

Inductivism, Inerrancy, and Presuppositionalism

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At the heart of contemporary evangelical Bibliology and apologetics is the question of Scriptural inerrancy -- in particular, the most appropriate and effective method of its exposition and defense. The three elements mentioned in the title of this paper have been derived from a short but potentially significant interchange between Daniel Fuller and Clark Pinnock in the CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR'S REVIEW. [1] Their brief discussion of Biblical authority is a noteworthy skirmish - one that puts a particular epistemological and apologetical outlook to a critical test. An analysis of the Fuller-Pinnock encounter may very well offer evangelicals unexpected but sound guidance through the thicket of present-day theological and apologetical questions impinging on inerrancy. To begin this recommended analysis, we can rehearse how Fuller and Pinnock relate the three topics of inductivism, inerrancy and presuppositionalism to each other. Three major theses emerge from a reading of the two published letters exchanged between these two writers and each can be substantiated by quotation from the relevant literature. Thesis I may be stated as follows: **PRESUPPOSITIONALISM IS OPPOSED TO EMPIRICAL PROCEDURES AND INDUCTIVE INVESTIGATION.**

Fuller says to Pinnock: "If faith really has to BEGIN the approach to Scripture, then I don't think you can talk very meaningfully about induction. I would argue that really, after all, you are on Van Til's side, not on Warfield's" (p. 331). "I am trying to do as Warfield and let induction control from beginning to end. You say on page 185 [of Pinnock's BIBLICAL REVELATION] that following Christ's view of Scripture 'will always prove safe'.... This is the language of an unassailable starting point - the language of deductive thinking - of Van Til" (p. 332).

Pinnock replies to Fuller: "It is more common to be criticized by our fideistic evangelical colleagues for being too concerned about questions of factual verification. Dr. Fuller recognizes that I wish to follow the epistemology of the Princeton apologetic as it was developed by B. B. Warfield, but he believes that I am inconsistent in this and tend to lapse into presuppositional modes of expression, if not thought. He would even place me on Van Til's side, MIRABILE DICTU" (p. 333). Pinnock wants us to understand that "Dr. Fuller and I share a view of the constructive relation between faith and history" (p. 333).

Thus it is that both Pinnock and Fuller set an inductive, empirical approach (like that of Warfield and the Princeton school) over against the approach of presuppositionalism (as found in an apologist like Van Til). On the one side you have a constructive relation between history and fiat where induction controls from beginning to end the questions of factual verification, whereas on the other side you have mere deductivism and fideism. Presuppositionalism and inductivism are

accordingly portrayed as polar opposites, as conflicting epistemologies. To this antagonism Fuller and Pinnock both give assent.

Here now is Thesis II: INDUCTIVISM AND EMPIRICAL APOLOGETICS ARE INDEPENDENT OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL COMMITMENTS, LETTING NEUTRAL REASON AND CRITICAL THINKING CONTROL THE KNOWING PROCESS FROM BEGINNING TO END. On this point Fuller and Pinnock are again agreed. In their discussion with each other, both men make much of the alleged "inductive" nature of their epistemologies and their approach to Biblical authority (and hence apologetics). It is indispensable at this point to rehearse what they mean by their commitment to "inductive" procedures. Let us once more have them speak for themselves to this question.

"Induction, as I understand it, means letting criticism control all aspects of the knowing process from beginning to end" (Fuller, p. 330). "All knowing, including the knowledge which faith claims to have, comes by but one way" (Fuller, p. 332). This one way is the empirical approach, which is committed to factual verification (Pinnock, p. 333). With inductivism faith does not begin the approach to Scripture, nor does it start the knowing process at all (Fuller, pp. 331, 332). On the other hand, true empiricism does not let negative criticism and naturalistic presuppositions control thought (Pinnock, p. 333). Therefore Fuller and Pinnock are saying that one begins with neither a commitment to Scripture nor a commitment against Scripture. Apparently, then, one is to be completely "open-minded" or neutral from the outset. Indeed, this is precisely what they both claim. For inductivism maintains that no mere claim to authority is self-establishing (Fuller, p. 330), and it refuses to claim "an unassailable starting point" (Fuller, p. 332). Moreover, it will not permit circular reasoning and argumentation (Fuller, p. 330). Hence inductivism on this account does not resort to self-attesting starting points, nor does its chain of explanations and evidences ever bend around and ultimately book into itself, forming a wide argumentative circle. Clearly, then, this outlook holds to "the right of reason and criticism to be sovereign" (Fuller, p. 330). It will "let critical thinking prevail" (Fuller, p. 332) -- "to go all the way" (p. 333), because "you can't just have it 'in part'" (Fuller, p. 332). According to Fuller and Pinnock, if one is "consistently inductive" (p. 332) his every commitment will be based totally on empirical evidences and critical thinking. In particular, belief in inspiration and the security of Biblical authority will rest, we are told, totally on inductive evidence (Fuller, p. 332) and well-authenticated credentials (Pinnock, p. 333). This, then, is the non-presuppositional inductive (or empirical) approach that Fuller and Pinnock claim to be utilizing. It makes a radical, all-encompassing demand on us epistemologically -- "you either have it or you don't" (Fuller, p. 332).

We would formulate Thesis III as follows: THE QUESTION OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY CAN BE SETTLED ONLY INDUCTIVELY. It should be rather obvious that this thesis is demanded by the previous two. Presuppositionalism has been shunned, and the radical demand to let inductive empiricism answer every question in the knowing process has been affirmed. Thus the question of the Bible's errant or inerrant nature must be answered, it at all, in an inductive manner. Fuller and Pinnock would both say as much.

