

The Transcendental Argument

“TAG” goes like this: “The proof for God’s existence is that without Him you couldn’t prove anything.” What this argument is trying to convey is actually rather simple, though the implications of this truth can get deep. To understand any fact, facet, point of view, evidence, truth claim, piece of knowledge, etc. one must presuppose the God of the Bible. Without Him, life is meaningless. Either there is no foundation for intelligibility, or that foundation is a faulty one. In order to utilize this argument in an effective way, we must learn the “Don’t Answer, Answer Method.”

Don’t Answer, Answer

Proverbs 26:4-5 “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Or you will also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, That he not be wise in his own eyes.”

1. Don’t reason with a fool (someone who doesn’t fear God) by starting with his presuppositions. Instead, point out where his worldview has a problem. This is what Paul did at in Acts 17. He starts out by doing an internal critique of their worldview in order to show why it was wrong, all the while offering the truth of Christianity as the alternative.
2. Paul tells the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 10:5, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” Notice “speculations” must be destroyed so that thoughts are taken “captive” to Christ.
3. Answering a fool according to his folly means locating the folly (where he went wrong) and shining a light on it. This is nothing short of exposing an individual’s sin. Christians are the “light of the world,” and it is our duty to expose the nonbeliever’s error for both his sake and the sake of our testimony, rather than joining with him in his foolishness. This means that when confronting nonbelievers we engage their worldview at the point in which it starts going off the rails. We attack their faulty presuppositions.
4. 1 Corinthians 1:23 “but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness.” When the apostles and Jesus reasoned with a Jewish audience they reasoned from the Scriptures. However, with a gentile audience (individuals who don’t accept the Scripture as authoritative) we see that first their worldview had to be destroyed before it could be replaced by Christianity. This is the reason for the apostle’s diverging approaches when witnessing to gentiles as opposed to Jews. They understood the necessity of answering a fool according to his folly.

Self-Refuting Statements

Every worldview essentially breaks down into a self-refutation when it does not start with Christ. Here are some common examples that show the inconsistency in the nonbeliever's worldview.

Relativism/Deconstructionism

Statement: "There are no Absolutes!"
Answer: "Are you absolutely sure?"

Statement: "It's impossible to know anything for sure."
Answer: "Are you sure you know that?"

Statement: "No one should be judged for their lifestyle"
Answer: "Is that your judgment regarding those whose lifestyle requires judging?"

Statement: "You can't just align yourself with a dogma"
Answer: "Are you aligned to that dogma?"

Statement: "No one can define 'God.'"
Answer: "Is that your definition for God?"

Statement: "There is no right or wrong."
Answer: "Is that right?"

Statement: "Don't be dogmatic!"
Answer: "Are you being dogmatic?"

Statement: "Word's cannot relay meaning."
Answer: "Do your words relay the meaning that words cannot relay meaning?"

Statment: "Nobody's right"
Answer: "Are you right about that?"

Statement: "All things are relative."
Answer: "If all things are relative then so is your statement. In which case I have no reason to believe it."

Statement: "All opinions are equally valid."
Answer: "My opinion is that not all opinions are equally valid. Is my opinion valid. If it is, then the statement is false. If it's not, then the statement is still false."

Statement: "Your truth is different than mine."
Answer: "My truth is that your truth is wrong. Is my truth wrong?" (Usually with this type of objection making it real is important. Give an analogy such as, "If you jumped off a building and believed gravity wouldn't pull you toward the earth would you not hit the ground?")

Statement: "Words can mean anything you want them to."
Answer: "I want your words to mean, 'Words can mean nothing you want them to.' Is that what they mean?"

Statement: "No truth is unchanging."
Answer: "So the statement you just made is changing and may not be true tomorrow." Emotionalism (Usually tied in with Relativism)

Statement: "I feel I'm right."
Answer: "I feel I'm right. Does that make it right?"

Statement: "What works for you doesn't work for me."
Answer: "What works for me is doing morally reprehensible things to you. Does that work for you?"

Empiricism

Statement: "Science is the best (or only) way to determine truth."
Answer: "What scientific experiment proved this statement to be true?"

Statement: "Science doesn't need philosophy."
Answer: "Is that your philosophy for science?"

Statement: "We can't know anything apart from experience."
Answer: "How did you experience this statement?"

Statement: "All knowledge is confined to the realm of experience" (Immanuel Kant)
Answer: "Have you experienced all knowledge?"

Statement: "I only believe in science."
Answer: "What experiment did you use to arrive at this statement?"

Statement: "Apart from mathematical equations we can know nothing absolutely"
Answer: "Where's your equation proving that statement to be true?"

Pantheism/Eastern Religion

Statement: "Everything is an illusion."
Answer: "Is that statement an illusion?"

