

# Does the Triune God of the Bible Exist? debate transcript (partial)

Jamin Hubner vs. Ben Wallis

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## 1 Opening statement: Jamin Hubner

Okay, well thank you Josh and Ben Wallis for joining me in this debate, and for everyone else who's listening. Just let me know if I'm not coming in loud and clear, because this is my first Skype debate. So that's exciting.

The question of tonight's debate is, does the Triune God of Scripture exist? I'll be arguing the affirmative, which means I'll be arguing for the Christian God exclusively, not some generic God, while my opponent will be arguing some variation of agnosticism, such as 'we don't know,' or 'we don't know if God exists, and we can't know.' It should be clear that no creature can argue for or prove the existence of God like arguing or proving any other fact of creation, precisely because God's existence *isn't* a fact of creation. It's a fact of the creator. God is not part of creation; He is independent of it. He does not live in temples made with hands, as Paul put it in Acts 17. God is on an entirely different level of existence than creation. He transcends creation, and therefore any argument for His existence must reflect that fact of transcendence.

God, as the professor Cornelius Van Til put it, is the ultimate fact. His existence is more fundamental than the existence of anything else. So as a creature, and as a Christian, I can only answer the question of tonight's debate in terms of arguing the impossibility of the contrary. That is, God exists because it would be impossible for Him not to exist. Nothing can be explained—not facts, laws, biological information, the uniformity of nature, objective morality, the metaphysical preconditions of science, dogs, cats, or sauerkraut—nothing can be explained, let alone exist, without the Triune Creator of them all.

So it's not that the Christian offers a slightly better world view than the atheist or the agnostic. The Christian offers the *only* world view that makes sense of intelligible experience. And that is precisely what I'm offering tonight—not merely one answer to this question, but the entire Christian world view, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, all of the answers to the most basic questions of life, like origin, meaning, morality, and destiny. So I don't presuppose merely

God's existence this evening, but also His revelation—that is, the authority and truthfulness of His Holy Word.

And that brings us to the question of epistemology: How do I know? Well, how do I know anything? That's a question that will be answered in two very different ways this evening. The agnostic and atheist will answer that question in countless ways, such as pure intuition, reason, the scientific method and naturalistic empiricism, logical positivism and falsificationism, and so on and so forth. Of course, [one can] simply say, we can't know anything for sure. But that is a self-contradictory statement. How do you know that you can't know anything for sure, let alone what someone else can know? Unbelief is plagued with these kinds of inconsistencies. Nevertheless, no answer from my opponent will be, 'because God says so,' or, 'because God has made it plain to me,' as Romans 1 clearly states it is the case. It will always be something unrelated to God. And while the agnostic may try to appear as though he is religiously neutral, the fact is he must dismiss the possibility of God's existence and His revelation from the outset. God is no use to him, and can never be; for he is an agnostic. This phenomenon will be demonstrated consistently as this debate goes on.

The Christian, on the other hand, knows things, particularly about God, because God Himself has revealed Himself to us, through nature, through His images, through His written Word, and through the perfect image of God, Jesus Christ the God-man. It's not as if God might be floating around in outer space, and just so happens to be the creator—but we can't know for sure. Not at all! All persons have knowledge of God just by virtue of being God's image. Furthermore, Romans 1 goes on to say that God's attributes are clearly perceived in the things that have been made. When a person looks at an airplane or scissors, he knows instantly that the airplane and scissors has a creator more intelligent and more powerful than the objects themselves, even though he has never seen, met, or maybe not even *heard* of their maker. Yet when my opponent looks at the scissors and its maker, the airplane and its maker, and in fact everything surrounding these objects, like the planets, billions of stars in space, and the countless galaxies, he insists there isn't any reason to believe a powerful and wise God created any of these things.

Further still, God spent 1500 years, approximately, writing 66 books in about every genre imaginable to communicate to creatures across the planet who He is, what He's like, and therefore who we are as His images. But it get's even more intense. God Himself became man as Jesus Christ 2000 years ago, and essentially said to the world, 'I'm God, and My Word is authoritative.' What kind of verification tops that? The Christian God is so personal and so persistent in revealing Himself through almost any means possible that it boggles the mind to think that we have any reason to conclude we just don't know, or we don't have access to knowledge about God. If the countless ways that God has clearly, historically, objectively, truthfully and consistently revealed Himself isn't sufficient for my opponent this evening as a reason to believe, then I think it is clear that nothing is sufficient.

A brief word should be said about God's relationship to creation. God is

the creator and sustainer of His creation. He is self-existent, self-defining and self-sufficient, and He establishes order in creation through immaterial laws so that human persons can understand Him. He doesn't need anything external to Himself to exist. He is truly independent. Creation, however, is not. Everything that is not God is dependent on God. This includes human persons; hence, Paul also says in Acts 17, in Him we live and move, and have our being. My opponent this evening also denies this fundamental truth about creation and its relationship to God, and therefore rejects a fundamental truth about his own existence. He denies that he is dependent on God in any way, and insists that God is entirely unnecessary for anything at all, whether objective morality, the metaphysical preconditions for science, immaterial information, immaterial laws of logic, or anything in creation itself. All of these things can, in principle, exist and be explained entirely apart from God and His revelation. Human autonomy is enough in my opponent's world view, and his own reason is sufficient to determine what is right or wrong, possible and impossible, reasonable or unreasonable, revelation or not revelation in the universe. For example, in his debate with Chris Bolt, Mr. Wallis said,

What I'm interested in doing is looking at the reasons [Christian theists] give for holding to their God-belief. I want to know, are they good reasons, or are they flawed reasons?

What does Mr. Wallis mean by "good reasons"? "Good" according to whom? If it is only according to himself, then Mr. Wallis can never be wrong, because he decides what is ultimately good or not good, flawed or not flawed. He can decide not to accept an argument just by changing his criteria of goodness and acceptability. Furthermore, since he is not a Christian who is accountable to an objective moral standard, he can change his ethical standards as often as he wants, and in theory not feel guilty for being deceptive. But if he defines "good" not according to himself, what or who does he define it by? Christianity? If so, then the argument I presented is acceptable, since it is clearly the [unintelligible] sufficient of God's special revelation. If not Christianity, why not? If Mr. Wallis wants to define what are "good reasons" to believe in God without reference to God or His revelation, which is the only self-authenticating and ultimate moral, rational standard, two things are clear: First, Christianity is automatically disqualified from the outset. Again, Mr. Wallis is not being neutral in any respect. Second, he is reduced to favoring human definitions of "good reasons," whether his own or somebody else's, neither of which will be objective, infallible and unchanging. Why, then, should we trust them? In fact, why should we trust anything my opponent has to say this evening, since he is not under the moral authority of a good and perfect standard—supposedly. What is the standard of honesty in the agnostic world view, and why should we adhere to that standard as opposed to the Christian standard?

Of course, there is another option: Mr. Wallis could be talking about "good reasons" according to Christianity. Now, this would make sense, since Christianity offers an objective, revealed, unchanging, knowable standard for truth

claims, especially on matters relating to God. But in that case my opponent would actually be borrowing from Christianity in order to argue against it. That sounds impossible! But as will become clear tonight, not only is such an irony possible, it's *inevitable*. God has created everything, and that is indeed one of my ultimate presuppositions and therefore [it] cannot be verified outside of itself. That's what an ultimate presupposition is, and all persons have these. And since God has created everything, anything in creation which the agnostic or the atheist appeals to in order to support their position immediately vindicates Christian theism. The agnostic and atheist can only argue against the Trinity with the weapons that the Trinity has provided, whether that's the ability to reason, the uniformity of nature and inductive reasoning, objective morality, immaterial information, etc. These things are made by God, and designed primarily to glorify God. It's only through sin that man uses all of these abilities to suppress the fact that he is a broken, sinful creature before a Holy Creator.

This relationship between creator and the creature cannot be over-stressed. My opponent, as a creature, has created nothing and owns nothing, and he and his agnostic world view is fallible, sinful, limited, dependent, changing, subjective, and therefore unreliable. God, however, owns everything, created everything, and is utterly Holy and infinite. His Word, therefore, is Holy, revealing infallible, perfect, unchanging, objective, and reliable truth. God's people obviously adhere to this body of truth, that we usually call the Gospel, or Good News, and it's the basis for ordering our lives and interpreting reality.

Much of this is taught in Romans 1. Romans 1 teaches that all persons have knowledge God, and so the person who doesn't acknowledge God, or says he doesn't believe in God, is self-deceived. Just as God is the ultimate and fundamental fact, so human knowledge of God is the most fundamental knowledge that there is. Why, then, don't all persons acknowledge God? Verse 18 answers the question: Sinners suppress the truth in unrighteousness. The person who rejects Christian theism, whether atheist or agnostic, is like a person swimming in a pool trying to hide a kick-ball under his legs. Sometimes that suppression of truth can become so normative that he doesn't even remember it's there. But every now and then that kick-ball accidentally slips up to the surface. That's precisely what happened when Mr. Wallis said, "I want to know, are they good reasons, or are they flawed reasons?"

And that's what happens when any person holds fast to countless ethical, epistemological and metaphysical principles that point directly to the Christian God. Why does an agnostic look for good reasons to believe something? Why does the agnostic look for truth? Why does the agnostic seek coherence? Why does the agnostic believe child-molestation, rape and the holocaust is wrong? Why does he treat his wife as more than just another animal to use to reproduce his DNA around the planet? The Christian has an easy and valid answer: it's because, even the agnostic is made in God's image, in the image of a rational and good God. The cup in the cupboard might try and erase the stamp underneath its base that says 'made by God,' but the cup is still a cup. The agnostic is still an image of God, and still a creature.

This happens continually with Wallis's debate with Chris Bolt. He says that

he's looked at all the arguments for God's existence, and "they just don't work at all." First of all, how would you know if an argument worked? Isn't Wallis to be an agnostic assuming that there are no good reasons or arguments to believe in God? Second of all, how would a person ever become a Christian if he refuses to give up his autonomy and let God and not man determine what is possible and impossible, reasonable and unreasonable, workable and unworkable in the universe.

Mr. Wallis also said in that debate,

I can't find any reason to suppose that God exists, and so I don't believe that he does.

