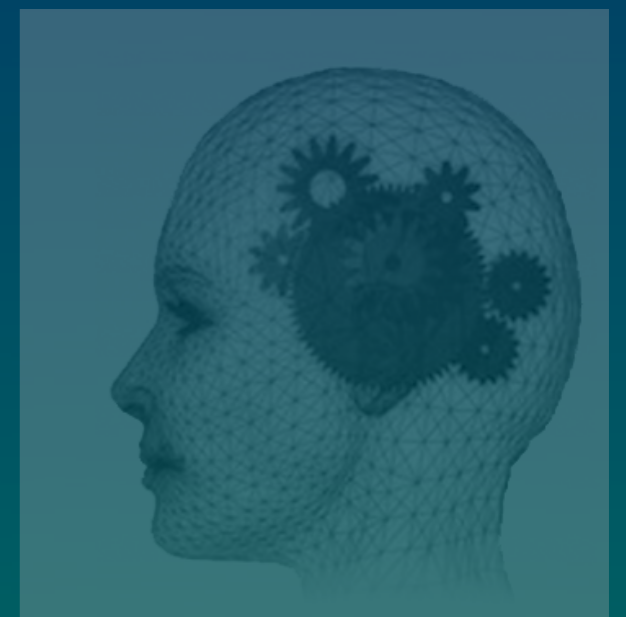

The Islamic Mindset

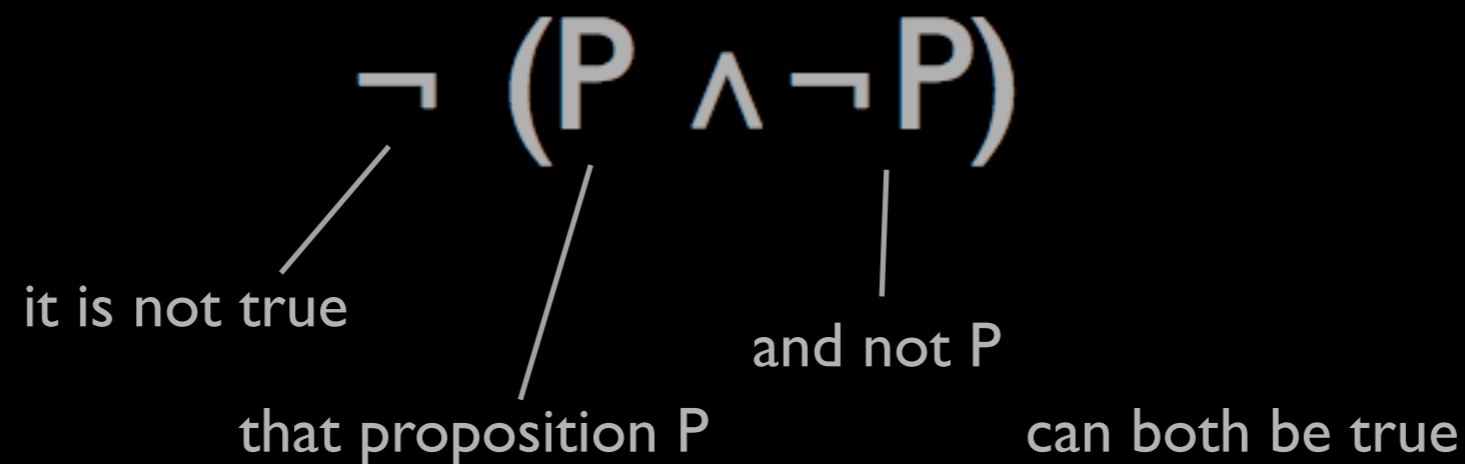
Epistemology and Truth

http://www.geocities.com/elf_sopron2005/



Evangelism to Muslims,
be it debate or dialogue,
involves **truth claims**

The Law of Non-Contradiction



*How do we know
what we know?*

EPISTEMOLOGY

A key issue is **justification**:

