

Open Bible Christian Ministries Presents:

# The Skeptic's Challenge

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# If God Is Good, Why Is There Evil In The World?

This is thought by many to be the most difficult question, both philosophically and emotionally. If you were left to be the architect of this world, would you permit all this misery? This is a question raised by Dostoevski in his work *The Brothers Karamosov*. King David, in the Bible struggled with it. The first word of Jesus from the cross was: *Why?* It is a part of our humanity.

We would all certainly agree that there is evil in this world. We are indignant at the way some people treat others. The abuse of children, rape, murder, tragic accidents are all events that strike at the very fabric of our lives.

The problem seems to be that Christians believe that:

- God is all good
- God is all powerful, and yet
- Evil exists

There seems to be an inconsistency there that goes like this:

- If God is all good, He wouldn't want that evil
- If God was all powerful, He could eliminate that evil
- Therefore, if God exists He is either not all powerful or not all good.

So we need to ask ourselves if that is a good argument. Before we answer that we need to ask ourselves:

*For whom is evil logically a problem: the Christian or the non-Christian?*

The unbeliever cannot assert this unless he says there is evil. If nothing counts as evil, there is no question. In order to ask the question, he must evaluate something as evil. So what does the unbeliever mean by good and evil? By what standard does he determine that or make that moral judgment?

Good and evil could mean what evokes public approval or disapproval. But if that is true, the following statement would

always be senseless: *the vast majority of the community heartily approved of and joined in that evil event*. The majority could never participate in an evil event. But we know that ethics does not reduce to statistics. Most people think of the goodness of something evoking their approval rather than their approval constituting its goodness.

What about evoking the approval of the individual? That is even worse. If good means I approve, then we could never agree with each other in ethical judgments. Why? Because one is a judgment about me, one about you.

How about instrumental theories of good. Good is defined by consequences brought about - greatest good for greatest number. If this is true, one would have to be able to rate and compare happiness in order to make that judgment. How do you rate and compare the unhappiness of some with the same action provoking happiness in others. Some would interject that good is what produces a particular end. That is true only if the end is good. But that begs the question. Someone might say what is good maximizes the freedom of people. But how do you know the freedom of people is good?

None of these are workable theories for the nature of good and evil. The unbeliever cannot *prove* that what he is talking about is evil.

The point is the Christian can say something is evil because his world view accounts for that judgment, because there is a living Creator who has revealed Himself. Child molestation is evil; but on what basis does the unbeliever call that evil? If you reject God, you are left with: *Everybody can do what is right in their own eyes*. Does the molester then have the right to do what he wants - because it brought him happiness? The problem of evil is not even intelligent unless you begin with a Christian world view.

As an unbeliever you might retort with: *I might not be able to account for evil, but you as a Christian still have a paradox in your way of thinking that needs to be resolved*.

How can we believe as Christians that there is no inconsistency? What are my presuppositions? God reveals himself in the Bible.

The Bible teaches that God is all good and all powerful. Now I am going to draw my conclusions in light of that.

From that, I draw the conclusion that there is a **morally sufficient reason** for that evil. That is a logical conclusion. God must have had good reason for what He has done.

As an unbeliever you may want to believe that we have to solve the problem in a *neutral* fashion. But my commitment is to the existence of this God and I can thus draw the logical conclusion that there is a morally sufficient reason for evil.

We have solved the logical problem, but we know that is only a part of the problem. There is the psychological problem as well. We would like to have answers.

We have a problem when the reason is not given to *why* bad things happen to us and others. But God rarely provides an explanation for the evil we experience or observe (Deuteronomy 29:29) Even if God told us, we might not understand it and still be baffled (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Even though He does not give us the reasons, they are a part of His plan for history (Romans 8:28)

We are called on by the Bible to trust that God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil in this world. But the Bible does not give us the reason(s), then leave it up to us to finally judge whether God has been good or not.

As an unbeliever you refuse to trust God and will not believe unless you are given the reason why. You will not trust God unless God submits Himself to the moral evaluation of the unbeliever. Let God be on trial and unless God consents to trade places with the unbeliever, the unbeliever won't trust Him. What do you think? Will God enter into that.

Here is the key: ***It is a question of ultimate authority in a person's life.***

What if we said: *All right unbelievers. You all now have the right to judge God.* What would happen? Do all unbelievers agree on what is good and evil? No. Once you take it out of the hands of

God, you have made it impossible for any moral judgment to be made.

The only logical (and consistent) approach is to say that only God has the right to declare what is good and evil.

The question that Adam and Eve faced in the garden is the exact same question that unbelievers are facing today. Do I have faith in God's Word simply because He says so? Or should we evaluate it based on our own moral authority?

Since Adam and Eve would not presuppose the goodness of God, they have visited upon the human race all the torments we have. When an unbeliever will not accept the goodness of God simply based upon His word, they are simply perpetuating the source of all human woes. Rather than solving the problem of evil, they are adding to it.

