

Chapter 1: God Exists

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

Psalm 14:1; 53:1

"Professor Wittmer, why do you believe in God?" My Chinese student and friend had asked me this question often in the two years that I had known her. Her communist upbringing had taught her that God was merely a superstitious belief used by timid souls to prop up their weak minds, yet here was an educated westerner who claimed to talk with God on a regular basis. I couldn't always tell whether she was genuinely interested in knowing God herself or whether she was merely looking to sharpen her debating skills, but I took her question seriously all the same.

I typically responded by launching into my list of powerful arguments. I told her that I believe God exists because someone had to make the world. Look at the intricate detail carved into each cell. Contemplate the sheer size and beauty of the universe. Do you really think that all of this came about by accident? Or consider morality. If God does not exist, then who is to say what is right and wrong? Anything would be permissible. But since we obviously believe that some acts are right and others are wrong, then we must also believe in a God who grounds these laws.

Despite my best efforts, Sun Yi (not her real name) never found my arguments completely convincing. She always found a way to wriggle out of them. For instance, if I argue that the complexity of the world demands a world-maker, wouldn't I also have to admit that the grandeur of God requires a God-maker? If I reply that God didn't have a beginning but just always was, then why isn't she permitted to say the same thing about the world? And why do we

need belief in God to ground morality? Isn't society able to determine right and wrong on its own? That's how China has functioned for centuries, and in some ways her society is less corrupt than my "Christian" America.

Our conversations usually ended in a stalemate, leaving me frustrated that I couldn't come up with better arguments and leaving her smugly confident that she had held her own against her Christian professor. Perhaps her communist education had been right all along. She respectfully refrained from spiking the ball and dancing in the end zone until she was out of earshot, but I knew that someday soon she would return to taunt me with her question.

Only this time I was ready for her. In the intervening days, my Bible reading had brought me to Romans 1:18-20, a passage that seems to imply that all people possess some basic knowledge of God. So this time when Sun Yi asked me why I believe in God, I simply turned the question back on her.

"Sun Yi," I said, "it really doesn't matter why I believe in God. But tell me, why do you believe in God?"

I'll never forget her response. "Oh," was all she said, but her smiling eyes met mine and we both knew that the game was up. We enjoyed many more stimulating conversations that semester, but she never asked me that question again.

First Things First

The heart of *Heaven Is a Place on Earth* covers the content of the Christian story—the creation-fall-redemption narrative that answers our questions of origin, meaning, and destiny. In these two bonus chapters we uncover the twin pylons that ground our narrative. What are the ultimate beliefs that anchor the Christian worldview? If you were to feel your way all the way back to the center of your worldview (as you were asked to do in chapter 1), what would you

find there? If you were successful, then you already know that your first presupposition, or starting point, is your belief that God exists.

To explain why this is so, I defer to Alvin Plantinga, the man *Time* magazine called “America’s leading orthodox Protestant philosopher of God.”¹ Plantinga is the leader of a movement, called Reformed Epistemology, that is almost single-handedly responsible for making belief in God respectable among secular philosophers. He hasn’t persuaded every philosopher that God actually does exist, but he has convinced many that it is entirely possible.²

When Plantinga embarked on his teaching career in the 1950s, most philosophy departments in secular universities could not fathom how any intelligent person, let alone someone with a Ph.D. in philosophy, could possibly believe in God. Such was the case at Wayne State University, where, despite the warm collegiality he enjoyed with the others in his department, Plantinga says he “often felt beleaguered...alone, isolated, nonstandard, a bit peculiar or weird” for his Christian beliefs.³

However, rather than remain intimidated, Plantinga began to study the modern worldview that shaped their arguments against belief in God. His analysis discovered fundamental flaws that discredit the atheism of the modern worldview and suggest that it is secular philosophers rather than Christians who had better get their house in order. In this manner Plantinga turned the tables on the secular establishment. The hunted became the hunter; the critics of Christianity were now on the run.

Plantinga’s basic plan was to uncover the ultimate beliefs of the modern worldview. He noticed that most modern thinkers were not fully aware of these ultimate beliefs, for just like air, they were so universally assumed that few people thought much about them. Perhaps if

contemporary philosophers could clearly see the foundation of their worldview, they would be forced to confront its limitations.

