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# VERIDICALISM VERSUS PRESUPPOSITIONALISM: A REVIEW ARTICLE

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*Crucial Questions in Apologetics.* By Mark Hanna. Baker, 1981, 139 pp., $5.95.

Professor Hanna's ambitious aim is to construct an apologetic method, named Veridicalism, to avoid "the stalemate between Presuppositionism [*sic*] and Verificationism." Or, one might say, between fideism and empiricism; or, again, between apriorism and the *tabula rasa* theory. Of course, these terms need some definition. Yet the first three-quarters of the book is sparse in definition. One must read almost a hundred pages before finding out what some important terminology means and then go back and read the whole again. There are two definitions given near the beginning, but sometimes a later definition is substantially different from the earlier one.

One of these terms thus ambiguous is "fideism" or "presuppositionism." The two words seem always to be synonymous, and since the author aims to present a theory that is neither fideistic nor verificationistic, neither Calvinistic nor Arminian, the term "fideism" should be restricted to a single, well-defined meaning throughout the book. But this is not the case.

Preparing for a definition, the author begins by asserting that fideism destroys the possibility of truth and knowledge (p. 17), so that "every view, irrespective of its absurdities, is on the same epistemological footing with every other view" (p. 18). On the same page he asks, "Can one be a fideist and avoid such a consequence?"

Properly speaking, this is a description rather than a definition. In actuality it is a conclusion that should be drawn only after valid arguments have been given to support it. Yet it reveals some important characteristics that the author thinks he sees in the nature of fideism. But if so one must ask, "Are there any fideists loose in the neighborhood?" Does anyone claim to hold a view that his description fits? In what books may we find his description accepted and defended? Maybe there are such people, but who are they and what reasons do they offer in favor of this position?

Barth and Brunner may be two satisfactory examples. But are these two theologians presuppositionalists? Or, to make the question clearer, are there two sorts of fideism—one that fits Hanna's description and claims that no theory is better than any other, and a second type of fideism that denies an equal epistemological basis to absurdities? Can there not be a presupposition that insists on the difference between truth and falsity? I could mention two names in support of this contention. Now the author has several good pages defending fixed truth and the necessity of logic. Indeed, these are very good pages. But his refutation of fideism, as stated and as applicable to Barth and Brunner, has incautiously and without further argument been extended to include presuppositionalists who abhor ab-

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surdities as much as the author does.

There is a second case of faulty definition. The fault, however, differs from the preceding. In the previous case a definition correctly applied to one position was transferred to a view that, at least *prima facie*, contradicts it. Here in this second case two definitions merge in such a way that neither serves any necessary function. The terms defined are "certainty" and "certitude."

On page 58 the author sets forth one necessary element in the definition of certainty as "the intellectual apprehension of an objective state of affairs." One's first impression of this phrase, especially as it is said to differ from certitude, which is "a subjective assurance," is that "certainty" attaches to propositions and "certitude" attaches to minds only. We could call the latter subjective and the former objective. Clearly on this understanding of the definition certitude is possible when the proposition is false. Many people are assured of what is untrue. In fact the author on page 81 acknowledges that "on one level" there are experiences of misplaced certitude. "But any case of conviction whose referent state of affairs is as one holds it to be is an example of certainty."

His next sentence, unfortunately, is disconcerting: "On another level, however, we may call into question the certainty we acknowledge on the first level." Now aside from the fact that these levels remain unspecified, one must ask, "Should not the sentence have said 'certitude' rather than 'certainty'?" If certainty is a quality of a true proposition we cannot deny or even doubt that a true proposition is certain. We may doubt that a proposition we have in mind is true, but this is misplaced certitude, not misplaced certainty.

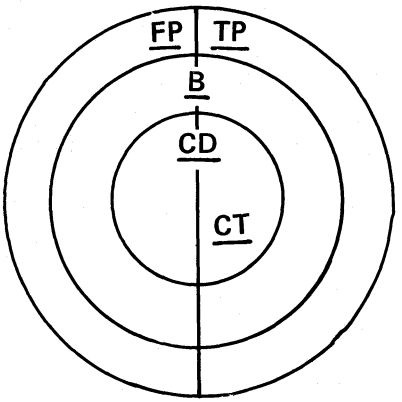
Furthermore, if certainty is objective and attaches to propositions, then certainty does not require certitude. There are many propositions, propositions that are "certain," of which a man, either ignorant of or confused by them, can have no certitude. But if this be the author's meaning, then certainty, attaching to propositions, means no more than that the propositions are true. And if this is so, the term "certainty" is superfluous and confusing. "Certitude" would be the only meaningful term.

