

The Borrowed Capital Fallacy

Presuppositionalism, Transcendental Overreach, and the Public Ownership of Rational Norms

Phil Stilwell

Independent Scholar

ORCID: 0009-0009-3725-8682

Revised August 2026

Central claim

When the generic charge that non-Christians “borrow” logic, induction, or morality from Christianity is used as an objection against a critic, it requires two arguments: an exclusive-grounding bridge showing that Christianity alone makes the relevant norm possible, and an attribution bridge showing that using the norm commits this critic to Christianity. The borrowing metaphor by itself establishes neither bridge, so it does not yet warrant that dialectical accusation. This leaves Christian accounts of rationality and carefully argued local critiques open; it rejects a universal shortcut, not every transcendental argument.

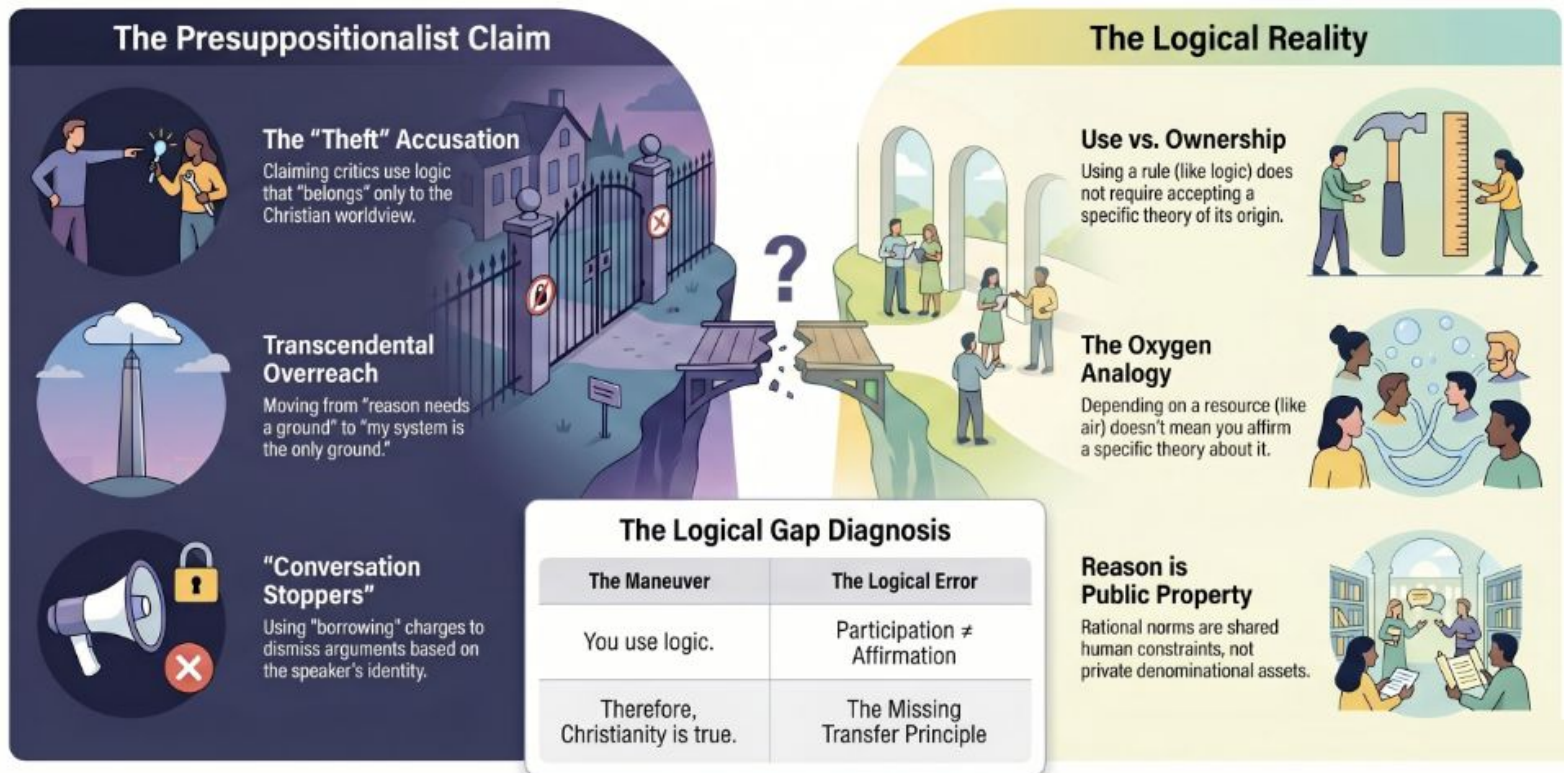
Preview: The accusation needs two bridges