So Plantinga asked what beliefs lay behind contemporary arguments against belief in God. He asked what notions lay behind these beliefs, and so on until he had worked all the way back to the center of the modern worldview. He found that the very center—the ultimate belief of the modern worldview—is humanity’s complete reliance upon itself. Specifically, he discovered that, following the founders of modern philosophy, Descartes and Locke, modern thinkers ground everything they believe on their rational and empirical abilities.⁴

Plantinga observed that modern philosophers implicitly trust any belief acquired through their reason or five senses. In Plantinga’s words, they believe anything that is self-evident, incorrigible (rationalism) or evident to the senses (empiricism). By “self-evident” he means things that seem to be obviously true, such as the fact that $2 + 2 = 4$. Most people do not mentally do the math when they hear this equation, for it is such a staple of their beliefs that it is self-evidently true for them.

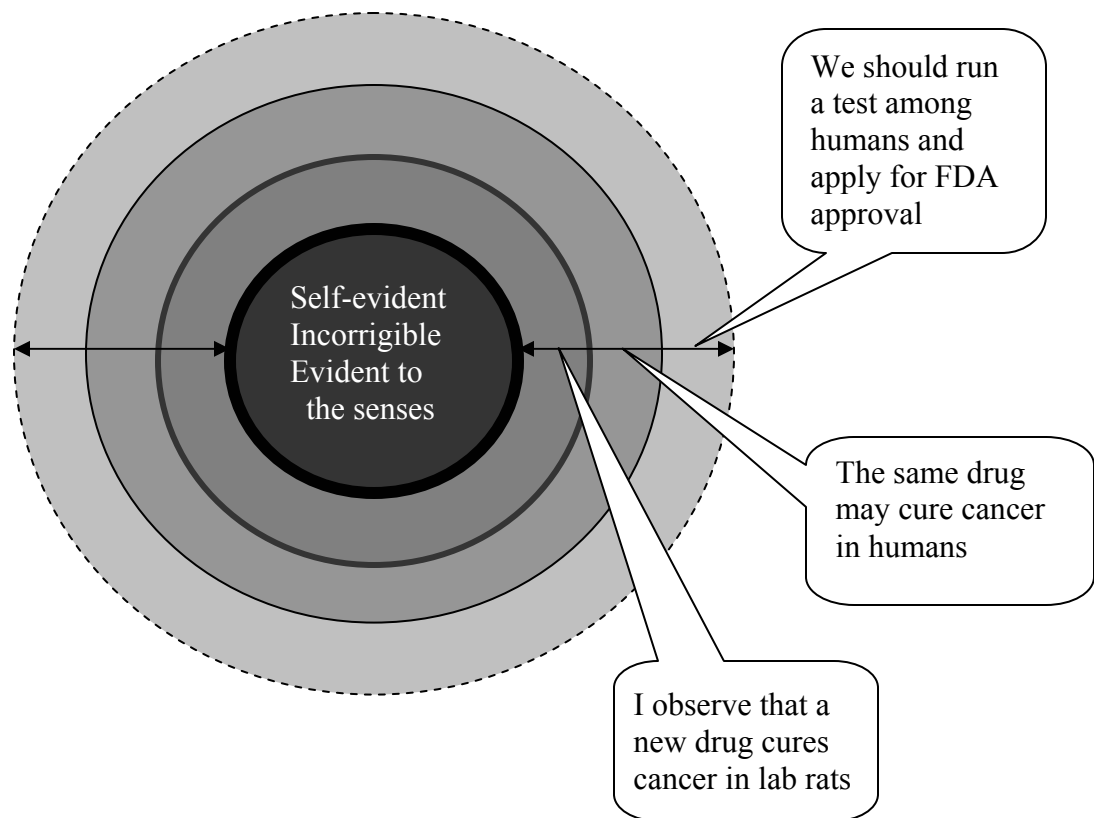
By “incorrigible” Plantinga means beliefs that cannot possibly be doubted. For example, one such belief occurs immediately after you dismount from a merry-go-around or worse, the Twirl-A-Wheel of Death. As the world chases its tail in ever tightening circles around your body, only one belief remains constant: you’re dizzy and you know it. Dizziness is one of life’s few incorrigible beliefs, for unlike most other beliefs, it’s awfully hard to deny when it comes.

Besides these rational starting points, Plantinga noted that the modern worldview also begins with an empirical standard. While making allowances for the limitations of our empirical abilities (for example, we know that the straw in our soda is not really as bent as it appears through the side of our glass), we nevertheless believe that most of what our eyes and ears tell us

is reliable. So besides beliefs that are self-evident and incorrigible, we are also inclined to believe things that are evident to our senses.