Our first interpretation of the defining clause, however, may have been mistaken. Maybe certainty is not altogether objective. Maybe it attaches to minds as certitude does. The defining clause says that certainty resides in "the intellectual apprehension." Such a certainty would be as subjective as certitude. But the author straddles the issue. He wants certainty to be a quality of both the mind and the proposition. On page 85 he states that "certainty requires both subjective assurance and the truth or[1] reality of that which is apprehended." Just how one quality—certainty—can attach univocally to the mind, the intellectual apprehension, and an external state of affairs is hard to understand.

Bypassing this embarrassing difficulty the following diagram seems to picture Hanna's definitions.

The inclusive circle has as its objects all propositions, half of them true (*TP*) and half false (*FP*). The middle circle takes in all the propositions one has in mind and believes (*B*). The smallest circle in its full extent represents all propositions of which I am assured. It is the circle of certitude (*CD*). But the propositions

[1]The disjunctive "or" in this case must, I believe, be the Latin *aut*, for the author through the book seems to divorce truth and reality. Hence this "or" is not *vel*, much less *sive*. It is unfortunate that one English word must serve to designate three distinctly different meanings.




on the left side are false, while those on the right side are true. This half is the area of certainty (*CT*).

It is a very neat arrangement, is it not? But though these divisions are used at least from page 58 to page 85, here and there, one must ask, "What good are they?" The right half of the smallest circle—that is, certainty—means no more than that proposition X, which we happen to believe, is true. It helps not at all in determining whether proposition X is in fact true. And as for certitude (the whole inner circle), it is of no use whatever. The author's attempt to distinguish certitude from certainty neither harms his opponents nor helps him. The essential point in apologetics is to defend the truth of X, and this schematism does not do so. Indeed, to anticipate, the book as a whole fails to explain any method by which one may determine the truth of a particular proposition. A few incomplete procedures are mentioned, but the obvious objections to them are ignored.

There is a third definitional flaw: not so much a definition that is faulty as the absence of a definition that is needed. Embedded in the previous useless material is a phrase that calls to mind Wittgenstein's words in the *Tractatus*: "that which is the case." Hanna's phrase is "a state of affairs." Already quoted is: "Certainty is the intellectual apprehension of an objective state of affairs." Obviously then we cannot know what certainty is until after we know what the phrase "state of affairs" means. I am certain—that is, I am certitudinous—that the author would agree that states of affairs are fundamental to apologetics. On pages 25-26 he characterizes a particular attack on Christianity as formidable on the ground that it is "made on the basis of epistemological objectivism, the view that there are extrasubjective states of affairs. . . . Other criticisms of the Christian faith which repudiate epistemological objectivism cannot be taken seriously." Then on page 32 he says, "The very nature of Christian faith is predicated on epistemological objectivism. . .the view that there are extrasubjective states of affairs."[2]

Then later, on page 77, he continues in the same vein: "The constitutive tenets of any position are referential meanings, for they are propositions. A proposition is an assertion that some state of affairs does or does not obtain. A state of affairs is anything that is or is not, anything that does or does not have a certain

[2]These passages seem to substantiate the earlier footnote relative to disjunction. Here again it seems that the truth is not really "real."

property, or anything that is or is not related to something in a particular way. Every proposition—which is essentially the meaning expressible by a declarative sentence—refers to a state of affairs. That is why constitutive tenets are referential meanings. . . . The truth-value (truth or falsity) of a proposition is determined by the state of affairs to which it refers."

This I find not merely unsatisfactory, but even self-contradictory. Besides indicating Hanna's dependence on the phrase "state of affairs" the sentence, in its context, at least seems to deny that propositions are states of affairs. The proposition is a statement about a state of affairs, and if a proposition does not refer to itself it is hard to see how Hanna could consider a proposition as a state of affairs. Propositions then are not realities. The presuppositionalist, at least some of them, would insist that truth is very real and that only propositions can be true. Nevertheless, though the paragraph thus denies that propositions are states of affairs, the definition of a state of affairs ("anything that does or does not have a certain property," and so forth) applies to propositions as well as to anything else, if there be anything else. Hence the paragraph contradicts itself.

There is another word, used very frequently, which, like Wittgenstein's unintelligible "what is the case," seems to me to be equivalent to the word "given" or "givenness": in German from Kant on, *das Gegebenes.* Hegel of course denied that anything is given. So did Augustine. Hanna toward the end of his book attempts to show how we can know that something is given. In my opinion his attempt is a failure and, in addition, if it were not a failure, it would be a failure, for a process that identifies the given and distinguishes it from something else shows that the given is not a given but an intellectual interpretation.