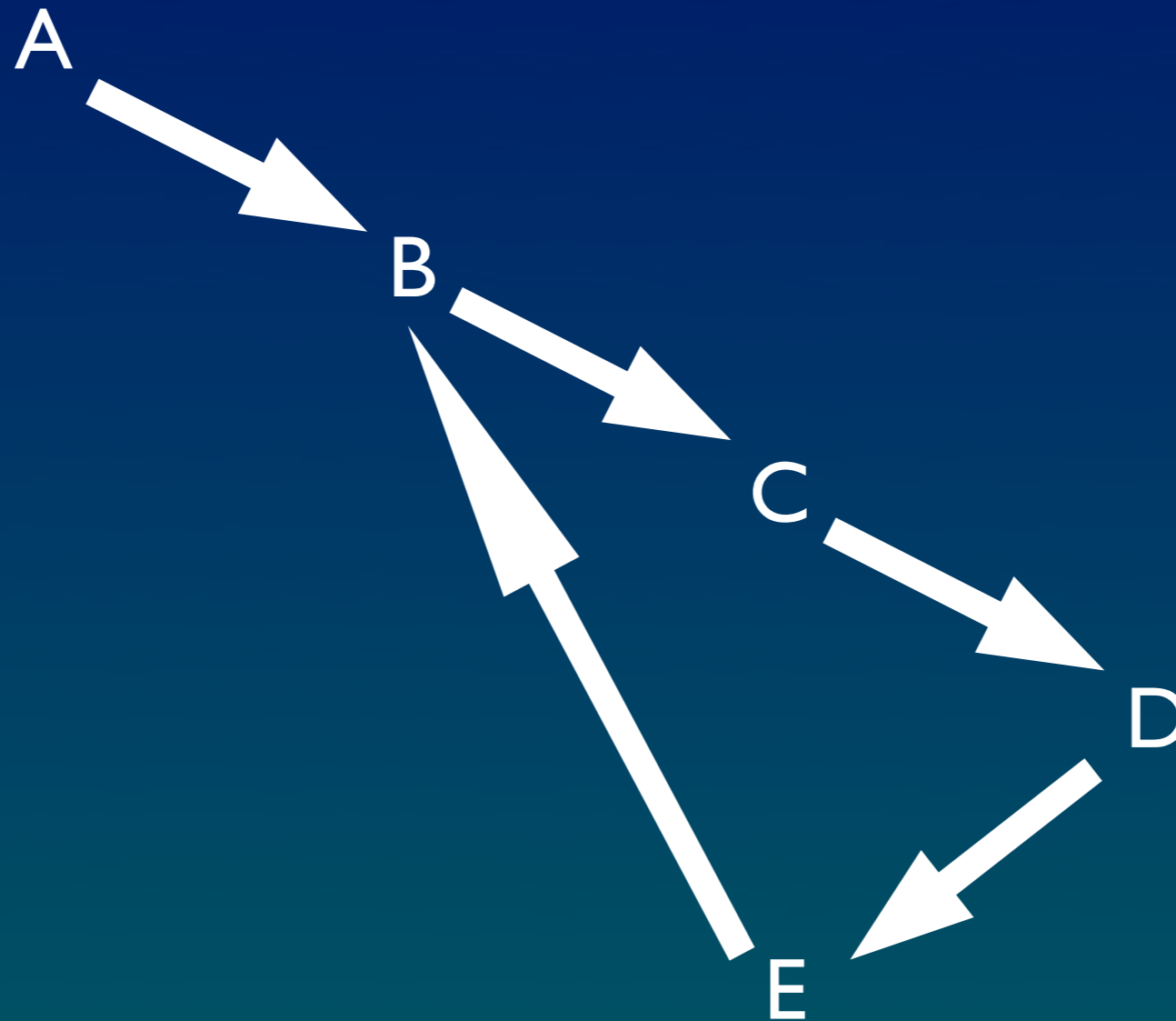
how can I demonstrate that I am justified in believing X?