Plantinga observed that this rational and empirical foundation has grounded the entire worldview of modernity. In short, modern people have been taught only to believe assertions that are self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses, or that at least have been logically inferred from these ultimate, prior beliefs (see figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Strengths of the Modern Worldview



So a doctor may examine his patient's lab results and, by process of elimination, diagnose her illness with reasonable certainty. An accountant may mathematically analyze a client's books and find that he owes more taxes than he thought. A scientist may trust the results of her experiments and, to a lesser extent, the theories she derives from them. For instance, after

observing that a specific drug reduced the rate of colon cancer in lab rats, a medical researcher may logically order a comprehensive study to see if a similar drug may work the same for humans. In these ways and more, the modern worldview has proved enormously successful. It has survived so long simply because it works.

The Hunted Becomes the Hunter

Despite this undisputed success, however, Plantinga noted that the modern worldview also suffers from serious shortcomings. Indeed, its shortcomings are fatal flaws that not only discredit its arguments against belief in God but also threaten to unravel the entire worldview. When Plantinga exposed these problems, it became apparent to many that it is moderns rather than Christians who should be running for cover.

To understand the force of Plantinga's criticisms, you should know that there are three main criteria that determine the strength of any worldview: coherence, correspondence, and comprehensiveness. Coherence refers to internal consistency. No one wants to possess a worldview that contradicts itself, especially on important matters.

Correspondence measures how accurately a worldview depicts experience. It is not enough for a worldview to hang together logically; if it does not correspond to reality—to the world we inhabit and experience—what good is it? For example, consider the plight of people suffering from schizophrenia. They are to be pitied, not because their worldview is incoherent, but because it widely diverges from reality. In their minds it is quite plausible to believe that they are the Messiah, a professional athlete, or an undercover double agent protecting their family from the Russian mafia. The tale they weave makes perfect sense, but none of it is true. So rather than applaud their active imagination, we encourage them to return to reality, helping them to sort out their reliable beliefs from those that are purely fictional.

Finally, comprehensiveness examines the size and scope of our worldview. It is not enough to possess a logically consistent worldview that only makes sense of my little neighborhood. The best worldviews are those that are able to account for the largest slices of life, as comfortable in Calcutta as they are in Cleveland.

The modern worldview fails on all three counts.

First, modernity fails the test of coherence because its ultimate belief is self-contradictory. This is a bit of a mind-bender, but we can see what Plantinga means. Remember that modernity's ultimate belief is that we should only hold beliefs that are self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses, or are at least logically deducible from beliefs that are. However, this concise statement of modernity's ultimate belief fails to meet its own criteria, for the statement itself is neither self-evident, incorrigible, evident to the senses, nor deducible from beliefs that are.

In other words, the statement itself is not obviously true. It is not something that can be touched or seen, and there is no way to argue to it from prior beliefs that are (touched or seen). Like any other ultimate belief, we must simply assume that it is true without proof. However, it seems inconsistent that a worldview that demands proof every inch of the way should itself rest on a foundation that cannot be proved.