## Does God Exist?

The following is taken from Dr. Greg Bahnsen's opening argument in his debate with Dr. Gordon Stein at UC Irvine. The entire debate, entitled, *The Great Debate: Does God Exist?* may be purchased from Covenant Media Foundation at [www.cmfnow.com](http://www.cmfnow.com) or 1-800-553-3938.

*It is necessary at the beginning of a debate to define one's terms and in particular we should make clear what is meant by the term "God." I want to specify that I am arguing for Christian theism and for it as a unit or system of thought, not just theism in general. The reasons for this are (a) the various conceptions of deity in the world religions are logically incompatible leaving no unambiguous sense to general theism; (b) I have not found the non-Christians religions to be philosophically defense able, each of them being internally incoherent or undermining human reason and experience; (c) since I am by the grace of God a Christian I cannot from the heart adequately defend those religions faith which I disagree. My commitment is to the triune God and Christian worldview based on God's revelation in the Old and New Testaments.*

Secondly, we should indicate what is and what is not at issue in this debate and on what basis we would hope that you would consider it. It must be clear that we are debating about philosophical systems, not the people who adhere to or profess them. Our concern is with the objective merits of the case that can be made for atheism or Christian theism, and not related, subjective or personal matters. The reasons for this are (a) the personalities of those individuals who adhere to different systems of thought are not relevant to the truth or falsity of the claims made by those systems. Atheists and Christians can equally be emotional, unlearned, intolerant, rude; (b) subjective claims made about the experience of inner satisfaction or peace and promotional claims made about the superiority of Christianity or atheist are always subject to conflicting interpretations and explanations being autobiographical rather than telling us anything for sure about the truth of the system; (c) the issue is not whether atheists or professing Christians have ever done anything undesirable or morally unacceptable (respectively the French Revolution's Reign of Terror and the Spanish Inquisition), but whether atheism or Christian theism as philosophical systems are objectively true.

(1) *The nature of evidence*

How should the difference of opinion between the theist and the atheist be rationally resolved? What Dr. Stein has written indicates, like many atheists that he has not reflected adequately on this question. He writes:

*The question of the existence of God is a factual question and should be answered in the same way as any other factual questions.*

*The assumption that all existent claims or questions of fact are answered in the very same way is not merely oversimplified and misleading, it is simply mistaken. The existence, factuality or reality of different kinds of things is not established or disconfirmed the same way in every case. We might ask Is there a box of crackers in the pantry? We know how we would go about answering that question. But that is a far, far, cry from the way we would*

*determine the reality of barometric pressure or quasars, or elasticity, or gravitational attraction or radioactivity, or names or grammar or past events or future contingencies, or categories, or laws of thought or political obligations, or individual identity over time, or causation or memories, or dreams or beauty or love. All these things are real and none of them do you confirm the existence or reality in the same way you do the box of crackers in the pantry. When Stein says that we settle all factual questions in the same way, that is just unlearned. There are thousands of existence or factual questions and they are not at all answered in the same way. Just think of the differences in argumentation and types of evidence used by biologists, grammarians, physicists, mathematicians, lawyers, logisticians, merchants and artists. Each of those fields has a way of arguing, but they do not use the same kinds of arguments or appeal to the same kinds of consideration.*

*It should be obvious that the type of evidence one looks for in existence or factual claims will be determined by the field of discussion and especially by the metaphysical nature of the entity mentioned in the claim under question. We may debate how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, but the way we determine the existence of an angel is different from the way we determine the reality of a pin. Dr. Stein's remark that the question of God's existence is answered in the same way as any other factual question mistakenly reduces the theistic question to the same level as a box of crackers in the pantry, which we will hereafter call the cracker in the pantry fallacy.*

*What Dr. Stein has written about the nature of evidence in the theistic debate points to a second philosophical error of significant proportions. In passing we would note how unclear he is when speaking of the evidence that must be used, describing it variously as logic, facts, or reason. Each of these terms is susceptible to a whole host of differing senses depending upon who is using the terms.*

*I take it he wishes to judge hypotheses by the test of logical coherence and empirical observation. The problem arises when Dr. Stein elsewhere insists that every claim*

*which someone makes must be treated as a hypothesis which must be tested by such evidence before accepting it.*

Don't miss this. He says that every claim made by someone must be first treated as a hypothesis. What Dr. Bahnsen is going to attack is the fact that not every claim can be of a hypothetical nature. Because then you would never have anything on the basis of which to judge any hypothesis.