Observed practice	Exclusive-grounding bridge	Attribution bridge	Warranted result
A non-Christian reasons with logical, epistemic, or moral norms.	Christianity must be shown to ground that exact norm adequately and uniquely.	The critic’s actual commitments must be shown to entail Christianity or contradict its denial.	Until both bridges are defended, rational use is answerability to a norm, not illicit borrowing from Christianity.

A local argument may expose a contradiction in one critic’s worldview. The stronger claim that every non-Christian act of reasoning is borrowed capital requires a unique ground and a valid commitment relation for every relevant norm and user.

Visual preview:

The Borrowed Capital Fallacy: Is Reason Private Property?



The gated left side depicts the theft accusation and its power to stop conversation; the open right side separates using a rule from accepting one theory of its origin. The center panel marks the missing transfer from “you use logic” to “Christianity is true”. This image illustrates the inferential gap. It does not establish what ultimately grounds rational norms, which remains a separate comparative question.

Abstract

Presuppositional apologetics often argues that a non-Christian who uses logic, induction, or moral judgment is relying on resources that make sense only within Christianity. The strongest version is not the crude claim that the critic secretly affirms Christian doctrine. It is that Christianity uniquely makes rational practice possible and that denying Christianity while reasoning is therefore inconsistent. That challenge deserves a stronger answer than the observation that people can use rules without knowing their origin.

This paper separates five claims that the borrowing metaphor compresses: use of a norm, answerability to it, its metaphysical ground, Christianity's alleged status as its unique ground, and the critic's alleged inferential commitment to Christianity. A generic borrowing charge succeeds as an objection against a critic only if it establishes two bridges. The *exclusive-grounding bridge* must rule out serious alternative accounts and identify the Christian God-concept rather than generic theism or some thinner metaphysics. The *attribution bridge* must show that a particular critic's actual commitments, together with the norm used, entail Christianity or contradict its denial. Leading presuppositional strategies may expose local tensions in some worldviews, but the borrowing slogan does not by itself establish either bridge.

The result is bounded. It does not show that Christian metaphysics is false, that rational norms lack an ultimate explanation, or that every transcendental argument fails. It shows that metaphysical dependence is not automatically inferential commitment and that a worldview cannot gain exclusive ownership of public rational norms by declaring its rivals unable to use them. Presuppositionalism must identify the norm, defend the modal necessity, compare alternatives reciprocally, and state what would count against its exclusivity claim.

Keywords: presuppositionalism; transcendental arguments; borrowed capital; rational norms; epistemic normativity; public reason; apologetics

1 The Strongest Charge Under Examination

Presuppositional apologetics begins from a serious insight: an argument does not float free of every background commitment. Reasoning depends on standards of inference, concepts of truth and error, expectations about an ordered world, and norms governing what one ought to believe. Van Til treats the Christian system as the precondition for intelligible predication, and Bahnsen develops this strategy as a transcendental argument intended to show the impossibility of the contrary. Frame and Oliphint preserve the rejection of autonomous neutrality while giving evidence, persuasion, and practical dialogue larger roles (Van Til 2008; Bahnsen 1998; Frame 2015; Oliphint 2022). The historical relation between Van Til's method and post-Kantian idealism is complex, but the ambition is plain: Christianity is offered not as one hypothesis within an otherwise neutral field but as what makes the field of rational assessment possible (McConnel 2005).

