing the veracity of premise one of the argument from consciousness, just as any other fact, therefore depends upon the reality of the Christian worldview, and finds its meaning only within God's plan and Word. The implication of this is key: the only way we can begin to fruitfully pronounce on any fact—and even more seriously, facts related to anthropology and theology—must be based on exegetical grounds on the Word of God, utilizing reason not as a legislative judge but as a receptive re-interpretive tool.

Van Til summarizes my basic contention: "It will then appear that Christian theism, which was first rejected because of its supposed authoritarian character, is

⁵⁶ Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics* 55.

⁵⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena* (4 vols.; ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) 231.

the only position which gives human reason a field for successful operation and a method of true progress in knowledge.”⁵⁸

With this in place, we have a firm foundation from which the argument from consciousness can truly function without wavering. As we take our cue from Scripture we hold firmly from the Word of God that humanity is constituted of a psychosomatic whole. Scripture teaches that there is a spiritual aspect and a physical aspect to the human person, working together in functional harmony. Two texts, among many, bring this into view, establishing with authoritative force the fact of premise one.⁵⁹ The first comes from 2 Corinthians, and the second from the Gospel of Luke:

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. (2 Cor 5:6–9, ESV)

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:39–43, ESV)

Among other things, the former text teaches us that it is possible to exist apart from the body and to be at home with the Lord. While there, it is possible to please him, bringing into view the retention of our consciousness even apart from physical states. For Paul, the inner man is that which is being renewed, hidden within a jar of clay—an outer, physical self that is wasting away (2 Cor 4:7, 16). Likewise, Jesus communicates to the thief that his conscious self will still remain unharmed even when the physical body perishes. The thief is promised conscious enjoyment of paradise that very day with Christ. The spirits of believers, then, wait in the intermediate estate for the resurrection of the body, where body and soul will be conjoined once again in a glorified estate in the eschatological consummation of the new creation (1 Cor 15:42–53). Mental states, then, are indeed distinct from physical states, and because this is the case the denial of the same will lead to absurd consequences, as the argument from consciousness shows. Divine revelation provides the necessary foundation for the argument from consciousness to carry its force, irrespective of what our professed commonsense intuitions might be.

⁵⁸ Van Til, *Defense of the Faith* 125.

⁵⁹ A comprehensive discussion on this issue is beyond the purpose of this paper. For a thorough exegetical and theological study making the case for human nature as a psychosomatic whole, see John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

V. SOME CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: THE TEN TENETS, TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTATION, AND THE TRINITY

I have placed the argument from consciousness on the firm foundation of divine revelation. I have also shown that placing it on the foundation of “common” sense would produce insurmountable problems. In doing so, I have attempted to apply the principles propounded by Cornelius Van Til and the Ten Tenets of *Covenantal Apologetics*. Many more implications could be pursued, but I will focus on just two more. First, notice that the foundation of divine revelation is necessary to account for or establish the veracity of any fact—establishing the existence of consciousness by an appeal to divine revelation, by virtue of the impossibility of establishing it decisively any other way, is emblematically true for any other fact we might desire to establish. Thus a discussion of any fact can be utilized to point back to the triune God, for every fact is revelatory of his control and authority.⁶⁰ This emphasis cannot be missed: divine revelation, covenantal apologetics contends, is the necessary precondition for meaningful and fruitful predication of any fact at all. The ability to pronounce on the cogency of the argument from consciousness to begin with, just as any other argument, presupposes the reality of the Christian worldview. Persuasion, therefore, does not depend on whether the unbeliever accepts the validity of the argument for consciousness, for the very fact that we know we can fruitfully discuss the matter is already evidence for the truth of the Christian worldview.

