Veridicalism

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Before I came up here, I had some correspondence with the Dean . . . what's his name . . . Roberts. And he had previously written me concerning the contents of the course, and I answered somewhat at length. And among other things, I said to him that if he knew who would be taking the course, they might read, Crucial Questions in Apologetics by Mark Hanna . . . is that right? And try to figure out how I would answer him.

I don't know how many of you did that. Some of you did? Well, apparently, some of you did. I didn't know whether he could get to you in time or not, so I am going to read my paper on Mark Hanna, and I think there will be enough explanation in this lecture so that even if you have not read his book, you will understand the argument – though of course, those who have read the book will understand it better. The more material you read, the more you study, the better you get.

So this is on the Crucial Questions in Apologetics. Professor Hanna's ambitious aim, is to construct an apologetic method named, "veridicalism". That's the name he coined.

"The method named, veridicalism: To avoid the stalemate between presuppositionism [sic]" – (Now he doesn't use the word presuppositionalism [sic], which is ordinarily used – he thinks it is a little too long a word, so he changes it to presuppositionism – and when I am quoting him, I will quote him as he writes). If I give some of my own ideas, I may use a term I am accustomed to.

Well, he aims to construct an apologetic method named veridicalism, to avoid, [quote], "The stalemate between presuppositionism 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 definitions. 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 thing again. There are two definitions given near the beginning, that sometimes, a later definition, is substantially different from an earlier one.

One of these terms, thus ambiguous, is "fideism", or "presuppositionism". These two words, always seem to be synonymous – and if you read the book, you will have to decide whether you think they are or not, but they seem to me to be synonymous. And since the author aims to present a theory that is neither fideistic, nor verificationistic; neither Calvinistic, nor Arminian; the "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, "[Quote] every view, irrespective of its absurdities, is on the same epistemological footing with every other view."

I did have a pen in my hand a few times when I was reading your papers, and when somebody misspelled "epistemological," I put a little red circle – at least in some cases – maybe I missed a few. Please try to spell "epistemological." I must say however, that the spelling of these papers in this class, is considerably better than the students of [laughters] . . .

Well, he doesn't restrict the term fideism, to one single meaning. Preparing for a definition, the author begins by asserting that fideism destroys the possibility of truth and knowledge. So that, [quote] "every view, irrespective of its absurdities, is on the same epistemological footing with every other view. [end of quote]" On the same quote: "Can one be a theist and avoid such [audio skipping]…sequence, namely, absurdity" [End of quote].

Now properly speaking, this is a descript [audio skipping] . . . in actuality, it is a conclu . . . [audio skipping], after valid argument have been given to support it. Yet it reveals some important characteristics, which the author thinks he sees in the nature of fideism. But if so, one must ask – Now, remember how he describes – not define, but describe – fideism. It is something that "destroys the possibility of truth and knowledge." If so, one must ask, "Are there any Fideists loose in the neighbourhood?" 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 favour of this position?

Barth and Brunner, may be two satisfactory examples of his notion of fideism. But are these two theologians, presuppositionalists? Or to make the question clearer, are there two sorts of fideism? One which 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 a difference between truth and falsehood? 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 absurdities as much as the author does. There is a second case of faulty definitions. I want to give maybe three. I guess I could give another... three indications that he doesn't very well define his terms, and a reader has a good deal of difficulty knowing what he is talking about.

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 which, at least, prima facie, contradicts it. Here, in this case (the second case), two definitions merged in such a way that neither serves any necessary function.

The terms defined are, "certainty," and "certitude." And now, I am going to read two or three pages, which may be seen as tedious to you about certainty and certitude. If you are very ambitious, you may be able to keep awake, but if you did not go to bed until 1pm last night, you got up at 4 this morning, here is your chance to take a nap.