*There is to be nothing of begging the question or of circular reasoning, he says. This is oversimplified thinking and misleading, what we might call the pretended neutrality fallacy. One can see this by considering the following quotation from Dr. Stein:*

*The use of logic or reason is the only valid way to examine the truth or falsity of a statement that claims to be factual.*

*One must eventually ask Dr. Stein then how he proves that statement itself.*

*How does he prove the statement that logic or reason is the only valid way to prove factual statements. He is now on the horns of a dilemma. If he says that the statement is proved by logic or reason then what has he done? He has reasoned in a circle which he says we cannot do. If he says that they statement is proven by something other than logic or reason, then he has refuted the statement that all statements are proven by logic or reason.*

*So he either violates his own rule by reasoning in a circle or he refutes his principle. My point is not to fault Dr. Stein's commitment to logic or reason. My point is to observe that it actually has the nature of a pre-commitment. What he is talking about here is not something that he has proven but something that he has taken into the debate and his research. It is something that he has assumed in advance. It is a presupposition. It is not something he has proven by empirical experience or logic but it is rather that by which he proceeds to prove everything else.*

*He is not presuppositionally neutral. [this is to show that everyone has their ultimate authority, everyone has that which they do not question. On the basis of which they prove everything else. They are not neutral.]*

*He does not avoid begging crucial questions, rather than proving them in the ordinary way. This tendency to beg crucial questions is openly exposed by Dr. Stein when the issue becomes the existence of God.*

*Having shown that he is not neutral, and that Dr. Stein has his presuppositions, which are vicious, such that he assumes that there can be no evidence for God's existence. Dr. Stein actually writes that you can never use the supernatural explanation in science. Whether one can or not, the fact is that when someone tells you that you cannot, he is stipulating a rule showing that he rules out God before he even goes to look at the evidence.*

*Dr. Stein is committed to disallowing any theistic interpretation of nature, history or experience and he is committed in advance. He is just as much begging the question then as is the Christian who is approaching the question with his theistic presuppositions. The theist does the same thing when certain empirical evidences are put forth as allegedly disproving the existence of God. The naturalist would insist that Christ could not have risen from the dead or that there is a natural explanation, yet to be found as to how it happened. So the supernaturalist insists that the alleged discrepancies which happen in the Bible have explanations even if they have not been found yet, and that the evil in the world has a sufficient reason behind it which is known to God. Each of us have our governing presuppositions, even as all philosophical or worldviews do. At the most fundamental level of everyone's thinking and beliefs there are primary convictions about reality, man, the world, knowledge, truth and behavior. Convictions by which all other experience is organized, interpreted, and applied.*

*Dr. Stein has such presuppositions and so do I, and so do all of us. It is these presuppositions which determine what we accept by ordinary reason and evidence for they*

*are assumed in all of our reasoning, even about reasoning itself. Even the way that we reason about reasoning assumes our basic presuppositions.*

*How then should the difference of opinion between the theist and the atheist be rationally resolved? [We are not going to give up reason here. We are going to say “how can we intellectually deal with each other and resolve this?] We have seen two of Dr. Stein’s errors regarding it: the crackers in the pantry fallacy and his pretended neutrality fallacy. In the process of discussing them, we have observed that belief in the existence of God is not tested in any ordinary way, like other factual claims.*

*The reason for this is because of the non-natural character of God. Metaphysically, God is not a natural object. Secondly, epistemologically because of the presuppositional character of commitment for or against his existence. Because we reason presuppositionally and we are dealing with a non-natural entity, the kind of reasoning is not going to be ordinary.*

*Arguments over conflicting presuppositions between different worldviews must be resolved somewhat differently, yet still rationally, than conflicts over factual existence claims **within** a worldview or system of thought. We must compare the worldviews themselves and ask whether they provide the preconditions of intelligibility and rationality for man’s experience and thinking. We must engage in transcendental argumentation, the only kind that ultimately deals with skepticism, the foundations of science and logic, and the question of epistemological certainty.*

*When we do that we see why one must rationally be committed to the existence of God. We would prove God’s existence from the impossibility of the contrary. The transcendental proof for the existence of God is that without Him, it is impossible to prove anything. The atheist worldview is irrational and cannot consistently provide the preconditions of intelligible experience, of science, of logic, of morality.*

That is the end of Dr. Bahnsen’s opening remarks in his debate with Dr. Stein.

In Dr. Bahnsen’s closing speech, basically what he said to Dr. Stein was that the fact that he came to the debate proves his point. Because debate presupposes the laws of logic. If you do not have to observe laws of logic then why debate with someone. But the laws of logic make no sense in an atheist worldview. In an atheist worldview where there are no immaterial things, much less things that have the characteristic of universality or obligation, logic makes no sense. You cannot find universality in rocks. You cannot find obligation in atoms or molecules. Since we are saying that we are obligated to follow the universal, absolute laws of logic, and the atheist worldview rules out there being any thing like that, then the fact that Dr. Stein came to the debate shows that he is assuming a Christian worldview in order to argue against God’s existence!

This is what is called the transcendental proof. You show that the other person must be standing on your ground, your worldview, in order to be arguing with you. You prove the impossibility of the contrary.