The argument from consciousness is thus helpful in an *indirect* fashion. While standing on the truth of Christian theism, we can deploy the argument to show the absurdity of any other worldview that seeks to deny Christianity, or any aspect of Christianity. Recall Tenet 8:

Suppression of the truth, like the depravity of sin, is total but not absolute. Thus, every unbelieving position will necessarily have within it ideas, concepts, notions, and the like that it has taken and wrenched from their true, Christian context.⁶¹

By knowing Tenet 8, we know that any other worldview that opposes Christianity will be internally inconsistent. The argument from consciousness exposes the inconsistency of strong naturalists, as it shows that naturalists depend upon the existence of mental states to even begin to predicate whether mental states exist, and presses upon the weak naturalists their inability to account for the existence of conscious states. The key to emphasize here, though, is this: the naturalists are irrationally inconsistent *not primarily because they deny the validity of an appeal to first-person commonsense phenomenology but because they deny an aspect of the Christian worldview*. Furthermore, as the argument from consciousness powerfully shows, they *depend* on the truth of the Christian worldview—that they exist as a psychosomatic whole—for them to even debate the matter meaningfully, utilizing their mental states, in the first place. Thus the argument is not to be used as a justificatory preamble for

⁶⁰ Recall Tenet 10.

⁶¹ Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics* 55.

Christian theism. Rather, the argument gains its force only when it is already placed on the presupposition of Christian theism, grounded in divine revelation to establish its foundational premises.

Second, by starting explicitly from the triune God's own self-revelation, we avoid the pitfall of concluding with bare theism or a finite god. Put another way, if one constructs these arguments from a purely rational foundation independent of the sources of divine special revelation, serious problems will arise.⁶² In this context, a notion like consciousness, for the Covenantal apologist, ought to be only predicated of God if its content is first gleaned by divine revelation, not from our own rational musings. God's consciousness is not just a higher kind of consciousness than ours in the same scale of being, for God's consciousness is a consciousness that is of a wholly distinct kind. There are two levels of reality: the Creator's and the creature's, with an ontological chasm between the two that can only be overcome by God's voluntary condescension to communicate in analogical language. This chasm, in other words, cannot be overcome by a mere projection of finite categories, for God's being is beyond the epistemic jurisdiction of our limited spatio-temporal existence. To go from the bottom up to predicate things of God is to exercise inappropriate epistemic license as to what we can know about God from the creaturely level, for God is wholly other. Whatever consciousness God has, therefore, is a consciousness far different than the ones humans possess in the spatio-temporal realm, and one that remains incomprehensible to us.

Moreover, to construct a notion of consciousness from the creaturely level and to impose it upon the divine runs the danger of precluding the necessary tethering of that consciousness to the three persons of the Godhead. The consciousness of God is possessed by each person as each of the persons is genuinely conscious of the others, yet this subject-object relationship never compromises the coinherent interpenetration of the persons in an indivisible unity. This conclusion is non-derivable from our level, and cannot be seen as a mere extension of the finite consciousness produced by natural theology.

In short, divine consciousness as revealed by the triune God and an abstract consciousness constructed by human reason are two distinct things, and thus any attempt to merge the two would be problematic: the product of natural theology is a consciousness of a god, who, though perhaps on a higher level than us, is only higher in *degree*. Natural theology can only discover a god who exists in the same transcendental category of being as the creature, and to attempt to conclude with the true Christian God is to overextend the boundaries of our finite projections. Beginning with revelation, however, means that we begin with the ontological, simple, self-contained Trinity, whose existence is wholly distinct from ours. Contrary to popular opinion, God is indeed wholly other, and first-person phenomenology cannot indicate to us the nature of this God. To predicate anything truly of *this* God, therefore, is something that we cannot do unless we consult and stand on his

⁶² For a significant example of this see Paul Maxwell, "The Formulation of Thomistic Simplicity: Mapping Aquinas's Method for Configuring God's Essence," *JETS* 57 (2014) 371–403.

own self-disclosure as our *principium cognoscendi*. In recalibrating the argument from consciousness, and placing it on divine revelation rather than on natural theology, we preserve its concluding premises from devolving into a proof for some finite god. Instead, we begin from the ontological Trinity, and we lay an argument that concludes, also, with the Trinity.⁶³

⁶³ I would like to thank Professor K. Scott Oliphint for his probing comments and questions, along with Nate Shannon, Deryck Barson, and Jonathan Brack for patiently going through the paper with me in the Carriage House of Westminster Theological Seminary. Their help improved this paper significantly.

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