However, these two committed empiricists and anti-presuppositionalists do not come to the same conclusion about the inerrant nature of Scripture -- that is, in the application of their common inductive approach they have reached contrary positions. Fuller maintains the full inerrancy of

"any Scriptural statement or necessary implication therefrom which involves what makes a man wise to salvation" (p. 331): "if it errs where historical control is possible in matters germane to 'the whole counsel of God' which 'makes men wise unto salvation,' then all the Bible becomes questionable" (p. 332). Pinnock calls this unacceptable "Though convenient for sidestepping certain biblical difficulties, this dichotomy is unworkable and unscriptural" (p. 334). We must, instead, take the view of the Biblical authors: "The attitude of Jesus and the Apostles toward Scripture was one of TOTAL trust.... What Scripture said, with A PRIORI qualification, God said, was their view. The whole GRAPHE is God-breathed and fully trustworthy" (p. 334). Consequently, "the theological truth is discredited to the extent that the factual material is erroneous" (p. 335). So we observe that Fuller and Pinnock have agreed on all three of the aforementioned these, but they have not ended up in the same place. These two empirical apologists do not see eye to eye with respect to Scriptural inerrancy and authority.

What makes this divergence of conclusion so interesting to us today is the additional fact that, in their differing conclusions about Scriptural inerrancy. Fuller and Pinnock make decided counter-accusations that the other writer is really less than true to the radical demand of inductivism. Each man considers himself to be the genuine champion of inductive empiricism in the attempt to relate faith to history. Says Fuller, "I would argue that really, after all, you are on Van Til's side, not on Warfield's " (p. 331): "there is a part of you that wants to be inductive, to let critical thinking prevail. But you can't go all the way" (p. 332). Fuller challenges Pinnock with these words: "Are you willing to be as consistently inductive as he [Warfield] was?" (p. 332), and after mentioning resistance to the thunderous veto against induction in Pinnock's book on BIBLICAL REVELATION Fuller asks, "Are you willing to go all the way in resisting this veto?" (p. 333). Thus Fuller thinks that Pinnock has arrived at his viewpoint on Scriptural inerrancy by a manner inconsistent with inductivism.

Nevertheless, and on the other hand, Pinnock feels that it is, rather, Fuller who has not been faithful to the inductive epistemology we have just outlined. He declares: "Fuller is less empirical at this point than Warfield and I, because if he were more careful in his induction, he would see at once that the dichotomy he has proposed {between revelation and non-revelational statements in Scripture} is untenable in the light of what he calls 'the doctrinal verses'" (p. 334). Indeed, Pinnock says that Fuller's view of inerrancy would "make it relative to some dubious A PRIORI standard, inaccurately derived from the doctrinal verses" (p. 334). Pinnock concludes that Fuller "is less than fully consistent in the way he relates faith and history.... Most of the material which in his view would belong to the 'revelational' category lies outside the reach of science and history, safe from their critical control" (p. 334) -- even though in reality the theological and factual material "are so inextricably united in the text" (p. 335). And so there we have the counter-allegations. Pinnock feels that Fuller is not consistently inductive; Fuller says the converse is true.

Let us now explore and respond to the three Fuller-Pinnock thesis SERIATIM, aiming to draw out of this telling interchange principles and insights that can give us basic guidance in such theological and apologetical issues as center on the inerrancy of Scripture.

As to Thesis I, we must rather flatfootedly challenge its accuracy. Both Fuller and Pinnock have counterfieted the presuppositional outlook by aligning it with fideistic deductivism over

against empirical and inductive methods. A perusal of Van Til's many publications is sufficient to falsify this preconceived misrepresentation. For instance:

The greater the amount of detailed study and the more carefully such study is undertaken, the more truly Christian will the method be. It is important to bring out this point in order to help remove the common misunderstanding that Christianity is opposed to FACTUAL INVESTIGATION. [2]

What shall be the attitude of the orthodox believer with respect to this? Shall he be an OBSCURANTIST and hold to the doctrine of authority of the Scripture though he knows it can empirically be shown to be contrary to the facts of Scripture themselves? It goes without saying that such should not be his attitude. [3]

The Christian position is certainly not opposed to EXPERIMENTATION AND OBSERVATION It is quite commonly held that we cannot accept anything that is not the result of a sound scientific methodology. With this we can as Christians heartily agree. [4]

Surely the Christian, who believes in the doctrine of creation, cannot share the Greek depreciation of the things of the SENSE WORLD. Depreciation of that sense world inevitably leads to a depreciation of many of the important facts of historic Christianity which took place in the sense world. The Bible does not rule out every form of empiricism any more than it rules out every form of A PRIORI reasoning. [5]

Now this approach from the bottom to the top, from the particular to the general, is the INDUCTIVE ASPECT of the method of implication.... All agree that the immediate starting point must be that of our everyday EXPERIENCE and the "facts" that are most close at hand.... But the favorite charge against us is that we are ... employing the deductive method. Our opponents are thoughtlessly identifying our method with the Greek method of deduction We need only to observe that A PRIORI reasoning, and A POSTERIORI reasoning, are equally anti-Christian, if these terms are understood in their historical sense On the other hand, if God is recognized as the only and the final explanation of any and every fact, neither the inductive nor the deductive method can any longer be used to the exclusion of the other. [6]