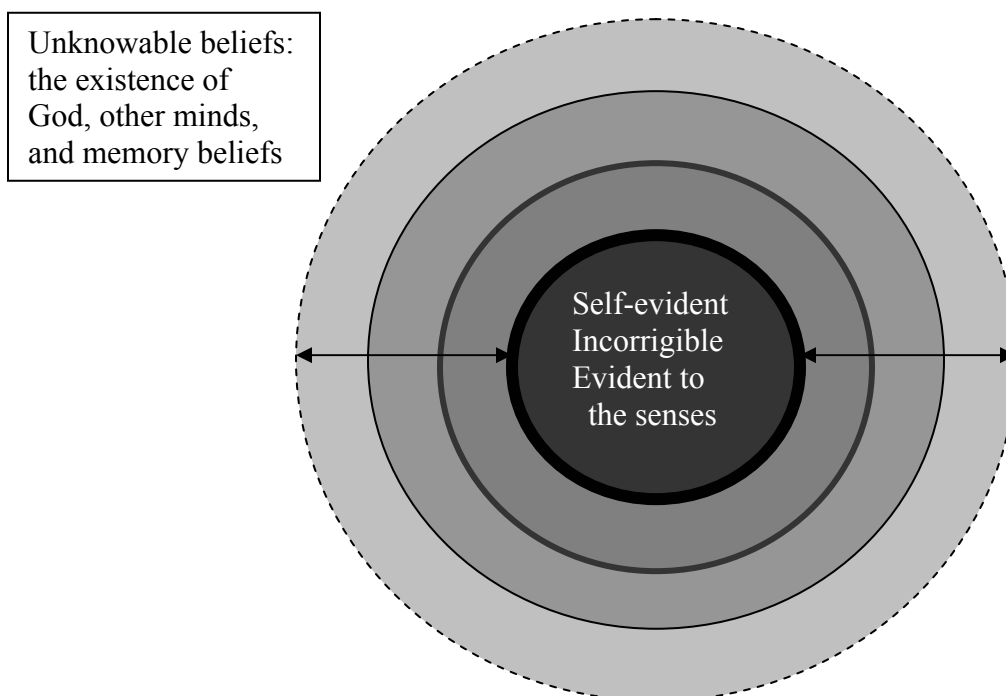
Thus modernity harbors a deep contradiction at the center of its worldview. Why should anyone believe a worldview whose ultimate belief contradicts itself? The modern worldview never gets off the ground, for it violates itself in its very first step. And if such an anemic worldview lies behind modern criticisms of belief in God, why should we lose any sleep over them? Their arguments only reveal the depth of their own problems.

Second, modernity fails to correspond to many things that we take for granted (see figure 1.2). For instance, consider the nearly universal belief that other people possess minds. The modern worldview may know that other people possess brains, for these are physical objects that can be seen and touched, but it cannot assert that other people have minds (because minds are immaterial, as in, “she has a mind of her own”).

The modern worldview may assure me that I have a mind, for that may be self-evident to me. However, the fact that you have a mind is not self-evident; all I can know for sure is that you have a brain. I may observe you “making up your mind” or “changing your mind,” but for all I know, these mindlike activities are entirely the product of chemical reactions occurring within your physical brain.

Indeed, because your mind is not self-evident, incorrigible, evident to my senses or deducible from the same, I must conclude that you do not possess a mind (and you must assume the same about me). The fact that we are both offended by this conclusion suggests that the modern worldview is deficient on this score. Of course we believe that other people have minds, but we must reject the modern worldview when we do so.

Figure 1.2: Limitations of the Modern Worldview



Not just the existence of other minds, but also the content of our memories is negated by the modern worldview. We fondly remember many things: our first kiss, a game-winning homerun, an inspiring sermon, the tangy taste of strawberries, and the serenity of a summer sunset. All of these memories, plus many others, must logically be discarded under the modern worldview because no memories are self-evident, incorrigible, evident to the senses or inferred from beliefs that are. (Because our memories are fallible, they can be doubted; because they are mental, they're not evident to our senses). Who hasn't been surprised, especially as we age, by places or experiences that are not quite what we remember? As one wag put it, the joy of aging is the thrill of rediscovering what we already knew. Nevertheless, despite our spotty recollections, we all have memories that we treasure and are not prepared to give up. If forced to choose, we would prefer to give up the modern worldview instead.

Like memories and minds, the modern worldview has no room for God. God's existence is not one of its ultimate beliefs because God is neither self-evident (according to them) nor incorrigible (he can be doubted) nor evident to our senses (no one has ever seen him). Thus, God does not fit within the center of the modern worldview.

Furthermore, besides not being an ultimate belief, God's existence is not clearly deducible from other, ultimate beliefs. I had attempted to do this with my friend, Sun Yi, arguing that things that are evident to our senses, such as our beautiful, orderly world, demonstrate that God must exist. However, I quickly discovered that while I thought I had proved God from her ultimate beliefs, she did not necessarily have to agree with my argument. She could always find a way to avoid my conclusion. Thus, since God is neither one of their ultimate beliefs nor necessarily deducible from them, modern thinkers consider it foolish to believe in him. He simply does not fit anywhere within their worldview.

However, since the modern worldview cannot account for memory beliefs (what I believe I remember) and the existence of other minds, why should we be concerned that it objects to belief in God? Perhaps God is in the same class as memories and minds, things that are so obviously true they discredit the modern worldview that denies them. Rather than cower in fear before the onslaught of modernity, we may well question the reliability of its worldview. Any worldview that fails to account for so many things that normal people take for granted should patch up its own holes before criticizing others.⁵

Third, if the modern worldview is unable to account for such commonly held beliefs as the existence of God, other minds, and memory beliefs, then there are large parcels of reality that it fails to include within its purview. And this fact threatens to make it a fairly small worldview, not nearly as comprehensive as one might like.