Christian Apologetics and Justification

- Christian approaches to apologetics have traditionally used an **evidentialist** model of justification
- X is shown to be true by appeal to Y and Z
- This can lead to two problems: **circularity** or **infinite regress**



The Problem of Circularity



A is true because of B because of C because of D because of E because of B

The Problem of Circularity

- **“The Qur’an is a heavenly book.”**
- *“How do you know?”*
- **“Because it was revealed to Allah’s prophet, Muhammad.”**
- *“How you can be sure that Muhammad was a prophet?”*
- **“Because Allah demonstrated his prophethood by a miracle.”**
- *“What was that miracle?”*
- **“The Qur’an.”**
- *“Why is the Qur’an a miracle?”*

Repeat ad infinitum

The Infinite Regress Problem

B^1 because B^2 because B^3 because B^4 ... because B^∞

Foundationalism

Two types of belief

Ordinary beliefs

Basic beliefs

- Self evident
- Immediate



René Descartes
(1596-1650)

“Cogito ergo sum”
“I think, therefore I am”

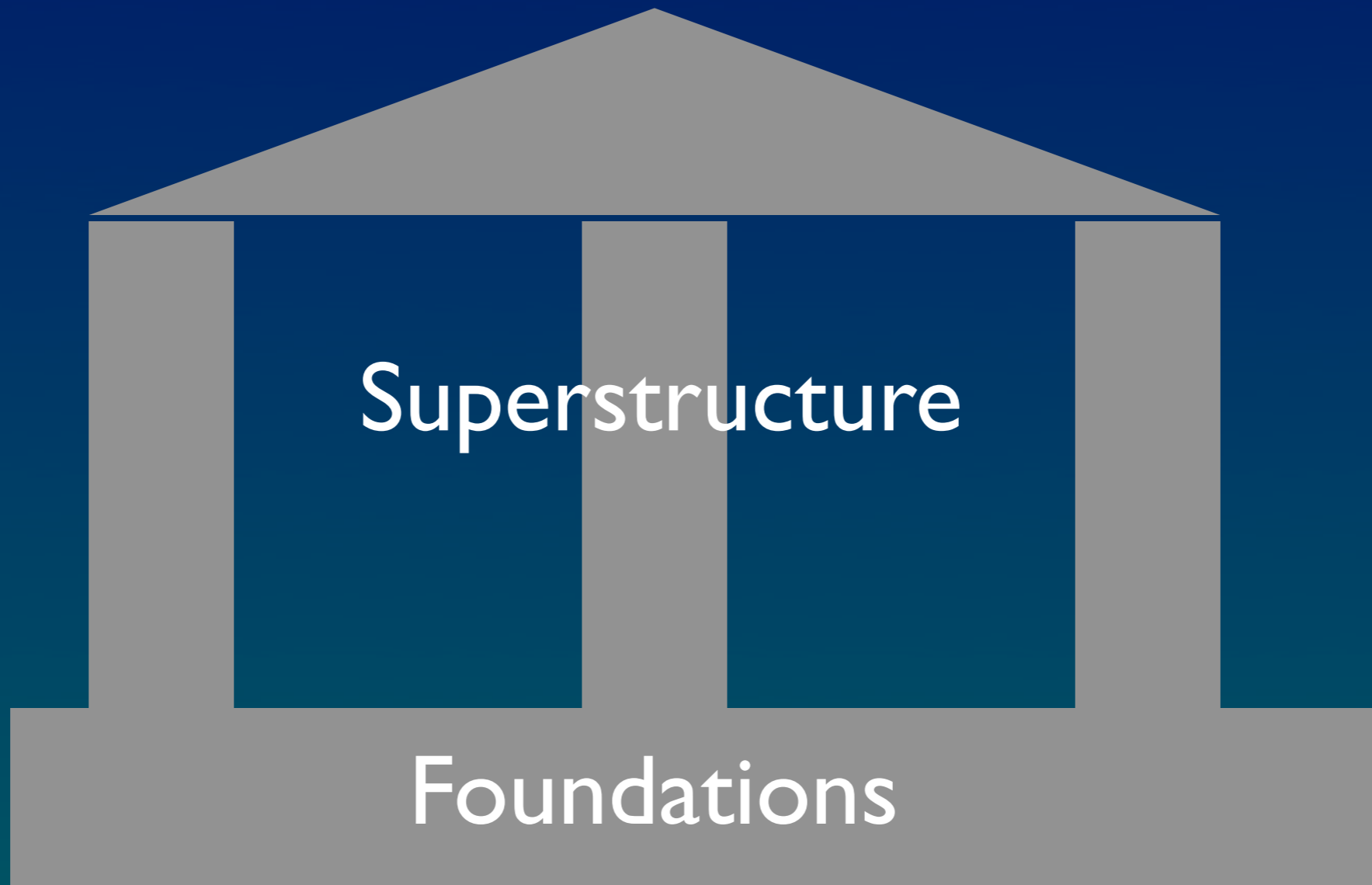
Reformed Epistemology

- Francis Schaeffer
- Cornelius Van Til
- Alvin Plantinga

‘To ask whether the triune God of Scripture exists and whether the space-time world is what it is because of this God, is to presuppose that abstract possibility is back of God ... The God of Scripture is back of all possible eventuation in the space-time world.’

Cornelius van Til cited in D. Z. Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism*,
(London: Routledge, 1988) p.11

A Christian View of Epistemology



Islamic Epistemology and Justification

- Islam shares some features with a Christian approach to epistemology
- Muslims tend to work with some form of **foundationalism**
- But there are also important **differences**
- We need to be aware of these, or we risk talking past one another



I. Little division between ordinary and basic beliefs

Muslims place a far wider range of beliefs into the basic belief category than Christians do

For example: the majority of their doctrines — the existence of Allah, his attributes, the divine nature of the Qur'an, the prophethood of Muhammad

This why questioning these beliefs has occurred to few Muslims

It is also why they often react to our questions with hostility; you are challenging the very heart of their epistemology

2. Islam as *a priori* true

- Muslims consider Islam to be *a priori* true as an entire system.
- Witness for example the tendency to speak not of *converts* but *reverts*.
- And how the Qur'an describes all of the prophets before Muhammad as *Muslims*