Every bit of historical investigation, whether it be in the directly biblical field, archaeology, or in general history is bound to confirm the truth of the claims of the Christian position.... A really fruitful historical apologetic argues that every fact IS and MUST BE such as proves the truth of the Christian theistic position. [7]

Far from being indifferent or antagonistic to inductive and empirical science, Van Til has devoted much of his scholarly labors to the constructive analysis of the philosophy of science. He has always insisted that Christians relate their faith positively to science and history, finding unequivocal evidence, indeed a definite demand, for distinctively Christian conclusions in all inductive study of the facts themselves. [8] On the other hand he has persistently and apologetically attacked unbelieving philosophies on the telling ground that they render inductive science impossible. [9]

Consequently it is not at all surprising that Van Til has been unflinching in his opposition to fideism, apologetic mysticism, and the notion that belief cannot argue with unbelief. He is highly critical of those who saw no way of harmonizing the facts of the Christian religion with the "constitution and course of nature. They gave up the idea of a philosophical apologetics entirely, This FIDEISTIC attitude comes to expression frequently in the statement of the experiential proof of the truth of Christianity. People will say that they know that they are saved and that Christianity is true no matter what the philosophical or scientific evidence for or against it may be... But in thus seeking to withdraw from all intellectual argument, such fideists have virtually admitted the validity of the argument against Christianity. They will have to believe in their hearts what they have virtually allowed to be intellectually indefensible. [\[10\]](#)

It might seem that there can be no ARGUMENT between them. It might seem that the orthodox view of authority is to be spread only by testimony and by prayer, not by argument. But this would militate directly against the very foundation of all Christian revelation, namely, to the effect that all things in the universe are nothing if not revelational of God. Christianity must claim that it alone is rational.... An evangelical, that is a virtually Arminian theology, makes concessions to the principle that controls a "theology of EXPERIENCE" ... and to the precise extent that evangelicalism makes these concessions in its theology, does it weaken its own defense of the infallible Bible.[\[11\]](#)

These pro-inductive or pro-empirical attitudes of Van Til are conspicuous: To miss them one would need to approach his writings, if at all, with far-reaching and vision-distorting preconceived notions. We cannot but conclude that the Fuller-Pinnock Thesis I is simply mistaken. Presuppositionalism is not opposed to empirical procedures or inductive investigation, nor does it discourage them.

E.G., see Van Til's analysis of Dewey in his review of THE PHILOSOPHY OF JOHN DEWEY, ed. P.A. Schilpp, WTJ 3 (November, 1940): "We would humbly but firmly maintain that only Christianity makes sense and philosophy as well as other forms of human experience intelligible" (p. 72). The same theme can be traced throughout Van Til's many writings; for instance, "I think that science is absolutely impossible on the non-Christian principle" (THE DEFENSE OF THE FAITH [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995]285) since it undermines the inductive procedure (pp. 283-284). speaking of the non-Christian's method, Van Til says: "Its most consistent application not merely leads away from Christian theism but in leading away from Christian theism leads to the destruction of reason and science as well" (p. 119).

What Van Til and the presuppositionalists DO say -- and this point will be crucial to the understanding subsequent parts of this paper -- is that not only must one utilize inductive empiricism but he must press beyond this and examine the foundations of science and inductive method. That is, we must not stop short in our philosophical analysis but rather inquire into the presuppositions necessary for an intelligent and justified use of empiricism. As Van Til puts it: "I would not talk endlessly about facts and more facts without ever challenging the non-believer's PHILOSOPHY OF FACT." [\[12\]](#) Van Til makes it clear that presuppositionalism does not "disparage the usefulness of arguments for the corroboration of the Scripture that came from archaeology. It is only to say that such corroboration is not of independent power."[\[13\]](#) The

apologist "must challenge the legitimacy of the scientific method as based upon an assumed metaphysic of chance."[\[14\]](#)

So hopeless and senseless a picture must be drawn of the natural man's methodology, based as it is upon the assumption that time or chance is ultimate. On his assumption his own rationality is a product of chance.... Our argument as over against his would be that the existence of the God of Christian theism and the conception of his counsel as controlling all things in the universe is the only presupposition which can account for the uniformity of nature which the scientist needs.[\[15\]](#)

Having challenged Thesis I and having briefly explained the nature of presuppositional reasoning with respect to inductivism, we can now proceed to correct the dubious allegation of Thesis II that inductive empiricism is independent of presuppositions, allowing neutral and critical thinking (which assents to nothing except upon evidential strength) to control the knowing process completely from beginning to end. We already have had occasion above to note that inductive empiricism is intelligible and justified within the context of certain metaphysical and epistemological precommitments or basic assumptions. Thus we have already challenged the alleged neutrality of the inductivist. As hard as Fuller and Pinnock may try to hide it from themselves, the stubborn fact remains that, for them both, critical and neutral reasoning does not prevail and reign supreme throughout their knowing processes. They have their covert presuppositions. I would like to illustrate this observation by means of a series of considerations that can be conveniently summarized under three headings.

(4) Of course, the nature of evidence that should be given for the theory of induction will be determined by the nature of that theory's objects and methods. So we can ask, "What kind of entity is spoken of in the inductivist's self-referential theoretical statements?" Once this is answered, if ever, we must go on and ask, "What is a proposition, an idea, a belief, a standard of evidence, a directive, a rule, etc.?" For instance, are they properties, relations, substances, individuals, dispositions, functions, modes of cognition, or what? These are all categorically different things in metaphysics, and therefore without dealing with the demands of such questions are incomplete, inadequate, inconsistent and self-delusory apologetic may inevitably be the outcome.