The words are, "certainty," and certitude." [Question from student: What page is this on?"] Well, it begins with page 58, but it goes for 40-50 pages, I think. But you can start from page . . . I'll give another page later on, it's page 81. Maybe I have some other pages (i.e. 58).
. . . [audio skipping] as "an objective state of affairs". Do you find those words on that page? I must have quoted them correctly for a change. And try to keep that in mind. This may not be a definition, but at any rate, he gives us one necessarily element in the definition, and it is the "intellectual apprehension of an objective state of affairs." One's first impression of this phrase, and I might say this was my first impression (of course it does not follow that everybody has the same first impression that I do), but anyhow, it is a possible impression. One's first impression of this phrase, especially as it is said to differ from certitude, which is, "a subjective assurance." Now he is going to define certitude, or at least characterise it as "a subjective assurance." And one's first impression is, that certainty, attaches to propositions (i.e. an intellectual apprehension of a state of affairs). The word "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 position 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 state of conviction, whose reference state of affairs is as someone holds it, is to be an example of certainty."

Now I'll read that sentence again. (I got one word wrong). "But any case of conviction, whose reference state of affairs is as one holds it to be, is an example of certainty." Now, I say this is a first impression. Maybe we will change our idea of what he means later on, but the first time you read it (The first time I read it at any rate), it seems that certainty, is something objective, and

certitude is something subjective. And on page 81, he acknowledges that on one level (whatever that may mean: that's the trouble, he doesn't tell you what that meant), he acknowledges that on one level, there are experiences of misplaced certitude. "But any case of conviction whose reference state of affairs is as someone holds it to be, is an example of certainty." His next sentence however, on page 81 – his next sentence unfortunately, is disconcerting. On another level however, we may call into question the certainty we acknowledge on the first level. (Oh I thought certainty attaches to propositions—now it doesn't seem to). We had a proposition that was certain on one level – objectively true; and on another level, this that was objectively true before, is now false.

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, and we haven't the least idea what he means – in addition to that, one must ask, should not the sentence that I just quoted, 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! That's just tautologous. We may doubt that a proposition we may 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 or confused by them, can have no certitude. Supposed that I shall tell you that there are as many prime numbers as there are numbers. Well, you may have a hard time determining whether that is certain or not, and as you are trying to figure it out, you wouldn't have any certitude. And you might work a long while before you figured out what was meant. If certainty is objective and attaches to propositions, then certainty does not require certitude. There are many propositions. Propositions which are certain, of which a man, either ignorant or confused by them, can have no certitude. But if this be the author's meaning, then certainty, attaching to propositions, mean no more that the propositions are true; and if this be so, the term certainty, is superfluous and confusing. Certitude would be the only meaningful term.

However, our first interpretation of the defining cause, may have been mistaken. Maybe certainty is not altogether objective. Maybe it attaches to minds as certitude does. The defining clause is 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, let me turn over to that if you can find it . . . on page 85, he states that, "Certainty requires both subjective assurance and the truth or reality of that which is apprehended." So apparently, certainty is at least partly subjective, and isn't altogether objective. Certainty requires both subjective assurance (now, that's subjective isn't it). It also requires the truth or reality of that which is apprehended; such as, there are as many prime numbers as there

are numbers. Just how one quality, "certainty," can attach univocally to the mind (the intellectual apprehension), and to an external state of affairs, is hard to understand – and he doesn't explain it.

Bypassing this embarrassing difficulty, the following diagram seems to picture Hanna's definitions. Suppose this circle represents all propositions. And these propositions are false; and these are true. Now then, we have an inner circle . . . something like this . . . and we will find that certitude is the whole circle, but of course, these propositions which we have subjective assurance of are false because they are in this half and over here, these are true. Look at that a minute while I… The inclusive circle, the big circle on the board, has as its objects, all propositions. Half of them true, and half false. The middle circle, takes in all propositions that one has in mind. This little circle . . . the rest you don't know – whether true or false, you don't know all of the propositions there. The middle circle takes in all the propositions that you are thinking of. And also those which you believe. Now, the right-hand half of it . . . no, you are assured of all of them. This is the circle of certitude. But the proposition… on the right hand side … I drew it differently here and this is a left… the proposition on this side, on the right hand side, are true, the propositions on the left hand side are false. Now, the propositions that are true, that is, this half of the little circle, is the area of certainty.