As it turns out, modernity's greatest strength proves to be one of its largest weaknesses. Modernity's main selling point is its ruthless determination to root out every belief that might possibly be false. Modern people are inherently suspicious. They would rather suspend belief than stifle their doubts and naively commit to something that might not be true. So they are likely to do their homework, carefully evaluating the evidence for a belief before they commit to it. The upside is that if they do their homework well, they can be reasonably confident about the beliefs which they hold.

However, the downside of this method is that once modernity has completed its homework, typically very few beliefs remain. When it comes right down to it, there are not many beliefs that our reason and empirical skills can establish beyond all doubt. Thus, in its admirable desire to achieve absolute certainty, modernity leaves us with little to believe. If we

want to fill out our worldview with other beliefs (such as the content of our memories and the existence of other minds), we need to reach beyond modernity and borrow from someplace else.

Why Not Begin With God?

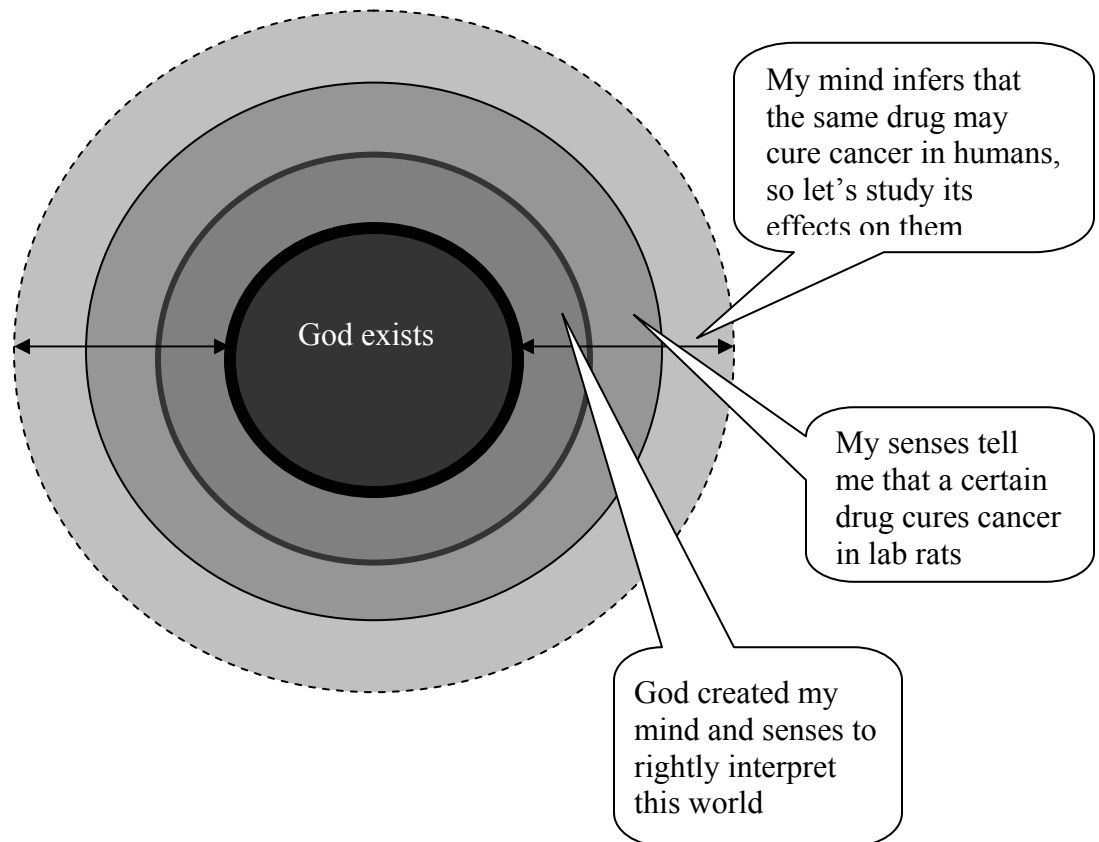
In light of modernity's lack of coherence, correspondence, and comprehensiveness, Plantinga asks why we should believe that its ultimate beliefs are true. Why should we limit ourselves to only those beliefs that are self-evident, incorrigible, evident to the senses, or logically implied from those that are? And if we don't have any good reason to limit ourselves in this way, perhaps we can enlarge the center of our worldview to make room for other, even more ultimate beliefs. Specifically, why not make one of our ultimate beliefs our absolute certainty that God exists?

