

The Importance and Necessity of Special Revelation

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This article is a reply that deals with certain criticisms concerning views expressed in my article titled *Pagan Philosophy, Unbelief, and Irrationalism*.¹ This article briefly exposed the bankruptcy of materialistic and empirical philosophy in particular and the worldview of non-belief in general. It was asserted: "Matter is silent; it does not speak. It does not say what is right or what is wrong. The definition between good and evil is found in the Bible. God is not silent." These assertions on my part were not original. Many Christian apologists have discussed these ideas when dealing with atheistic materialism.

The article was challenged regarding the accuracy of these assertions and how assertions of this nature could be harmonized with the teaching of Scripture that shows matter does speak using passages such as Romans 1:19,20, dealing with creation's testimony, and is therefore not silent. To start with, the claim "matter is silent" must not be understood apart from the context of the article: to point out that the materialistic worldview is philosophically unable to arrive at truth from any source, particularly matter. Matter according to this view is ultimately just an accident and is therefore meaningless. As will be seen, the crux of the problem is with fallen man. The article in question did not deal with the broader subject of general revelation from a Christian perspective.

Also, when stated that "matter is silent" this assertion should be understood as meaning that matter does not speak in or with an audible sound like human speech and does not communicate or have any meaning at all within the framework of a non-believing worldview. This is especially true when dealing with specifics, notably in the areas of science, ethics, and logic. Considering the Christian worldview in contrast, it can be said that matter does have a testimony. Its testimony is imprinted in it by virtue of its creation. In this reply, there will be a brief account of general revelation (creation knowledge) and special revelation (biblical knowledge) along with additional challenges to materialistic philosophy, contrasted with biblical philosophy. However to clarify things, reformed Christians believe that God conveys truth through both of these avenues. There is no conflict between these two forms of revelation. I believe that all creation testifies that God exists e.g., Psalms 19:1-3, Romans 1:18-20 and that God has spoken authoritatively in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. As will be seen, the problem is

¹ Jack Kettler, *Pagan Philosophy, Unbelief, and Irrationalism*, (Minneapolis: Contra Mundum, 1998).

with man and specifically fallen man.

The article in question points out that the non-believing worldview is unable to articulate in a credible way a theory of ethics. The transcendental argument, or as some might say a worldview apologetic, was briefly used to illustrate the deficiency in non-believing thought. The transcendental argument shows the Christian worldview to be true because of the impossibility of the contrary. A worldview must have a theory of knowledge that can account for certain things, such as ethics, logic and science. The non-believer has never shown how one can get from matter like rocks to a concrete argument of why Stalin's murder of millions of people, in particular the Ukrainians, was wrong. The thrust of the aforementioned article is against atheistic materialistic philosophy, which produces death and destruction recorded repeatedly in history.

To start with, in light of the truth of Christianity and within the framework of the Christian worldview it can be said that creation has a testimony, albeit not audible like human speech. Creation does testify of God's existence. In contrast, within the framework of a materialistic worldview, matter is absolutely silent. This is a suppressed or imposed silence, the result of fallen man's ethical state reflected in his apostate philosophy. Within the Christian worldview the testimony of creation or general revelation is absolutely true but limited in its scope. Being limited does not imply deficiency. God always intended to give special or biblical revelation. Jesus is God's fullest revelation to man and He is revealed to us in the Scriptures. General revelation does not tell us about Jesus' death on the cross and how men are to be saved. The book of Romans and the Gospels do.

Matter is not alive. God creates matter. Because of this, matter has God's imprint. Therefore, matter's testimony mirrors or is reflective. It reflects God's glory like the moon reflects the light of the sun. This testimony is general in scope. In the article it is said, "matter is silent" which is to point out the bankruptcy of materialistic philosophy and its inability to speak with intelligence concerning specifics in the area of ethics, since its worldview is deficient. The materialist starts with time and chance and matter. If non-believers start with matter, how do they get from A (matter) to B (ethics)? Matter does not logically lead to anything within the framework of materialism. There are obvious disagreements between Christians and non-Christians in the area of interpretation of matter. The reason for these disagreements can be accounted for by the way in which evidence is interpreted. In essence, fallen man rejects God's interpretation of creation and imposes his own autonomous interpretation on created things, thus suppressing the truth. As will be seen, the materialist has nowhere to turn except his own conflicting autonomous capricious subjective evaluations.