For clarity, a *God-concept* is a specified conception of a deity, with enough attributes and doctrinal content to distinguish it from other conceptions. The target here is the presuppositional claim that the Christian God-concept disclosed in Scripture uniquely grounds rational norms. The paper does not treat every Christian defense of reason as presuppositional, nor every presuppositionalist as using the borrowing metaphor in the same way.

The weak reconstruction of the charge says: "You use logic; therefore you affirm Christianity." A defender can reject that formulation immediately. The contention is usually deeper. On the presuppositional account, the non-Christian may deny Christianity explicitly while living in a world that is intelligible only because Christianity is true. The critic's reasoning is then said to reveal a practical dependence and an internal failure: the stated worldview cannot supply the conditions that the critic's practice requires. Suppression or self-deception may explain why the dependence is not acknowledged.

That stronger claim cannot be answered merely by noting that a person can depend on oxygen without believing in oxygen. The analogy distinguishes dependence from belief, but the presuppositionalist already grants the difference. The real questions are whether Christianity has been shown to be the *unique* necessary ground and whether dependence of a practice on its true ground makes a particular speaker inconsistent. Those are separate bridges.

A purely conditional statement has a smaller burden: “If Christianity is true and uniquely grounds reason, non-Christians reason within a reality they misunderstand.” That statement describes metaphysical dependence under its antecedent. It does not yet expose an inconsistency in the critic’s commitments, defeat the critic’s argument, or supply evidence that the antecedent is true. The present paper targets the borrowing charge when it is asked to perform that stronger dialectical work.

The burden in one sentence

A borrowed-capital accusation used against a critic is warranted only after Christianity has been shown to be the unique adequate ground of the exact norm in use and the critic’s actual commitments have been shown to conflict with denying Christianity; observing rational practice establishes neither result by itself.

2 Five Claims Hidden Inside Borrowed Capital

The metaphor of borrowing moves easily among relations that must be kept apart. Table 1 distinguishes them. The order matters because each later claim adds argumentative content that the earlier claim does not contain.

Table 1: Five claims hidden inside borrowed capital.

Claim	What it says	What it can establish	What it does not establish
Use	A person makes an inference, evaluates evidence, or offers a moral judgment.	The person participates in a rule-governed practice.	Which metaphysical account of the rule is true.
Answerability	The person’s move can be correct, mistaken, supported, or defeated under the norm.	Criticism may assess the move by standards the practice recognizes.	That the person endorses a theory of the norm’s source.
Ground	Some fact, structure, practice, faculty, or reality explains why the norm has authority.	A metaphysical or explanatory proposal can be compared with rivals.	That only one proposal is adequate.
Exclusivity	Christianity alone can supply the relevant ground.	If defended, rival accounts fail an important adequacy test.	That every user is inferentially committed to Christianity.
Attribution	This person’s commitments plus the norm entail Christianity or contradict its denial.	If demonstrated, a local charge of inconsistency may follow.	A universal verdict about all non-Christians or all rational norms.

The first two claims are close to the surface of ordinary argument. To assert that an inference is valid is to undertake commitments about what follows and what would count against it. Inferentialist accounts describe assertion as entry into a practice of commitments and entitlements; objectivist accounts instead emphasize standards that bind reasoners regardless of social acceptance (Brandom 1994; Boghossian 2006). These approaches disagree about the explanation, but both distinguish being answerable to a norm from owning it as private property.

The third claim asks a real philosophical question: why do rational norms bind at all? Answers range over realism, constitutivism, social-pragmatic accounts, naturalist proposals, Platonist accounts, and

several forms of theism. Cuneo argues that rejecting moral facts threatens epistemic facts through a companion-in-guilt relation; Korsgaard develops an account grounded in reflective agency and autonomy (Cuneo 2007; Korsgaard 1996). Citing these alternatives does not establish them. It establishes that the grounding question is occupied by structured rival theories, not by an empty space that Christianity wins by default.

