

## A Christian Apologetic (The case for a Christian theistic worldview)

At the beginning of this talk I want to define my terms and grounds for discussion. This is not some generalised debate about moral and ethical issues – it is rather a defence of Christian theism. I am not arguing for theism in general, the reason behind this is that the various concepts of deity found in the world religions are in many cases logically incompatible and do not lead in any broad sense to general theism – if such a thing exists. In addition, I am a Christian and therefore, do not find other religions philosophically defensible and often undermine human reason and experience – Equally, I could not fairly defend the faith of a religion with which I disagree – so I am defending a Christian worldview based on God's triune revelation of himself in the scriptures of the old and new testament.

At the outset we must agree that all faith, for it to make philosophical sense, or to provide any ground for discussion must have some philosophical, rational element. We discuss with one another on the basis and ground of reason. It is also important to note that the Christian worldview does not depend on those who practise Christianity. Atheists and Christians can both be intolerant, rude, unintelligent and irrational in their personalities yet, it is unfair to compare these personal characteristics with the worldview itself. In addition, claims of peace that are associated with both atheism and theism should be discounted as they are entirely subjective and do not fall within our remit of argument based on the ground of reason.

I am defending Christian theism as a philosophical system and as such, I cannot see the philosophical ground for atheism as an outlook on life.

The Bible says (and if you have a problem with the Bible then maybe that is a topic for later discussion!) quite simply in the Psalms that,

'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.' (Psalm 14 v.1)

and,

'The wicked through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not always in his thoughts'. (Psalm 10 v.4)

Yet, despite this obvious handicap to an unbeliever the Christian Church has never been afraid to defend itself. In Acts 17 we have an account of the missionary travels of the Apostle Paul. He was in Athens and was 'disputing' in the synagogue and the marketplace. Then he met certain philosophers, Epicureans and Stoicks and they took him to the Aeropagus (the ancient arena for philosophical discussion). Paul standing on Mars hill said 'Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions. I found an altar with this inscription. TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.'

This I believe is the correct approach to take when defending Christianity to an atheist or agnostic philosopher. Christianity is fundamentally declarative in its approach. This is why I find myself in a difficulty when faced with the theistic proofs (so-called) for the existence of God.

I think that the rational proofs demonstrate conclusively the existence of God, but to the atheist's mind this is discounted by the effect of sin –

This I will demonstrate by a short extract from a defence of Atheism being given by Gordon Stein who is President of the Rationalist Society, Free from Religion foundation and a key figure in the world wide atheist movement.

(recording of the debate between Bahnsen and Stein is available on the internet)

All these arguments ignore the transcendental proof of a Christian worldview. You see there is something fundamentally wrong with the idea that a finite, space bound creature like ourselves can hope to fully prove the existence of an infinite, eternal and unchangeable God with his being of wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. This is really the first fundamental error that takes place in an atheist's mind. He assumes quite wrongly that the existence of God is a factual question that can be resolved in the same way as any other factual question.

The assumption that all existence claims can be answered in the same way is quite simply a mistake. The existence and factuality of different things is not confirmed in the same way in every case we might ask if Mr Dentith is seated on a chair and we know how we could start to answer that question. The existence of the chair is confirmed or denied in a series of ways yet, they are very different from the way that we would confirm or deny the factuality and existence of say barometric pressure, gravitational pull, quasars, elasticity, radioactivity, laws in nature, names we give to things, grammar, numbers, history, geography, love, politics, individual identity, dreams and beauty. In all these examples, we do not engage in anything like walking over to Mr Dentith and looking at the object on which he is seated. This difference in the proofs we elucidate for things explains the academic curriculum you see in school – why biology brings a different set of laws and proofs than physics or even English Grammar. The evidence we command is determined by the field of discussion and if we are discussing an infinite God then that must shape the evidence we seek after. It will not be possible to fully comprehend God yet, it must be possible to see facets or features of God in ourselves and the world in which we live. This approach is what Paul was using when he began to 'declare God' to the Epicureans and the Stoicks.

In Romans, Paul asserts that all men know God so inescapably and clearly on the basis of natural revelation that they are left without defense. He portrays the unbeliever as one who is holding down the truth – suppressing God in a sinful heart as they are fearful of his wisdom.

