

‘Defending a Thesis’: Pragmatic Acts in Contemporary Christian Apologetics

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Abstract—In this paper, I argue that the pragmeme ‘defending a thesis’ characterises Christian apologetics and that the various pragmatic acts performed are instantiations of this generalised situation type. Linguistic efforts have not really dealt with Christian apologetics generally, and specifically from a pragmatic perspective. This is the gap this paper hopes to fill. Furthermore, in the literature on pragmeme there is no study that focuses on the issue of ‘defending a thesis’. For data, ten purposively selected texts from five prominent and contemporary Christian apologists were studied and representative excerpts were analysed using insights from the theory of pragmeme/pragmatic acts. The study concludes that the various individual practs- *arguing, substantiating, disclaiming, authenticating, challenging, defending*- in Christian apologetics are instantiations of the pragmeme ‘defending a thesis’.

Index Terms—pragmeme, pract, pragmatic force, Christian apologetics, argument

I. INTRODUCTION

Studies on religious discourse have focused on its various shades and from different theoretical perspectives. For instance, Crystal (1965), Crystal and Davy (1969) consider the language of religion from a linguistic stylistic perspective; Samarin (1976) relying on Hymes’ (1962) Speaking grid examines the sociolinguistic constituents of typical religious community. Babatunde (2007) is a speech acts analysis of evangelical Christian sermons in Nigeria; Odebunmi (2007) is a stylistic analysis of electronic advertisements and Taiwo (2007) looks at tenor in electronic media discourse in Nigeria. Similarly, within the literature on pragmatic act theory no effort exists on its application to the analysis of Christian apologetics. Departing markedly from previous studies, therefore, the current paper examines pragmatic acts in Christian apologetics as means of realising the pragmeme ‘defending a thesis’. To the best of my knowledge the only linguistic endeavours on Christian apologetics are Inya (2010) and Inya (in press) which investigate the Generic Structure Potential of the discourse, among other things. The current paper is another original attempt to analyse Christian apologetics from the perspective of pragmeme/pragmatic act (Mey, 2001; Capone, 2005).

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: Section 2 presents an overview of Christian apologetics. Section 3 provides the theoretical base of the paper, which focuses on the theory of pragmeme/pragmatic act. The method adopted for this research as well as analysis appears in Section 4. This is afterwards followed by Section 5, the conclusion.

II. CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS: AN OVERVIEW

“Apologetics” is described as the defence of the Christian faith (Ken and Bowman, 2005). The word is derived from the Greek word *apologia*, which was originally used to refer to a speech made in defence of oneself or an answer given in reply to an accusation. In ancient Athens, it referred to a defence made in the courtroom as part of the normal judicial procedure. After the accusation, the defendant would be allowed to refute charges with a defence or reply (*apologia*). The accused person would then attempt to “speak away” (*apo*—away, *logia*—speech) the accusation. The classic example of such an *apologia* was Socrates’ defence against the charge of preaching strange gods, a defence reported by his most famous pupil, Plato, in a dialogue called *The Apology*.

In the literature, apologetics is said to have at least three functions or goals. Beattie (1903, p. 56) presents them as *defence* of Christianity as a system of belief; a *vindication* of the Christian worldview against its assailants such as atheists, agnostics etc., and a *refutation* of opposing systems and theories such as atheism, pantheism, deism etc. Reymond (1976, p. 5-7), however, presents four functions of apologetics. The first three are essentially the same as Beattie’s (1903). According to Reymond (1976), apologetics addresses objections to the Christian position; it provides an account of the foundations of the Christian faith by examining the theology and, epistemology of Christianity; thirdly, it challenges non-Christian systems, particularly in the area of epistemological justification; and finally, it seeks to persuade people of the truth of the Christian position.