Exclusivity and attribution do the decisive work. If a Christian account explains rational normativity well, that is evidence for adequacy. It is not yet proof that every alternative is impossible. Even unique adequacy would describe what makes rational practice possible; a further argument is needed to show which propositions a particular user is logically or rationally committed to accepting. The borrowing metaphor hides this final movement by making dependence sound like a debt knowingly incurred from an identified owner.

3 What a Transcendental Argument Can Establish

A transcendental argument begins with something the interlocutor cannot easily abandon—experience, self-consciousness, meaningful judgment, or rational practice—and asks what must be true for it to be possible. Strawson’s reconstruction of Kant made this form prominent in twentieth-century philosophy, while Cassam and Stern map its different ambitions and limits (Strawson 1966; Cassam 1999; Stern 2000). The form is legitimate. The pressure lies in the word *must*.

Suppose an argument begins with the fact that we make meaningful judgments. A modest conclusion might identify concepts or commitments we cannot avoid while judging. An ambitious conclusion says that a particular mind-independent reality must exist. Stroud’s central objection is that a condition on how we must think does not automatically become a condition on how reality must be. Perhaps a belief that some condition obtains, rather than the condition itself, is enough for the practice in question (Stroud 1968). Later transcendental arguments often accept more modest conclusions about indispensable beliefs or conceptual commitments (Stern 2000).

Presuppositionalism adds a still more specific ambition. It must move not only from rational practice to a world-directed condition but from that condition to a richly specified Christian system. Three modal steps should therefore be distinguished:

1. **Practice necessity:** some condition is required for the rational practice as described.
2. **World necessity:** the condition must obtain in reality, rather than merely be represented or assumed by practitioners.
3. **Christian identification:** the necessary reality is uniquely the Christian God-concept, including enough doctrinal content to exclude generic theism and other accounts.

A proof of the first step is not a proof of the third. The identification step may be possible, but its work cannot be supplied by the phrase “the preconditions of intelligibility”. Logic, induction, moral obligation, conceptual unity, and scientific regularity are also different targets. A single label does not show that they share one grounding relation, much less that one detailed theology uniquely bears it.

4 Bridge One: Exclusive Grounding

The exclusivity bridge is stronger than the claim that Christianity offers an account of rational norms. It says that no non-Christian account can do so adequately. That universal negative is difficult because candidate accounts fail or succeed for different reasons. A realist may treat logical validity or epistemic reasons as objective features not constituted by anyone’s attitudes. A constitutivist may connect some norms to the conditions of agency or reflective endorsement. An inferentialist may explain discursive

authority through reciprocal practices of commitment and correction. A theist may ground rational order in a divine mind but reject specifically Christian revelation. A Christian philosopher may defend warranted belief through proper cognitive function rather than through a generic borrowing charge (Boghossian 2006; Cuneo 2007; Korsgaard 1996; Brandom 1994; Plantinga 2000).

These positions have costs. Realists owe an account of how normative facts fit into reality and how we know them. Constitutivists must show that the relevant standards genuinely bind rather than merely describe agency. Social-pragmatic accounts must preserve the possibility that an entire community reasons badly. Naturalists face hard questions about normativity and reliable induction. Generic theism must explain why a personal source helps and why its properties are sufficient. Christian accounts must show why their extra doctrinal content improves the explanation rather than merely accompanying it.

That reciprocal scrutiny is exactly what the exclusivity claim requires. It is not enough to demand ultimate explanation from rivals while allowing one's own system to stop at revelation or self-attestation. Nor is it enough to find a difficulty in one form of naturalism and conclude that every non-Christian option has failed. The relevant comparison is many-to-one: the Christian account must meet its own explanatory burdens and outperform the strongest relevant alternatives for the exact norm under discussion.