Don't miss the revolutionary nature of Plantinga's proposal. If we start with modernity's ultimate beliefs, we will never be able to believe in God, for, to modernity at least, God is neither self-evident, incorrigible, evident to the senses, nor deducible from beliefs that are. However, why should we feel obligated to start with modernity's ultimate beliefs? Why not begin with God? If we place God at the very center of our worldview, making him our ultimate belief or presupposition, then we are entirely justified for believing in him. We no longer need to prove his existence, as modernity demands, but we are able to simply assume his existence. God is no longer something we must argue *to*, for he is now the starting point we argue *from*.

Note that Plantinga is not denying the usefulness of our rational and empirical skills. Of course we should believe truths that are self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to our senses. However, the reason why we believe such things has now changed. Rather than begin with them as our ultimate beliefs, we now trust them because we first believe in God (see figure 1.3).

In Plantinga's words, we only have sufficient reason to trust that our minds and senses are rightly interpreting reality if we first believe that a living God has created our minds to function properly in this environment. If we don't believe that a transcendent being has created both our minds and this world and then placed them together, what reason could we give to trust our minds in the first place? Thus, rather than use our minds to prove God, we should recognize that our reliable minds already imply God's existence. If God does not exist, then we could have no confidence that we know anything at all.⁶

Figure 1.3: The Christian Worldview



Perhaps you are objecting, "But what right do we have to begin with God? Don't we need evidence or at least a good argument to justify our belief in him?" Only if we accept the tenets of the modern worldview. However, if we reject the notion that human rationality and

empiricism are ultimate, then we no longer need to justify God's existence with arguments and evidence. We may simply start our worldview with our commitment to him.

But isn't this "fideism"? Fideism is a dirty word among philosophers. Calling someone a "fideist" is like calling a loyal resident of Ann Arbor an Ohio State Buckeye, or worse, a Michigan State fan. It's like the n- word to African Americans, "right wing fundamentalist" to conservative Christians, or "Hello, Waiter" to an Ivy Leaguer. You never want to concede to anyone that you might be a fideist. You might as well hang a "kick me" sign around your neck.

Fideism means that you're flying blind, that your faith is a wishful stab in the dark. Fideists have no good reason for believing what they do—they just do and hope for the best. For example, imagine that one September evening you and your buddies are taking a shortcut through your neighbor's yard when you stumble upon his swimming pool. It's too dark to see if it is still filled with water, and since it's mid-September, he may well have drained it already. There's a dare, then a double-dare, and before you can say "fideist" you're doing a cannonball off the high dive, hoping against hope there is something below to cushion your fall. Of course, you may luck out and find that the pool contains enough water to keep you out of the emergency room. But you get no credit for guessing right. You're just dumb lucky; next time you just might kill yourself.

Isn't your leap into the pool exactly what Plantinga says it's like to believe in God? If we place God in the center of our worldview—if we make him our ultimate belief and claim that we don't need arguments or evidence to justify our belief in him—how come we're not fideists? Sure, we might get dumb lucky and discover that the God we start with actually does exist, but we might just as well find out that we are flinging ourselves upon a figment of our imagination. The odds are the same, aren't they?

What Everyone Believes About God (and might not want you to know)

Not exactly. There is an important reason why belief in God is not fideism. Unlike our blind leap into our neighbor's pool, we don't merely *hope* that God exists. We *know* it. And not only do *we* know it, but *everyone else* does, too. This is the important insight I learned from the first chapter of Romans in my dialogue with Sun Yi.

To grasp the significance of Romans 1 we must first understand its place within the context of the entire book. The heart of Romans is chapters 4 through 8, where Paul celebrates the free grace of Jesus Christ. However, to prove that everyone needs this grace, Paul must first demonstrate that everyone has sin that they need to be saved from.

This is the point of the early chapters of Romans, where in 3:9-20 Paul concludes that all people are sinners and deserving of God's wrath. He is able to make such a bold statement because he proves that all Jews (2:17-24) and all Gentiles (1:18-32) are guilty before God. Since that accounts for the entire population of the world, Paul declares in chapter 3 that everyone is sinful and in trouble with God (and consequently needs the gospel of Christ).