III. THEORETICAL BASE

Pragmeme and Pragmatic Acts

The theory of pragmatic acts, a socio-cultural interactional view on pragmatics was proposed by Mey (2001). Generally, this approach is an alternative to the cognitive-philosophical perspective to pragmatics represented by neo-gricean pragmatics, relevance theory and speech act theory (Kecskes, 2010). Specifically, it is based on the premise that the speech act theory is “thought of atomistically, as wholly emanating from the individual” (Fairclough 1989, p. 9) and that it lacks an action theory. In other words, the seeming action in speech act stems from the individual’s intentions and the strategies they employ in achieving them. This, however, is idealistic as the ideal individual lives in a social world with opportunities and limitations that have bearings on their intention. Thus, as a socio-cultural interactional orientation towards language use, the pragmatic act theory promotes ‘the priority of socio-cultural and societal factors in meaning construction and comprehension’ (Kecskes, 2010, p. 1) and focuses heavily ‘on the interactional situation in which both speakers [writers] and hearers [readers] realize their aims’ (Mey, 2009, p. 751).

Mey (2001) describes this interactional situation as: ‘the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation as well as what is actually being said’ (p. 221). From the foregoing, it implies that utterance or speech act is only one factor which must work in concert with other situational/contextual factors for meaning realisation or for the performance of a pragmatic act. Thus, Mey (2001) argues that “there are no speech acts but only situated speech acts or instantiated pragmatic acts” (p. 218), as such the emphasis is on characterising a general situation prototype, which is called a *pragmeme*, and can be realised through individual pragmatic acts (Mey 2001, p. 221).

Mey (2001) presents this theory in a model of *pragmeme*:

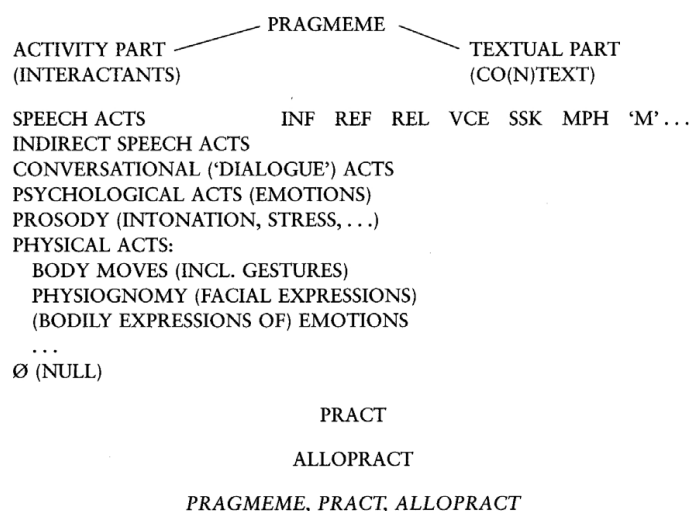


Figure 1: A Model of Pragmatic Acts (Mey 2001, p. 222)

In the model above, the column to the left itemises the various choices available to the language user for their communicative purposes. The column to the right represents elements found in the texts: 'INF' stands for 'inference', 'REF' for 'establishing a reference', 'REL' for 'relevance', 'VCE' for 'voice', 'SSK' for 'shared situation knowledge', 'MPH' for 'metaphor' and 'M' for 'metapragmatic joker'. It is the interaction of the elements on both sides of the schema that realises the pragmatic acts. The abstraction of a pragmatic act is the *pragmeme*, the instantiated or realised form is the *ipract* or *pract*. Mey (2001, p. 221) argue that "every *pract* is at the same time an *allopract*, that to say a concrete instantiation of a particular *pragmeme*".

According to Capone (2005), “A *pragmeme* is a situated speech act in which the rules of language and of society synergize in determining meaning, intended as a socially recognized object sensitive to social expectations about the situation in which the utterance to be interpreted is embedded (p. 1357). He further indicates that a *pragmeme* requires three types of embedding:

- The embedding of an utterance in a context of use, with an aim to determine the referential anchors that complete the propositional form of the utterance;
- the embedding in rules that systematically transform whatever gets said in a context into whatever is meant there, in conformity with the social constraints and rules bearing on the utterance in question;
- the embedding in the cotext, whose features are transferred onto the utterance by eliminating semantic or otherwise interpretative ambiguities and enriching further its (range of) interpretations, by making them more specific (Capone 2005, p.1357).

