

The Fatal Maneuver

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There is a fatal maneuver in debate where if you can show that your opponent's position contradicts itself or makes itself impossible, then you have effectively destroyed his position and all that follows from it. It is a powerful move. It checkmates your opponent. However, if it is illegitimately used, it can backfire and inflict a fatal blow against the position of the one who uses it.

My system of philosophy and method of apologetics is rightly called "biblical" or "presuppositional." I begin with revelation and deduce the rest of the system from it. From this basic principle, the system can be adapted to respond to any objection as well as to destroy any opposing system. The system is constructed upon revelation and then uses deduction to derive the information inherent in revelation. From the start, it excludes irrational and impossible epistemologies such as those that place any reliance on intuition and sensation.

One prominent school of "presuppositional" apologetics protests that this surely goes too far. It admits that induction is fallacious, at least on its own, but then it is somehow redeemed when we operate under biblical presuppositions. It admits that sensation cannot yield knowledge, at least by itself, but then it can function as a reliable way to acquire knowledge once biblical principles are assumed. Or, it says that the unbeliever can use induction and sensation with good effect, but only that he cannot "account" for this. I have already critiqued this incoherent and unbiblical school of apologetics in a number of places, and it is not my main purpose to do it again here. But for the rest of this discussion, we need to keep in mind that its adherents have never shown *that* or *how* biblical presuppositions can make what is inherently irrational and illogical become rational and logical. It is just an unjustified assertion on their part.

Yet my point concerns something else, and that is how this school of apologetics attempts to refute mine, and how this backfires against them. One frequent objection is that if we must begin from the Bible, then surely we must first use our senses to even read the Bible. I have already answered this several times in several places, and there has been no successful attempt at a rebuttal. Among other things, this objection begs the question, and really ignores my position in the first place. This is because if I am correct, then we really *do not* need to use our senses (in the sense intended by my opponents) to read the Bible. I could respond to the objection just like I could to any empirical atheist — I could push the debate into a purely mental world (as in a dream) just by suggesting it. From there, I can re-establish the physical world by my first principle, but what has happened to the empiricist, whether Christian or not?

Because I have answered the objection, it has failed to damage me. However, now that my opponents have stated the objection, and stated it as something that is consistent with *their* position, then *they* must answer it themselves. Because they have stated that one *must* use his senses to know what the Bible says, now they must show either that our senses are infallible, or if our senses are fallible, that there is an infallible way of telling

in which instances they are correct and in which instances they are incorrect. If they cannot do this, then *they* cannot read the Bible, so that their entire system — their whole *Christian faith* — collapses, and it does so just as easily as empirical atheism, or any non-Christian religion or philosophy.

Some of them try to justify sensation as a reliable way to obtain knowledge. To argue for empiricism apart from Scripture is impossible, and they acknowledge this. And so, seemingly consistent with their own position, they argue for the basic reliability of sensation from Scripture. But what would it take to establish their position from Scripture? They acknowledge that our senses are fallible, and so they are not interested in supporting empiricism by arguing that the senses are infallible. However, if the senses are fallible, then they must establish from Scripture an *infallible* method by which to distinguish instances in which the senses are correct and instances in which they are wrong. But if they have a method at all, and if their method is fallible, then we still need to infallibly know *how* fallible it is and *when* it is fallible; otherwise, the whole thing collapses into skepticism again. They have not even come close to establishing any of this. At best, they have only shown that the sensation of a given biblical character was accurate in a particular instance, because the Bible reveals that it was accurate in that particular instance. For all we know, that person never had another accurate sensation again. So they need much more than this. What they need (but fail to provide) is a theory of epistemology concerning sensation that applies to the people and experiences that are not already described in the Bible.

Because they insist on empiricism but fail to justify it, then by applying the objection against me, they have completely shut *themselves* out of the Bible. In attempting to perform a fatal maneuver against my position, they have killed their own. In fact, unless they can answer their own objection, they cannot even have an objection against me, since according to them, they would need the reliability of the senses to even read or hear about my position in the first place. Therefore, if I were to take their position seriously, I would have to say that their *entire* system falls apart, that there is no way they could know *anything* that is in the Bible, that they have never heard the gospel, and so that they cannot even be Christians at all. But since I do not take them seriously, and since I can explain their lives with my position, I can be more charitable to them than their own position allows.

As it is, any non-Christian can confront adherents of this school of apologetics and apparently bring down the entire Christian system using only this point. It is true that most non-Christians will not do this, because most non-Christians have empiricism as an integral part of their belief systems, so that they will usually not attack what they themselves believe. However, if a non-Christian finds himself backed into a corner, he can always bring this up to ensure mutual destruction. Thus I declare that this other school of presuppositional apologetics a complete failure. To the extent that it adheres to Scripture in its various parts, of course it is superior to non-Christian systems, but this is irrelevant in the construction of a philosophy since it fails at the very beginning, so that it cannot even get to those scriptural parts, and if non-Christians ever awake to this, it will prove to be a total disaster for these believers in debate and evangelism.

If anyone disagrees with the above, let him prove — not just assert — how by sensation he manages to read even one word from the Bible. Logically demonstrate how it happens — establish every premise and show that every step proceeds by necessary inference — and I will concede the whole debate on this issue. Anything else that you say is irrelevant — you have asserted the necessity of sensation, as something that you need even before you read the Bible, so now you must establish it.

If you are unable to do this but insist on holding to your position, then let me offer you one piece of advice. You might never encounter a non-Christian who will challenge the reliability of sensation, but if you ever run into someone who does, know that the answer is to reject sensation and stand on revelation alone. Many people are interested in defending an idol theologian, but I am interested in the cause of Christ. I cannot stop you if you must remain in your false and dishonest position because of your loyalty to a particular personality or school of thought. But remember what I am telling you. One day you might need it. Not every non-Christian that you debate will give you the same pass on this issue that you give to yourself.

Then, there is another objection that has to do with my view on divine sovereignty, and how it relates to metaphysics and epistemology. I affirm that God must be active in facilitating and controlling all human thoughts, whether true or false, biblical or heretical. The adherents of this other school of presuppositional apologetics once again try to perform a fatal maneuver against me. They suggest that according to my view, I could be deceived in affirming my view. First, this is just outright stupid, since the Bible says that God can send evil spirits to convince people of error. So no matter *how* it happens, God is the one who decrees that someone would be deceived. Second, they demonstrate that they really have no idea how to perform this fatal maneuver, since it again backfires against them. If I am deceived *in the way* that the objection suggests (that is, by my own explanation of how one comes to believe falsehood), then it actually proves my position. If I am deceived *in the way* that I say one is deceived, then I am in fact not deceived. To illustrate, if God sends a demon to "deceive" someone into thinking that God does not send demons to deceive, then God *does* send demons to deceive. Likewise, if God causes me to believe the "falsehood" that it is God who causes one to believe falsehood, then God *does* cause one to believe falsehood, and I am in fact not deceived. In other words, my position cannot be demonstrated as self-refuting in the manner attempted by the objection.

The fatal maneuver of showing self-contradiction in your opponent's position can be a powerful and effective move in debate. Just make sure that the opponent's position is *in fact* self-refuting and that your objection does not backfire against you. See to it that this fatal maneuver is not fatal just for you. Of course, if it can backfire to show incoherence in your own position, then your position is wrong and not worth defending in the first place, as the above have shown.

And if you still disagree, here is another exercise. Show this article to any non-Christian with more than a sixth grade education and tell him to apply what he reads here. Now see

if you can still defend your faith against him using your brand of "presuppositional" apologetics.