

Understanding Christian Apologetics

Lesson 4: Using Friendly Curiosity to Destroy Arguments against the Knowledge of God

I. Colliding Authorities

- A. “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor 10:5)
- B. “Apologetics, in many ways, is simply a battle over authorities. It involves making plain just where we stand, or better, where we rest, with regard to what we claim. It also involves encouraging our opponents to make plain where they rest their own case. The authority issue is always primary.”¹
- C. Two fronts in the apologetic battle
 - 1. Negative apologetics: refuting challenges to the Christian faith (this is the focus of our next few lessons)
 - 2. Positive apologetics: commending the Christian faith (this will be the focus of some of our future lessons)

II. Getting in the Driver’s Seat²

- A. Look for a way to inquire about the person’s beliefs (e.g. “I see you are wearing a cross. Are you wearing that because you believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins?”)
- B. When someone makes an assertion that is in conflict with Christian truth, use questions to get the person to clarify what exactly they are saying and begin to look for ways to expose the weaknesses of their views

¹ K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics*, 163.

² This section is a summary of chapter 3 of Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*.

1. Immediately expressing your disagreement or stating your own view puts the person on the defensive
2. Asking questions puts the person at ease and conveys your desire to understand their position
3. “Questions are engaging and interactive, probing yet amicable. Most important, they keep you in the driver’s seat while someone else does all the work.”³

C. Gather information

1. Ask variations of the question, “What do you mean by that?”
2. Try your best to avoid misunderstanding or misrepresenting what the person is saying
3. Ex. — the person with whom you are speaking says, “everything is relative”
 - a) “What do you mean by ‘relative’?”
 - b) “Is your assertion ‘everything is relative’ relative, or is it an absolute?”
4. People often say things without really thinking through what they mean; they themselves may be confused about what they mean

D. Repeat what you think the person is saying in your own words (“So, it sounds like you are saying... Am I understanding you correctly?”)

III. Reversing the Burden of Proof⁴

- A. “The burden of proof is the responsibility someone has to defend or give evidence for his view. Generally, the rule can be summed up this way: Whoever makes the claim bears the burden. The key here is not to allow

³ Koukl, 48.

⁴ This section is a summary of chapter 4 of Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*.

yourself to be thrust into a defensive position when the other person is making the claim.”⁵

- B. When talking with someone, be on the lookout for vague generalities and forceful but empty slogans
1. Ask the person to give supporting reasons for their assertions
 2. Use variations of the question, “How did you come to that conclusion?”
 3. In asking this question, you are trying to understand why the person thinks the way they do
 4. Many people will be unprepared for this question because they have not really given much thought to why they hold their views
- C. Remember that “An alternate explanation is not a refutation... It’s not uncommon for someone to say, ‘Oh, I can explain that,’ then conjure up a story that supports her view.”⁶
1. Richard Dawkins offers the following explanation of how flight might have evolved: “How did wings get their start? Many animals leap from bough to bough, and sometimes fall to the ground. Especially in a small animal, the whole body surface catches the air and assists the leap, or breaks the fall, by acting as a crude aerofoil. Any tendency to increase the ration of surface area to weight would help, for example, flaps of skin growing out in the angles of joints. From here, there is a continuous series of gradations to gliding wings, and hence to flapping wings.”⁷
 2. “Dawkins’ breezy account obscures two obstacles. First is the need for a massive infusion of new genetic information — at just the right time and in just the right balance — to accomplish the prodigious structural changes needed for flight. Second is the

⁵ Koukl, 59.

⁶ Koukl, 62.

⁷ Koukl, 62.

mechanical, sensory, psychomotor alterations required for the kind of flight that evolution could take advantage of. In order to overcome these serious hurdles, Dawkins needs to show the detailed and precise evolutionary pathways in specific cases of flight (birds, for example). This he does not do.”⁸

- D. Three questions to use in assessing alternate explanations
1. Is it possible? — some explanations can be shown to be impossible when examined
 2. Is it plausible? — just because something might be possible does not mean that it is a reasonable option; does it fit the facts?
 3. Is it probable? — is it the best explanation
- E. Guard against the ploy of shifting the burden of proof back to you when you have not make any claims
1. While we should be ready to support any assertions we make about our views, it is unfair for a person to respond to our clarifying questions about his views by saying, ‘Why don’t you prove me wrong?’
 2. Point out that he is the one who has made an assertion, not you
- F. When you sense you are overmatched
1. Admit that the person seems to know more about the subject than you do
 2. Ask him to slow down and clearly explain his position and the reasons why he holds it — “If you take this approach, no egos are at stake, so there are no losers. You are simply asking the more aggressive person to give you his best shot. Essentially, you are inviting him to do what he wanted to do in the first place, beat you

⁸ Koukl, 63.

up. You're just giving him the opportunity to do a complete job."⁹

3. End the conversation by saying, "Let me think about that."
4. Research the issue on your own so you can be better prepared next time, whether it is with the same person or someone else

⁹ Koukl, 70.