This "given" or "state of affairs" seems to be synonymous with the term "real." The state of affairs is what is real. But such synonymous terms do nothing toward identifying any reality. What is real? What is a particular state of affairs? What is given? Are dreams real? They are real dreams, are they not? Are mathematical equations real? The logical positivists, if they used the word "real," would say "no." Are propositions real? By giving propositions referents, and with other wordings, the author seems to exclude propositions from the real, objective world. In that case we can never know the state of affairs but only a replica, symbol, or picture of it. No extrasubjective reality could be in one's mind, could it? A picture of a reality is not that reality, is it? If the picture is in our mind, the thing itself is outside and unknown—unknown, because whatever is known must be in one's mind. One further question: Is the sensation of red or the taste of chocolate real? Realism, whether Plato's intellectual realism or the physical realism of the 1930s, insists that man can know reality and not just a mental reproduction of it. Hanna's position, even though he may not recognize or acknowledge it, is that a state of affairs is unknowable.

Lest anyone think that the foregoing criticism attacks a "straw man" and does not present Hanna's views fairly, there is a sort of negative evidence to the contrary. On page 109 we read, "Thoroughgoing presuppositionists categorically deny the possibility of apprehending any state of affairs in a purely objective way; that is, the doctrine or 'immaculate perception' is a delusion. For every act of apprehension is an act of interpretation." If the term "objective" is taken in Hanna's empiricist sense, this is a very accurate statement about one essential part of presuppositionalism. Clearly he accepts for himself the Roman Catholic superstition of immaculate sensory perceptions. Neither of us is attacking a straw man.

But while his descriptive statements with regard to presuppositionalism are usually quite accurate—though he made that previous blunder about fideism—his arguments seem peculiar at times. For example, to select another case where the harm is minimal, Hanna asserts on his own that "no position can escape such givenness, not even the most radical skepticism" (p. 102). This mention of skepticism heads in the wrong direction. If Hanna wished to commend his Veridicalism, he should have said, "No position can escape givenness, not even Hegelianism." For it is the latter that is best known for resolutely abolishing *das Gegebenes.* It is this kind of mistaken direction that weakens the relevance of some of his arguments against his opponents.

The crux of the dispute, however, is his success or failure in explaining how a "state of affairs" can be known or, more broadly, how knowledge is possible. If his theory cannot produce knowledge, then despite his attempts at refutation presuppositionalism remains at least a possible choice. It is necessary first to state Hanna's theory of "justification." This is no easy matter, for it is both confused and incomplete. Any interested reader must consult the text and make his own decision.

It seems to this reviewer, however, that his first principle is the existence of states of affairs. And before proceeding the reviewer wishes to point out that this is a presupposition, for Hanna shows neither how this principle can be deduced from something more ultimate nor how a state of affairs can be identified.

Unfortunately connecting Christian presuppositionalism with Karl Popper and his disciple W. W. Bartley III (pp. 94, 95), Hanna states that "the attempt of nonjustificationalism to dispense with irrefutable. . .starting points is a failure. . .[because] whenever a truth claim is made, the claimant is under a rationality norm to provide justification when it is expected or requested" (p. 95). Here Hanna entangles himself, for he never, so far as I can see, justifies this his fundamental claim. Is not this his presupposition? The situation is not as if the presuppositionalists reply with a simple *tu quoque* and let it go at that. Aristotle, though far from being a presuppositionalist, in Book Gamma of the *Metaphysics* showed how the principles of logic are embedded in every intelligible sentence. He also argued that unless an argument went back to first principles and stopped there an infinite regress would be necessary and therefore the justification could not be completed. If a veridicalist—to use this new term—or anyone else that rejects first principles, wishes to refute present-day presuppositionalists, he cannot be excused from facing their argument. Hanna does not face it—though, to use his own words, we expect and request it.

Points two and three on pages 95, 96 insist on givenness. Presumably the author means sensory givens, for otherwise a first principle, a proposition, might be a given, and this is what he seemed to deny earlier.

He further criticizes his opponents on the ground that they "operate with a principle of adequacy that is logically prior to the apprehension and utilization of biblical statements. . . . Therefore the formal principle functions as a neutral criterion" (p. 98). This, however, is a serious misunderstanding of the theory Hanna is attacking. As briefly indicated in the previous reference to Aristotle, the laws of logic are themselves embedded in every declarative sentence throughout the Bible. Since, however, they are not stated explicitly, as they would be in a logic textbook, a learner may come to know them only after he has read and thought upon various Biblical passages. Most people, in reading any book, are interested in its explicit subject matter and do not consciously repeat to themselves the laws

of disjunction, conjunction and implication. So too with the Bible. But this does not mean that logic is a neutral criterion, a set of non-Biblical principles. God is truth, and Christ is the wisdom and *logos* of God. One may admit that the axioms of logic are of more universal application than many other Scriptural axioms. One may also admit that the other axioms could not be true without these all-embracing logical forms. But since the other axioms cannot be deduced from the forms of logic—no axiom can ever be deduced from another—they too remain axiomatic. At any rate logic is Biblical, not neutral.