Statement: "We must lose our desires."
Answer: "Is that your desire?"

Statement: "All is one."
Answer: "Who's making the statement, you or me?" (Eastern religions have no way to account for person-hood or differentiate between entities)

Nihilism

Statement: "Life has no meaning."
Answer: "Do you really mean that?"

Statement: "There is no such thing as truth"
Answer: "Is that the truth?"

Statement: "I believe in nothing."
Answer: "Is that something you believe in?"

Statement: "Every assertion is false."
Answer: "Is that assertion false?"

Statement: "There are no rules"
Answer: "Is that your rule?"

Statement: "The whole world is an illusion"
Answer: "Is your statement an illusion?"

Statement: "There are no laws of logic"
Answer: "Martians store ponies 3 dollars cackle feathers" (i.e. answer absurdity with absurdity) or "Did you use logic to arrive at that statement?"

Skepticism

Statement: "I doubt everything."
Answer: "Do you doubt that you doubt everything?"

Statement: "We must all be skeptical of any truth claim."
Answer: "I'm skeptical of your truth claim."

It may be harder to spot self-refuting claims in religious systems such as Islam, Mormonism, and Catholicism due to the fact that 1) they steal much of their theology from the Christian worldview, and 2) because their contradictions are not as obvious. Discussing apologetics with members of other faiths is often more involved but the same exact method is used. We answer the fool according to his folly. This requires us to do an "internal critique."

Performing an Internal Critique

An internal critique is an “inside look” into another person’s worldview. When the Christian puts on the nonbeliever’s glasses he is in effect “test driving” their worldview. A helpful transportation analogy may help explain. The Christian is hypothetically grabbing the keys to the nonbeliever’s car, taking it for a spin, and crashing it into a ditch. He is taking the nonbeliever’s worldview to its logical conclusion showing that it can not account for the preconditions of intelligibility. To be more accurate, he’s actually proving that the nonbeliever’s vehicle can’t even start because it doesn’t have any fuel.

Performing an internal critique of another person’s worldview is exactly what Paul did in Acts 17. Paul’s mission was to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that the Epicureans (atomic materialists) and Stoics (materialist pantheists) would repent. He starts with presenting a belief they had in common, that an “unknown God” existed and possessed the attributes of sovereignty and self-sufficiency. He next uses the resurrection as authentication that God will judge the world. It was at this point that Paul was cut off from finishing his presentation of the person of Christ, but not without gaining followers. To be logically consistent the Greek philosophers should not have had a problem with a man being raised from the dead if truly God is sovereign. However, in reality, although they relied on God for their life, movement, and existence, they did not believe that God could take human form or be resurrected physically. This was a contradiction, and Paul capitalized on it.

In a way this is also what Christ did numerous times. The woman at the well and the rich young rulers are good examples of this. Christ uses their conscience (what they know to be wrong) in order to convict them of their sin. He is pointing out a logical inconsistency in their lifestyle. The rich young ruler valued material wealth over God while the woman at the well was caught in a net of adultery. Both however, wanted to be spiritually satisfied—the woman at the well through “living water,” and the young ruler through keeping the greatest commandment. Christ pressed them to show that their whole outlook on life was in direct violation to their stated goals and offered the remedy of repentance.

Tactics in Performing Internal Critiques

5. Ask Questions
6. Look for Inconsistency, Contradictions, Arbitrariness, and the Inability to Provide the Preconditions for Intelligibility
7. Bring Worldviews to their Ultimate Conclusions

Questions to ask Other Worldviews

Resources: <http://www.proofthatgodexists.org/other-worldviews/>

Logical Fallacies

In order to argue effectively for the Christian worldview, believers should possess a basic knowledge of logical fallacies. Just as knowledge without wisdom is detrimental, so is knowing Scripture without understanding how to use it. It is one thing to know that the Bible is true, it is another to discern the errors in all arguments that attempt to contradict it. The following is a basic glossary of both informal and formal logical fallacies. Feel free to add examples below each heading as you encounter them.

- Informal Fallacies
 - Reification: Attributing a concrete characteristic to something abstract.
 - “Mother Nature”
 - Evolution has taught us how to be moral
 - The earth does not want us drilling for oil.
 - Equivocation: Shifting from one meaning of a word to another within an argument.
 - Faith cannot be proven, so I cannot accept the Christian Faith.
 - Jesus said to love, so when Christians don’t love transgenders, they are disobeying Jesus.
 - We see evolution all around us, how can you deny the science of evolution?
 - Begging the Question: Merely assuming what one is attempting to prove.
 - The Bible is true because it says so.
 - My mind tells me that it is reliable.
 - The future will be like the past because in the past the future was like the past.
 - Question-begging Epithet: Using biased (often emotional) language to persuade people rather than using logic.
 - “God is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction.”
 - Christians hate diversity because they are intolerant.
 - The science deniers want to ban the teaching of Darwinism.
 - Complex Question: Attempting to persuade by asking a “loaded question.”
 - When will you Christians start embracing science?
 - Will you ever take Jesus’ advice and stop judging?
 - Is there a reason you’re not loving?