**This means the Muslim mindset
will filter out many questions
simply because Islam *is* true**

It is not that Muslims are blinkered, or
deliberately ignoring issues; rather these
questions are *non issues*, given that the
truth of the *overall system* is assumed

3. Islam as *self-evidently* true

- If all the major doctrines of Islam are basic beliefs, if the whole Islamic system is *a priori* true, then logically Islam must be self-evident (of the same order of statement as $2+2=4$).
- For a Muslim, the Qur'an is so clear, its message so self-evidently true, that all one has to do is to read it and one will become a Muslim.

**No wonder that Muslims react
so forcefully against those who
have read the Qur'an**

4. The wilful ignorance of the disbeliever

- If Islam is self-evidently true, then those who have looked into it and have rejected it have done so wilfully, or because Allah or Satan has blinded them.
- There is simply no way that somebody could examine Islam in all fairness and decide it is false.
- If they could, it would throw the claims for Islam's self-evident nature into question.

5. Shame and honour

- For Muslims, defending Islam is a matter of honour.
- To show weakness, doubt, or to ask questions of faith is to bring shame upon you and Islam.
- Therefore, however strong the arguments of your opponent, you must not show any wavering.

For the Muslim mindset, emotion is strongly bound up with intellect and reason. This is a mystery to post-Kantian Westerners.

So How Do We Respond as Christians?

- Continuously ask yourself the question, *why is this person arguing like this?*
- Look for the hidden assumptions.
- Be bold and challenge them on their basic beliefs.
- Be prepared to defend what you believe.
- Help Muslims to see the interconnectedness of many of their beliefs.

Conclusions

- The different basic beliefs of Christians and Muslims mean we often end up talking past one another.
- We need to understand why our Muslim friends think the way they do.
- Unless we ask epistemological questions, we will be much less effective.

We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

2 Cor 10:5

- Basic beliefs are not beyond challenge or question.
- Plantinga observes two basic beliefs may clash.
- Muslims may even find such a clash *within* their own system (especially if we help!)
- Basic beliefs can be tested against the ‘real world’.
- A good example is *jihad* with moderates.
- The aim is to show the basic belief does not fit the world.
- The task is to force a clash and create cracks in the foundations.