We might ask, what kind of reason would suffice to suppose that God exists? Hasn't Mr. Wallis already determined *a priori* that there is no possible way to know if God exists or not? If he has, then he has shut the door in God's face, and remained fixed on his throne of autonomy. If he has not, then what does it mean to be an agnostic, and, of course, why would an agnostic be willing to argue for the knowability or possibility of God's existence either way? In short, what part of my opponent's world view makes it capable of making any assertion about God's existence whatsoever? Secondly, why should anyone listening to this debate accept Mr. Wallis's answer to any of these questions as anything more than his subjective, fallible opinion?

We might remember the words of Augustine, who said we believe in order that we may understand.<sup>1</sup> Thank you.

## 2 Opening statement: Ben Wallis

Thank you. I'd like to thank everyone involved with our debate today, including the moderator, Mr. Whipps, who has generously donated his time to making this event possible, and to Mr. Hubner as well, to whom I'm also grateful for his participation. I'm very happy that I myself have the opportunity to participate, and I hope that everyone involved, including our audience, is able to get something out of today's event. I really want everyone to enjoy this, and that's what I'm going to try to make possible.

The question before us today is this: Does the Triune God of the Bible exist? I take the position that nobody knows the answer to that question. In this way, I am what some have called a *weak agnostic*. As philosopher Kenneth Lucey writes:

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<sup>1</sup>Here Mr. Hubner seems to paraphrase St. Augustine's tractate 29.6 on the Gospel of John, in which he writes, "Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that you may understand; since, 'except ye believe, you shall not understand.'" Augustine himself appears to loosely paraphrase (perhaps through the Vulgate) Is 7:9, which reads, "And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (KJV). <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701029.htm>

The term ‘agnostic’ is here used for the weak position of the individual who, if sincerely reporting his beliefs, would say that he does not know whether or not God exists.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, I do go somewhat beyond this position. In addition to sincerely professing ignorance as to whether or not God exists, I maintain that everyone else is ignorant too! Let me clarify, though, that I don’t think it’s *impossible* for someone to know whether or not God exists; so, I’m not what we sometimes call a *strong agnostic*. It’s just that I have reason to believe that all human beings are in a state of ignorance.<sup>3</sup> My evidence for this position rests on two points: First, in my personal survey of arguments for and against the existence of God, I have found them all flawed to some extent or another. Second, I simply can’t imagine any evidence which we could possibly encounter which would enable us to construct better arguments. Now, this reasoning itself may seem somewhat weaker than we might like, and I do admit that it’s not rock solid. Just because all the arguments I’ve surveyed so far are flawed, that doesn’t mean that there isn’t some argument out there which I haven’t encountered, and which *does* provide us with knowledge of the existence or nonexistence of God. And even though I can’t imagine any evidence which could prove or disprove the existence of God, the fact remains that my imagination is limited. So, let me be clear that I acknowledge these shortcomings. I could be wrong, and someone out there really does know whether or not God exists. But even though I can always be wrong on just about anything under the sun, I have to go by what the evidence indicates. And the evidence is stacked up squarely against people having knowledge of God’s existence or nonexistence.

But what about Mr. Hubner’s claim that he has knowledge of the existence of the Biblical God? Do we have any good reason to think that Yahweh is real? Philosophers and theologians throughout history have struggled with this question, putting the full weight of their ingenuity and resources towards justifying their belief in God. Perhaps sadly, their efforts have not met with success. The existence of God remains as much of an open question today as it was a thousand years ago, or two thousand, or three, and so forth. And the reason for this is obvious: all the evidence which people have marshalled in support of God’s existence hasn’t actually done the job. None of it helps us at all in determining whether or not God exists.

Mr. Hubner seems to acknowledge this failure of evidence-driven apologetics. On his website, he writes:

Christians use bad methods of engaging the world every day. This dishonors God and hinders the proclamation of the true gospel. ...the popular approach of evidentialism coupled with ‘natural theology’ is one of those bad methods.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Lucey, Kenneth G., “An Agnostic Argument,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (1983), p249.

<sup>3</sup>That is, we are all in a state of ignorance as to whether or not God exists.

<sup>4</sup>Hubner, Jamin, “Catholics and Protestants Together: Natural Theology Exposed” (on-

Of course I agree with much of that. Christians really do use bad arguments, and, apologetics in general—including the evidentialist approach—seems a hopeless cause. But has Mr. Hubner discovered a better way to try and answer the question? My job today is to explain why I think that no, he hasn't. To that end, let us consider his method.

He calls his approach *presuppositionalism*, and we're going to spend the next few minutes trying to understand what it is, and how it works. We'll begin by looking at one particular example of a transcendental argument which Mr. Hubner published on his blog. After that, we'll move on to an alternative method of presuppositionalism. In both cases, we will find that the presuppositionalist approach is unhelpful for dealing with the question of whether or not God exists.

What he describes in this first example is actually a kind of deductive argument which uses a logical system drawn up by philosopher of science Bas van Fraassen in 1968. Mr. Hubner cites van Fraassen directly, and quotes his original 1968 paper where he gives his definition of what he calls a *presupposition relation*. Mr. Hubner also cites Don Collett, a professor of Old Testament studies who in turn cites and quotes again van Fraassen, and uses his deductive system to construct his own self-described transcendental argument.<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Hubner's transcendental argument for the existence of God, as it appears in his online blog, proceeds thusly:

- (1) The existence of creation presupposes that God exists.
- (2) Creation exists.
- (3) Therefore, God exists.<sup>6</sup>

If we read premise (1) in just the right way<sup>7</sup> then this argument is deductively valid by van Fraassen's semantics, which is to say that the conclusion must be true if both premises are true. So, are those two premises true? If we understand 'God' merely as any creator of the rest of the universe, then we can readily accept premise (1). However, even a general notion of God usually includes such basic features as intelligence and moral awareness, neither of these being required in order to say that 'creation exists.' Yet if we're going to understand God in the traditional way, as we might understand the Biblical God for instance, then there seems to be no reason at all to accept premise (1). How about premise (2)? Is it true that creation exists? In other words, has some *thing* created the rest of the universe? Well, maybe, but again, I just don't see any reason to think that this is the case. Moreover, I don't see how to show that a creation exists without first showing that a creator exists—but why should we think that

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line realapologetics.org essay), <http://www.realapologetics.org/scholarship/2009/09/12/why-a-catholic-can-be-greeted-by-protestants-in-the-vatican>

<sup>5</sup>Collett, Don, "Van Til and Transcendental Argument Revisited" [sic] (tsm.edu online essay). [http://www.tsm.edu/sites/default/files/Faculty Writings/Collett - Van Til and Transcendental Argument Revisited.pdf](http://www.tsm.edu/sites/default/files/Faculty%20Writings/Collett%20-%20Van%20Til%20and%20Transcendental%20Argument%20Revisited.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>Hubner, Jamin, "Lessons in Logic and Argumentation: Types of Arguments" (realapologetics.org blog post), <http://www.realapologetics.org/blog/2010/12/20/lessons-in-logic-and-argumentation-types-of-arguments>

<sup>7</sup>In particular, we need to read premise (1) as "Creation exists presupposes God exists."

there's a creator in the first place? So, this line of argument doesn't look to be a strategy conducive to persuasion. In short, it just doesn't help us at all.

On the other hand, we ought not be too quick to use this single example of a transcendental argument to condemn presuppositionalism in general. Indeed, according to Mr. Hubner, transcendental arguments are not supposed to be deductive. Since the argument Mr. Hubner gave clearly *is* deductive, perhaps it's not a transcendental argument after all. Mr. Hubner could have simply mistaken it for one in his zeal to present something more formal than usual. If so, then Prof. Collett may be ultimately to blame, since he seems to have influenced Mr. Hubner significantly. Yet Prof. Collett appears to have only a modest understanding of deductive logic, and Mr. Hubner may not have realized this when he borrowed his material. For example, Prof. Collett erroneously suggested in his paper that van Fraassen's system is distinct from deduction, and when he tried to use it for his own purposes, he produced an invalid argument whose conclusion is always false in that system since it violates the law of excluded middle.<sup>8</sup> I'm concerned that Mr. Hubner may have inherited some of these mistakes, in which case he may need to re-evaluate what he means by 'transcendental' argumentation.

I alluded before, though, that Mr. Hubner offers us an alternative interpretation of presuppositionalism. In a blog post, he writes:

...transcendental arguments do not argue from facts and evidences to a conclusion by induction or deduction like traditional arguments, but rather [ask] how facts, evidences, etc. can even exist, have meaning, and be intelligible to human beings in the first place.<sup>9</sup>

I think this gives us a pretty big clue. If Mr. Hubner is correct that transcendental argumentation is about asking questions, then maybe we're not really dealing with *argumentation* at all. Maybe instead we're dealing with a form of cross-examination mixed with rhetoric. Consider, for instance, Mr. Hubner's comments in a recent podcast:

Arguments can be convincing, but the truth really comes out in a debate, that is, when another person is able to come and examine him, to ask questions.<sup>10</sup>

I get the impression from Mr. Hubner that he sees this process of cross-examination as the most important part of Biblical apologetics. For example, in one of his blogs, he describes a debate in which presuppositionalist apologist James White quizzed skeptic Dan Barker on the nature of logic, Mr. Hubner writes:

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<sup>8</sup>For a fuller discussion of Prof. Collett's paper, including direct quotations from it, cf. Ben Wallis, "Collett's Transcendental Argument" (2010, online blog post), <http://benwallis.blogspot.com/2010/12/colletts-transcendental-argument.html>

<sup>9</sup>Hubner, Jamin, "A Concise Outline for the Transcendental Argument for God's Existence" (realapologetics.org blog post), <http://www.realapologetics.org/blog/2010/07/01/a-concise-outline-for-the-transcendental-argument-for-gods-existence>

<sup>10</sup>Hubner, Jamin, "A Case For Debate" (online realapologetics.org podcast), 8:50, <http://www.realapologetics.org/podcasts>

James asked the right questions and revealed the beast, and Barker ended up having to say, in essence, that  $2+2=4$  only when there is a person to believe it.<sup>11</sup>

He concludes that Barker's position is "absurd," and he attributes this absurdity to Barker's denial of the Biblical God. In this way, Mr. Hubner tells us, his presuppositional method works for "exposing the irrationality of unbelief."<sup>12</sup>

So the idea, here, is to grill the unbeliever with all sorts of tough questions about the nature of reality, epistemology, metaethics and other complex subjects, in an effort to get him to make a mistake, or something that sounds like a mistake to someone who isn't an expert. Such mistakes are then chalked up not to the complexity and sophistication of certain philosophical issues, but rather to the unbeliever's rejection of Yahweh. Of course, that kind of cross-examination is not an argument, and even as a demonstration, it's irrelevant to the question at hand. If Dan Barker has an inaccurate view of the nature of logic, that's just not evidence for the existence of God.