It is a very neat arrangement, is it not? But though these divisions are used at least from page 58 to 85 – and that's why I said I could give you a few pages, but it's scattered all the way through. This isn't just a little paragraph in the book. It's almost 30 pages, you see. Though these divisions are used at least from page 58 to 85, here and there, one must ask, what good are they? The right hand half of the inside circle, "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 of that 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 might determine the truth of a particular proposition. A few incomplete procedures are mentioned, but the obvious objections to them are ignored.

What I have said briefly… I can briefly resume this page and a half that I've read by saying that using the term certitude and certainty do not advance the argument at all. They give you no notion of how to proceed. Furthermore, they are not very well distinguished. That was supposed to be an example of his inability to define his terms. Now, that was a second case of poor definition, wasn't it?

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. His words are, "That which is the case." In fact, I think that phrase occurs in the very first sentence of the Tractatus, but I haven't read the Tractatus for … oh dear… 15 or 20 years. But I think that's right in the very first sentence of the Tractatus. Wittgenstein's phrase is, "That which is the case." Hanna's phrase is, "A state of affairs." Already quoted is, and this is repeating the quotation, "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 certitude-inous", that the author would agree, that states of affairs, are fundamental to apologetics. On pages 25 and 26, he characterizes a particular attack on Christianity as formidable, on the grounds that it is made on the basis of epistemological objectivism, the view that there are extra-subjective states of affairs. And continuing the quote, "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 extra-subjective states of affairs."

This quotation I just read and the previous one sort of indicates that he thinks that true propositions are not states of affairs. But what then is a state of affair? 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 [Clark: this sounds as if it going to be a definition] is anything that is or is not. Anything that does or does not have a certain property; or anything that is or is not related to something in a particular way. [Clark: Oh dear, that does take in a lot of ground doesn't it]

I guess I better read that part of the quotation over again. "A state of affairs is anything that is or is not. Anything that does or does not have a certain 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 tenants, are referential meanings. The truth value, truth and falsity of a proposition, is determined by the state of affairs to which it refers."

[Inaudible question from students]

[Clark replies]: Did you notice that this last quotation is self-contradictory? I'll read it again then go on… I think I will cover what you asked in the next paragraph. Just let me, I'll read it a little faster this time. I don't know whether to read slow and give you time to think – maybe I read slow and it annoys you and you don't think. If I read fast, well then, by the time I get to the second line, you've forgotten the first. Alright! I'll read this quotation again. And if you

understand what I am driving at, you won't have too much trouble getting the general drift even if you missed it – a point or two. I am trying to show that he fails to define the essential terms of his own position; and hence he leaves his readers without any idea of what he means. So here is what he says on 77: "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 property; or anything that is or is not related to something in a particular way. Every proposition refers to a state of affairs. That is why constitutive tenets are referential meanings. The truth value 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. A 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 a state of affair? And there is another word, used very frequently, which Wittgenstein's unintelligible phrase, "What is the case," seems to me to be the equivalent to the word given or given-ness, in German from Kant on das gegebenes.

Hegel, of course, denies that anything is given. So did saint Augustine. Hanna, towards 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. The given, or state of affairs, seems to be synonymous to 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 use the word real, would say, "No, mathematical equations are not real." Are propositions real? By giving propositions referents [R-E-F-E-R-E-N-T-S, not C-E] – 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 extra-subjective 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 if he might not recognize or acknowledge it, is that a state of affairs is unknowable.

Lest anyone thinks that the foregoing criticism attacks a strawman, and does not presents Hanna's view fairly, there is a sort of negative evidence to the contrary. On page 109, we read, "Throughgoing presuppositionalists categorically deny the posssible of apprehending any stateof affairs in a purely objective way." That is, the doctrine of immaculate perception is a delusion. He's trying to explain the positions he's opposing, you see. He is against presuppositionism. And presuppositionism says we can't apprehend states of affairs ina purely objective way. And he calls this the doctrine of immaculate perception and says that is a delusion. Let me say it again, the presuppositionalists are asserting that the doctrine of immaculate perception is a delusion. "For every act of apprehension is an act of interpretation." Now that is his description of presuppositionalism.