The Christian sees all of creation as testifying of God's existence. The Christian looks to God to find the true meaning of matter and the facts surrounding it. The non-believer, however, sees nothing except matter, which cannot mean anything nor have anything to say apart from man's imposed interpretation. From a Christian perspective, man is governed by presuppositions. These presuppositions are determined by his nature, that is either fallen or redeemed. He interprets matter consistent with these presuppositions.

Fallen man is still committed to the Satanic lie that “ye shall be as gods knowing good from evil” (Gen. 3:5). In the fall mankind rejected God given knowledge

Many are not epistemologically self-conscious, including some Christians, and therefore are unaware that they have presuppositions, which govern their interpretations. In particular, fallen man generally refuses to acknowledge that he has presuppositions and that his presuppositions govern interpretations of matter or anything else. To many, what is put forward as evidence and interpretation seems self-evident; but in reality is nothing more than a subjective evaluation. Escaping from subjectivity is no easy task. Does non-believing philosophy enable man to get beyond his subjectivity? Can non-believing man's rationalism (reason alone using logic) save him? Can the laws of logic within the framework of a non-believing worldview accomplish this? How can they, since the laws of logic cannot even be explained or justified within the framework of this philosophy? For example, where did these laws come from? Are they universally interpreted in the same way? The laws of logic within the framework of non-belief are nothing more than a philosophical construct, which ends up collapsing into irrationality.

Rational man, in other words, has no basis for his rationalism. The statement “matter is silent” should be understood in contrast to the statement that “God is not silent.” This second assertion is the Christian solution to obtaining knowledge. God has spoken clearly to all men through the Scriptures. We have a biblical foundation for seeking knowledge and obtaining it. God given revelation is objective. Ungodly men reject biblical revelation, they suppress the truth that God has revealed to them through creation (Romans 1:18). God has clearly spoken in the Scriptures, i.e. special revelation to mankind concerning what is required of him. The suppression of God's revelation by fallen man is evidence of his epistemological rebellion.

In addition, regarding matter it can be said that, whatever testimony general revelation has, it is because God is the author of it. In and of itself, matter has nothing to say. Someone may object and say, “we can learn many things from rocks.” This type of assertion is naive. Evidence is interpreted within the framework of a worldview. The presuppositions that govern a worldview determine what may be learned. If the presuppositions are false, evidence will be misinterpreted or suppressed. The mind of man does not interpret raw data without the aid of controlling presuppositions. Some deny this. For example, empiricists, those who believe that man's mind is blank in the beginning of life and then knowledge comes through sensations, believe that man's mind is capable of assimilating and correctly interpreting these raw data.

For example, empiricism historically argues that knowledge comes through sensations in the following order: (a) sensations, (b) perceptions, (c) memory images, (d) and the development of abstract ideas. In this system of interpretation perceptions are inferences from sensations. How does the empiricist know valid from invalid inferences? Given this uncertainty, how can the empiricist be sure of anything, let alone what type of matter he has? In addition, studies have shown that some individuals do not have memory images. How can this group of people know things empirically? This is no small problem for

empirical epistemology. Tiredness, drugs, and optical illusions can deceive the senses, particularly in the area of sight (color) and hearing (sound) causing further uncertainty. The Christian would also not rule out sin and demonic deception as factors leading to false conclusions. Assuming that empirical epistemology has resolved these difficulties is just that, an assumption.

Consistent empirical epistemology leads to skepticism, as in the case of Scottish philosopher David Hume. Allegedly, Emmanuel Kant was awakened from his dogmatic slumbers when he saw the effects Hume's skeptical consistency were having on empirical epistemology. Kant tried to save epistemology by positing that man's mind organized empirical data by *a priori* categories through which sensations could be understood. Whether he did or not is another issue. Another problem for the empiricist is that it is impossible to know the totality of empirical data on any subject with the endless complexities of inter-related details, which always leaves open the possibility that the empiricist is mistaken in more than just his perceptions. Moreover, empirically, how does the empiricist assimilate the numerous sensations such as sight and touch into a coherent basis for knowing what anything is? The empiricist needs to explain his process of abstraction and demonstrate that it is free from error. Assuming the system works without demonstrating the process is nothing more than begging the question. Empirical scientists are notorious for making unjustified metaphysical assertions. See Gordon H. Clark's *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God*² and John W. Robbins, *The Sagan of Science*³ for a number of instructive examples of this.