Nevertheless, this seems to be the strategy most often employed in debates with presuppositionalists. Indeed, their approach goes back at least to the late twentieth-century apologist Cornelius Van Til, who writes that, when engaged with a non-theist, a Christian apologist

must ask him to reason univocally for us in order that we may see the consequences.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, Van Til envisions a cross-examination procedure. Another presuppositionalist apologist Michael R. Butler uses a longer version of this Van Tilian passage to outline the transcendental argument for the existence of God as he sees it. In his description also we find that it's not really an argument after all, but, instead, as I've suggested, it's more like a blend of rhetoric and cross-examination. The rhetoric consists of making all manner of grandiose claims about God, particularly with respect to man's capacity for reason. Consider, for instance, this striking passage from Mr. Hubner's blog:

The burden of proof is on the [skeptic] who denies the source for all meaning and yet lives like there is meaning, not on the [Christian] who provides an actual ontological, epistemological, and ethical basis for meaning.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Hubner, Jamin, "Evidence, TAG, and Presuppositional Apologetics" (realapologetics.org blog post), <http://www.realapologetics.org/blog/2010/01/12/evidence-tag-and-presuppositional-apologetics>

<sup>12</sup>Hubner, Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Van Til, Cornelius, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), p204, as quoted in Michael R. Butler, "The Transcendental Argument for God's Existence" (online essay), <http://butler-harris.org/tag>

<sup>14</sup>Hubner, Jamin, "A Critique of Frame's Critique of Van Til's TAG" (realapologetics.org blog post), <http://www.realapologetics.org/blog/2010/06/22/a-critique-of-frames-critique-of-van-tils-tag>

This kind of rhetoric would be far more convincing if only it could be accompanied by an explanation of those lofty philosophical foundations which the presuppositionalist claims to have. In my experience, however, presuppositionalist explanations amount to little more than saying that ‘God did it.’ As I hope is obvious, though, that’s just not a serious answer to any difficult philosophical issue, and in fact oftentimes it isn’t even coherent, for example when we’re investigating the problem of induction. Mr. Hubner will have to correct this deficiency if he wishes to be persuasive.

So I think it’s easy to see that, though it may be entertaining on some level, this method of trying to find cracks in his opponent’s position while neglecting to otherwise support his own, doesn’t really help us get at the truth. Is the fact that Dan Barker is an atheist really the best explanation for his failure to give a flawless account of the ontology of logic? It seems to me that a far better explanation is that logic is just a very complex subject, and laypersons and even experts are bound to make mistakes when they talk about it. After all, Mr. Hubner made just such an error when he failed to recognize that van Fraassen’s semantics afford a deductive system—and he wasn’t even being pressured by tough questions! Does that mean that he’s suppressing Christianity in unrighteousness? Or is it just another case of logic being a tricky subject?

So, in sum, we’ve seen that I don’t currently have any good reason to believe that the Biblical God exists. We’ve further seen that both Mr. Hubner and I agree classical arguments and evidence don’t help us in that regard. We’ve looked at an example of one of Mr. Hubner’s transcendental arguments, and we’ve seen that it too fails. And finally we’ve seen that presuppositionalist rhetoric is unsupported, and that its cross-examination methods are utterly irrelevant to the question of whether or not the Biblical God exists. With all this in mind, it certainly appears that Mr. Hubner’s god-belief lacks any rational justification. So, Mr. Hubner may *believe* that God exists, but since his belief is not rationally justified, he doesn’t *know* that God exists.

### 3 Rebuttal: Jamin Hubner

Thank you, Ben, for your opening statement. There are a number of assertions made, pretty much everything made, that seems to demonstrate a fundamental ignorance of the primary point of presuppositionalism, which isn’t merely the transcendental argument, but the impossibility of religious neutrality. I’m going to go through some statements, here. One statement is that “everyone else is ignorant true,” “I don’t think it is impossible for anyone to know.” Ben made the assertion that everyone is ignorant. Now, this is a great theory, but if absolutely everyone is ignorant, how do I know that that’s true? Because you’re obviously ignorant, so why would I trust you? What does this absolute ignorance that all people have amount to? And you obviously can’t arrive at knowledge, you can’t amount to something certain, or anything that would provide the foundations for any epistemological assertion. So that was somewhat troubling.

Several times Ben admitted that he could be wrong. He said, “I could be

wrong.” How could he be wrong? That’s what I’m trying to figure out, is how can Ben be wrong given his world view? He said several times, maybe this might be the case, or we need to do this, “maybe we’re not...dealing with [an argument] at all,”<sup>15</sup> “that’s just not evidence” in response to the transcendental argument, it’s not an argument “at all,” “in my experience, however, presuppositionalist...amount to little more than saying that ‘God did it,’ ” and so forth. All of this is opinion. All of this is opinion, it’s not argumentation. For instance, he said, maybe there might be a creator. That was one of my most central arguments and assertions in my opening statement. Now, he admits that it’s possible that there might be a creator. Now, what does he do with this possibility? Because this possibility—on this possibility hinges virtually everything—the way everything is dealt with, our entire world views, the possibility of objective morality and everything else. How does he respond to this possibility? He says, “I just don’t see [that it’s necessary],”<sup>16</sup> and then he moves on. In fact, he says, “why should we think there’s a [creation] in the first place?”<sup>17</sup> And so it’s interesting that at some moments in Ben’s opening statement he is an agnostic and says, well, we can’t know this, we can’t know this. And other times he says, here’s what we can know: we can know that it’s not necessary to have a created universe, it’s not necessary to have an objective standard for any of these things.

And so he also makes the claim, “I have to go by what the evidence [states].”<sup>18</sup> Well, which evidence? How do you determine which evidence is [unintelligible] for you? Well, the answer is the same with all of these questions, folks: it’s autonomy. Mr. Wallis cannot be proven wrong because it’s all based on his autonomy. He’s a law unto himself. And so he determines what is contradictory or non-contradictory.

And so it’s the same thing with the transcendental argument. Why isn’t the transcendental argument “an argument at all”? Well, because he says so. It doesn’t work like induction or deduction, therefore we throw it out the window. It just doesn’t fit. And of course he reduces all of presuppositional apologetics and the transcendental argument for God’s existence to a cross-examination period. Well, not necessarily. And it also isn’t true—I nowhere asserted—that cross-examination is the most important part of Biblical apologetics. I never made that assertion. It is very important, but not the most important part. I think truthfulness and being [unintelligible] in every respect, and knowledgeable, is also important. I’ve think conversations and being [locally involved in] churches are very important to Biblical apologetics, and so forth.

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<sup>15</sup>Wallis, opening statement. The full quotation reads, “If Mr. Hubner is correct that transcendental argumentation is about asking questions, then maybe we’re not really dealing with *argumentation* at all.”

<sup>16</sup>Wallis, opening statement. The full quotation reads, “I just don’t see any reason to think that this is the case.”

<sup>17</sup>Wallis, opening statement. The full quotation reads, “Moreover, I don’t see how to show that a creation exists without first showing that a creator exists—but why should we think that there’s a creator in the first place?”

<sup>18</sup>Wallis, opening statement. The full quotation reads, “But even though I can always be wrong on just about anything under the sun, I have to go by what the evidence indicates.”

And he made another generalization about presuppositional apologetics: “the idea...is to grill the unbeliever with...tough questions...to get [them] to make a mistake.” No, that’s not it, Ben. It’s to demonstrate the complete inability to answer any basic question of life at all, on behalf of the agnostic. That’s the point, to demonstrate that my world view gives an explanation for the way things are, and that agnosticism can’t do that, and it doesn’t do that, and there’s no reason anyone should believe it. That’s what we’re talking about, here.

And so, we have more assertions: statements that “that’s just not evidence,” it’s just “not an argument.” Well, again, it’s back to [a time], according to who? According to Ben Wallis. Given his standards, given his foundation and approach to reality, there is nothing that could suffice. And so, Ben presents it like, I’ve looked at all these arguments, I’ve searched all these things, I’ve been raised in the Christian tradition, and it’s just not good enough, it’s just not good enough. Well, it’s not good enough for *you*. It will never be good enough for you as long as you determine what is true and what isn’t true, possible and impossible, contradictory and not contradictory, in the universe. You can’t accept God, you can’t understand Christianity and its rationality, while you’re holding so tightly onto your own autonomy. It’s just not possible.

Mr. Wallis said, “In my experience, however, [a] presuppositionalist...[amounts] to little more than...‘God did it.’ ” That’s exactly right! If the creator of the universe is who He says He is, He is as powerful, and as wise, and as omnipotent as He says He is, then of course! I don’t have the weight of solving the world’s problems and explaining all the basic questions of life if God exists and has revealed Himself. That’s God’s job. I’m not in the throne of God, I’m not trying to answer all those big questions. I’m just a creature, and I follow what He said—what God has said. And so, he might not like that answer, but it’s a perfectly legitimate answer, is to say that God did these things. It’s an explanation. And he continues on and said, “that’s...not a serious answer [for] any...philosophical issue.”<sup>19</sup> Well, it might not [be] to you, Mr. Wallis. Again, whose standards are we going by, here?

What answer will suffice? Is the creator of the universe, who became man, revealed Himself, spent 1500 years writing 66 books, saying, here is my [Law], here is how I interact with human beings—He’s revealed Himself—if none of that is enough, and if none of that has any relationship to “any...philosophical issue,” well then I’m pretty sure it will never be possible for you to understand Christianity, and certainly not to embrace it. And [then], of course, then the assertion was, “Hubner will have to correct this deficiency if he [is] to be persuasive.” Again, this is the kind of thing that [unintelligible] schizophrenia of the agnostic. At one point, there is this sincere thing of, well, I’ve looked at these arguments, and I don’t think this is true, I don’t really know. And now he’s saying, no, no, no, the Christian argument, the Christian world view is deficient, it’s not persuasive. And so here you have an agnostic, who is supposedly un-

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<sup>19</sup>Wallis, opening statement. The full quotation is, “As I hope is obvious, though, that’s just not a serious answer to any difficult philosophical issue, and in fact oftentimes it isn’t even coherent, for example when we’re investigating the problem of induction.”

certain of anything, making definite assertions about one particular world view. Upon what basis can Mr. Wallis do that? And so, there's a lot of questions that need to be answered, here, and so few of them have been answered, at least on Mr. Wallis's blog, and in his other debate with Mr. Bolt. And so I think he's got plenty of time to do that this evening.