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 strawman. That is, he knows what presuppositionalism is, and he attacks their point of view and since I quote him verbatim, why I'm not inventing a strawman. If you can show that my interpretation of it is incorrect then my arguments don't apply, but at least I quote him.

But while his descriptive statements with regards to presuppositionalism are usually quite accurate, though he made that previous blunder about fideism near the beginning of the book. Though his descriptive statements with regards to presuppositionalism are usually quite accurate, his arguments seems peculiar at times. For example, to select another case where the harm is minimal. I'm using this not as an important point but just as an example of how he confuses things. Now Hanna asserts on his own that "No position can escape such given-ness, not even the most radical skepticism." Page 102. You want to turn to 102. Let me read this... I am giving this as an example, and I admit it is an example of only minimal importance. But it shows a tendency, it is an example of a tendency. And this is example is his assertion "No position can escape such given-ness, not even the most radical skepticism." Page 102. This mention of skepticism heads in the wrong direction. If Hanna had wished to commend his veridicalism, he should have said "no position can escape given-ness, not even Hegelianism" for it is the latter that is better known of 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. However, whatever the readers think, it seems to this reviewer that Hanna's 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 neither shows how this principle can be deduced from something more ultimate, nor how a state of affairs can be identified. Unfortunately connecting presuppositionalism with Karl Popper and his disciple, W. W. Barkley III, all of which you find on pages 94 and 95 if you're looking at the book.

Audience: ??? do that with first principles?

Do what?

Audience: ???

You have to say what they are. You have to write your axioms down. And he doesn't. I am assuming that he regards a state of affairs as one of his first principles, but he doesn't say it. In fact, if he said it he'd be contradicting himself because he doesn't want to be a presuppositionalist. Do I make myself clear? The kind of system I want is a system where you state your axioms and deduce your conclusions. He does not state his axioms, and he says he doesn't have any, and yet he seems to assume, without any proof, that there is such a thing as a state of affairs. At least, he doesn't define what a state of affairs is, and what we have seen already it apparently means that we can't know any state of affairs. We only have a picture of it and we don't have the real thing.

Unfortunately connecting presuppositionalism with Karl Popper. And you see here is another case that indicates to me that I have correctly understood what he means by presuppositionalism because he is now contrasting it with Karl Popper. And if you know what Karl Popper said well then that explains this.

Unfortunately connecting presuppositionalism with Karl Popper and his disciple Barkley, Hanna stated that, and this is on page 94, 95, "The attempt of non-justificationalism to dispense with irrefutable starting points is a failure, because — I've omitted a few words and put in the word "because," it doesn't alter the sense as you will see — let me read it over again, "The attempt of non-justificationalism 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." 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, at least in his view, thought he 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 the 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 2 and 3 on pages 95 and 96 insist on given-ness. 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 said they weren't givens. He further critcizes his opponents on the ground that the "Operate with a principle of adequacy that is logically prior to the apprehension and utilization of Biblical statements." "Therefore the formal principles function as a neutral criterion." This is on page 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 declaritive 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 axioms can ever be deduced from anything else, they too remain axiomatic. At any rate, logic is Biblical, not neutral. And some where or other I try to show that logic is the, to use sort of a metaphorical term, logic is the architecture of God's mind.

Strangely, Hanna almost always avoids the term and the idea of 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. You might remember in my first lecture, the first written lecture, I tried to emphasize that apologetics was interested in a system of truth. Not disjointed truths that are all confused and unsystematized. We're interested in a system of truth. And Hanna doesn't seem to recognize this. 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, if he had 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. Now didn't one of you say that he used, he asserted that logic was the presupposition or something? Well, now look at page 98 where he denies that. He says, "The principle of non-contradiction cannot be postulated simply becaues it is a necessary condition of every, and he underlined the word every, simply becaues it is a necessary condition of every act of presupposition or postulation."

This "because" seems to have no force. If truth is a logical system, its first axiom must be the law of contradiction, or the law of identity which is really the same thing. Even non-presuppositionalists and non-Christians try to axiomatize logic.