This requisite embedding of an utterance in the cotext and context is largely an interpretative process that enriches the propositional form of such utterance and assigns a particular contextual configuration that will make the meaning of the utterance more specific, as such discarding other alternative interpretations that may not be inferable from such a situational configuration. It is a norm of utterance interpretation that relies on the societal context of the utterance and

other cotextual elements. In the words of Capone (2005): “the norms for the interpretation of pragmemes come from a societal perspective on language” (p.1358).

Capone (2005) and Mey (2001) construe pragmemes as transformations utterances go through when acted upon by the forces of context, transformations that “reshape the original illocutionary value of a speech act by adding contextual layers of meaning, or even may change the illocutionary value of the speech act” (Capone, 2005, p. 1360). Such transformations according to Capone (2005) ‘are based on knowledge of a number of principled and conventional interactions between utterance meaning and certain contextual and situational configurations’ (p. 1360). Capone (2001) provides ample examples of the transformative effect of context on certain utterances and claims that within the context of a court, for instance, a declarative utterance, which should merely provide an assertion, can be transformed into a speech act with legal implications. Further examples of pragmemes are presented in Capone (2005), for instance, he illustrates how the utterance ‘I saw you’ when used in a classroom situation by a teacher to Michealango who whispers the answers to a question to his desk mate can be transformed into the pragmeme ‘stop prompting’.

Kecskes (2010, p. 2894) argues that ‘pragmemes represent situational prototypes to which there may be several pragmatic access routes (practs)’ and proposes that situationa-bound utterances (SUBs) are instances of pragmatic acts. He indicates that the pragmeme ‘inviting someone to take a seat’ can be concretely realised by the following SUBs: ‘Why don’t you sit down, Please take a seat; Sit down, please’.

Odebunmi (2006, 2008) have applied the theory of pragmatic acts to the analysis of proverbs in literary texts: Yerima’s *Yemoja Attahiru* and *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees* as well as Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods are to Blame*. Odebunmi (2008) claims that the proverbs in *The Gods* are used between a speaker and a hearer, and that they are roughly divided into: crisis motivated proverbs (CMP) and non-crisis motivated proverbs (NMP). The paper then focuses on CMP, which comprises social crisis-motivated proverbs (CMP: soc) and political crisis-motivated proverbs (CMP: Pol) ‘the reason being that the events in the play are predominantly crisis-driven’ (Odebunmi, 2008, p. 78). The users of the proverbs draw on psychological acts, which interact with contextual features such as reference (REF), metaphor (MPH), inference (INF), shared situational knowledge (SSK), shared cultural knowledge (SCK) and relevance (REL) to produce the following practs: *counselling, cautioning, accusing, challenging, veiling, persuading, prioritizing, encouraging, threatening and admitting*.

The current paper departs from the foregoing as it applies the theory of pragmeme/pragmatic acts to Christian apologetics. I argue here, as I did elsewhere (Inya, 2010 and Inya, in press), that Christian apologetics belong to the context/discourse type of argumentation as such the pragmeme of ‘defending a thesis’ is strongly privileged. Therefore, the various pragmatic acts or practs performed in Christian apologetics are instantiations of the pragmeme ‘defending a thesis’. This argument will be substantiated presently.

IV. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

For data, ten purposively selected texts from five prominent and contemporary Christian apologists: Robert J Morgan, Ravi Zacharias, William Lane Craig, Thompson Bert, and Josh McDowell were used. The underlying motivation for the selection laid in the fact that these apologists addressed certain key issues privileged in Christian apologetics such as: the uniqueness of the person of Christ; the reliability of the Bible; the question of creation; evolution; and the Christian response to certain contemporary philosophical and religious worldview. As for the analysis, Figure 3 below presents a schema of the pragmeme ‘defending a thesis’ and its constituents practs:

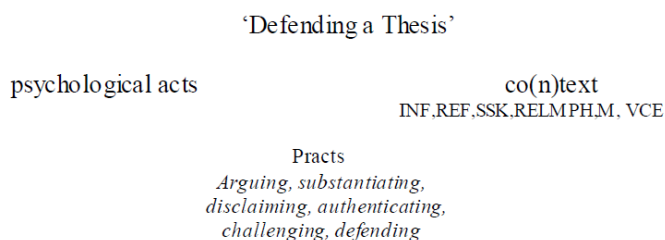


Figure 2: A diagrammatic schema of the pragmeme of ‘defending a thesis’ and its constituents practs