Presuppositionalists sometimes answer that rival theories can describe rational norms only because the Christian account is true beneath them. But this repeats the exclusivity conclusion at the level of explanation. If Christianity is already assumed to be the condition of every successful description, rival success will automatically be redescribed as dependence on Christianity. The strategy becomes evidentially inert unless some public difference distinguishes a world in which Christianity uniquely grounds reason from a world in which another account does.

5 Bridge Two: Attribution and Inconsistency

Even if Christianity were the true ground of rational norms, it would not follow that every user is internally inconsistent in denying it. Two meanings of *commitment* must be separated.

An *ontological dependence* is a relation between a practice and whatever in reality makes it possible or correct. The user may be unaware of that relation. An *inferential commitment* is a relation among propositions the user accepts, together with rules the user is responsible for accepting. A person can be ontologically dependent on a condition without having premises from which that condition follows. If a Christian metaphysics is true, a non-Christian may reason within the reality that metaphysics describes while holding false beliefs about its source. Falsity is not automatically contradiction.

A local inconsistency argument is still possible. Imagine a critic who says that every norm is merely a personal preference and then condemns an opponent as objectively irrational. The critic's universal subjectivism conflicts with the authority claimed for the criticism. A presuppositionalist can expose that tension. Yet the immediate conclusion is that these commitments do not fit together. It does not follow without the exclusivity bridge that Christianity is the only repair. The critic might abandon universal subjectivism, adopt a realist view, restrict the original claim, or accept another account.

Attribution also requires attention to logical closure. People rarely believe every remote consequence of what they believe. To accuse someone fairly, an argument should identify the accepted premises, show the relevant implication in accessible steps, and permit correction of either the premises or the conclusion. "Your worldview cannot account for reason" is not yet such a demonstration. It names the verdict that the demonstration must earn.

Theological diagnoses of suppression or rebellion may belong to an internal Christian account of unbelief. They cannot replace the attribution argument in a public exchange. If disagreement itself is treated as confirming suppression, then every objection becomes evidence for the theory and no

response can count against it. That self-sealing structure changes the debate from assessing reasons to classifying the speaker. The result may preserve a theology of disagreement, but it gives no independent reason to an interlocutor who does not already accept that theology.

6 Public Norms Without Metaphysical Neutrality

The title's phrase "public ownership" is intentionally provocative, but it needs discipline. Rational norms are not property in a literal legal sense. Calling them public means three narrower things.

First, their *application is reciprocal*. A contradiction does not cease to be a contradiction when made by an apologist, an atheist, a Buddhist, or a Platonist. Second, their *assessment is shareable*. Participants can ask what follows, what evidence supports a claim, and what would defeat it. Third, their *authority is not granted by denominational membership*. A person does not gain permission to reason by first signing a metaphysical ownership statement.

None of this assumes a view from nowhere. Every reasoner begins with beliefs, practices, and inherited concepts. Public accountability means that those starting points may themselves be made explicit, compared, criticized, and revised. It is compatible with the possibility that one metaphysical account is true. What it rejects is self-exemption: one party may not use shared norms to disqualify all rivals and then refuse reciprocal assessment because those norms allegedly belong to that party.

Brandom's language of commitments and entitlements is useful here even for readers who reject his full theory. Assertion places a claim in a network of what follows from it, what conflicts with it, and what can support it (Brandom 1994). Boghossian's defense of objective epistemic standards pulls in a different metaphysical direction, but it likewise treats rational assessment as binding beyond local endorsement (Boghossian 2006). These theories disagree about grounding. Their disagreement itself illustrates why participation in rational practice cannot identify one proprietary metaphysics without additional argument.

7 The Strongest Presuppositional Replies

The borrowed-capital critique should not end with slogans of its own. Four replies deserve direct answers.

7.1 Ultimate standards involve circularity

A defender may argue that every ultimate standard must use itself in its own defense. Reason cannot be defended without reasoning, and evidence cannot be defended without evidence. Christian self-attestation is therefore not uniquely circular.