(5) The foregoing questions, along with the upcoming one, all indicate that one's metaphysic must be formulated correctly at the outset if epistemological headaches are to be avoided later. For instance, cognizance is a familiar kind of fact to epistemologists (e.g., "I see x," "I know p," being conscious of, believing, remembering, etc.), and cognizance is just as much a reality as what scientists study directly. Thus we ask how cognizance is to be categorized, so as to avoid category mistakes about it. The common tendency is to hold that cognizance is a relation between a subject and an object. But this leads to the obvious epistemological problem of seeking an object of cognition. As a relation, cognizance would require something that cognizance is about, for relations require the existence of their terms. But, then, to what is a belief related in cases of past belief? What is its object? More generally, what is the nature of the objects of cognition, especially in cases of error and illusion?

(6) So to be intelligible and reasonable an inductive epistemology cannot be understood, accepted, and followed with an ontology. With reference to empiricism and metaphysics, it should be noted that no valid argument has ever been given for the statement, "Only perceivable individuals exist."

And indeed such a proposition is highly suspect in light of the importance of abstract entities. Without abstract entities (a) there would be no sense in talking about validity and invalidity in argument; (b) there could be no induction, for nothing would be repeatable (i.e., the future would have to be different from the past); and (c) there would be no objective knowledge, since we could not transcend the individuality of experience and gain a community of knowledge (i.e., we could not experience the same thing). So, then, abstract entities seem necessary for inductive epistemology, but of course abstract entities are precisely the kind of things we cannot and do not experience empirically and inductively.

(7) Given Fuller's and Pinnock's notion of inductive empiricism where neutral, critical thinking controls the knowing process from beginning to end, their alleged epistemology commits them to the view that all synthetic and meaningful ideas derive from experience, that all non-demonstrative (inductive) reasoning is empirical generalization from observations, and that empirical knowledge is founded upon a set of independently intelligible and separately credited observation claims. The credibility of this outlook is subject to serious challenge: (a) If held consistently from beginning to end, it would preclude the use of certain ideas necessary to inductive science (e.g., normal observer, location, etc.) that cannot be empirically specified in the above way; and (b) it would involve saying that what one directly experiences are his own sensations and thoughts, and, therefore, since words derive their meaning from observation and stipulation, some theory of private language must be affirmed. Against this, however, such a theory is not intelligible; language calls for a consistent application of words, but to speak of a privately consistent application is meaningless since there is no possible way to tell independently (i.e., objectively or publicly) that a word is in fact being used consistently (i.e., given the same private sense now that it was given in the past). Fuller and Pinnock must EITHER show that they are not committed to the views that lead to the above two problems and yet are consistently following inductive empiricism from beginning to end, OR they must present refutations to these problems in a way that consistently follows inductive empiricism from beginning to end. Whatever response they choose, it will soon be clear that their inductive method is committed to a great deal of philosophical fare that was not "critically" or "neutrally" established. Moreover, the view that there are independently intelligible and separately credited observation claims should also be cross-examined and rejected in light of the following considerations: (c) observation claims derive their credibility from background assumptions (e.g., what counts as a "fact," and how facts are discerned, is determined within a broader theoretical framework; every observational claim takes one beyond his present direct experience -- instance, assuming normalcy of perception in the particular instance, uniformity of category scheme, constancy of observational subject, commonality of language, etc.); (d) observation claims indeed derive their meaning within the network of background assumptions (e.g., there are no purely ostensive words since an observational term -- "red" -- will not retain a constant meaning through a change of theory -- e.g., from Aristotelian to quantum physics); and (e) observations themselves are theory-infected, that is, are interpretations of stimuli in light of assumptions, beliefs, categories, and anticipations (e.g., the work of GESTALT ology, indicating the ambiguity of objects of perception, etc.). Again we have compelling reason to doubt that inductive empiricists actually do or can let critical and neutral thinking control the knowing process from beginning to end; the very appeal to observation is governed by presuppositions that transcend the particular observation itself. To acquiesce to these considerations, Fuller and Pinnock would have to retract or radically qualify their thorough inductivism. But on the other hand if they wished to dispute these considerations, could they do so

on purely empirical and inductive grounds without engaging in philosophical assumptions and reasoning?