Fig. 2 basically indicates that the writers employ psychological acts in their attempt to appeal to the readers’ sense of reason and judgment. The privileging of the psychological act is predicated on the fact that the writers’ utterances are products of an inner motivation to establish some truth derived from a strong persuasion about the Christian worldview. Different co(n)textual elements interact to generate the pragmatic acts in the discourse. These elements include: Reference (REF), Relevance (REL), Inference (INF), Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK), Metaphor (MPH) and Voice (VCE). The practs performed from the union between the psychological acts and the various co(n)textual elements are: *arguing, substantiating, disclaiming, authenticating, challenging and defending* and they are all realisation of the pragmeme ‘defending a thesis’, as each of the pract is an attempt to defending a particular thesis developed by the apologist. I shall illustrate from the data how the interaction of these elements produce the practs identified above:

The pragmatic act of *arguing* is generally privileged in Christian apologetics and a foremost ‘realiser’ of the pragmeme ‘defending a thesis’. The act is produced by the interaction of the following contextual items: REF, REL, INF, SSK and MPH. The examples below will illustrate this interaction:

Ex. 1

Early in the nineteenth century, it became fashionable in some circles to discount the uniqueness of Christ by questioning His very existence in history. In Germany some of the higher critics openly doubted the historicity of Christ, suggesting that the stories about Him were myth like those of the Greek and Roman gods, or perhaps shadowy legends like those of King Arthur and Camelot.

(TUC; Morgan, 2003, p. 61-265)

In Ex. 1 above, the writer reports that in the nineteenth century, the German higher critic questioned the very existence of Christ. They *argued* that Christ is a legendary figure by making reference to the Greek/Roman mythology and gods, and the legend of King Arthur and Camelot. The relevance of these references and the inference to be drawn is assisted by SSK. This point will be explored using the reference to the legend of King Arthur and Camelot. Camelot features in Arthurian legend, as the favourite castle of King Arthur, a legendary British king of ancient times. In Arthurian stories, Camelot is a centre for social, administrative, military, and religious activities. It is also from Camelot that knights leave on the quest for the Holy Grail, the sacred cup used by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper (Lacy, 2009). This brief contextual information, which should be a shared situational knowledge (SSK), brings to the fore the higher critics’ pract of *arguing* that the existence of Christ is also a legend like those of King Arthur and Camelot.

Ex. 2

Christians also have a founding document on which our spiritual faith and freedom are based, one more fabulous than even the Declaration of Independence. It is the Bible, composed over 1,600 years in sixty-six installments, written in three languages on three continents. It has a central theme and a unifying scheme; and Christians, believing it inspired by God, consider it infallible, inerrant, and sufficient for all human need.

(TRTBD; Morgan, 2003, p. 79)

Here again the writer engages REF, REL, INF, and SSK to generate the pract of *arguing* for the reliability of biblical documents. The apologist makes reference to the Declaration of Independence, the founding document of the United States of America, and compares it with the Bible. Given the SSK that this is the most important document to Americans, and the *argument* of the writer that the Bible is even “more fabulous”, the reader is led along to infer that the Bible must be a very reliable document. This inference is further accentuated by the writer’s reference to other qualities of the Bible: written over a period of 1,600 years in 66 instalments, in three languages, on three continents, yet has a unifying theme, and is believed by Christians to have been inspired by God. In another context these might be considered mere information and nothing more. In apologetic context, however, these are pieces of information with the intent to ‘defend a thesis’, namely: the Bible is a reliable document.