Some reflexivity is unavoidable. But unavoidable reliance on reasoning does not validate every system built with it. The question is whether a specific Christian conclusion follows, whether it explains the norms at issue, and whether it survives comparison with rivals. A compass cannot be tested without using some standards of direction, but this does not make every compass equally accurate. The existence of ultimate starting points narrows what a proof can do; it does not erase distinctions among coherence, reach, explanatory cost, and corrigibility.

7.2 The contrary is impossible

The strongest Bahnsen-style strategy aims to show that denying Christianity destroys the possibility of proof, predication, or intelligibility (Bahnsen 1998). If successful, this would be more than an inference from ignorance. The difficulty is that modal force must be demonstrated, not announced. Showing that one rival account fails does not establish the impossibility of every contrary. Showing that we cannot

currently imagine a satisfactory rival does not establish necessary truth. And defining intelligibility in Christian terms guarantees the conclusion only by placing it in the premise.

An impossibility argument should specify the exact target class, derive a contradiction for each relevant alternative or establish a general theorem that covers them, and explain why the Christian account escapes the same standard. Until then, “impossibility of the contrary” is a research program or conclusion, not a shortcut.

7.3 There is no neutral common ground

The present argument does not require neutral foundations accepted without qualification by everyone. It requires reciprocal burdens. A Christian may argue from Christian premises and invite assessment of their consequences. A non-Christian may do the same. The disagreement can then concern truth, coherence, explanatory power, experience, or historical evidence. Public reasoning is not premise-free reasoning; it is reasoning in which no party’s disputed premise becomes immune merely by being called a precondition of dispute.

Intramural Reformed criticism also shows that rejecting Van Tillian method need not mean rejecting Christian revelation. Christian thinkers disagree about natural knowledge, common ground, warrant, and apologetic method (Plantinga 2000; Haines 2020). That diversity blocks an easy equation between criticism of presuppositionalism and hostility to Christianity.

7.4 Suppression explains resistance

A theological account may predict that some people resist truths they encounter. The prediction does not determine which disagreement is suppression and which is a legitimate objection. If both acceptance and rejection confirm the same diagnosis, the diagnosis cannot discriminate between a sound argument and a protected mistake. An apologist may retain the doctrine internally, but it cannot do the public work of answering the objection whose rejection it explains.

8 A Dilemma for the Borrowing Accusation

The presuppositional challenge can be read modestly or ambitiously. Table 2 shows the benefit and price of each route.

Table 2: Two versions of the challenge and their price.

Version	What it can legitimately do	What it must show	Evidential price
Modest internal critique	Expose a conflict between one critic’s stated worldview and the norm invoked in a particular argument.	The critic’s actual premises, the norm used, and the contradiction or unsupported step.	It yields a local correction, not Christianity’s universal ownership of reason.
Ambitious transcendental proof	Establish that Christianity uniquely makes rational practice possible for every user.	World-directed necessity, unique Christian identification, exhaustive defeat of alternatives, and the attribution bridge.	It bears a much larger modal and comparative burden than the borrowing slogan displays.

The dilemma is not that either route is worthless. The modest route can produce useful criticism. It asks whether a person’s asserted theory undercuts the standards that person invokes. That is ordinary philosophical work, and presuppositionalists may sometimes do it well. The ambitious route would be important if completed. It would identify a necessary condition of rational practice and support a specific worldview.

The problem arises when the modest route's evidence is paired with the ambitious route's conclusion. A local tension in one naturalist's account becomes the impossibility of every non-Christian account. A shared rational norm becomes Christian property. A metaphysical proposal becomes a personal accusation. The language of borrowing supplies the drama of a completed proof while hiding the uncompleted comparisons.

9 What a Disciplined Argument Must Show

A serious presuppositional argument can move beyond the slogan by answering five questions.