## 4 Rebuttal: Ben Wallis

Thank you. There sure is a lot of stuff, here, to talk about, but I guess what I'm most concerned about is, Mr. Hubner says that I am just making an unsupported assertion—well, he says an “assertion,” I take him to mean an *unsupported* assertion—so I'm making just an unsupported assertion that his transcendental argument isn't an argument. And the question, here, is, what is the actual content of his argument?

Now, in my opening statement—when I was preparing my opening statement, I didn't have his opening statement there in front of me, and so I didn't reference anything in his opening statement when I was reading mine, and now I can. And I heard a lot of assertions in his opening statement, which I believe he intends to string together into some sort of cohesive case. I don't see how they string together, though. It's possible that there is an argument hiding somewhere in there, but I'd like to go find that out.

What is the logical structure of this argument? Is it a deductive argument? Is it an inductive argument? Is it an abductive argument? He says on his blog that in addition to those three kinds of arguments, there are also transcendental arguments, and they're distinct. But I don't know any other kind of argument. I don't know what he means when he talks about “transcendental” arguments if he doesn't mean what I talked about in my opening statement. I've spent a great deal of time trying to sort of pin down presuppositionalist arguments,<sup>20</sup> and it's a very difficult thing to do. And it leads me to suspect that maybe it's not really an argument after all, which was of course sort of the theme of my opening statement.

So I guess that's what I really want to know: what is the logical structure of this argument? Why should we take it as persuasive? I described two examples, basically: I described the deductive approach that he has, which he doesn't—I think that was a mistake,<sup>21</sup> but I gave it because it was the only thing that I could find on his website which resembled an actual argument. But the other approach is this business of rhetoric and cross-examination which I talked about before.

Now, I had said that, it seems to me, I got the impression from him that he thought cross-examination was the either the most important part or one

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<sup>20</sup>That is, Mr. Wallis has spent time trying to understand the content and structure of presuppositionalist arguments.

<sup>21</sup>That is, it was a mistake for Mr. Hubner to describe his deductive argument as “transcendental.” In fact, transcendental argumentation as most presuppositionalists understand it may not resemble the deductive argument which Mr. Hubner published on his blog, and which Mr. Wallis quoted in his opening statement.

of the most important parts of Biblical apologetics. In his rebuttal he denied that, he said, no, no, no, that's not the most important part. Or at least that's the message that I got from him. Fair enough. But I don't see what else there is to this. We look at examples of debates—for example the Paul Manata debate, and the James White debate, the debate with Chris Bolt that I had, and, of course, the Bahnsen-Stein debate, of course—[in] all these debates we have the presuppositionalist making a series of grandiose claims about God. Let's see, what did Mr. Hubner say? God is “independent” of creation<sup>22</sup> and “transcendent,”<sup>23</sup> “His existence is more fundamental than the existence of anything else,”<sup>24</sup> we know things “because God says so,”<sup>25</sup> God reveals Himself,<sup>26</sup> etc., etc.

All of these very grandiose statements are made, and that's one part of the method. And the other part is going and grilling the unbeliever, and challenging him, and saying, you Mr. Unbeliever, you cannot come up with an alternative, here, and to prove it I will go and grill you until you make a mistake. And so on his website, and as I quoted in my opening statement, we have presuppositionalist cheers whenever a skeptic makes a mistake. When Dan Barker made a mistake, there was Mr. Hubner to cheer James White on, and to say, Aha!, yes, there we are, there is that “irrationality” which comes from denying Yahweh. The problem is, he's making that critical assumption that we make mistakes because we deny Yahweh, and not because, gosh, these are tricky subjects.

He asks, why should people believe me when I say that this isn't an argument? Well, I'm not asking people to take my word for it. If this is all there is to the presuppositionalist method, then hopefully it should be clear why it's not persuasive, and *that* it's not persuasive. This is just not what we mean by ‘rational argument.’ It's not what *I* mean when I talk about ‘rational argument.’ I don't *mean* grilling people until they make a mistake; I don't *mean* stringing together a series of grandiose claims about God. That's just not what I mean when I talk about rational argumentation. If it's what Mr. Hubner means, then I would suggest that he is misusing language. I don't think that's what most other people mean. I think that, if I got up—and I made a series of claims, and then I grilled Mr. Hubner on some subject and he made a mistake, and then I said, aha!, yes, my position, it must be so now—I think everyone would be fairly clear as to the fact that that's not a rational argument. So, it's not clear to me why he would go and insist that it is.

It seems to me that what we're really owed is a better explanation of what the transcendental argument is, or what presuppositionalism is, because I suspect that he thinks that there's more to it than that. And as I said, it's tricky for

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<sup>22</sup>Hubner, opening statement. The full quotation reads, “God is not part of creation; He is independent of it.”

<sup>23</sup>Hubner, opening statement. The full quotation reads, “He transcends creation, and therefore any argument for His existence must reflect that fact of transcendence.”

<sup>24</sup>Hubner, opening statement.

<sup>25</sup>Hubner, opening statement.

<sup>26</sup>This paraphrases Mr. Hubner's opening statement remark that “And so if we're Christians, we always operate on the assumption that God exists, and He's revealed Himself in His Word.”

me to pin down, and I'm really trying to do it, and I don't want to misrepresent him. So, I should probably make it clear, I'm giving my impression of what's there. I'm telling you folks what I hear when I hear presuppositionalists go on about their transcendental arguments and so forth. If there's something more to it than that,<sup>27</sup> I really do want to know. I just don't think there is anything more to it than that. I think that that is the heart of the issue.

So let me go—I took a few notes, here—let me see if I can cover a few points in the time remaining. He made allusions to the teleological argument. That's the one thing that he sort of referenced that actually is an argument—or at least that I *recognize* as an argument—and that is of course the teleological argument. We look at things and we recognize design, we recognize purpose. But I don't think we do recognize purpose very well. We're able to go and to pick out things from our everyday experience and recognize them as having been made by human hands, for instance. I have the coffee cup in front of me, and I know this coffee cup was made by some sort of human ingenuity—it has a human purpose. And I don't know that by some secret or inscrutable intuition. I know it because I know something about coffee cups, and I know something about human beings. But we're not always great purpose-detectors. One of my favorite examples is, my father is actually sort of a railroad history buff, and he's spent a great deal of time researching the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the Terre Haute and Indianapolis Railroad and the various branches thereof. And so he would go throughout Indiana, through the countryside, trying to find little depots and right-of-ways, and so forth. And one of the things that he learned to do is to recognize things like right-of-ways. And I can't do it. I'll look at it, and it'll look like just a mound to me. I don't recognize the purpose in it at all. But he recognizes the purpose in it, and, like I said, it's not because of some ineffable or inscrutable intuition. It's because he has *experience* with railroad right-of-ways.

So, I think my time is up, so I will go ahead and yield the mic. Thank you very much.

## 5 Cross-examination A: Mr. Hubner examines Mr. Wallis

HUBNER: While it's still fresh in the minds of the listeners, you said you don't think people recognize design and purpose. You say, "I don't think we...recognize purpose very well."<sup>28</sup> Is that what you said?

WALLIS: Well of course we recognize purpose. What I'm saying is we don't have some kind of secret, or ingrained, or inherent intuition.

HUBNER: How do you know that?

WALLIS: I would suggest that we have no evidence for such an intuition. And part of the reason that I use those terms, "secret," "inscrutable," and

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<sup>27</sup>That is, more than rhetoric and cross-examination.

<sup>28</sup>This quotation comes from Mr. Wallis's first rebuttal, ~48:41, where he says, "I don't think we do recognize purpose very well."

“ineffable,”<sup>29</sup> is because I find the very concept incoherent. I’m not even sure what it means to suggest that we would have some sort of secret intuition.

HUBNER: Okay. In your debate with Chris Bolt, you said, “I can’t find any reason to suppose that God exists, and so I don’t believe that he does.” My question for you is, why would you be looking, since you already know there isn’t sufficient reason to believe that God exists?

WALLIS: Part of the reason that I have come to conclude that we don’t know, and that we’ll probably never know, is through my survey of those arguments. If I hadn’t gone out and looked, if I hadn’t taken the initiative, taken the effort, then I couldn’t say that, I couldn’t use that in support of my conclusion.

HUBNER: What kind of reason would suffice to suppose—not prove, but just suffice to suppose—that God exists?

WALLIS: Well, I already do think that it’s *possible* for God to exist. If you’re asking what kind of evidence or argument would be required in order to actually go and *believe* that God exists, I don’t know. As I said in my opening statement, the other prong of my agnosticism, or the evidence for my agnostic position, I should say, is that not only have I tried to pretty hard, I think, to go seek out evidence for and against the existence of God—remember I did have that “stint with strong atheism,”<sup>30</sup> because I had thought I’d found a good reason—the other prong, though, is that I can’t even imagine what would convince me. And that’s not to say it’s impossible. I just don’t know what it would take, and I can’t imagine evidence that would go and convince me, or an argument that would go and convince me of that. I just don’t know how that could possibly work.

HUBNER: But you do know how it can work, and you do have sufficient reason to believe that we just can’t know?

WALLIS: Well, like I said, the very fact that I can’t imagine how we can know seems to suggest in itself that maybe we’ll never know.

HUBNER: Okay. You said in your debate with Mr. Bolt, “My statement about non-belief is not a claim about probability.” Now I’m asking you, are you certain of this claim about probability, or are you just highly probable?

WALLIS: Well, my point was, as you read it back in fact, I’m *not* making a claim about probability. When I was debating with Chris Bolt, I wanted to go make it clear—and in fact I actually had this very same point in my first draft of my opening statement for this particular debate, although I cut it, maybe I shouldn’t have—I’m not trying to say that, oh, it’s 50/50 odds, and I’m not trying to say, like Richard Dawkins might, for instance, that, oh, it’s just very improbable that God exists. No, no, that’s not what I’m saying. I don’t know a good way to use probability to talk about God. That doesn’t mean *no one* knows a good way. Maybe *you* know a good way to use probability to talk about God, and if so, you’re welcome to share it.