## Doesn’t Evolution And Modern Science Discredit A Rational Belief In The God Of The Bible?

There is a common misconception people have which states that evolution and science are concerned with facts while God and the Bible are concerned with matters of faith. One deals with the seen, of which there is evidence, while the other is concerned with the unseen and cannot be proven with facts. Is that true?

Is evolution really science? Has it been proven by the facts?

Let us look at what it is that the person holding to evolutionary theory wants us to believe. Evolutionary theory teaches that time + matter + chance is what created the world. The person holding this would tell us that the earth has been around for 15 to 25 billion

years. Right there we have quite a margin of error. However, the inadequacies of neo-Darwinian thought is being shown by modern mathematicians who now tell us that it would take hundreds of billions of years for these things to be true. Moreover, we would need new natural laws for it to be valid.

Another scientist has pointed out that to get **one** cell by chance would require 100 functional proteins to appear simultaneously in one place. The probability for each functional protein would be 10 to the minus 20 power or one chance in 100,000,000,000,000,000,000. If that was not bad enough, it is actually one hundred times worse than that or 10 to the minus 2000 power. Evolution requires that you believe that will happen.

Another scientist reported that to get 2000 enzymes in a random fashion is 10 to the minus 40,000 power.

What is fueling this belief in evolution? If you look at the fossil record, life appears abruptly. It also appears in complex forms. There are systematic gaps between various living kinds in that record. We have **hundreds of millions** of fossils and **not one** of them provides an intermediary form, or missing link. There are no fossil traces of a transition from ape-like creature to man.

Now there is a new explanation for this which is called *Punctuated Equilibrium*. The problem for the evolutionist is that the fossil record shows equilibrium, continuity. It does not suggest the development of one simple form getting more and more complex. Therefore, those who hold to this new evolutionary theory write that evolution must have taken place in short spurts rather than over the long haul. If that is true, they claim, then there would not be enough time to leave fossil remains which is why there is no evidence for the evolutionary hot periods!

In other words, we are asked to believe that the *evidence* for evolution is that there can be **no** evidence for evolution. Is that a scientific approach or does someone just have their mind made up before they look at the fossils?

Here is another dilemma for the one who holds that the *facts* point to evolution. We know that it takes about 1000 years to produce one inch of top soil through the process of wind and erosion. So, if the world has been around for billions and billions of

years we would find a thick layer of top soil around the world. How much do we have? Between 6 and 9 **inches**!! There is not enough top soil to account for the earth being here that long.

Could it have been washed into the oceans? As we look there we would then expect miles and miles of sediment. What do we find? The average sediment is 0.56 miles. It is not enough.

What about meteor dust? As we are bombarded by small meteor showers, the dust is settling on the earth. At the current rate of dust falling, there should be about 50 feet of dust if the earth is billions and billions of years old. Because of its thin atmosphere, the moon should serve as a better indicator. In fact, when plans were being made to land a man on the moon, there was great concern that the lunar craft would be swallowed up in dust because of this. What did we find? On the moon, there is only 1/4 inch of dust!!

These are not sterling scientific credentials.

Think about the way that mammals have hearts, lungs and kidneys that work together. The evolutionist says that these evolved over time. However, you need all three working in tandem for any to be valuable. Even if you might picture them gradually evolving together, little heart, little lung, little kidney prototypes, they cannot work. In his book *Darwin's Black Box*, Michael Behe quotes Charles Darwin:

*If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.*

So what kind of biological system could not be produced this way? According to Behe, a system that is **irreducibly complex**. Having defined irreducible complexity, Behe shows that such a complex system cannot evolve because, until it reaches its final state it is non-functional. Evolution kills off its own specimens.

What modern biochemistry has done is to show that most biological systems are irreducibly complex.

Every change in the evolutionary scheme is preserved because of its favorable interaction with the environment. Think about the

change from non-eye to eye. Take that first step. That first change is only going to be preserved if it is favorable. How much is a proto-eye worth to an organism? Nothing. A fully functioning eye is helpful. But then think for a moment the way the eye works. It is wired to the *back* of the brain rather than the front, and it is backward wired coming in upside down. What is it about all that which is favorable to the organism?

So is sex. Where do babies come from? Human babies come through the process of copulation. The evolutionist says that we evolved from the primordial slime. Way back, billions and billions of years ago we were little amoebas. Amoebas do not copulate. They multiply by cell division. So what led to the change from cell division to copulation in the process of reproduction? What is the value of a partially developed genital?

Think for a moment how the evolutionist says that we arrived at where we are today. Evolutionary theory says that there was once nothing but disorder. Then the universe became ordered in one point and exploded. It was inorganic matter. Why did disorder become order?

Then we are told that the ordered, inorganic world became living or organic. How does non-life become life? Life is not just a more complex form of non-life! Bricks don't live, but if you put them in a certain way, they become alive, right? No. So what caused things to become more complex?

Then we are told that which is living is all identical. Then this living, identical soup becomes living, varied life forms. What caused that?