1. **Which norm?** Logical validity, epistemic obligation, induction, moral reasons, semantic content, and scientific regularity are not one object. The argument should identify the exact norm and the feature requiring explanation.
2. **Which necessity?** The defender should distinguish what a thinker must assume, what a practice requires, and what must exist in reality. The modal bridge between them needs defense.
3. **Why Christianity uniquely?** The argument should show why generic theism, non-Christian theism, realism, constitutivism, inferentialism, and other live accounts fail, and why specifically Christian content solves the problem.
4. **Why this critic is inconsistent?** The defender should state the critic's actual commitments and show the contradiction or entailment without substituting a theological diagnosis for the inference.
5. **What would count against the claim?** A theory that redescribes every rational success as dependence and every objection as suppression cannot learn from the exchange. The defender should state a failed prediction, unresolved norm, or rival success that would weaken exclusivity.

This standard is demanding because the accusation is demanding. To say that one worldview alone makes rational criticism possible is not merely to offer a coherent internal story. It is to make a universal and exclusive claim about all rival reasoning. The burden should match the reach.

The constructive alternative is not silence about foundations. Christian philosophers may defend divine explanations of normativity, develop accounts of proper function and warrant, argue from contingency or moral realism, and criticize rival views. Non-Christians must answer their own grounding problems as well. The shared discipline is simple: identify the conclusion, display the bridges, compare alternatives under reciprocal standards, and allow the argument to risk correction.

10 Conclusion

The borrowed-capital accusation gains force by turning the critic's use of reason into evidence that Christianity is already presupposed. Its strongest form is not defeated by saying that users need not know a resource's origin. It is defeated as a shortcut because two missing bridges remain.

The exclusive-grounding bridge must show that the Christian God-concept, rather than generic theism or a serious non-theistic account, uniquely makes the exact norm possible. The attribution bridge must show that a particular critic's actual commitments plus use of the norm entail Christianity or contradict its denial. A local worldview critique may establish the second relation in a particular case without establishing the first. A Christian metaphysics may be true without every non-Christian user being internally inconsistent. Neither result licenses the generic theft charge.

Rational norms are public in application and accountability, not necessarily ungrounded or metaphysically neutral. They bind arguments across communities and expose every worldview to correction. Presuppositionalism can enter that common space and argue for Christian explanations there. What it

cannot do is acquire the space by naming everyone else a borrower before the ownership case has been made.

The conclusion is therefore firm but limited: the borrowed-capital argument as commonly presented does not yet justify its universal accusation. It does not prove Christian metaphysics false or rule out a future transcendental argument that establishes both bridges. It requires the apologist to replace proprietary rhetoric with a public comparison whose standards apply to every side.

A Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

A.1 Plain-language reconstruction

- P1.** If the generic borrowed-capital accusation is publicly justified as an objection against a critic, then the argument publicly justifies both required bridges: Christianity uniquely grounds the relevant rational norm, and this person's use of the norm commits that person to Christianity or makes denial inconsistent.
- P2.** In the borrowed-capital argument as commonly presented, at least one of those bridges is not publicly justified. The metaphor does not rule out the relevant alternative grounds, and it does not derive Christianity from the critic's actual commitments.
- P3.** Therefore, the generic borrowed-capital accusation is not publicly justified by that argument as presented.

This conclusion says *not yet justified*; it does not say *necessarily false*. A future argument could overturn the result by establishing both bridges without defining the Christian conclusion into its standard of rationality.

A.2 Symbols

- x : the particular person whose reasoning is being criticized.
- N : the particular rational norm being used, such as non-contradiction or evidential support.
- C : the specified Christian worldview under examination.
- $U_x(N)$: person x uses norm N in an argument or judgment.
- $E_C(N)$: worldview C is the unique adequate ground of norm N .
- K_x : the conjunction (the combined statement) of person x 's actual commitments that are relevant to the argument.
- $B_x(N, C)$: the borrowed-capital accusation against x , concerning N and C , is warranted as an objection to x 's reasoning.
- J : the justification operator; $J(P)$ means that the public argument supplies adequate justification for proposition P .