Strangely Hanna almost always avoids the term and the idea "axiom." He uses the word twice on page 96 and perhaps once or twice elsewhere, but usually throughout his descriptions of presuppositionalism he obscures the point that his opponent defends a system of truth consisting of axioms and theorems. This contrasts with a chaos of independent and unrelated givens. Hanna faces the difficulty of imposing some sort of order on (shall we say?) his "brute facts." Perhaps, too, had he grasped the idea of systematic truth he might have found it more difficult to argue against presuppositionalism.

This also disposes of point two on page 98, where he denies that the laws of logic can be used as postulates or axioms. He says, "The principle of non-contradiction cannot be postulated, simply because it is a necessary condition of *every* act of presupposition or postulation."[3] This "because" seems to have no force. If truth is a logical system, its first axiom must be the law of contradiction, or of identity, which is really the same thing. Even nonpropositionalists and non-Christians try to axiomatize logic. The formula $(a<b)<(b'<a')$ is either itself an axiom or deducible from simpler axioms. The meaning of E can with the principle of obversion be deduced from the definition of A; but the meaning of A is an irreducible definition.

Strange to say, in this same paragraph he describes the law of contradiction as a "given." Since he has said it cannot be axiomatic, the term "given" cannot be applied to axioms. But what is a "given"? Earlier he seems to identify givens as the referents of sensations. Does he now admit that propositions can be given? If so, how can such a proposition be dependent on a referent-given? Can other propositions be givens? Then propositions must be realities, and at least these realities are mental. What then becomes of his insistence, if I understand him, on reality as independent of and external to a mind? I am afraid I do not understand him, for I think he is confused. His reply to me is that I am "patently absurd" (p. 98).

Following this charge of absurdity he claims that the laws of logic are not derived from the Bible. His argument requires the assertion that the laws cannot be so derived. My answer is that every declarative sentence—in fact, even questions and commands—are examples of logic. Not only so, but my brilliant colleague J. C. Keister has deduced detailed arithmetic from the Bible, and we are both confident that he will succeed in deducing calculus also, in detail.

As one proceeds, the sensory basis of Hanna's philosophy becomes more and more apparent. We may admit that the ontological starting point—though starting point of what is not made clear—is the Triune God (p. 101, point 1). This is irrelevant, for the whole question is, "How is knowledge possible? How do we know what the ontological starting point is?" Hanna answers: "(2) The epistemological

[3]If there is some difficulty with the meaning of the word "postulate," one should consult the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary*.

starting point is personal awareness focused in sensory, introspective, and intellective apprehensions." The only meaningful words in this sentence are "sensory awareness"—that is, sensation. If he tries to explain "intellective apprehension" he has passed beyond, or retreated from, allegedly given, objective sense data into the a priori and hence becomes a presuppositionalist *malgré lui.* If he avoids the a priori, one must ask how he gets to know God. Notice: He said the "Triune" God. Have any Australian aborigines or cultured English philosophers ever arrived at a knowledge of the Trinity through personal awareness of sensation? This is patently absurd.

At least I find it most confusing. Hanna tried to explain as follows: "The second step . . . is the recognition of the distinction between givens and assumptions. What is given? Generically described, it is whatever (1) presents itself to awareness (i.e. is not postulated or based on postulation), and (2) does so directly (i.e. without being inferred or derived by discursive reasoning), and (3) can be veridically corroborated by reflective examination" (p. 101).

One must now raise the question, "Is there anything at all that satisfies these three conditions?" One must also ask, "Are the conditions clear?" Point one seems to say that a person cannot be aware of anything he postulates, nor of anything he derives from his axioms. Hanna defines awareness as nonpostulational. Why then use the term "awareness"?

The second condition was that the nonpostulated object cannot be derived by discursive (deductive) reasoning. But this is not a second condition. It merely repeats half of the first condition—namely, "not . . . based on postulation." Very well, then, we cannot be "aware" of axioms and theorems.