(10) In the very nature of their historical discipline, Fuller and Pinnock are NOT the presuppositionless inductivists that they make themselves out to be. The historian studies not the direct phenomena but the sources that report the past. The historian must interpret his sources, attempting to reconstruct the past. He does not simply accept the facts as a passive observer. He is faced with the chore of cross-examining his sources (which cannot but be silent in response), knowing what questions are appropriately addressed to the various types of sources, knowing when he is pushing the sources too far for desired information, etc. Moreover, the historian's inquiry must be directed toward a specific goal from its inception; he does not simply string together anything and everything he learns about a certain period or event, but rather is seeking particular kinds of answers to particular questions, certain lines of evidence for various sorts of hypotheses, different conceptions of relevance, etc. History as a science is also inherently value-impregnated. The ordinary language that historians use is quite a bit more than merely descriptive. And this is only to be expected, since they cannot properly reduce human history to the history of natural objects -- to do so would be to screen out that which is peculiar to humans: intentions, desires, motives, morals, etc. In approaching the evidence the historian is also forced to use a criterion of selectivity, and this itself involves personal value judgments. Such selectivity enters right into the historian's attempt to find solutions, and not simply into his choice of problems to study. In this selectivity the historian either utilizes a notion of historical causation or a standard of historical importance. In the former case his causal explanations are not value-neutral, for he has to judge that certain conditions were relevant as causes and some were not. Furthermore, a causal analysis of human action and social history is itself a matter of assigning responsibility (thus involving moral judgment). If the historian follows out the idea of historical causation in his selectivity, then he is faced with the selection between competing models of "explanation" (i.e., shall he seek to render covering laws as suggested by Hempel, non-deducible generalizations [Gardner], joint-sufficiency conditions [Gouge], or necessary conditions [Dray; Danto]?). On the other hand, if the historian's selectivity is guided by a standard of historical importance (e.g., what is memorable, intrinsically valuable, etc.), then he is *IPSO FACTO* doing more than simple description of the past. Thus in all these ways we see how strong the case is against the common conception of objective, neutral historiography.

After a sober consideration of the ten issues we have briefly surveyed it ought to be quite clear that neutral and presuppositionless reasoning does not and cannot have full control in Fuller's or Pinnock's inductivism. The very use of that epistemology commits one to a great deal of unargued philosophical baggage. By its use one wittingly or unwittingly endorses certain crucial assumptions. And in connection with a commitment to inductivism, one inescapably must face difficult philosophical questions pertaining to epistemology and ontology, questions that can be left unanswered only at the price of theoretical arbitrariness and disrespect for the very justifying considerations that inductivism demands for our every commitment -- from beginning to end.

II. Evident Precommitments

When we read the letters Fuller and Pinnock have exchanged, we see quite obviously that each man is committed in advance to so conducting his empirical studies that the teachings of Scripture will be vindicated. Says Fuller, "I sincerely hope that as I continue my historical-grammatical exegesis of Scripture, I shall find no error in its teaching" (p. 332), for "if there is one error anywhere in what Scripture intends to teach, then everything it intends to say is suspect and we have not even one sure word from God" (p. 331). Likewise Pinnock declares that he will not permit naturalistic presuppositions to control his thought, lest he no longer speak as a Biblical supernaturalist (p. 333). Even apart from having verified every particular statement of the Scriptures, Pinnock generally indicates in advance that "the whole GRAPHE is God-breathed and fully trustworthy" (p. 334). Indeed he does not want to dichotomize the Bible into factual and revelational truths, lest the revelational material shrink "before the advance of the latest critical charge" (p. 335).

Therefore it is manifest on the very surface of their letters that Fuller and Pinnock are NOT after all neutral and without their scholarly precommitments. The kind of thing we have just witnessed them saying would, in a hostile atmosphere, be sufficient to indict and convict them for failing to be impartial and requisitely objective (or "open-minded") in their approach to the Bible's veracity. These two writers simply need to be honest with themselves and recognize that, because they are saved by God's redeeming grace and have submitted in faith and love to Jesus Christ, they are dedicated in advance to protecting their Savior's word from discredit. That, however, is NOT presuppositionless, neutral inductivism.

III. Scriptural Declarations

Finally, we know that presuppositionless impartiality and neutral reasoning are impossible and undesirable because God's word teaches that (1) all men know God, even if suppressing the truth (Rom. 1); (2) there are two basic philosophic and presuppositional outlooks -- one after worldly tradition, the other after Christ (Col. 2); (3) thus there is a knowledge falsely so-called that errs according to the faith (I Tim. 6) and a genuine knowledge based on repentant faith (2 Tim. 2); consequently, (4) some men (unbelievers) are "enemies in their minds" (Rom. 8) while others (believers) are "renewed in Knowledge" (Col. 3), and characteristic of these two mindsets is the fact that the former cannot be subject to God's Word (Rom. 8) but sees it as utter foolishness (1 Cor. 1), while the latter seeks to bring every thought captive in the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10) in whom is found all the treasures ***** BOTTOM LINE OF PAGE 300 IS MISSING ***** beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1). This mindset submits to Christ's word, just as the wise man builds his house upon a rock (Matt. 7); and it views the alleged foolishness of preaching as indeed the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor. 1). Presuppositionless neutrality is both impossible (epistemologically) and disobedient (morally); Christ says that a man is either WITH him or AGAINST him (Matt. 12:30), for "no man can serve two masters" (6:24). Our EVERY thought (even apologetical reasoning about inerrancy) must be made captive to Christ's all-encompassing Lordship (2 Cor. 10:5; 1 Pet. 3:15; Matt. 22:37).

Therefore in response to the Fuller-Pinnock Thesis II we must say: As a matter of fact, no man is without presuppositional commitments. As a matter of philosophical necessity, no man can be without presuppositional commitments. And as a matter of Scriptural teaching, no man ought to be without presuppositional commitments.

We come, then, finally to Thesis III, viz., that the question of Biblical inerrancy must be settled inductively, not presuppositionally.

Is this doctrine about Scripture to be formulated on the basis of what Scripture says about itself (and thus presuppositionally), or rather do we take the phenomenological approach of handling the various Biblical phenomena and claims (among which are the problem passages) inductively with a view to settling the question of Scripture's inerrancy only in light of the discovered facts of empirical and historical study?