A.3 Displayed inference

$$J(B_x(N, C)) \rightarrow [J(E_C(N)) \wedge J([U_x(N) \wedge K_x] \rightarrow C)] \quad (1)$$

$$\neg J(E_C(N)) \vee \neg J([U_x(N) \wedge K_x] \rightarrow C) \quad (2)$$

$$\therefore \neg J(B_x(N, C)). \quad (3)$$

A.4 Line-by-line explanation

Line (1): the two-bridge requirement. Suppose the public argument really justifies accusing person x of borrowing norm N from Christian worldview C and uses that accusation against the person's reasoning. Then that same argument must justify both parts of the objection. First, it must justify $E_C(N)$: Christianity is not merely one possible explanation of the norm but its unique adequate ground. Second, it must justify the implication $[U_x(N) \wedge K_x] \rightarrow C$: this person's use of the norm, combined with this person's relevant actual commitments, makes Christianity follow. The conjunction symbol $\wedge$ means "and"; inside the brackets it joins use with the person's commitments, and between the two J statements it means that both bridges are required.

Line (2): the diagnosed gap. The disjunction symbol $\vee$ means "or". This line says that at least one required justification is absent. Either the argument has not publicly justified exclusive Christian grounding, or it has not publicly shown that the person's rational use plus actual commitments entail Christianity. Both may be absent; the formula requires only that at least one is.

Line (3): the bounded conclusion. If a justified borrowing accusation requires two justified bridges, and at least one bridge is not justified, then the accusation is not justified by that argument. The symbol $\neg$ means "not". Notice that the conclusion contains J : it concerns what the argument has justified. It does not assert $\neg E_C(N)$, which would say Christianity is not the unique ground, and it does not assert that no later argument could succeed.

A.5 Validity and premise support

The inference is deductively valid. To see why, assume the opposite of line (3): suppose $J(B_x(N, C))$ is true. Line (1) then gives both $J(E_C(N))$ and $J([U_x(N) \wedge K_x] \rightarrow C)$. But line (2) says that at least one of those two justifications is absent. The assumptions conflict, so the opposite of line (3) cannot be maintained while lines (1) and (2) are true.

Validity does not settle the premises. Line (1) is conceptual: it states what the borrowing accusation must contain if it is more than a metaphor. Line (2) is interpretive and defeasible: it reports the paper's assessment of the argument as commonly presented. A presuppositionalist can overturn this paper's conclusion by publicly defending $E_C(N)$ for the exact norm at issue and by deriving C from $U_x(N)$ together with the critic's relevant commitments K_x . Merely repeating that reason presupposes Christianity would restate the two claims rather than justify them.

References

- Bahnsen, Greg L. (1998). *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.
- Boghossian, Paul A. (2006). *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199287185.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199287185.001.0001).
- Brandom, Robert B. (1994). *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cassam, Quassim (1999). *Self and World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cuneo, Terence (2007). *The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199218837.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199218837.001.0001).
- Frame, John M. (2015). *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*. Ed. by Joseph E. Torres. 2nd ed. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.
- Haines, David, ed. (2020). *Without Excuse: Scripture, Reason, and Presuppositional Apologetics*. Leesburg, VA: Davenant Press.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. (1996). *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: [10.1017/CB09780511554476](https://doi.org/10.1017/CB09780511554476).
- McConnel, Timothy I. (2005). "The Influence of Idealism on the Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til." In: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48.3, pp. 557–588.
- Oliphint, K. Scott (2022). *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.
- Plantinga, Alvin (2000). *Warranted Christian Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press. DOI: [10.1093/0195131932.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/0195131932.001.0001).
- Stern, Robert (2000). *Transcendental Arguments and Scepticism: Answering the Question of Justification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: [10.1093/oso/9780198250531.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198250531.001.0001).
- Strawson, P. F. (1966). *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. London: Methuen.
- Stroud, Barry (1968). "Transcendental Arguments." In: *The Journal of Philosophy* 65.9, pp. 241–256. DOI: [10.2307/2024395](https://doi.org/10.2307/2024395).
- Van Til, Cornelius (2008). *The Defense of the Faith*. Ed. by K. Scott Oliphint. 4th ed. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.