With this context in mind, let's look at Romans 1:18-32 to learn what specific sin the Gentiles have committed. The topic sentence of this passage occurs in verse 18, where Paul states that "the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness." Verses 18-23 explain "why" and verses 24-32 explain "how" this wrath is right now being revealed.

For our purposes, we will concentrate on why this wrath is revealed. Paul declares that the reason God reveals his wrath is that godless and wicked people have been suppressing the truth of his existence (v. 18). He observes that God's existence is obvious to everyone, for "God has made it plain to them" (v. 19).

What specifically has God made plain to everyone? Paul continues: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (v. 20). From this passage we may safely assume that everyone clearly knows not only that God exists but also something about his attributes (see also verse 32: God’s “righteous decree”). God’s revelation of himself is so powerful that Paul claims there is no excuse for not believing that God exists.

On a related note, I should mention that although Paul links this knowledge of God with creation, he is not necessarily implying that we must construct a compelling argument using evidence from nature to justify our belief in God. To admit this would be to fall again into the trap of the modern worldview, demanding that we only believe propositions that are logically argued from whatever is evident to our senses.

Instead, since Paul tells us that this knowledge of God belongs to everyone, and since not everyone (as we learn from Thomas Aquinas) has the brain power, education, desire, or free time to construct a convincing argument for the truth about God, we may safely conclude that this belief in God does not come via an argument.⁷ Belief in God does come through what he has made, but not necessarily by way of an argument from what he has made.

For instance, Plantinga describes how certain events in creation simply “trip our trigger” to believe in God. It may happen to some as they peer over the railing at Niagara’s Horseshoe Falls, to others as they sit in church, relax with friends after a satisfying meal, or cut the umbilical cord of their very own child. In ways too numerous to count, creation overflows with pointers to God. At any moment these signals of transcendence may catch us off guard and,

without the benefit of a sequential argument, remind us of what we already know—that God exists.

Inspired by this truth of Romans 1, John Calvin observed that “men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker.” He notes that even an “eminent pagan” like Cicero (an ancient Roman statesman and philosopher) agrees that “there is...no nation so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep-seated conviction that there is a God.” This is because “God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty.”⁸

Calvin calls this universal awareness of God a *sensus divinitatis* (sense of deity). He declares that every person, because they are created in the image of God and inhabit God’s world, is surrounded by unmistakable reminders of the presence of God. They may shut themselves up in their room, refusing to acknowledge the God who designed their beautiful world. But though they run from nature, they cannot run from themselves. As little images of God, they carry within themselves a constant reflection of their Creator. They cannot help but see God wherever they turn.

And this is why we Christians are not fideists when we declare that God is our ultimate belief. We are permitted to presuppose God’s existence because everyone else does, too. It’s impossible not to. Everyone knows that God exists. Some, like the adherents of the modern worldview, choose to suppress that knowledge and, feigning impartiality, claim they would believe in God if only there were more evidence or better arguments in his favor. Romans 1 calls this feeble attempt at intellectual honesty an inexcusable sin.

So rather than give unbelievers more evidence—evidence which they can readily misconstrue and explain away—why not call them on their suppression? Why should we work

so hard to prove God to those who already know he exists? If we continually attempt to argue them into the kingdom, we may only succeed in confirming their unbelief. I tried the argumentative approach with Sun Yi for a solid year, and all she learned was that she really didn't need to believe in God if she didn't want to. There is always an out, no matter how dubious, for someone who is determined to suppress the truth she already knows.

Even Atheists Know Better

But once my question called her bluff, Sun Yi was only too ready to admit that, despite her communist upbringing, she also believed in the existence of God. With that issue settled, we were able to spend the rest of our time together delving into the specifics of the Christian faith. It is a long road from atheism to the gospel, but the following year, Sun Yi finally repented of her sin and joined the family of God. I sometimes wonder how Sun Yi's journey might have been different if I had continued my efforts to argue her into the kingdom. At least in her case, it proved more effective to call her on her suppression of God rather than continue my feeble attempts to convince her of what she already knew.

Every person we meet believes that God exists. Their belief may be buried under thick layers of difficulties and denials, but it is there nevertheless. You can count on it. While adherents of the modern worldview typically attempt to suppress their knowledge of God, informed Christians choose to ground their worldview on this ultimate belief. That's a good start, but is it enough? Not quite. There is one more important belief that deserves to be in the very center of our worldview—and that is the subject of bonus chapter 2.