In the examples below, the authors cast their *argument* on the uniqueness of the Bible, in very poignant metaphors, and they rely heavily on SSK, REL INF and MPH to pract. The persuasive import of metaphors has been observed by Charteris-Black (2005) and Maalej (2007). Charteris-Black (2005, p. 13) argues that metaphor has very strong persuasive orientation as ‘it mediates between these conscious and unconscious means of persuasion- between cognition and emotion- to create a moral perspective on life (or *ethos*)’. Charteris-Black (2005, p. 13) further indicates that metaphor activates ‘unconscious emotional associations and it influences the value that we place on ideas and beliefs on the scale of goodness and badness’.

Ex. 3

A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put.

No other book has been so chopped, knived, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology or *belles lettres* of classical or modern times has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? with such venom and skepticism? with such thoroughness and erudition? upon every chapter, line and tenet?

(TUTB; McDowell, 1999, p. 11)

As indicated above, the author employs MPH, SSK, INF, REL, and REF to produce a pract of *arguing*. The author uses the metaphor of death and its various accompaniments: death knell, funeral, and tombstone to describe the fate the Bible has being put through ‘a thousand times over’ by its attackers. The shocking thing however is that the Bible has refused to stay dead and buried. The author sustains his argument by the use of violent metaphors in describing the actions of the attackers of the Bible: ‘so chopped, knived, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified’. The pragmatic force of this *argument* is bifocal: to project the Bible as a resilient, extra-ordinary document, and cast its attackers in a bad light as very violent and inconsiderate. The metaphorical expression has the overall objective of leading the readers into accepting the writer’s claim about the uniqueness of the Bible. The metaphors employed take on strong moral connotations as they present the church/Bible in a positive light and cast its attackers in a bad light. The metaphors also conceptualise the church/Bible as victims of violent attacks. Such metaphorical polarisation has a strong persuasive force as it might appeals to the sense of *ethos* (morality) and *pathos* (emotion) of the reader, and hence an emotionally-laden means of ‘defending the thesis’ of the uniqueness of the Bible.

The next pract that realises the pragmeme 'defending a thesis' is the pract of *substantiating*. The following example provides an illustration:

Ex. 4

The first is philosophy's move to the existential. The power of a Jean Paul Sartre or an Albert Camus was significant in the decades of the '60s and the '70s. Historian Paul Johnson points out the devastating impact of Sartre upon the intellectuals of the Angka Loeu movement in Cambodia that destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands in that "Gentle Land." Indeed, a tremendous power was unleashed as philosophers through drama and literature handcuffed the intellect of society's powerbrokers. Stories were introduced to tell us that "Man was the measure of all things," but they never paused to tell us the entailments of evil men who wrested power and means to destroy their own people. (AAMTMPPM, *Zacharias*, 1998, p. 3)

The writer, in example 4, produces the practs of *substantiating* the argument about the profound effect of postmodernism on philosophical thinking and its devious impact on the lives of the people of Cambodia. He makes reference to Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus the powerful proponents of existentialism, the philosophical stance that asserts that 'human existence is characterized by nothingness, that is, by the capacity to negate and rebel' (Redmond, 2009). He also refers to historical events: the wars in Cambodia, the ironical "Gentle Land", which were as a result of Sartre's existential orientation. Through a metaphor of domination, signified by 'handcuffed', the writer observes that the intellect of society had been suppressed by the hegemonic structures of drama and literature. The writer goes through these motions to *substantiate* his argument against postmodernism and by this subtly disclaims the worldview. The intention of the argument is this: if a worldview could promote the killings of innocent people, then it should not be identified with. The following example illustrates the pract of *disclaiming*:

Ex. 5

Space restricts the very tempting critique of Wilson's book, but enough to say that the blunders of fact made by him are too numerous to mention. He is not a scholar in this field of study. In the book **Who Was Jesus?** Oxford Professor N.T. Wright takes Wilson's argument apart piece by piece, showing its academic poverty. (TWTO; *Zacharias*, 1994, p. 3)