- Bifurcation: Claiming there are only two mutually exclusive possibilities when there may actually be three or more options.
 - Either you believe faith or you believe reason.
 - Either morality is superior to God in which case He is not God, or it is inferior in which case God arbitrarily determines what is moral.
 - You either love sinners in which case you affirm their sin, or you hate them.

- Ad Hominem: Directing an argument against the person making the claim rather than the claim itself.
 - You only believe in God because you were raised that way.
 - Maybe you wouldn't be a Christian if you went to college.
 - The Bible can't be true because the church is full of hypocrites.

- Faulty Appeal to Authority: Endorsing a claim simply based on the person making it.
 - Bill Nye says gender is fluid, and he's the "science guy!"
 - The scientific consensus is that climate change will kill us all unless we do something.
 - The signs at the National Park said it was millions of years old, so it must be true.

- The Strawman Fallacy: Misrepresenting an opponent's position and proceeding to refute the misrepresentation rather than what the opponent actually claims.
 - Christians believe gay people can't be saved.
 - Christians only care about babies in the womb.
 - Christians don't think atheists can be moral.

- The Naturalistic Fallacy: Arguing that since something is a particular way, it is morally acceptable for it to be that way.
 - It is natural for men to be polygamous, so it must be right.
 - We should treat each other with respect because after all, evolution created this feature within us.
 - It's ok if abortion remains legal because it has been legal for a long time.

This is not an exhaustive list of every fallacy that could potentially be encountered, but these are some of the more common ones. I recommend Jason Lisle's "Discerning Truth" for a fuller treatment. There are also many good websites that have free lists and examples of logical fallacies.

The Problem of Evil

All arguments against the Christian position utilize logical fallacies in order to work. The most common and perhaps potent argument in our culture is referred to as "the problem of evil," and it goes like this: "If God is both all-powerful and all-loving why does evil exist?" Stated in a more formal way the argument looks like this:

1. God is completely good
2. God is completely powerful
3. Evil Exists

For the argument to work, God must first be assumed. To assume evil you must assume good. To assume good you must assume a moral law. To assume a moral law you must assume a moral law giver

A Logical Resolution

1. God is completely good
2. God is completely powerful
3. Evil Exists
4. God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists.

This sufficient reason for the existence of evil does not actually have to be understood, it merely has to exist. As Bible-believing Christians we can really only go so far in our explanation as Scripture itself does. We can talk about how "all things work together for good for those who believe God and are called according to His purpose." We can talk about trials being for our benefit and the "testing of our faith." We can also talk about original sin and how man doesn't deserve anything but God's wrath, yet God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." In the end however, "The secret things belong to the Lord." Ultimately, the sections of Scripture (Job, Romans 9, Luke 13) that deal with this problem don't give an answer other than to assert that man has no standing or right to question God.

If we assert the Bible's claim, "Who are you oh man to judge God," and apply it to the situation, the roles are reversed. The question then becomes, "If God is all-good, and all-powerful, Why does He not punish us all now?" You see, open-theism doesn't solve the problem nearly as well as the Biblical doctrine of human depravity (i.e. that we all have an "Adamic nature" and are thereby sinners). So why do bad things happen to good people? The response is really, "What good people?"

"Theodicy" (realm of theology dealing with defending the existence of God's goodness and power in light of the existence of evil) needs to have Christ at the center. The nonbeliever has no hope, but the Christian does. (Heb. 4:15) Jesus can relate to all of our afflictions because He has first-hand experience of them.

Resources

Websites

<http://www.proofthatgodexists.org/>

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/>

<http://carm.org/>

<http://roarnomore.blogspot.com/p/apologetics.html>

Videos

American Vision: *Basic Training Series- Defending the Faith*; by Greg Bahnsen

American Vision: *How to Answer the Fool*; by Sye Ten Bruggencate

Answers in Genesis: *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*; by Jason Lisle

Answers in Genesis: *The Secret Code of Creation*; by Jason Lisle

Books

The Ultimate Proof of Creation by Jason Lisle

Discerning Truth by Jason Lisle

Always Ready by Greg Bahnsen

Pushing the Antithesis by Greg Bahnsen

Audio

Biblical Presuppositional Apologetics; by Michael Butler

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?seriesOnly=true&currSection=sermonstopic&sourceid=chalcedon&keyword=Apologetics&keyworddesc=Apologetics>