Another way of laying out the different approaches here is to point out that the Bible makes a large set of indicative claims (e.g., that David was once king of Israel, that Jesus was born at Bethlehem, that Jesus was divine, that salvation is only through his shed blood, etc.). Needless to say, this set is very large indeed. Now among this set of Scriptural assertions is to be found certain self-referential statements about the set as a whole (e.g., "Thy word is truth," "The Scripture cannot be broken," "All Scripture is inspired by God," etc.). The question then arises: Does one decide the question of Scriptural inerrancy by an inductive examination of the discursive and individual assertions of Scripture one by one, or by settling on the truth of these special self-referential assertions and then letting them control our approach to all the rest?

Christianity does not thus need to take shelter under the roof of "known facts." It rather offers itself as a roof to facts if they would be known. Christianity does not need to take shelter under the roof

of a scientific method independent of itself. It rather offers itself as a roof to methods that would be scientific. [\[16\]](#)

The point is that the "facts of experience" must actually be interpreted in terms of Scripture if they are to be intelligible at all. [\[17\]](#)

With this background we can better understand the general thrust of presuppositional method in apologetics:

To argue by presupposition is to indicate what are the epistemological and metaphysical principles that underlie and control one's method. [\[18\]](#)

The Reformed method of argument is first constructive. It presents the biblical view positively by showing that all factual and logical discussions by men take place by virtue of the world's being what God in Christ says it is. It then proceeds negatively to show that unless all facts and all logical relations be seen in the light of the Christian framework, all human interpretation fails instantly.... What we shall have to do then is to try to reduce our opponent's position to an absurdity. Nothing less will do.... We must point out to them that univocal reasoning itself leads to self-contradiction, not only from a theistic point of view, but from a non-theistic point of view as well. It is this that we ought to mean when we say that we must meet our enemy on their own ground. It is this that we ought to mean when we say that we reason from the IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE CONTRARY. [\[19\]](#)

I. Unargued Philosophical Baggage

In discussing issues under this rubric, my aim is to point out that inductive empiricism is not a philosophically neutral or unproblematic tool by which evangelical apologetics may proceed.

(1) Inductivists are not as thoroughly inductive as they think, for the reflexive theoretical statements of the inductivists about their procedure and practice, its merits and criteria are not inductive or empirical in nature. Hence extra-inductive commitments are immediately discernible.

(2) Should the Christian inductivist assume universal uniformity or regularity in nature and history so as to provide the metaphysical precondition of his inductivism -- but thereby exclude miracles? Or should he begin by allowing miracles (which, by the way, is a supra-empirical commitment to the range of the possible) -- but thereby dismiss the reliability and uniformity needed for inductive knowledge?

(3) What sort of rational basis or evidence does the inductivist have for his implied belief in natural uniformity (e.g., against Hume's skeptical attack on induction)? Such issues as the nature of induction, its preconditions, and the basis for a commitment to the uniformity of nature are rarely discussed by evangelicals. But this is at the heart of inductive epistemology, and it is still central in philosophical disputes today.

(8) Given the inductivist's commitment to empirical procedures, we can press even harder philosophically and ask whether sense perception is reliable, in light of (a) the problem of illusion (since the non-veridical nature of an illusion is not recognized while the illusion is experienced, how can veridical perception ever be distinguished reliably from illusions?), and (b) the problem of perspectival variation (since various visual images I receive from different perspectives on an object cannot reasonably be attributed to the changing qualities of that object itself, perception seems not to be telling me the truth about those objects).

9. Space will not permit us to speak further about such problems as (a) the traditional way of distinguishing inductive and deductive arguments and how it undermines the use of probability, (b) how to rate probability and explicate its nature in inductive study (especially in cases of the testimony of historical writers), or (c) how to explain the analytic/synthetic distinction that inductivism assumes, and especially how to explain the distinction in a way that does not commit us to such awkward and extra-empirical metaphysical furniture as necessity or essences. Suffice it to say that each of these issues presents a solid challenge to the credibility of Fuller's and Pinnock's espousal of exhaustive inductivism. How are they to delineate and delimit sharply their "inductive" method or the "synthetic" area to which it is applied with the calculus of "probability"?

It is clear to anyone who will reflect seriously on this question that the statements of Scripture ABOUT Scripture are primary and must determine our attitude toward all the rest. Why is this so?

(1) An exhaustive inductive examination cannot be carried out in practice. The doctrinal profession of the Bible's absolute truthfulness such that alleged errors or discrepancies are only apparent could take inductive scholarship as its sole or central foundation only if each and every assertion had been examined and publicly vindicated (the requirements of which stagger the imagination), but even then all of the external inductive evidence cannot be presumed to be in (future discoveries and refinements of evidence might pervasively change the complexion of the pool of relevant data) -- in which case the theologian could legitimately (i.e., by cautious, circumspect, presuppositionless, inductive warrant) profess only a provisional and qualified inerrancy, even if

he had successfully completed the enormous task of inductively confirming all of the Bible's numerous assertions. (2) By their very character, many Scriptural assertions cannot be tested inductively but must be accepted, if at all, on Scripture's own attestation (e.g., Christ's interpretation of his person and work as being divine and redemptive.^[20] We must not forget that the necessity of special revelation does not arise as a shortcut for the intellectually ungifted who do not pursue their inductive homework thoroughly and accurately, but rather stems from the fact that there are divine truths that all men, especially as fallen, could never discover on their own but that must be unveiled by God to them (cf. Matt 16:17). Such revealed truths (e.g., that the ascended Christ now makes continual intercession for us to the Father) are not subject to our inductive examination and confirmation; they are accepted on the authority of God speaking in the Scripture itself. And yet they are just as much members of the set of Scriptural assertions (and as such included in the range of the set-reference statements) as are the apparently more mundane historical assertions (e.g., that Judas of Galilee rose up after Theudas). (3) As we have seen already, inductive study itself has crucial presuppositions that cannot be accounted for except on a Biblical basis, and therefore in a profound sense of inductive study is already committed to the content of these self-referential statements of Scripture.