Those varied, living forms were unintelligible, and eventually something developed that was intelligent and articulate. What caused all those non-intelligent life forms to jump to intelligent ones? What caused those inarticulate life forms to jump to articulate life forms?

Then these language using life forms which did not have any traces of morality before begin to have moral notions. Where did these moral notions come from?

We are supposed to believe step by step that there were huge, unexplained, irrational changes. The inorganic became organic

became diversified which became intelligent which then developed into moral forms of life which we call man. No *rational* person can believe all that.

Stephen J. Gould wrote in 1974:

*The general preference that so many of us hold for gradualism [evolution] is a metaphysical stance embedded in the history of western cultures. It is not a high order empirical observation induced from the study of nature.*

Evolution then is a philosophical commitment. As Charles Darwin wrote:

*The value of the theory of evolution is that it enables us to dispute the Biblical view of man's origins.*

Far from discrediting a rational belief in the Bible, evolution shows itself to be an irrational leap of faith as it cannot even substantiate the claims that it makes. Far from being science, it is actually a philosophy of life.

That leads us to the question of which philosophy of life, the evolutionary, materialistic philosophy or the Christian philosophy best accounts for the world in which we live.

## Will The Future Be Like The Past? (The problem of the uniformity of nature)

The vast majority of people believe that tomorrow will be like today. In other words, what is true today will be true tomorrow as well. Just a simple illustration may suffice to explain what is meant by that. As you were walking in the dark last night at your house to get a drink of water, you stubbed your toe on the end of the bed. You winced and let out a little cry of "*Ouch!*" If you were to do the same thing again tonight, you would expect to say "*Ouch!*" again, and not "*Wow, that's feels good, let me do that again!*"

Why is that true? Because we believe that the causal relationships which we learned yesterday will also be the causal relationships we will see today and tomorrow. We believe that

the future will be like the past, that those things which we have learned from our experiences and observations, and the causal connections in the past, will hold true in the future.

In fact, this is the whole basis for science and scientific inquiry. The scientist will propose a hypothesis, and then conduct a number of experiments to substantiate what he believes to be true. Those tests are done again and again because he believes, all factors being equal, he should receive the same results each time. The future will be like the past.

The question that then comes to us, *Which worldview can account for the uniformity of nature?* So let me ask you, *Do you believe that the future will be like the past?*

If the answer is *No*, then we really have no further basis for conversation because you have just become entirely irrational. You are using words, but those words are devoid of meaning because they do not mean the same thing in this sentence as they did in the last.

If you answer *Yes*, then the follow-up question is, *Why do you believe that?*

One possible answer is, *Because it has always been that way.* While it is true that it has always been that way, because of your non-Christian worldview, you do not have any right to believe that tomorrow will be like yesterday, or next week like this week, or next month like this month.

While we agree that the future will be like the past, then we say that we are really talking about a Christian view of the world. As a Christian, I believe in a sovereign God who controls all things, who is an orderly God and a good God and has made this world so that we could master it and exercise dominion over it, under Him. God has told us in the Bible that seed time and harvest will follow each other in regular succession.

NKJ Genesis 8:22 *“While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease.”*

God is the God of the seasons. He will keep nature uniform. That is the kind of God we have. That is why I put gas in my car. I

do not get up every morning thinking that maybe today my car will run without gas. No, I have found out from experience that if there is no gas in the car, the car will not run. With the Christian view of the world, we do not expect this to be magical or occultic, or that the car will run on some kind of demon force tomorrow. If you do not put gas in your car, it will not run.

However, as an unbeliever, a non-Christian, why do you believe that? With your view of the world, there is no God who controls all of that. On your view, everything happens randomly. It is time, plus chance, plus matter that causes things. On that view, putting gas in my car is like rolling the dice. Maybe it will work this time and maybe it won't. As an unbeliever you do not have any guarantee that it will be that way in the future.

I can imagine the argument coming back, *It has always been that way in the past, so I have good reason to believe it will be that way in the future.*

Unfortunately, with that kind of answer you are simply begging the question, i.e. you are assuming the answer to the question in your method of answering the question. In other words, you have your answer before you get your answer. You have forgotten that the question has nothing to do with the past. The question has to do with the future. We are not disputing what has been true in the past, or the causal relationships of the past. Now we are asking why will the *future* be like the past. *Why are you counting on it being that way in the future.*

The answer, *I count on it being that way in the future because it has always been that way in the past* is just the question all over again.

Why do you believe that the future will be like the past?

May I suggest it is because you have made a philosophical assumption here about the nature of reality. But it turns out that you have no reason to assume that, given that your view of the world says that we live in a random, chance universe. You are not being consistent with your view of the world.

You might retort: *Well, everyone has to believe in the uniformity of nature, that the future will be like the past, or we could not live!*

Exactly! We must believe that because this is God's world, He controls it. If we do not live according to the truth in His world, we are not going to get along very well.