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<sup>29</sup>These descriptors come from Mr. Wallis’s first rebuttal, first at ~49:05, where he says that, “I don’t know that by some secret or inscrutable intuition,” and later at ~50:05, where he adds, “It’s not because of some ineffable or inscrutable intuition.”

<sup>30</sup>This comes from the introduction read by Mr. Whipps, ~0:53.

HUBNER: Well, but I've offered a good way from my world view, but you won't accept it because it's not compatible with your definition of a 'good way.' Don't you see that as kind of begging the question in terms of what would suffice for you to be a good argument—what is a good way and a workable argument—?

WALLIS: Well, I didn't really talk about the foundations of epistemology in my opening statement. I guess what I'm saying is that I don't know where you got that impression, that I—

HUBNER: Well, you made a claim, that the reason you're an agnostic is because you don't find "good reasons" to be a Christian. And my objection and my question is, what do you mean by "good," as in my rebuttal statement? I asked that in several ways. What do you mean by "good," and how do you know what is a good way and a good argument?

WALLIS: Well I suppose I don't have a complete theory of epistemology at my fingertips.

HUBNER: I'm not asking for a comprehensive system. I'm just asking—obviously you don't need a complete epistemology to dismiss Christian arguments which you don't find as "good"—so I'm just asking, what makes a good argument? What makes it good, and how is that standard somehow better than my standard for a good argument?

WALLIS: Good arguments, generally speaking—and there are some exceptions to this, I would think, as there are usually such exceptions—but generally speaking, a good argument is a deductive argument which has agreeably true premises or an inductive argument which has sufficient inductive force. Of course, you could always ask, what is sufficient inductive force? Well, that's where it gets hairy, and that's where I have to say, look, I just don't have a complete theory at my disposal.

HUBNER: Okay, so then a person can make epistemological judgments without having a complete theory of what "good" is. In other words, I just find it odd for an agnostic who isn't sure about these different things, that you have enough knowledge, and you have enough ability and capacity to go out and just say, I haven't seen any good arguments for Christianity. How could that ever be changed?

WALLIS: Well, I suppose I see that as your job to show how it can be changed, in other words, to show what does constitute a good argument, and to present it.

[discussion of order]

HUBNER: Mr. Wallis, you said in the last segment, "I'm not asking people to take my word for it." My question is, what are you asking people, then, to accept, if not your word?

WALLIS: Well, like I said, I'm not acting as an authority.

HUBNER: But you believe that your position is true, right?

WALLIS: Oh, absolutely, yes.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Here the word "absolutely" expresses a confidence in the response, and not an intimation towards some theory of *absolute truth*.

HUBNER: And why do you believe that it is absolutely true, when you believe that there really is no such thing as absolute truth? Or do you?

WALLIS: <laughs> Well, Mr. Hubner, that was just an expression, a response to your question: Yes, “absolutely,” I think that I’m right. I don’t mean to suggest that I’m *absolutely right*, or *infallibly right*, if you will.

HUBNER: So, ‘right’ in terms of probability? Because if you’re not right absolutely, then you have to be right either probably or probably not, correct?

WALLIS: No, not necessarily. Like I said, I don’t think that there’s a good way to use probability to talk about God’s existence, for instance.

HUBNER: So, in what sense are you right? If not certain, if not probably, how are you right? How is your world view true?

WALLIS: I think that I have good reasons to believe what I do,<sup>32</sup> and I’ve given some of those good reasons. I’ve talked about my survey of arguments for and against the existence of God. I don’t know what else we could mean by ‘good reason’ if not this sort of evidence, or induction or deduction support.

HUBNER: Okay, that will be all for now.

## 6 Cross-examination A: Mr. Wallis examines Mr. Hubner

WALLIS: You said that cross-examination is not the most important part of Biblical apologetics. Is there a single most important part?

HUBNER: No, I don’t think you can reduce down the entire enterprise of Christian apologetics to one thing. Obviously it depends on who you talk to. If you talk to some Christians, they’ll just say it’s all about truth, or other people, it’s all about conversions, or it’s all about evangelism. Obviously apologetics entails a whole lot of important aspects.

WALLIS: Do you regard the transcendental argument as distinct from induction, deduction, and/or abduction, or some combination of those things?

HUBNER: As far as it stands right now in my own research, I think it is distinct, although I don’t think anyone has found a way of formulating it in written words or in symbolic logic in a way that satisfies. And I [don’t] think that’s surprising, because of the nature of the argument. We’re talking about an argument that, depending on what the answer is, affects whether logic exists at all, whether it’s possible to make an assertion, to draw conclusions. So like I said when you quoted my blog post, we’re not just taking various facts and drawing a conclusion assuming all of these things. We’re dealing with the assumptions. That’s what makes a transcendental argument transcendental. It’s talking about things, what is the transcendental foundation for these things? And of course we could use anything really to implement and conclude in that type of argument.

WALLIS: You say that no one has found a way to formulate it “in written words.”

HUBNER: Yes.

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<sup>32</sup>That is, with respect to the existence versus nonexistence of God.

WALLIS: That strikes me as a doozy of a claim! I'm not suggesting it's false. I think you're right—I don't think anyone has found a way to formulate it as a distinct argument from those other three types of arguments that I mentioned.<sup>33</sup> But if we can't formulate it in written words, then how do you expect to communicate it? How do you expect me to know what you mean when you use this transcendental argument?

HUBNER: Well, what I meant by "written words" is, I meant written words *in the context of propositional logic*. I should have specified that; that's my fault. Clearly we can communicate what the transcendental argument is verbally, or through writing, or something like that. What I mean is that in terms of propositional symbolic logic, I just don't know of anyone—and that was never Collett's intention, by the way; he was trying to show a semantic distinction—I just don't know of anyone who has done that. And there's obviously a lot of explanations. The simple fact is there really isn't a lot of really scholarly presuppositional philosophers out there since Bahnsen died, and Van Til died. And you have Scott Oliphint, and Collett, and some others; they're out there. But as far as really spending their time trying to understand and formulate in any way the distinctiveness of the transcendental argument, it's still in development. So I can't help you in terms of what your question is.

WALLIS: Well, I'm sympathetic with some of that, but I would remind you that people like James Anderson and some others, Alvin Plantinga—I'm not sure how much of a fan you are of him, though—have succeeded in actually, really formulating transcendental arguments that are intelligible even if not persuasive. So those people are out there, but as you say, there's another school of thought—this Van Tilian, Bahnsen sort of thing—which is just very difficult for me to pin down, and so that's what I've been trying to do. And I'd like you to try to help me with that.

HUBNER: <laughs> You want me to help you refute my position? Okay.

WALLIS: Well I want you to help me *understand* your position.

HUBNER: Sure, sure. Okay, that's fair enough.

WALLIS: Hopefully you do want to communicate it, right? You're not trying to hide what it is?

HUBNER: Oh, no, no, I'm not trying to hide anything. I'm not trying to be cryptic, or anything like that. It's not like that. But I think where the issue comes down is in terms of world views, and what an ultimate presupposition is. And the fact also that the reason I argue the way that I do, and the way James White does, and the way Greg Bahnsen did, is not merely because the transcendental philosophical argument is the most complicated, or the most powerful, or anything like that. The reason we argue in that way is because it's the only way to do justice to Scripture. It's the way God himself approaches us. He doesn't approach us in terms of possibilities that God might exist, or the Resurrection may have happened. That's not the way we live, that's not the way we think, and that isn't what our world view is. It's a network of assumptions. And I think that's important to understand. It's not like there are a bunch of

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<sup>33</sup>That is, deduction, induction and abduction.

problems with the teleological, the cosmological and the ontological argument, and therefore we have to create something else. Rather, we have Scripture that approaches us with, “In the beginning God.” Genesis 1.<sup>34</sup> John 1: “In the beginning was the Word.”<sup>35</sup> Acts 17: “The God who made the Heavens and the earth.”<sup>36</sup> And the reason for this is we can’t do otherwise. We can’t operate, we can’t just exchange our world views like we can change shirts. We always operate on assumptions. And so if we’re Christians, we always operate on the assumption that God exists, and He’s revealed Himself in His Word. And so, the question between us is, first of all, would you acknowledge your presuppositions, and what are they? And the second thing between us is, do those ultimate assumptions explain the way things are? And so that’s in as best of terms as I can summarize it for now.

WALLIS: Again, though, I’m just not seeing what there is to that more than just the rhetoric, and of course there’s the cross-examination that we saw earlier. There is rhetoric, right? You agree on that much?

HUBNER: Well, I guess it depends on what you mean by “rhetoric,” but see, there is no such thing as religious neutrality. And I don’t think you will probably admit this, but that is a principle from which transcendental arguments are made. You have religious presuppositions that determine the way you think, the way you treat your family, and so on and so forth. The same with me. And if we don’t acknowledge that, we’re just going to be dealing with facts as we understand them within our framework of interpretation. And so both of us, we can sit down, and look into a petri dish, or into DNA, in biology, and I will see design and intelligence, and the sovereign work of a creator. You on the other hand will come to completely different conclusions even though we both have the same set of facts. And so facts aren’t neutral, in the same way that logic isn’t neutral or self-existent. It’s always in reference to something else. And that’s something that the agnostic and the atheist I don’t think will ever really admit, and can’t account for, is that everything is inter-related and everything has to have a creator, a self-existent, self-defining foundation. And that’s only God. And so in your approach it might just be like, let’s set aside as many assumptions as possible and just look at logical arguments. But we can’t do that because we haven’t answered the question first of how logical arguments are even possible.

WALLIS: I’m sorry if I want to interrupt you, here, because I don’t have much time to ask my final question, but are you suggesting that if only I could think rationally—if only I could actually think in a clear-headed way about this—that I would find for example the teleological argument persuasive? Is that what you’re suggesting? Or is it unpersuasive?

HUBNER: No, I’m not sure where you got that from.

WALLIS: Well I’m asking.

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<sup>34</sup>Specifically, Ge 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (KJV).

<sup>35</sup>Specifically, Jn 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (KJV).

<sup>36</sup>Specifically, Ac 17:24, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (KJV).

HUBNER: You can have knowledge of things, and you can even make logical arguments, but you do so *despite* the fact that you deny God's existence. It's like you're doing these things despite the fact that God exists, and you ultimately have knowledge of Him. And so that's what I mean when I said it was self-deception. But I'm not sure what the teleological argument has to do with that.