I just mentioned factual questions and we saw that different issues are proven in differing ways. Yet, surely the most basic question in Epistemology is

whether or not facts can be known without some reference to God... and so whether or not God exists. Facts, logic and the usefulness of rationality are determined, for me, by reference to the Bible.

The only argument for an absolute God that holds water is a transcendental argument.... This seeks to discover what sort of foundations the house of human knowledge must have, in order to be what it is. Quite simply, my reason for Christian theism is the utter impossibility of the contrary view.

The issue between a believer and a non-believer in Christian theism cannot be settled by a direct appeal to “facts” and “laws” whose nature and significance is already agreed upon by both parties in the discussion. The question is rather – what is the final reference point that is required to make these “facts” and “laws” intelligible....

Now assuming the correctness of this approach, for the sake of argument, I step onto the atheist turf and the “facts” that I see are not “facts” they are opinions, and the “laws” I see are nothing like laws. Now it is only when you in return step onto the Christian theistic position that you can make any sense of facts or laws that makes any intelligible sense. This is a method by presupposition that takes Christian theism as its base unit.

Only by taking a Christian theistic view can we make the acquisition of any form of knowledge intelligible. You see the consistent application of an atheist worldview does not only reject God but it destroys the ideas of proof and truth... it destroys both science and reason. We said at the start that our discussion must centre on the basis of reason... you accept that, but, reason is itself built on an acceptance of a Christian view of the idea that things can be true and the reason (and the laws that it involves) exists...

An atheists commitment to the random eventuation of history (termed the metaphysic of chance) renders the idea of proof impossible, predication unintelligible and the rational/irrational conflict unavoidable. We leave must leave views that do not make rational sense.... This means that you must leave your tenuous grasp on the empty and vacuous theory called Atheism.

I said that the argument for the existence of God and the truth of the Bible was based on ‘the impossibility of the contrary’. This cannot be better put,

‘The argument for the existence of our God and for the truth of Christianity is objectively valid... The argument is absolutely sound. Christianity is the only reasonable position to hold. It is not merely as reasonable as the other views, or even more reasonable than the other views, it is alone – it is the only natural, reasonable and rational view for anyone to take’.

Christianity is proved as it is the very foundation of the idea of proof itself. An atheist that claims his atheism is true – is engaging in a self-contradictory statement.

This does not mean that the unbeliever cannot know anything. Yes, Christianity is the base for Western scholarship and science, yet the unbeliever does make many useful contributions. This is where the notion of self-deception cannot be ignored.

Non-Christians are never able to apply their views consistently... they take the facts of God's existence, they take the uniformity of nature, they take the coherence of God's world... and they use the Christian ideas of proof and truth in relation to them, while at the same time they verbally deny that he is there. They need the Christian worldview, in order, for their lives to make sense – and the reason for this is that they were created by God and in his image.

Man inherently and inescapably needs his God – in this most basic sense we all 'live by Faith'. This is the basic contradiction at the heart of the atheist – on the one hand he does not believe in God and on the other he needs him and actually acts out his belief. Sin darkens the mind to this most basic self-contradiction. You know God, and you suppress that knowledge – you borrow all the Christian ideas without recognising it – because deep down in your consciousness there is a knowledge of God at work.

This idea of self-deception is not without wider philosophical credence. It is mentioned in Plato, Rousseau, Goethe, Nietzsche. It is given more space in Hegels – unhappy consciousness and Kierkegaards – purity of heart and even Sartre's view of bad faith. It is in the classics of literature.. Oedipus Rex, King Lear, Great Expectations, Madame Bovary, Doetoevsky and Tolstoy... indeed, in War and Peace we read in regard to Count Rostov....

'The Count saw clearly that something had gone wrong during his absence; but it was so terrible for him to imagine anything discreditable in connection with his beloved daughter, and he so prized his own cheerful tranquility, that he avoided asking questions and did his best to persuade himself that there was nothing wrong or out of the way.'

Self-deception is a feature of our sinful humanity. We love our sins, we do not like an all holy and all seeing God.... We know he is there.... He is foundation to our basic thought patterns..... We need him for our reason and rationality.... Yet, we deny his existence because we do not like to actually engage with the demands of living our life in the sight of God. You love your sins more than you love God.... That is why you call yourself an atheist.... Yet, to pretend you do not know that he exists is self-deception. Arguing about God's existence is like arguing about the air. You may affirm that air exists, or you may affirm that it does not. But, as we discuss and debate the issue we are both breathing the air all the time.