So you do know the truth, but you will not admit it. I am afraid you really are guilty before God. You live in His world, and enjoy the regularity of it but do not give thanks to Him for it, nor honor Him with your allegiance.

## How Are Things Like One Another? (The problem of universals)

*Seeing is believing* is a saying that we run across from time to time. People will say that unless they can see, feel, smell, hear, or touch something, they do not believe that it exists or is real. Some would even say, *Show me God and I will believe in Him*. If you are looking for an answer to that question, check out the Skeptic's Challenge question "*Does God Exist?*", page 4.

However, there are things that we believe that we do not see. Here we come to the problem of universals. What do we mean by that? Here is a little illustration that Dr. Greg Bahnsen would utilize. Duck is a universal. Ducks are not. When you see Huey, Dewey, and Louey out on the pond, they are ducks. But when we speak of them as being *ducks* we are referring to something that is not a *duck*. The word duck, d-u-c-k, is not a duck. When you put those letters together on a piece of paper, the word duck is not a duck. In other words, duck-ness as an idea is not out there on the pond.

To put it another way, there are likenesses in the world. Without them we would not be able to reason. Reason is a matter of finding out that a particular is a member of a class. We must have these universals.

It is impossible to reason only about particulars. For instance, we say *That barn is red*. What is the particular in that statement? *Barn*. But we are talking about something universal – the idea of

red, or red-ness. If we burn that barn down, the idea of barn (barn-ness) still exists and so does red-ness. Even if we burned every barn in the world down, so that there is no particular instance of a barn, we would still have barn-ness.

Or, think of your name. If we were able to eliminate every single instance of your name in the world, removed from every document, every old homework assignment, mortgage, loan, every single one, would you still have a name?

What is the point? It is simply this: you cannot touch any of those likenesses. You cannot taste them. You cannot smell them. You cannot hear them. You cannot see them. They are not in the physical world anywhere!! So if you do not believe in anything other than what you can experience, then you must stop talking. For when you speak, you refer to things which on your view of the world cannot exist!!

So why do we call them likenesses?

The barn is red. Thus I can find a particular incidence of red, but I cannot find red-ness. If there is nothing but physical objects, they are particular physical objects. If they are only particular, then I cannot refer to them in the way that I do when I say *this book*, *this table*, *this chair*, *this coffee* because there is no such thing as book-ness, or coffee-ness if there are only physical things.

If you insist that only those things we can touch, see, hear, smell, taste, i.e. the physical world, exist, then we have to say that all reasoning must end. We cannot even be using words to express ourselves.

So why do you call them likenesses? You might be thinking, I can see there is a likeness between Huey, Dewey, and Louey. I see this and that and I say they are like one another. What I see I call a duck. I see a likeness between all things which are breathing in my house, and I call them human beings. So I see there are only particulars, and I see there is a likeness and I give a name to those.

You say there are only particulars in this world, but then you see a likeness between them. Show me the likeness. Do not show me Huey, Dewey or Louey, show me the *likeness*. I would like to smell *duck-ness*. Since it is something, it must have a smell. When you

say that you see a likeness, you are seeing something that does not exist in your view of the world where nothing exists that is not physical. The likeness is not physical. The likeness is not physical.

In order to reason, you must use concepts, universals, likenesses, but your view of the world cannot account for them.

The truth is that you are using the Christian view of the world in order to claim that the Christian view of the world is wrong. Instead, you show that you do, in your heart of hearts, know that there is a God, but you do deny Him, as the Bible says, in unrighteousness.

## Is There More To Us Than Brains? (The problem of freedom of thought)

Does man have the ability to think freely? Can we entertain different notions, compare their validity and determine a course of action that we might take? Is there more to us than simply brains? By brain, we mean brain in the more or less technical sense of tissue that is found inside the cranium. Brain tissue is something physical. What controls the actions of physical things? The scientist or naturalist would tell us (in unscientific terms) the laws of nature, physics, biology, chemistry control what physical things do.

Think about this for a moment. If all of my thought processes are controlled simply by brain tissue, which itself operates according to the laws of physics, biology, etc., then there is in fact no freedom of thought. In other words, there is a certain kind of stimulus which comes into the system, and that stimulus, according to the laws of biology and physics, controls what happens in my brain, and my brain gives me the thoughts I have.

What are the implications of that? First, if a person believes that to be true, then one has no reason to be proud of thinking that. What one thinks, one cannot help but think. For this person, the

only thing that is real under this view of the world, is the physical world. That world operates by the laws of physics and biology.

So when this unbeliever says, *Naturalism is true*, we have no reason to respect his opinion. Why not? Because on his view of the world, that is just the laws of biology and physics leading him to say that sort of thing. He could not help it. It is not they he considered all the options and weighed the evidence in favor of that opinion and made an intelligent choice. No, there is no choice based on his view of the world!