WALLIS: So you don't think that it's persuasive, then, even to a rational person?

HUBNER: I don't think what is persuasive?

WALLIS: The teleological argument.

HUBNER: Well I think it might be persuasive to some people, but that's not how I make arguments. I don't make arguments first because they're persuasive. I do them first because they're honoring to God.

WALLIS: It sounds to me like you are appealing to it, though. You're suggesting that we look at creation. And we should be able to recognize God as the creator, and yet we don't. Is that not what you're suggesting?

HUBNER: Well the teleological argument is that design implies a designer. That isn't what I said. I simply said that a creation presupposes the Christian creator. So there are some obvious differences there. I think that 'implies' is a matter of probability, when I don't think there is any probability. I think it's absolute certainty. There's no possible way you could have a creation without a creator. So there are definitely some differences, there.

WALLIS: Well I thank you for your answers.

## 7 Cross-examination B: Mr. Hubner examines Mr. Wallis

HUBNER: I'd like to focus in this particular period of cross-examination on how, Ben, your world view is worked out in the real world. How do you actually live according to it? You've given your reasons why you're in the position that you are, why you are an agnostic, and so I guess one of the first issues is objective morality. How would you condemn universally, say, for instance, rape?

WALLIS: Rape is always wrong on my standard. When I say rape is wrong, I really mean it. I am condemning it universally.

HUBNER: But in your own world view, isn't that just your opinion? You're a subject, and you change, and so where is the object of standard to make an objective claim?

WALLIS: Oh, gosh, no, it's much more than just an opinion. It really is true that—

HUBNER: Well that isn't what you said in the last cross-examination. In fact, you said, "Don't even take my word for it," if I remember correctly. So how is your world view more than just your opinion?

WALLIS: I did not say that my world view was just an opinion. I said that I'm not acting as an authority. In other words, I don't expect people to just

take my word for it because they think I'm a smart guy. I'm actually trying to appeal to their sense of reason and rationality. But it's not a matter of opinion. These things are matters of fact.

HUBNER: Fact upon what standard? Obviously we could go to examples, it was a fact for Hitler that we need to progress the human race and eliminate all these less-evolved Jews, and so how could you possibly condemn that?

WALLIS: He may have thought it was a fact, but as you well know, it wasn't.

HUBNER: Yes, but it's not true in my world view because an objective standard says so. In your world view, it's just yourself, just a subject, just another person.

WALLIS: No, it's not just myself at all. I really do care about the interests of others, and I take them into account when I make moral decisions.

HUBNER: But caring for others, again, is purely subjective. It's just caring however you feel like caring. Some people care to beat their wives, and so you can't condemn—you can say that that's not beneficial, you can say that it's not pleasant, it's not good for society. But you can't say that it's wrong because you have no standard for wrong.

WALLIS: Of course I can say that it's wrong! Why in the world wouldn't I be able to say that?

HUBNER: Because you're making an objective claim, and you're not an objective standard. You're just a subject, you're a person that changes. You're not any authority, as you said.

WALLIS: I do take my standard to be objective. When I say that rape is wrong, I'm not just expressing my distaste. I'm appealing to facts about the human condition, and our situation, and society, and so forth. I'm not just expressing a feeling, or opinion, or whimsy, or something like that.

HUBNER: Okay, so what's your argument that rape is wrong?

WALLIS: My argument would have to depend on what exactly was in dispute. If there was someone who thought that rape was not wrong, I would frame my argument to convince that person that rape was wrong. For example, one obvious strategy would be to point out the terrible suffering that rape inflicts.

HUBNER: Okay, I just don't think you're seeing the connection between—a person can say two plus two equals five just because he believes it's objectively true. That's kind of what your argument amounts to, is, rape is wrong because I just say so. Well, just because you say so doesn't make it wrong. That just means that that's your opinion, that's your position. You can't make any universal claim without a universal objective norm. Okay, does that make sense, or not really?

WALLIS: Well any claim that I make is going to appeal to some standard, sure. And, to the extent that it's a standard, it's objective. What else do we mean by 'objective'?<sup>37</sup> So I don't understand why you would suggest that my standard isn't objective. You're right, I don't see the connection, but I don't think that there's one to be had.

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<sup>37</sup>In other words, what it *means* to be objective is that it depends on some fixed standard of reference.

HUBNER: Who do you believe Jesus Christ was?

WALLIS: <laughs> Oh, goodness! I am not a historian, and so my personal beliefs on who Jesus was are held with a low level of confidence. But as best I can figure out, Jesus was a Jew, he was a human being, he was baptized by John the baptist, he preached an apocalyptic sort of message that the—

HUBNER: Okay.

WALLIS: Yes, so on and so forth.

HUBNER: Okay, are you a philosopher?

WALLIS: I think that Mr. Whipps said in his introduction I'm not a professional philosopher. I don't have any formal training in philosophy.

[discussion of order]

No, I'm not a professional philosopher.

HUBNER: So, you're not a historian, so you don't have much certainty about Jesus. So, you're not a philosopher, so how can you have such certainty that you're willing to argue about—in a public, moderated debate—about agnosticism?

WALLIS: Well, again, I don't have—and I never claimed to have—any certainty. In fact, I thought I was quite clear that I said in my opening statement my position that everyone else doesn't know whether or not God exists, that that's—let's see, what did I say, exactly? I said that “this reasoning itself may seem somewhat weaker than we like.”<sup>38</sup> “It's not rock solid,” I said.<sup>39</sup> And it's not. I sure could be wrong. And so I'm always inviting people to go and, if they think I'm wrong, please tell me why.

HUBNER: According to what rules would they determine that you're wrong? Your rules, or their rules?

WALLIS: I don't claim any particular ownership over the rationality or the reason that we use. Hopefully we can find some common ground with our rationality. We can agree on deductive validity, for example, or we can agree on what constitutes good evidence for or against something. And most people do agree on all sorts of things of that nature. That's all that I would require, is for some sort of common ground, there.

HUBNER: In your debate with Chris Bolt, you said, “It's enough to say we're all locked into this pattern of behavior. That's all we can do.” That was your explanation for inductive reasoning. You realize this isn't really an explanation, right? Just to say that it's inevitable doesn't explain why it's the case.

WALLIS: That wasn't my explanation for induction. That's my explanation for why we can go ahead and *be at home with* induction. Because we look around and say, well, hey, we can't escape induction. There's no choice to be made, here, as if we have to make a decision on whether or not we will use induction. No, no, we're *going* to use induction. We are just induction-loving people, and we will go use induction. And the question is, are we epistemically justified in using induction? And unless by that question we're asking, well, can

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<sup>38</sup>Wallis, opening statement.

<sup>39</sup>Wallis, opening statement.

we use another form of reasoning to go sort of build induction from the lower forms of reasoning? My answer to that would be, induction is just something that we take to be rational *a priori*. In other words, induction is part of what we *mean* when we talk about *rational* reasoning. Just like you asked me before, what constitutes ‘good reason’? Well, one example would be a strong inductive argument. That’s just what we mean by ‘rationality.’

HUBNER: Is induction self-sufficient and self-defining?

WALLIS: “Self-sufficient” and “self-defining”? It’s not self-defining. I’m not sure what you mean by “self-sufficient.”

HUBNER: Can it exist and function in and of itself? It doesn’t need any external, ontological foundation.

WALLIS: It sounds like you’re asking that as if induction were some sort of abstract object, or something like that.

HUBNER: Okay, let me put it this way: Induction presupposes the uniformity of nature, right?

WALLIS: Sort of, yes.

HUBNER: Sort of, or always?

WALLIS: Well this goes back to Hume, of course. The question is, we observe constant conjunctions, right? We observe patterns, right? And so we make this—they’re called inductive leaps, Hume called them ‘custom,’ I believe, is what Hume called them, where we say, well look, I’m going to extrapolate this pattern to some larger context.<sup>40</sup> And that is an inductive inference. That’s what I take inductive inferences to be.

HUBNER: Where did the universe come from?

WALLIS: <laughs> There are so many different ways to take that question. Where did the *observable universe* come from? Well, according to the big bang model, and similar models, it came from some kind of a singularity. I’m not a physicist, though. I don’t really even know what it means to say that, to be honest, that it came from a singularity. Okay, that’s just what the physicists say, and so I’m on board with that.

HUBNER: I’m just confused at that kind of association with authority. Because you said, okay, I can’t say anything about Jesus because I’m not a historian, I can’t say anything about the origin of life because I’m not a physicist, or perhaps a biologist. And yet you can say and have obviously some degree of certainty, some degree of confidence, to where you can say this is true—absolutely true—about agnosticism in your own world view without being a philosopher. And so I just kind of see that as internally incoherent. Do you see what I’m saying?

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<sup>40</sup>Hume, David, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 5.1 (36), “For wherever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding, we always say, that this propensity is the effect of *Custom*. ...it is certain we here advance a very intelligible proposition at least, if not a true one, when we assert that, after the constant conjunction of two objects—heat and flame, for instance, weight and solidity—we are determined by custom alone to expect the one from the appearance of the other” (emphasis original). <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext06/8echu10h.htm>

WALLIS: I'm sorry if I gave you the wrong impression. I didn't mean to suggest that *because* I'm not a historian, I can't be confident in my conclusions. I don't have to be a historian. What I have to do is go study history. I have to go familiarize myself with the ancient sources. I have to do that. When I say I'm not a historian, that's a short way for me to communicate the fact that I haven't done all those things. In principle, though, it's possible to go and do those things,<sup>41</sup> and to some extent, that's what I've done with philosophy. I've gone and I've studied it on my own time. And I'm still not at the level of a professional philosopher by any stretch of the imagination. But I am to the point where I can speak intelligently about it, I think—I hope! <laughs>

HUBNER: Okay. Are you a materialist naturalist? Do you believe that only the physical world is what really exists?

WALLIS: No, in fact I'm an *immaterialist*. I take a position very similar, but not exactly the same, as the Bishop George Berkeley, who was a subjective idealist.

HUBNER: Okay. How do you know, how do you gain knowledge of something that is immaterial?

WALLIS: Well, we have what I like to call *models of experience*. What I take to be the primitive things, the fundamentally real things, are—Berkeley called them 'ideas,' I like to refer to them more as 'experiences.' The things that we talk about in our everyday life, when we talk about material objects for example, those are objects in models of experience that we use to go and navigate the world.