Here, in order to *disclaim* the position put forward by Wilson the writer refers to the fact that Wilson is not a scholar in this field of learning. The relevance of this statement is that it leads the reader to infer that Wilson is not qualified to make valid arguments in this area of scholarship. The writer further strengthens this pract of *disclaiming* as he refers to the fact that an "Oxford Professor" also *disclaims* Wilson's argument. The reference "Oxford Professor" is pragmatically strategic as the University of Oxford is one of the oldest and most prestigious universities of the English-speaking world. It has a long standing record of unprecedented scholarship. Thus, if an "Oxford Professor" takes an argument apart, then it is not worthy of any meaningful scholarly attention. Given this SSK, the relevance of this reference becomes very forceful and the pragmatic act of *disclaiming* very poignant. Furthermore, the nominal group 'Oxford Professor' does not merely describe or introduce the referent 'N.T. Wright' as would be the case in a classroom situation or any other non-argumentative contexts. In the contextual configuration of Christian apologetic, such an expression is used to provide authentication for the sources of the arguments presented by the author. More on this in the next paragraph:

The other pragmatic act observed in the data is that of *authenticating*. Its prevalence in Christian apologetics is necessitated by the fact that this form of discourse is an argumentative one and the authenticity of the source of the arguments referenced is very important. The more credible and authentic the source, the more valid the argument may be considered to be.

Ex. 6

Luke was undeniably brilliant, possessing remarkable literary abilities and a deep knowledge of the Greek language. He was the only non Jewish author of the Bible. Yet he wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else-28 percent. He was a physician and a scientist. He was a writer and a medical missionary. He has proved himself a historian of first rank. Here he tells us that before writing his Gospel, he did the work of an investigative journalist, recording his findings in an orderly manner based on careful investigation: "It seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:3-4).

(TRTBD; *Morgan*, 2003, p. 81)

In the example above, the writer contextually engages the elements of REF, REL, and INF to produce the pract of *authentication*. The writer makes reference to Luke's brilliance, literary and linguistic abilities; he also gives us a list of the credentials of Luke: 'a physician and a scientist', 'a writer and a medical missionary', 'a historian of first rank', 'an investigative journalist'. The pragmatic relevance of itemising Luke's credentials is to *authenticate* the Gospel of Luke.

Other instances of this pract can be illustrated from the data:

Ex. 7

Raymo, professor of physics and astronomy at Stonehill College in Massachusetts, has written a weekly column on science for the *Boston Globe* for more than a dozen years, and was reared as a Roman Catholic. (TMFU; *Bert*, 1999, p. 21)

Ex. 8

Professor M. Montiero- Williams, former Boden professor of Sanskrit, held this perspective. After spending forty-two years studying Eastern books, he compared them with the Bible and said:

Ex. 9

Earl Radmacher, retired president of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, quotes Nelson Glueck (pronounced Glek), former president of the Jewish Theological Seminary at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and one of the three greatest archaeologists:

Ex. 10

Elie Wiesel, renowned novelist and Nobel Peace Prize recipient

(*TUTB; McDowell, 1999, pp. 4, 11-12, 14*)

In the examples above, the writers employ the following elements to produce the practice of *authentication*: REF, REL, INF and SSK. References are made to the professorial status of the sources: 'Raymo, professor of physics and astronomy'; 'Professor M. Montiero- Williams, former Boden professor of Sanskrit'; the office of the referents as well as their years of experience and height of achievements: 'retired president', 'former president'; 'more than a dozen years' as a columnist for scientific journal, and 'forty-two years' of studying Eastern books, 'one of the three greatest archaeologists', 'renowned novelist and Nobel Peace Prize recipient'. The academic status, office, experience and achievements of the sources of the writers' arguments qualify them to make very valid statements and arguments about the reliability of the Bible. Thus, these writers pragmatically co-opt the readers into reaching the conclusion. In other words, through merely providing these pieces of information about their sources and relying on SSK, the writers create the pragmatic environment for the practice of *authenticating* their sources.

In the data, it is observed that this pragmatic strategy is used by some writers but to a different pragmatic end: to produce the practice of *challenging* the positions contrary to the writers'. The following examples will illustrate this point:

Ex. 11

In 1989, Richard Dawkins, renowned atheist and evolutionist of Oxford University, released the second edition of his book, *The Selfish Gene* in which he discussed at great length the gene's role in the naturalistic process of "survival of the fittest." Dawkins admitted that, according to the evolutionary paradigm, genes are "selfish" because they will do whatever it takes to ensure that the individual in which they are stored produces additional copies of the genes. In commenting on the effects of such a concept on society as a whole, Dr. Dawkins lamented: "My own feeling is that a human society based simply on the gene's law of universal ruthlessness would be a very nasty society in which to live" (1989b, p. 3, emp. added).