You might protest and say, *But I did think through supernaturalism, and I have looked at the various options, and I have concluded that the natural one is the best option.*

But it could not have happened that way on your view of the world. On your view of the world, certain stimuli came into your ears and eyes, and your brain tissue did certain things as electrical stimuli ran through your nervous system, and you had an idea. You just uttered the idea as the vocal chords responded to the stimuli and you said, *Naturalism is true*. That is no more an intelligence of process than the growth of weeds. Weeds grow according to the laws of biology and physics, too. Your thoughts and weeds are on the same level, according to your view of the world.

As a Christian, I do not think that is true. I think that your saying *Naturalism is true* has such eternal significance that, unless you have a change of heart, you will go to hell for it. So as a Christian, I honor the freedom of thought that is there. But on your view of the world, you cannot encourage me to believe anything. Because I do not have the choice to believe anything any more than you do. My brain just operates according to the laws of physics and biology.

As an unbeliever, if naturalism is true, you have no reason to think that naturalism is true because you do not have a brain that operates with freedom of thought.

It is only the Christian view of the world that makes sense out of arguing over these things. As a Christian, we can account for why a person believes wrong things. The Bible tells us about that

person and his rebellion against God. More importantly, we can account for why we even debate these things.

The natural conclusion for the naturalist is that a person's brain is no different than a weed. No one goes out there and tries to persuade a weed not to grow. So it does not make any sense to appeal to the gray tissue up there in a person's cranium not to do the things that gray tissue does. Some people have gray tissue that leads them to say sentences that do not make any sense under the non-Christian view of the world, but naturalism is true. Some people have gray tissue that leads them to say that supernaturalism is true and that is the end of the story.

Are we more than brains? Yes, we are. We are made in the image of God and we have mind, soul, spirit, the invisible personality of man. That personality enables me to decide what I will think about right now. If I wanted to, I could stop thinking about writing this article right now. I could image myself on a beach on the Outer Banks of North Carolina in the middle of summer getting a nice tan, getting somewhat hot because it is warm there. I can weigh options. Do I want my coffee black, with cream, with sugar, with cream and sugar, with flavored cream? That is because on the Christian view of the world, God has made me in His image. I am like God in that I have freedom of thought. I am unlike God in that I often use my thoughts in a way that is disobedient to Him.

In fact, I have the freedom of thought to use that freedom to deny that God even exists, and to tell myself that only what is natural is real. I can use my freedom to suppress the truth that I have that freedom and claim that this is a deterministic world, without freedom at all. How unfortunate! The Bible says that you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

## Are there laws of morality? (The problem of ethics)

This is a day that is marked by pluralism, tolerance, and relativism. Can anyone say for sure what is right and wrong with

so many ideas competing in the marketplace of thought? We have to some degree as a culture lost the idea of absolutes and replaced it with *different strokes for different folks*. What is right for you might not be right for me.

So we might begin by asking a tongue in cheek question that is not really a play on words: *Are you absolutely sure that there are no absolutes?* In answering that, one finds oneself on the horns of a dilemma. In fact, what one finds is that there are ethical absolutes and that those absolutes tend to agree with one's one set of ethics. So people will say there are no ethical absolutes, that some former absolutes should be relative. But then the things that they believe have to be believed by everyone, and they are going to enforce it with the power of the State if they have to, e.g. *there are no absolutes*, and everyone had better believe it. However, if we are going to rule out absolutes, then we must do it in a consistent way.

The truth is that we all have a standard of what we consider to be right and wrong. Each of us tries to justify our own ethical principles. What are some ways that people try to justify their own ethical standards apart from the Bible? Do they work? Are they consistent? Or are they simply arbitrary?

There are those who would hold out that it is okay to do something as long as it does not hurt someone else. What is wrong with that kind of thinking? The question that immediately comes to mind is: *Why is it wrong to hurt other people? How do you justify that claim?*

In fact, if you are a non-Christian who is an atheist, then you believe that this world came about through the chance forces of evolution. According to that view of history and the development of the human race, a good portion of the evolutionary process is a matter of dog eat dog, survival of the fittest. Nature is red in tooth and claw. The surviving races and species are usually so because they have been willing to hurt others and take advantage of them. You know that out in the realm of nature, there would not be any species of animal that was not willing to feed on other living forms. That is true of us too. So nature would seem to suggest to us that hurting is a part of the evolutionary process.

In fact, you say that sexual immorality is acceptable because that is just the way that nature made us. If that is true, then how do you defend the fact that nature has also made us violent, so there is no reason on your view of the world why we should not hurt other people. In fact, it is not only acceptable to hurt someone on your view of the world, there is also a good reason for it – to survive. In fact, with such an evolutionary view of the world, one could become someone who hurts people for entertainment. There are people who are like that in this world. Just think of the Columbine High School tragedy.