Expanding Your Worldview

1. Do you agree that God's existence is an undeniable starting point for the Christian worldview? If you are not sure, imagine for a moment that God does not exist and that you do not believe in him. The wave of nausea that just washed over you is a good sign that God is your ultimate belief and that you can't even fathom giving him up. If you didn't feel any despair, turn off your T.V. and try again. Give it your full attention and a sense of utter hopelessness will eventually come. (Sorry for such a depressing exercise. Flip the T.V. back on and, like millions of entertained Americans, the nausea will quickly wash away).
2. Study Romans 1:18-32. Consider what all people know about God and how they know it. How might this inside information into the thoughts of lost people change the way we explain the gospel to them? How might we use this inside information to counsel ourselves or other believers who may be wrestling with serious doubts about God?
3. What is the proper role for evidence and argument in the Christian faith? Several good books describe powerful lines of evidence that may encourage the saints and lead sinners to Christ (for example, see Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*). How might we use this information without implying to others that our belief in God depends upon these arguments? Is there a way to cite evidence and arguments without running the risk that the unbeliever will hold her own and feel even more justified in her unbelief?
4. Do we have to place God in the center of our worldview in order to justify our belief in him? Rather than make God our presupposition, why couldn't we begin with modernity's ultimate beliefs and simply argue our way to God? So long as the argument is compelling to us, wouldn't we still be justified to believe in God? What dangers, if

- any, lurk in this approach? What advantages, if any, does this method hold over the Reformed Epistemology model presented in this chapter?
5. This chapter defended belief in God against the arguments of the modern worldview, primarily because that is the specific challenge that Plantinga faced but also because this worldview still grounds most contemporary objections to belief in God. To go further, consider how the material in this chapter might also be used to dialogue with a postmodern person who believes that everyone may justifiably believe whatever they want. This individual may be willing to grant your right to presuppose God's existence but questions why you think everyone else should do the same. What could be said to him?
 6. This chapter discussed how and why we know that God exists. Is it possible to move beyond this generic God and both know for ourselves and demonstrate to others that the one true God is the God of the Bible, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? How do we know that our Christian God is the right God?

¹ See *Time* 115, no. 14 (7 April 1980): 65-68, for an article on Alvin Plantinga and the revival of belief in God among philosophers.

² To learn more about Plantinga's thought, an extremely readable summary is Kelly James Clark, *Return To Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). Other philosophers who have helped Plantinga develop this Reformed Epistemology include Nicholas Wolterstorff, William Alston, and George Mavrodes. You may read their initial contributions to the movement in Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). For Plantinga's most important contributions to Christian philosophy, see a wide representation of his essays in James F. Sennett, ed., *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

Something similar to Reformed Epistemology, albeit in even stronger terms, is also expressed by a group of theologians known as presuppositionalists. This perspective, first articulated by Cornelius Van Til, a long-time professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, argues that belief in the Christian God is necessary to rightly and fully interpret any aspect of life. See Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*; John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*; Cornelius Van Til: *An Analysis of His Thought*; and Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic* (all published by Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co. in Phillipsburg, NJ).

³ See Alvin Plantinga's spiritual autobiography in "A Christian Life Partly Lived," in *Philosophers Who Believe*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 45-82.

⁴ René Descartes (1596-1650) and John Locke (1632-1704) inaugurated the Enlightenment, an age of bold thinking that most scholars identify with the beginning of the modern world. Descartes attempted to ground his worldview upon rationalism, choosing to believe only those things that his mind could figure out on its own. He soon realized that the only thing he could know for sure was the fact that he was thinking, a discovery that led him to his famous conclusion, "I think, therefore I am." Locke disagreed with Descartes' rationalism and opted instead to ground his worldview on empiricism. He believed that all knowledge comes through our five senses—sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. This empirical method laid the foundation for modern science, which bases its knowledge on observable experiments.

⁵ To read more about how modernity denies both the existence of God and other minds, see Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), chapters 7-10.

⁶ For a philosophical discussion concerning how belief in God is necessary to justifiably claim that we know anything at all, see Alvin Plantinga, "Justification and Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987): 403-26, and *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 227-240.

⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a 1.1.

⁸ Calvin, *Institutes* I.3.1.