Ex. 12

The eminent humanistic philosopher, Will Durant, went even farther when he admitted: By offering evolution in place of God as a cause of history, Darwin removed the theological basis of the moral code of Christendom. And the moral code that has no fear of God is very shaky. That's the condition we are in.... I don't think man is capable yet of managing social order and individual decency without fear of some supernatural being overlooking him and able to punish him (1980). (*TMFU; Bert, 1999, pp. 14, 15*)

In these examples, like the ones above, the writer engages the contextual elements of REF, REL, INF, and SSK to *challenge* the positions of his opponents and consequently defend his own. For instance, he refers to the opponents as 'renowned atheist and evolutionist of Oxford University' and '[t]he eminent humanistic philosopher'. The relevance of this is made obvious when the writer presents the arguments of these opponents which are antithetical to their position, and reveal the ethical danger inherent in accepting humanism. For instance, the 'renowned atheist and evolutionist of Oxford University' expresses his fears that a society that lives by the dictates of the naturalistic worldview would be a 'nasty' one and the 'eminent humanistic philosopher' similarly reports that the existential ramification of his worldview is an immoral society, and he worries that man is not capable of handling such a state of affair. The pragmatic force is felt when it can be inferred that this antithesis and the ethical danger of this worldview, which inadvertently accentuates the position of the writer, are expressed by eminent adherents of humanism. Thus, the implication of the apologist's strategy can be succinctly captured: what better arguments can you put forth when the eminent men in your camp have clearly presented the ethical questionability of your position. By this the writer *challenges* the opponents and sets up the readers to undermine this worldview.

The stance that the apologist adopts is the voice (VCE). The voice is a contextual element that furnishes us with the goal of the writer, his/her persuasion and position in an argument. **Ex. 13** below illustrates the point. Upon reading the extract, the reader is able to infer that the writer is a Christian apologist, who tries to *defend* the existence of God and does this by arguing that the universe, which may have resulted from the Big Bang singularity, has its cause in God. Thus, if the Big Bang singularity from which the universe emerged must have a cause, the writer's position is that God is that Cause or Creator.

Ex. 13

All one needs is a way of distinguishing cause from effect in the specific case. Now in the case of the hypothesis of theological creationism, we have, as I noted, a logically airtight means of distinguishing cause from effect, namely, it is *metaphysically impossible* for God to be caused by the world, since if God exists, His nature is such that He exists necessarily, whereas the world's existence is metaphysically contingent (as is evident from its beginning to exist). That entails that there is *no possible world* in which God is caused by the Big Bang singularity. Hence, it is easy for the theist

to explain in what sense God is causally prior to the universe or the Big Bang: God and the universe are causally related, and if the universe were not to exist, God would nevertheless exist, whereas there is no possible world in which the universe exists without God.

(*ARGCBBC*; Craig, 1994)

Finally, through engaging the various co-textual features and particularly VCE, the pragmatic act of *defending* the existence of God as well as His being the creator of the universe is inferred.

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have examined various pragmatic acts performed in Christian apologetics and argued that these individual practs are concrete realisations of the pragmeme 'defending a thesis'. What this means is that the practs identified *arguing*, *substantiating*, *disclaiming*, *authenticating*, *challenging* and *defending* are the various ways apologists defend the thesis of their argument. These acts are recovered as the utterances are embedded in the context and the cotext such as MPH, SSK, INF, REL, and REF, which enrich the logical forms of the utterances and yield the appropriate practs. The contributions of this paper are theoretical and pedagogical: it furthers the literature on pragmeme and can be of pedagogical help to apologists in particular and practitioners in argumentative discourse in general. Future research can concentrate on a comparison between practs performed in Christian apologetic discourse type and other argumentative discourse types such as academic, legal, parliamentary and political discourses.

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