Though from a Christian standpoint, they are horrible people, and as Christians we would condemn them severely, we have a reason to do so. While one would not question your condemnation of such people as well, but for what reason given your view of the world?

But you might retort, *if everybody did this, then we would not survive well as a species. In fact, if everyone did this then there is a chance that the whole race would die out.*

Of course, I would have to ask you just how you know that. That is a humongous prophecy about the future and I would doubt whether or not you have enough evidence to support it. But let's just say for the moment, it is true. But let me ask you this: *Why would it be wrong for the human race to die out?*

Many species have gone by the way in the history of evolution. Since that is the course of evolution, why shouldn't the human species die out? Why is that a bad thing, from an evolutionary point of view?

But the fact of the matter is that not everyone is going to want to hurt other people. That is a fact of nature too. Not everyone gets pleasure out of hurting people and not everyone hurts people to the point where they die. So why should we say that it is wrong for everyone? That is the only fair thing. If it is wrong for everybody, then it needs to be wrong for you as an individual.

In other words, you are appealing then to a principle that we must distribute moral rights evenly and that is why we should not hurt someone else. Where do you come up with the idea that moral rights should be distributed evenly?

Here is a sign that says *Don't Walk on the Grass*. Being a belligerent person, I am going to walk on the grass. Someone pleads with me, reasons with me by saying, *There is a good reason for that sign. If everyone was to walk on the grass then the grass would die out and it would be just muddy there. So if you enjoy having grass there, then you should not walk on it.*

My simple reply is: *You are right if everyone walks on it, it will. But not everyone is going to walk on it, so I will go ahead and walk on it.*

You might take offense at that and tell me it isn't fair, but I will simply ask where you got the idea that moral rights must be evenly distributed. The fact is I am claiming a moral exception. Since I know that not everyone is going to walk on the grass with that sign there, I will be the exception. A few exceptions can be tolerated without killing the grass.

*But if you hurt people, they might hurt you. It is in your best interest not to go around hurting other people. It is a form of self-preservation.*

But what if a person is a masochist, and they really wish that people would hurt them? But I know that you do not believe that, and neither do I. The point is that as a Christian I have a reason to believe it, but you don't given your view of the world.

*But it is in the prudential interest of the greatest number of people to have laws which forbid hurting other people? But who says that everybody should be happy? Where do we find that principle? Besides, why should a person care if everyone else is happy, as long the individual is happy? This person feels the best when he is hurting someone else.*

You might come up with other consequences that you believe would be detrimental, but the question comes back to *What is wrong with those consequences. On what authority would you claim that those consequences are detrimental?* Besides, in a random, chance universe how can you ever predict the future and its consequences.

The truth is that everyone wants to live by an ethic. There are things that we would both find wrong and repulsive. We do not believe child molestation is right. But in your view of the world how

can you say it is wrong? In the Christian view of the world, God condemns it and says that such people should be executed. But on your view of the survival of the fittest, how do you defend such a position. The truth is that while you condemn the action, you have no right to do so. Once again, you borrow from the Christian view of the world in order to live in this world which was created by God and is governed by His law, yet at the same time denying He exists or that you owe Him anything.

The truth is that you do believe in moral absolutes. The simple fact that you might be debating in your own mind the claims of Christianity is evidence that you believe in such absolutes. How? Is it all right for me to lie to you in order to convince you that my point of view is correct? Why not? Why shouldn't I try to win the debate any way I can, if it is for your own good, or if it makes me happy to win such debates?

In fact, why should we be going to the laws of logic rather than the laws of violence to settle our differences? Most people would say that violence is a much more effective than logic in getting ahead in life. Why shouldn't we resort to violence to settle the argument?

Moreover, your very debating with a Christian is a sign that you have already bought into the Christian's worldview.

Do not be a hypocrite about what you believe. Live consistently within it. If everyone can create their own reality, if everyone is right, then no one is wrong. Therefore, you lose all moral ground to condemn Hitler for the Holocaust because he just created his own reality and culture where it was okay to kill Jews, Poles, and other people he considered inferior. You lose all ground to condemn the South for their cultural racism, and you must say that it was wrong for Martin Luther King, Jr. to try to change their ethical norms. It is just different strokes for different folks. You have to respect other points of view.

No, truth is not person relative. Truth is declared by the One who is absolute Truth and He has declared it for all of us to read in the Bible. He is the only One who is able to set the absolute standard for right and wrong. We must submit to His rule. But there is our problem. We want to be God. We want to set the standards

ourselves. We want to be the #1 person in the universe. We are rebels at heart.

Dr. Cornelius Van Til used to give the illustration of a child slapping her father in the face. The only way that a child can do that is if she is sitting on her Father's lap. So as rebels, we sit on God's lap and slap Him in the face, refusing to submit our will to His. We use the Christian view of the world in order to argue that there is no God and no Christian view of the world.

Preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching  
those things which concern the Lord  
Jesus Christ, with all confidence...  
- Acts 28:31

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