We see, then, that the self-referential statements are and must be primary in our approach to the nature of Scripture and the question of its authority. The question of Biblical inerrancy must be resolved presuppositionally. Central to evangelical Bibliology and apologetics is the issue of inerrancy and inductivism, and yet we must see that the latter is in no position to serve as the foundation for the former. If intelligibility in our doctrinal affirmation of inerrancy depends on the intelligibility of the presuppositionally pure inductive theory of apologetics, then the doctrine has been scuttled for sure.

And so we can agree with Pinnock against Fuller. One cannot but let the Bible speak for itself about its own nature and attributes, and consequently one cannot choose to submit to Scriptural truths at some points (e.g., Christ's deity and redeeming work are beyond the adjudication of empirical criticism) and reserve self-sufficient critical authority elsewhere (e.g., historical data are accepted or rejected on the strength of empirical examination). Fuller's inductive approach is epistemologically and theologically impossible. It is double-minded.

On the other hand, we can agree with Fuller against Pinnock when he says Pinnock has not really been thoroughly inductive, for Pinnock allows certain Scriptural statements a privileged and controlling position -- one that is not subject to the radical demand to let critical thinking prevail.

Before we are tempted to reply to this charge that nonetheless Pinnock does take an inductive and evidential apologetical approach to these self-referential statements of Scripture, let us hesitate and observe that such a reply is hardly tenable. (1) If Pinnock really took a thoroughly inductive approach to such statements, that could only mean that he verified the set-reference statement itself by inductively confirming every particular assertion covered by it -- that is, every claim that is within its range. This then would collapse into the phenomenological approach we have just rejected. It would be subject to its crucial defects, and Pinnock would be prey to Fuller's taunt that a part of him wants to be inductive but that he cannot go all the way. (2) Moreover, it must be observed that the very empirical apologetic pursued by Pinnock in defense of the Bible's divine credentials is of necessity grounded in metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions for

which only the Bible can account. That is, he is intellectually dependent on the Bible's veracity even while examining the Bible's claims. (3) Nor should it be thought that Pinnock can credibly work toward an empirical confirmation of SOME of Scripture's historical details and then inductively infer that the OTHER statements of Scripture can also be accepted, for (a) the argument would be thoroughly fallacious (just as if someone argued that because SOME (even many) statements in the KORAN, or in Churchill's GATHERING STORM, etc., are empirically confirmed, we can infer that ALL of the statements in these writings must be accepted as without error); (b) the historical details may very well be veracious without the theological interpretation of them being inductively substantiated (e.g., that Paul was correct in historically asserting that Christ was "born of a woman" is hardly warrant for saying that Paul was also correct in soteriologically asserting that Christ "condemned sin in the flesh"); and (c) this approach would be subject to the same criticism as we have made of Fuller (albeit in a slightly different way) -- that is, the inductive approach to inerrancy by an empirical apologist like Pinnock submits to Scripture's self-testimony at some places (e.g., the interpretation of Christ's person and work is absolutely inerrant) but relies on self-sufficient critical reasoning elsewhere (e.g., the historical data are provisionally inerrant to the extent of empirical confirmation or informity). Pinnock operates inconsistently on two different and incompatible epistemologies: On the one hand the Bible's assertions are endorsed as true, although admitted as possibly untrue, only on the basis of a neutral and critical evaluation of external evidence and independent reasoning (strictly gauged to inductive and empirical credentials), but on the other hand the Bible's assertions are accepted as true without qualification on its own sufficient authority (and in spite of apparent empirical difficulties). He double-mindedly defends a conception of Biblical authority in a way that compromises that very authority by its methodological assumptions. The question is this: What exercises control over out speculation, evaluation, and conclusions -- God's revealed word in Scripture, or some authority external to God's revelation? Do empirical difficulties render the Bible's inerrancy only apparent, or does the Bible's inerrancy render empirical difficulties only apparent? Does critical thinking reign supreme only over PART of the Bible? The errors of Fuller and Pinnock are epistemological and theological twins.

Significance and Conclusion

The reason it is important for us to consider and analyze this important exchange on inerrancy between Pinnock and Fuller is simply that it brings to the surface certain latent issues and inconsistencies in the popular evangelical witness today. There is a basic intramural dispute that must be resolved in our approach to inerrancy, and this resolution is a necessary first step toward our apologetic reply to those who are antagonistic to an evangelical understanding of Scripture and its authority. Fuller correctly observes, "But we evangelicals have a basic question we must settle before we can talk very coherently with those farther afield" (p. 330).