In addition to numerous philosophical problems relating to interpretation, it should be clear that matter has nothing to say within the framework of non-believing philosophy. What could it say? Within this framework, matter is ultimately an accident and therefore meaningless. In addition to this problem, all men have *a priori* commitments, which are at work and from which truth or falsity is deduced. The question is not does man have these commitments, but what are they? Do these commitments acknowledge God in the reasoning process? If one starts with non-Christian premises it is impossible to arrive at biblical truth. For a conclusion to be valid it cannot contain information not stated in the premises. The non-believer cannot have accurate knowledge because his presuppositions, starting premises, or axioms, which govern interpretations, are false.

When non-believers seem to arrive at conclusions consistent with biblical revelation, it is by accident, inconsistency, or theft. Many times the non-Christian worldview steals the ethical conclusions from the Christian worldview. This borrowing or more properly stealing from the Christian worldview is why non-believers at times seemingly speak the truth without having the necessary presuppositions to arrive at the truth. The non-believer, because of the bankruptcy of his position, is forced to live on stolen concepts. Thankfully, many non-believers rejected Nazism's "final solution". In other words, at times, by God's common grace, the non-believer sees the *reductio ad absurdum* and

2 Gordon H. Clark, *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God*, (Jefferson, Maryland: Trinity, 1987).

3 John W. Robbins, *The Sagan of Science*, (Jefferson, Maryland: Trinity, 1988).

horror of where his own philosophical commitments lead.

Since God is the creator, He gives the true interpretation of all things. All true interpretation must come to a grip with God's revelation, in which is found the meaning and interpretation of matter. When dealing with the difference between right and wrong one deals with specifics. Natural or general revelation is only good as far as it is intended. It is right and true as far as it goes. It is intended to show man that God exists and testifies of His eternal power and Godhead (Romans 1:18-20). General revelation testifies but its testimony is not intended to address specifics in the area of science, logic and ethics. It is to special revelation in the Bible that we must turn.

Any theory of knowledge that attempts to build a philosophy without God's special revelation (the scriptures) is doomed to failure. Reformed Christians believe that general revelation is sufficient to condemn man. Special revelation, i.e. biblical revelation, adds to man's culpability. God's purpose in general revelation is not to give man specific knowledge in many areas. To illustrate, matter does not give specifics concerning the difference between first degree murder and manslaughter nor adultery and fornication, or whether fornication (*pornea*) is a category under which adultery is defined. This is found in special revelation, e.g., in the case laws of the Old Testament.

As has been seen, Christians have a solid basis for knowledge. All men have God's moral law stamped upon their conscience. The diligent reader should consult Ronald H. Nash's *The Word of God and the Mind of Man*⁴ and his *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's theory of knowledge*.⁵ These two books explain and develop for the modern reader elements of Augustine's philosophy in the area of epistemology that is found in his *De Magistro*.⁶ These works deal with the mechanics of how the Christian receives knowledge into his mind. Man has a moral awareness of right from wrong, not learned from matter or uncertain sensations but from our mind being illuminated directly by God. We read: "That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world" John 1:9; and, "For in Him we live and move and have our being..." Acts 17:28a. God directly illuminates man's mind so he knows the difference between right and wrong. God's law is stamped upon our consciences. This knowledge gives man his moral awareness and is the result of man being created in the image of God.

In summary, to press non-belief further, it can be said the apostate worldview man has erected is full of contradictions. Oftentimes, if consistent with this materialist worldview, he cannot know anything, since consistent empiricism leads to agnostic skepticism which he then uses as a smoke screen or cover to justify ignorance and hostility to God's law. If not consistent with the philosophical conclusions of a materialistic worldview derived

4 Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1982).