HUBNER: Okay. This is a quote by Berkeley. He says,

The table I write on I say exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed—meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it.<sup>42</sup>

So, in other words, Berkeley is asserting that things only exist if they can be perceived. Do you agree with that?

WALLIS: To an extent, yes. The problem is, that kind of statement needs to be unpacked. That kind of statement—and Berkeley actually got a lot of flack for this—it gives the impression that we can think things in and out of existence, for example, and of course we can't.

HUBNER: How do you know that you can't?

WALLIS: Through experience and through inductive inferences.

HUBNER: But experience would be the means by which you think or not think something into existence. Why is one personal experience of your consciousness superior to another experience?

WALLIS: I'm not suggesting that experiences are superior to other experiences. Like I said, we have models of experience, ways of going and making sense

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<sup>41</sup>That is, it's possible to learn the essentials of an academic discipline without obtaining formal academic credentials.

<sup>42</sup>Berkeley, George. *A Treatis Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* 3 (p195). <http://books.google.com/books?id=DGAVAAAAYAAJ>

of experience, so that we can navigate our experience—and for other purposes, as well, I suppose.

HUBNER: What is the Bible?

WALLIS: Well I assume that when you ask what the Bible is, you're referring to the 66-book Protestant Bible, right?

HUBNER: That's correct, yes.

WALLIS: Well, that's what it is. It's those 66 books.

HUBNER: Is it true? Is it really God's Word, what it claimed to be? Is it God's self-revelation?

WALLIS: I don't know. I just have no way of knowing that—or, I don't think I have any way of knowing it, at least.

HUBNER: Okay, I think I'm finished.

## 8 Cross-examination B: Mr. Wallis examines Mr. Hubner

WALLIS: In your opening statement, you said that Christianity gives us some kind of standard which is “the only self-authenticating and ultimate moral, rational standard.” This is from your opening statement tonight. Now, there's a lot there. What I'm most concerned about is that word, “ultimate.” What do you mean by an ultimate standard, as opposed to a non-ultimate standard?

HUBNER: That's pretty easy to answer. A standard, for example, put it this way, some standards for truth claims and morality, or whatever, can be disputed. They're fallible, they're changed, they're updated. You look at different businesses and corporations, they have their own ethical codes and so forth, and those change over time. They're fallible, they're products of human reasoning. You can debate those. By “ultimate,” I mean you can't argue with it because it's what God says. It's perfect, it's inherently ultimate. There's no higher authority by which it can be verified. That's why it's self-authenticating. And so “ultimate” entails a lot of different things, but basically it just means that it cannot be refuted, it's the highest standard that there is.

WALLIS: You say that “ultimate” means, among other things, that “you can't argue with it,” but here I am, arguing with it. How do you reconcile that?

HUBNER: You're arguing with it, but not successfully. You haven't dismounted it as the ultimate standard. So anyone can make claims in ignorance of what presuppositions are behind those claims, and what preconditions are necessary for them. But I think it's pretty clear what that means.

WALLIS: So you're saying that I can't *successfully* argue with it, and that's what it means, or at least that's part of what it means, for a standard to be ultimate. Is that correct?

HUBNER: Yes, it's ultimate because it has its authority and origin in God. It is His self-revelation.

WALLIS: Well that sounds strikingly different from what you've been saying.

HUBNER: Well, “ultimate,” like you said, we can unpack these different words, and I’m not trying to trick you. It’s just, “ultimate” means, when push comes to shove, for any given truth claim, Scripture wins. It’s *ultimate*. It’s *final*.

WALLIS: So, let me see if I understand this correctly. It’s “ultimate” in the sense that it is ordained by God, and because you can’t successfully argue with it?

HUBNER: Well, to argue with Scripture would be to argue with God, because Scripture is God’s Word.

WALLIS: So, again, I guess—try to help me out, here.

HUBNER: Okay, well, put it this way. When I go into the court room, why do I put my hand on the Bible? What is the point?

[discussion of order]

The point of using a Bible before swearing is saying, this is the highest standard there is. To lie against this would be to lie against the highest authority in truth and honesty, and so forth. But how does God do that? How does God ensure the truthfulness of what he’s saying? Well, he does that by swearing by himself, Hebrews says. Now, you say, that’s circular reasoning. Well of course it’s circular reasoning! It has to be, that’s the nature of an ultimate standard and an ultimate authority. There’s no higher authority by which it can be verified, and so it has to be verified by itself. And so everyone has a world view that has some kind of ultimate authority. For you it’s probably human autonomy. It’s the highest standard. If nothing meets that standard, it can’t be proven wrong. There isn’t really anything that would suffice to change your position. And for the Christian, though, the highest standard is God, who is perfect and Holy, the creator and sustainer of all things. And so He rightly deserves that position because He’s the only one qualified for the position. And so that’s the nature of the case for God’s Word, is that it’s a self-authenticating entity, because God Himself, that’s His revelation, that’s the nature of being God.

WALLIS: Great. Now, where I’m going with this is as follows: In trying to explain what it means for a standard to be “ultimate,” you’ve appealed to a number of concepts. For example, you’ve appealed to the concept of *success* when you say that you can’t successfully argue with it; you’ve appealed to the concept of *higher beings*, because you’ve said that there’s no being higher than God. You’ve appealed to the concept of *perfection*, of *qualification*; you say that God’s the only one qualified, here. But it seems to me that in order to make the judgments of what is successful, what is higher, what is perfect, what is qualified; in order to do all those things, you need to be appealing to standards—standards which tell you what makes something ‘successful’ or not, what makes something ‘higher.’

HUBNER: Exactly. And the standard I’m appealing to that I didn’t provide, which I can, is Scripture. Scripture talks about itself. It talks about God. It reveals the kind of standard that I’m talking about. First of all, it’s [unintelligible, perhaps Koine Greek], it is God-breathed, and so Scripture is God’s Word. And so, then we look at, what is God like? The nature of the origin of

something determines the nature of something that comes out of that person's mouth. And so we have all these other statements in Scripture: God cannot lie, Scripture is pure, like gold being refined seven times in a fire, and so forth. And when I'm saying these different words, these are all concepts expressed in Scripture. I'm not saying them from any other authority. I would obviously not do that. And so you're absolutely right, there has to be a standard for all these things, and that is God's Word. That's why it's self-authenticating.

WALLIS: What leads you to believe that my standards are not similarly consistent with themselves?

HUBNER: Well, first of all, you're not self-existent. You're not always truthful.

[discussion of order]

You're not self-existence. You depend on all kinds of different things to exist. If you don't drink water for forty days, you're probably going to die. God is not like that, He does not depend on anything outside of Himself. And furthermore, He is God, He is the creator, the sustainer, the owner, the sovereign ruler of creation, and so by nature He's always truthful. He is always consistent with Himself. He has revealed himself, and so there's a massive difference between God and His Word as a standard and you as your standard. You're temporal, God is eternal. You're fallible, God is infallible. We could go on and on, and on, and on.

WALLIS: Again, though, it sounds like you're just saying that, when you say that your standard is "ultimate," that is, that you're essentially saying that your standard is consistent, it's not internally problematic. And, again, I didn't hear you answer my question before, why should we take my standards as inconsistent, or not self-consistent, as you might like to say?

HUBNER: Because they're not consistent with Scripture.

WALLIS: But that's not what it means to be inconsistent. I'm not asking for an external critique. I'm asking for an *internal* critique.

HUBNER: Why do I need to give you an internal critique? What's wrong with an external critique? Why dismiss that from the outset? I don't see the point of that. God has spoken, He has said what is true, and I would rather argue with you than with God on truth claims. I'm not going to question God and his authority. My responsibility as a creature is to honor His Word, and to carry out his truth.

WALLIS: If you don't want to give an internal critique of my standards, and of my system of reasoning, if you like, that's fine, but I had been under the impression—

HUBNER: Well I think I've already given an internal critique. I've asked at least eight, nine questions in the opening statement. I'm not sure any of those have been answered.

WALLIS: Can you give me an example of an unanswered question?

HUBNER: Sure. You said, "I can't find any reason to suppose that God exists, and so I don't believe that he does." And I asked several questions. I asked, what kind of reason would suffice, and you just said, you didn't really answer the question.

WALLIS: Oh, sure I did. I said that good reasons are supported by deduction with agreeably true premises, or inductive conclusions with strong evidentiary backing. But what I'm asking is not—and I thank you for the example of a question that you think was unanswered—but what makes you think that unanswered questions demonstrates an inconsistency in my position? Maybe I *can't* answer certain questions, but what about my inability to answer some particular question would lead you to believe that my views are inconsistent?

HUBNER: Well, first of all, you believe that unanswered questions lead to inconsistency, otherwise why did you ask me to answer your unanswered question?

[discussion of order]

WALLIS: Again, let me clarify, I'm not suggesting that unanswered questions make for inconsistency.

HUBNER: Well I don't think you've ever asserted that unanswered questions makes for inconsistency. I think that assertions, multiple assertions that have no explanation and no foundation. And that has been demonstrated by unanswered questions. It's simply a demonstration that your world view really isn't much of a world view. It can't really be lived out. It can't function, except in terms of re-affirming self-autonomy.

WALLIS: Well, I guess I'll just have to express my—I don't know how you can take that to be an inconsistency. Like so many things, it seems like we're talking about different things when we use the same words.

HUBNER: Well, again, I'm not sure I said that unanswered questions are inconsistent. But I can definitely show you internal inconsistency. But my cross-examination period is over.

WALLIS: I asked you a question of what you think is an example of an internal inconsistency. I'm giving you the opportunity here and now.

HUBNER: Okay, you make objective claims without an objective standard. That's inconsistent.

WALLIS: What leads you to believe that I don't have an objective standard? I've already suggested to you that I do.

HUBNER: You told me, but I don't think you understand that just because you say something is true doesn't make it the case.

WALLIS: Well I explained what it is. I talked about induction and deduction, and moral reflection, and all of that good stuff.

HUBNER: So, logic is your objective standard?

WALLIS: Deductive logic is part of my objective standard for rationality, yes, absolutely.

HUBNER: And you don't think that deductive logic, or any type of logic, can be used to make the opposite conclusions that you have?

WALLIS: It's certainly possible, but I have no reason to think so because you haven't offered an argument—not one that I can identify. And I have to express my surprise that you haven't seemed more concerned with spelling out the argument.