That basic question is epistemological in nature -- viz., whether we should take an inductive or presuppositional approach to the nature and authority of the Bible. We must conclude from our previous discussion that Christ's Lordship -- even in the area of thought -- cannot be treated like a light switch, to be turned on and off at our own pleasure and discretion. Christ makes a radical demand on our thinking that we submit to his Word as self-attesting. To do otherwise leads away from a recognition of his divine person and saving work, for it leads away from an affirmation of Scripture's inerrancy. Moreover, it simultaneously leads away from the intelligibility of all experience and every epistemic method. One must begin with the testimony of Scripture to itself, rather than with the allegedly neutral methods of inductivism. And this means acknowledging the veracity of Scripture even when empirical evidence might appear to contradict it (following in the steps of the father of the faithful, Abraham: Rom. 4:16-21; Heb. 11:17-19). The classic inter-school encounter between Pinnock and Fuller points beyond itself to the basic and inescapable need for a presuppositional apologetic, rather than the allegedly pure inductivism espoused by Pinnock and Fuller. Speaking of such a presuppositional approach to the issue of inerrancy, J.I. Packer said:[\[21\]](#)

[1] "Daniel Fuller and Clark Pinnock: On Revelation and Biblical Authority." CHRISTIAN SCHOLARS REVIEW ***Check original footnote***

[2] C. Van Til, A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN EPISTEMOLOGY, Vol. 2 of the series "In Defense of Biblical Christianity" (den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1932; reprinted 1969)7.

[3] C. Van Til, A CHRISTIAN THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959)35.

[4] C. Van Til, CHRISTIAN-THEISTIC EVIDENCES (mimeographed syllabus, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1961)52.B****

[5] C. Van Til, AN INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY (mimeographed syllabus, Westminster Theological Seminary, reprinted 1966)45.

[6] SURVEY, pp. 7, 120, 9, 10.

[7] THEORY, p. 293.

[8] For example, Van Til has consistently criticized allegedly "Christian" approaches to science which maintain either that the circle of naturalistic interpretation vaguely points beyond itself to certain religious truths (i.e., projection into theology or that the scientific interpretation of the facts can also be supplemented with a religious perspective (i.e., imposition of a theological dimension). E. g. see Van Til's articles "Bridgewater Treatises" and "Butler, Joseph," THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CHRISTIANITY (ed. G. G. Cohen: Marshallton, Delaware National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), 2. 178-179, 238-239, and Van Til's reviews of THE SCIENTIFIC ENTERPRISE AND CHRISTIAN FAITH by M. A. Jeeves, WTJ 32 (May, 1970) 236-240; THE PHILOSOPHY OF PHYSICAL SCIENCE by A. Eddington, WTJ 3 (November, 1940) 662; and THE LOGIC BELIEF by D. E. Trueblood, WTJ 5 (November, 1942) 88-94.

[10] EVIDENCES, p. 37. Van Til's clear opposition to fideism is not sufficiently countenanced and credited by some fellow apologists (e.g., N. Geisler, 'CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976] 56 ff. In fact Van Til has made a very similar, but much earlier, critique of fideism than Geisler.

[11] C. Van Til, "Introduction," in B. B. Warfield, THE INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948)36,67.

[12] THE DEFENSE OF THE FAITH (1966) 258; also in THEORY, p. 293.

[13] "Introduction," p. 37.

[14] EVIDENCES, p. 63.

[15] DEFENSE, pp. 119, 120.

[16] EVIDENCES, p. 56.

[17] THEORY, p. 26.

[18] DEFENSE, pp. 116, 117.

[19] SURVEY, p. 225, 204, 205.

[20] Lest it be thought that Christ's interpretation, rather than being self-attestingly established, is and vindicated by some informal logic such as "If Jesus rose from the dead, then he is God and accordingly speaks the truth at every point," it should be commented that this very logic is far from reflecting the unbiased, accepted and uniform conclusion or thinking of the world of advanced scholarship? That is, the logic of such an argument is itself derived from and warranted by the Scriptures (if they are in fact properly interpreted as teaching this line of reasoning), which means that Christ's interpretation is after all still based on Christ's own word. That this reasoning is subject to dispute is perhaps illustrated by considering just three aspects of it: (1) The inference "if resurrected, then divine" is hardly acceptable if applied in a discriminating and special pleading fashion so as to avoid concluding that Lazarus was also God; (2) the committed secularist would almost certainly look upon such an inference pattern as a manifestation of primitive, mythic, God-of-the-gaps thinking and present an alternative inference pattern congenial to naturalism (e.g., "If Jesus rose from the dead, then very complex and sophisticated biological principles and factors surpassing those presently recognized and utilized by scientists remain to be discovered and rendered in natural formulas"); and (3) one clearly begs many important questions, the unbelieving philosopher will note, if he simply reasons that "if Jesus was God, he always spoke the truth," for this naively utilizes only one of many competing conceptions of deity -- e.g., the Greek gods were not unfailing truth-tellers! The evangelical apologist must finally realize that what should count as an acceptable test for recognizing and acknowledging something as a divine revelation can only be set forth and warranted by God himself--which could only be done by revelation. That is, the criteria for identifying revelation would themselves have to be revealed if they were to be objectively trustworthy and properly accepted over against the competing and mistaken options of man's imagination. Divine revelation must be self-attesting, for God alone is adequate to witness to himself; cf. J. Murray. "The Attestation of Scripture," *THE INFALLIBLE WORD* (3rd rev. ed.; ed. P. Woodley: Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967 [1946]) 6, 10, 46-47.

[21] J.I. Packer, "Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority," *THEOVELLOS* 1/1, p. 12.