The third condition is "veridically corroborated by reflective examination. . . ." Now either the term "veridically" refers to Hanna's own veridicalism, and in this case is a begging of the question, or with the phrase "reflective examination" it refers to some deductive process excluded in the prior conditions. At any rate, he does not give an example of any knowledge that fits these conditions. One must press the point: Does he know that David was King of Israel? that ocotillas are not cacti? that $E = mc^2$? If so, how? A particular example, explained in detail, would have been most acceptable.

In working out his theory positively Hanna reasonably wants to contrast it with his opponents' views. But here his descriptive statements are not so accurate as the earlier ones. One page 104 he asserts, "Presuppositionism errs in its tendency to interpret rational justification as the application of human criteria to divine truth." This is plainly false. The accusation might be true if charged against evidentialism, empiricism or Arminianism. It also seems to apply to Hanna's own veridicalism. But not to Calvinism. There may be several varieties of presuppositionalism. Earlier Hanna apparently put Barth and religious existentialists in this category. But these people reject the universal applicability of logic and give no rational justification of their paradoxes. Brunner held that God and the medium of conceptuality are mutually exclusive. But other presuppositionalists—I would not call Brunner a presuppositionalist—presuppose the inerrancy of Scripture. They find the norms of logic embedded in the Bible, and therefore they regard God as a rational rather than as an irrational being. Hence they do not use "human" criteria to judge divine revelation. Christ is the Logic and Wisdom of God. His mind is revealed in Scripture. We were created as the image of God—that is, as rational beings. Hence Hanna's statement is just plain false. Or does

he mean that while men cannot think that the number four is both odd and even, God can and does? Mere human arithmetic must do for our check stubs, but for God and his divine arithmetic 2 + 2 = 5. For us David was king of Israel but not of Uganda, while for God, who does not use our merely human logic, David was both. On the contrary, there is only one logic. It is divine, and that is the logic we ought to, and sometimes do, use.

Again there comes the matter of particular examples. On this same page (p. 104) he says, "Since there are extrabiblical truths, and since truth is formally one, veridicalism holds that it is legitimate to appeal to corroborative factors which are available to man universally." But this must be a nonempirical, a priori, presuppositional assumption for him. He has nowhere shown that there are any extra-Biblical truths, nor has he shown how his independent givens can fit into a system formally one, nor does he offer any argument that there are corroborative factors available to man universally, nor how he can discover anything true about every man in the past and every man in the future. This is all presuppositional, and therefore he should not use such principles.

Hanna also has some other presuppositions. To summarize a little too briefly, pages 111, 112 argue that justification cannot stop at a first truth but must regress to infinity, because a first truth is presuppositional and presuppositionalism is bad.

By calling these presuppositions another name, such as intellectually apprehensible givens, Hanna seems to include universals in the groundwork of his theory. But the more obvious candidates for givenness are sensory data—"data" means "givens." On page 116 he mentions "eyes, optical nerves, etc." He also mentions smelling a rose (p. 122), "physiological and environmental conditions" (p. 124), and that "sense consciousness is the basis or starting point of knowledge" (p. 131). Note that the latter is an unmodified assertion of empiricism. All knowledge is based on sensation. How then can he claim to have found a philosophy midway between apriorism and empiricism? Again he says, "I am aware of sensory objects. I do not know these realities by inference. . .[but through] the neurological system and environmental conditions" (pp. 133, 134). How can he tell what effects his neurological system has produced in his sensory experience? And where did he get his information on environmental conditions? Is not this all a circular begging of the question?

Living on the ridge of a mountain, and having some fifty trees on my half acre of lawn, I see out my window the glistening results of an ice storm. Every small twig is brilliant with colors. Reds, blues, yellows and purples sparkle, and some greens—that is, I have such sensations. Does this mean that the twigs are red, blue and yellow? Does it mean that ice is red, green and blue? Is there anything "out there" that is red, blue or purple?

Empiricists tell me, though of course I do not credit any empirical statements, that dogs do not see color. Then is not color, certainly the particular color, an effect of the neurological apparatus? Some people say that the ice and trees have no color but that the sun has these colors. They are transmitted to us by vibrations in the ether. How vibrations in an unperceived ether can be colored I do not know. At any rate nearly all scientists say there is no ether: Light consists of invisible particles. Are some of these invisible particles green and others red? I may indeed see red and green as sensations, but is anything "out there" red or green? As for what is in my mind, when looking at a color my art instructor and I do not

agree as to which tube of paint I should squeeze.

My conclusion is that empiricism and Hanna's "veridicalism" are, or is, utterly impossible. And if there is no third choice between having presuppositions and having no presuppositions, and if knowledge is to be shown possible, only presuppositionalism offers any hope.