## 9 Closing statement: Jamin Hubner

Alright, thanks, Josh, and thanks, Ben, again for joining me, and in fact asking me to do this debate. And it's been a challenge with such short notice. I never thought that I'd put together and prepare for a debate like this in less than a week. But God has been faithful, and I hope this will be beneficial to God's people.

Basically, I think the question that a lot of us have in our minds is, why exchange Christianity for agnosticism? What [does] agnosticism really have to offer except skepticism and uncertainty? And why is skepticism and uncertainty more preferable to what the Christian world view offers? I think that's the question that really needs to be asked, and also who is consistent with their world view and gives an explanation for the way things are? Now, I sincerely believe that Mr. Wallis thinks that I've offered no argument against his position, I've shown no internal inconsistency. Well, I've asked him what he means by "good reasons," what his standard is for good reasons. It seems to continually change. It might be logic, it might be reason or rationality, it might be just his own opinion. Basically this demonstrates what Frank [Royte] called a chair on wheels. He gave this wonderful lecture called 'What We Believe,' and gave his analogy of this huge gymnasium, a huge dark room. And a person is wandering around in this room, totally blind, totally not finding his way, but then he finds this chair. And this chair, of course, represents God and His Word. It's a fixed point of reference. It's an unchangeable, revealed, knowable standard, and it's given by God. So it is there, meant for human persons, so that we aren't lost in this world, just guessing around, guessing who this Jesus guy is, guessing if rape is wrong or how it's wrong, or any of these things. We're given this chair—we're given this standard, this revelation—for a reason, and it's to know God. And what Satan has done, that is the Evil One—there is this spiritual warfare, we have to admit, in reality—and what Frank [Royte] says is what Satan [does] is put wheels on the chair. Everybody knows now what's right and what's wrong. We can just change our standards. If I don't like something today I can just change it tomorrow. And I think that's been demonstrated quite thoroughly in Mr. Wallis's inability to provide an objective standard. He says, well I'm an objective standard. Well, objective—do you change? Will you always exist? Not just merely objective, but eternal? Unchangeable? Infallible? What kind of standard does agnosticism really offer? Is that the standard we should embrace? That's a question I think needs to be answered this evening.

Mr. Wallis said several times he has [a] very difficult time pinning down my argument. Now, I think part of that is because he genuinely just doesn't understand it, and maybe not had enough time to read all the literature, and even if he had, he still doesn't quite get it. And that's okay. I think the real reason why Mr. Wallis is having such a difficult time in pinning down Christianity is perhaps because it's true, and he's actually arguing with the truth that God has revealed. If God exists and His Word is true, we would expect that. We would expect to find this kind of difficulty, this unacceptance, just this foreignness. It's just so alien. And I think that's what we've seen this

evening, and I think it's been clear what the Christian world view has offered and why it's really the only explanation for the way things are.

Otherwise I think the question of the debate, I think I addressed the nature of that question in my opening statement. The first thing I said was, I cannot argue for God's existence like anything else. God is not part of creation. And so Mr. Wallis basically demands that there be an argument, that there be something by which he can compare this to. Friends, God and Christianity is unique! If it's the only true religion, if it's the only true system, why do we keep expecting it to be like everything else? That really is puzzling, and so the first thing I said is, this is different, here. If we're talking about God, He transcends creation, and evidence and arguments for Him are not going to be 'A, B, equals God,' or however else you want to put it, in inductive reasoning. God will not have it that way, because God transcends creation. And that includes our understanding of logic, and our understanding—and of course God transcends, I think, logic itself. [K.] Scott Oliphint goes as far as to say that logic, like all else save God, is created. Now, I'm not exactly sure how true that is given that logic is an expression, I think, of God's mind. It's how God sovereignly rules and orders creation.

But I think there is an important point, there, is that what we understand is creation, our knowledge is analogical. Our knowledge of God is analogical because there's two levels of existence. And so when Mr. Wallis wants proof, he wants evidence, he wants an argument, God has offered it all. If 1500 years and 66 books, walking the earth, talking to human beings, recording this, and making it available to almost anyone in the world, if that isn't enough, I think it's clear that nothing really will be. And I think that shows the nature of unbelief, and truly the exclusiveness of unbelief. [It's] that, really, it's not that God hasn't revealed Himself, it's not that things aren't clear. The fact is, the unbelieving mind has an axe to grind. It doesn't want to be responsible. It doesn't want to have anything to do with God, because we're sinful, and God is holy, and we just don't like that. And so with that I would encourage Mr. Wallis to actually read Scripture. Read it, and just to see what it has to say. And pray, reading through John, that if a God exists, that He will show himself.

And I just want to thank again Mr. Wallis, and Josh for moderating this debate. And I pray that this will be acceptable in God's sight as a presentation of the Gospel, and a defense of the truth. Thank you.

## 10 Closing statement: Ben Wallis

Thank you very much, and thank you, Mr. Whipps, for donating your time to this purpose. It really is a nice thing to do, and I sure do appreciate it. And Mr. Hubner, I am very glad that you took me up on this. I know it was short notice, and I really do appreciate it. And I hope that you are glad that you did it. I'm glad that I did it. I've had a great time, and I hope that everyone involved has had a good time, including the audience.

Now, closing statements—gosh!—there's always so much information to sum

up. It's tough to know where to begin. I suppose, when I looked at the issue originally, really I think the big question is, do we have reason to believe in God or not? And obviously we've only tackled one particular approach to finding a reason to believe in God—Mr. Hubner's approach, the presuppositionalist approach. I don't think it is the least bit persuasive. No doubt a lot of other people find it not persuasive at all, as well, but some people do find it persuasive. Mr. Hubner, for example, finds it very persuasive. I want to try to get those people to really think hard about what's going on in the transcendental argument—what's going on with presuppositionalism. Mr. Hubner, for example, says that we should take the fact that “God has created everything” as an “ultimate presupposition,”<sup>43</sup> because to take anything else<sup>44</sup> as a presupposition, or even just a conclusion based on other presuppositions, is somehow impossible. The problem is, he hasn't gone and explained why it's impossible for anything else to be true, at least not to my satisfaction. And he's issued a number of criticisms, some of them serious, but he hasn't actually, that I can recognize, painted any coherent, cohesive argument for the existence of God.

And so I think that's the important thing to remember. There's a great difference between criticizing my position, *certain elements* of my position especially,<sup>45</sup> for example my ethical theory, and presenting an argument or a reason in support of God's existence. Those two things are not equivalent. And so when Mr. Hubner says, well look, Mr. Wallis doesn't have a permanent, “unchanging” standard—Mr. Wallis's standard is impermanent and insecure—that's a serious criticism, I think.<sup>46</sup> It's one I can answer, and my answer, if anyone is curious, is that this is not any unique position to skepticism, or atheism, or agnosticism, or secularism, or anything of that sort. The theist is in just as precarious a position. The theist may appeal to God, and declare that to be an unchanging standard, but I don't see any reason to suppose that God is going to give us an unchanging standard. Moreover, if we *do* want an unchanging standard, I don't see why it's so difficult to go get one.<sup>47</sup> All we have to do is adhere to that standard without exception. The problem with that is that such a rigid approach to morality is impractical, and leads us to great difficulty, no less so on the theistic view than the nontheistic view.

In short, I don't see that he's actually offering us anything more. And that's just one example of his criticisms, of course. There are others. He has said, for example, that Christians give up their autonomy, but that skeptics such as myself, we rely on our own fallible human means of judgment.<sup>48</sup> I don't see how

<sup>43</sup>Hubner, opening statement ~11:39.

<sup>44</sup>That is, anything *contrary* to the statement that “God created everything.”

<sup>45</sup>Here we distinguish between criticizing a position as a whole, and criticizing certain doctrines or elements of some position.

<sup>46</sup>For example, Mr. Hubner, in his opening statement, ~9:46, declares that “Since he is not a Christian who is accountable to an objective moral standard, he can change his ethical standards as often as he wants.” A little later, ~11:18, he adds, “Christianity offers an objective, revealed, unchanging, knowable standard for truth claims.”

<sup>47</sup>That is, to find an unchanging standard *without appealing to God*.

<sup>48</sup>For example, at ~15:23, Mr. Hubner asks, “How would a person ever become a Christian if he refuses to give up his autonomy, and let God and not man determine what is possible

Mr. Hubner is avoiding using his judgment. I mean, surely he's not suggesting that God is going and making his judgments for him, that Mr. Hubner is just a sort of little God puppet, and God's actually doing all the work. Surely that's not what he's suggesting. But if that's not what he's suggesting, I don't see how he avoids making personal decisions, personal judgments, and taking personal responsibility for those decisions and judgments, in just the same way that skeptics do. So, again, I don't see how that theist is in any better of a position than the skeptic in this regard, either.

He says that I've "shut the door in God's face," that I am not willing, in other words, to go and to consider the possibility that I might be wrong.<sup>49</sup> But clearly, unless he thinks that I'm just lying or hopelessly deluded—and I think that he *does* think that I'm hopelessly deluded—at least I've gone and professed fallibility, whereas Mr. Hubner says that it's just "impossible" for God not to exist.<sup>50</sup> So it seems like he's actually the one who's shutting the door on the alternative view, here. So, again, we have an instance of the theist view not offering us anything different than the secular view.

But all of these criticisms, even if I couldn't answer them, as I said in my opening statement, if we want to go find cracks in the opponent's position, well, maybe that hurts my credibility, but, again, I'm not acting as an authority. I don't need to be credible. I expect people to weigh these arguments for themselves, and to decide—well, if they can recognize them, at least—but to decide whether or not Mr. Hubner has presented a persuasive case for the existence of God. And if I happen to have a hole in my ethical theory, I just don't see how that's evidence for the existence of God.

So, with all of that in mind, I suppose I will close, and I'll say that I'm going to have to remain agnostic. I expect Mr. Hubner will remain a presuppositionalist apologist, and that's okay. I think, hopefully, we've both given each other lots to think about. And I may not have been persuaded by Mr. Hubner's words, but I do promise to think about them, and to take them to heart. And I hope that everyone else does the same with the words of both of us, here. So, I hope everyone has enjoyed themselves, and I thank everyone for this wonderful opportunity to take part in this event. Thank you.

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and impossible, reasonable and unreasonable, workable and unworkable in the universe?"

<sup>49</sup>Hubner, opening statement ~15:52.

<sup>50</sup>In his opening statement, ~3:15, Mr. Hubner states unequivocally, "God exists because it would be impossible for him not to exist."