5 Ronald H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1969).

6 Augustine, *De Magistro* in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, Editor, John H. S. Burleigh, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, MCMLIII).

from sensations, he then claims as an atheist to have certain knowledge of right and wrong using his reason, alone which is in defiance to biblical knowledge. Philosophically unbelief vacillates between these two positions of knowing and not knowing. These two opposite poles of allegiance constitute a never-ending dilemma, thus revealing the futility of non-Christian epistemology. Does any of this affect the non-believer? No, the philosophy of non-belief presses on irrationally, certain of its uncertainty, oblivious of the self-refuting contradiction being advanced. To illustrate, for example, some non-believers claim *absolutely* that there are no *absolutes*. The philosophy of non-belief contradicts itself when it claims *not to know* (uncertainty, agnosticism) *and to know* (certainty, atheism). Both atheism and agnosticism are two sides of the same coin. Fallen man's contradictory uncertainty and certainty are manifestations of his epistemological and ethical rebellion against God.

Also no less devastating, many examples could be given of non-believers asserting absolutes and omniscient statements within the framework of a system that does not allow absolutes. When finite man without biblical authority asserts absolute omniscient statements, it is indefensible. Also, it should be noted the absurdity of atheism's claim when asserting "there is no God". The absurdity is this: it is impossible to prove a universal negative. Furthermore, when the atheist that "there is no God" the second question of the Socratic technique "how do you know that?" reveals the failure of this unverifiable claim. So much for the non-believer's demand for verification. The agnostic claims for himself ignorance concerning the existence of God. It should be noted that this claim of ignorance is not an argument against the existence of God. Rather, it is a sign of epistemological bankruptcy and what could be described as a deficiency of knowledge, or a self-confessed mental condition.

In essence, fallen man has erected a closed system. His system is closed to God. He does not allow God to speak. Since man rejects the Creator, he has nothing within his closed system that he allows to speak with ethical certainty. He is left to himself. As long as fallen man excludes the biblical God from his system, he cannot know anything with certainty. Non-believing thought has no basis for absolutes. If there are no absolutes there can be no meaning attached to anything since everything could be said to be true and not true at the same time, which is unacceptable nonsense. Thus, fallen man is left with only endless matter, unintelligible sensations, or his atheistic apostate reason. This is the bankruptcy of atheistic materialistic humanism.

It is only the Christian that has a rational basis for knowledge. This is because we allow God to speak to us in creation and Scripture. Our system is not closed like the non-Christian. The Bible tells us about general revelation and man's requirement to worship the creator. The Bible tells us the specifics on how to worship the creator. It is only because we have special revelation that an intelligent conversation on these matters can be carried on. General and special revelations are biblical concepts. It would be impossible to have a discussion about these concepts without God's special revelation, the Bible, since biblical revelation is where the concepts appear. Clearly, without special revelation there would be no discussion of ethics, science, and logic with any certainty.

In conclusion, without the Bible, i.e., special revelation we would not be able to talk about the concept of general revelation. This is because, it is in Scripture we learn of general or creation revelation. The objector to my previous article recognized the truth of Christian revelation, but gave away unnecessary ground to non-belief by not fully grasping the effects of the fall and therefore missed the thrust of the argument, which was directed against non-believing philosophy. Our knowledge of general revelation is dependent upon special revelation. Therefore, special revelation is indispensable. The importance and necessity of special revelation is absolutely essential. Without special revelation we would be left in a swamp of autonomous empirical subjectivity which is where the non-believer finds himself. The non-believer is left in the dark as long as they suppress the truth of God that has been revealed to them. God has spoken. This is certain: God speaks to us in the Scriptures (special revelation) with human language utilizing logically structured sentences in which He tells us the difference between right and wrong. Consequently, the strength of the Christian worldview is clearly seen by the impossibility of the contrary.

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Note:

As in my previous article nothing in the above article should be understood as being original with me. I am indebted biblically and philosophically for the above comments to Francis A. Schaeffer, Gordon H. Clark, Ronald H. Nash, Cornelius Van Til, and Greg Bahnsen.