

Faith vs. Faith An Apologetic Dialogue

by Joseph E. Torres

Introduction

This conversation is excerpted and adapted from a message board discussion regarding theistic arguments. After I presented the transcendental argument for the existence of God [TAG], another participant [we'll call him Tom] took issue with my argument.

Dialogue

Joe: The transcendental argument for the existence of God [TAG] is more than an argument for the existence of the triune God of Bible. It is actually an argument for the truth of the entire Christian worldview. As opposed to the traditional arguments, which tend to focus on God being the first cause, the grand designer, or the most perfect being, TAG argues that it is God who makes cause, purpose, design, morality, science, and logic even intelligible in the first place. Without this particular God, nothing is intelligible, meaningful, or valuable.

Tom: I read a small amount of each link you posted before I realized that it was all taken out of the Bible and put into some semi-scientific language, and presented as a model for the history of the universe and the physical world. You are under the impression that without God, there can be no basis for science or morals. Science is observation based on thorough mathematic deduction, which does not appear to require God. Moreover, arguing that morals cannot exist without God sounds like arguing that children who do not learn right from wrong from their parents can never learn right from wrong from anyone. But if one were to live by the law of reciprocity, one would lead a truly moral life without the need for deity. Likewise, the Ten Commandments were not the origin of moral reasoning; they just took common beliefs and put them in the form of a command from God so that they would receive more respect.

To be honest, the only book about Christianity I've dabbled in is the Bible, which is marginally factual at best. To believe in Jesus as the Son of God, the Lord and Savior, takes more than *blind faith*; it takes a *blind eye* to the process of logical deduction, the scientific process.

There is no logical way, through direct or indirect observation, using sound scientific method, to deduce that Jesus Christ was in any way divine. It's just another part of another one of earth's countless belief systems. It has no basis in fact, it is a *belief*.

Joe: Thanks, Tom, for your comments. But you seem to miss the transcendental thrust of my arguments. I'm not saying that people cannot live morally, cannot do science, and cannot think rationally if they're not Christian. What I'm saying is that their *worldview* cannot account for it. It cannot explain why it is that we can do science. It cannot explain the laws of logic, or human dignity, or the authority of morality. Non-Christians do know, in their heart of hearts, that God exists. I am simply saying that they borrow Christian principles in order to argue against Christianity.

Your reasons for rejecting Christianity are not concrete. In fact, they make tons of assumptions that you are unable to justify. For example, you assume repeatedly that evolutionary theory has discredited the scientific respectability of Christianity. But, as I've mentioned earlier, science depends upon the inductive principle; that the future will be like the past. Science needs the uniformity of nature in order for it to proceed with repeatable observation. But science *cannot* prove induction (because it's not observable); induction must be established on other grounds. So, on what grounds do you justify induction? According to Darwinism, the universe has no structure that governs exactly how things occur. In a reality of chance, why expect the future to be like the past? After all, anything is possible! Remember, that's how Darwinists say the world came into being.

I have a question for you. Are you a materialist? Do you think that all that is real is physical? If so, how do you explain the existence of laws of logic? You've said many times that Christian belief is sub-rational. But, how do you explain laws of logic? Are they just rules agreed upon by a bunch of people? If they are, why *ought* we to follow them? If they're not absolute, what's the big deal if we think out of accord with them? On the other hand, if they are universal, and binding upon all minds, how do you explain them? Are they physical objects? Do they exist in space somewhere? Do they exist in a world of Platonic forms?

My challenge to you is to account for the uniformity of nature, the authoritative nature of moral absolutes, and laws of rational thinking on a materialistic account. Unless you can justify these things, then it is you, not I, that operates on blind faith.

Tom: Morals have nothing to do with God. I knew right from wrong long before I had any concept of God, and I continued to hold true to my

ideals of reciprocity long after I heard of, and disagreed with, the concept of God.

Logic has nothing to do with God. I will take a bit out of Michael Martin's TANG argument. According to the brand of Christianity assumed by TAG, God created everything, including logic; or at least everything, including logic, is dependent on God (i.e., it is contingent on God). Moreover, if principles of logic are contingent on God, God could change them. Thus, God could make the law of non-contradiction false; in other words, God could arrange matters so that a proposition and its negation were true at the same time. But this is absurd. How could God arrange matters so that New Zealand is south of China and that New Zealand is not south of it? So, one must conclude that logic is not dependent on God, and, insofar as the Christian worldview assumes that logic is dependent, it is false. Logic is simply a byproduct of the observable and deductible universe.

Joe: Tom, I'm beginning to think that at *some* level we're speaking past one another. As I read your replies I continue to think that you're missing my point. I am *not* saying that non-Christians do not lead moral lives. You explain that you learned morality apart from a conscious belief in God. Fine, I never said, nor do I believe, the opposite. I'm not asking about how we came to learn the details of morality. Rather, I'm asking: What is the ultimate *authority* behind moral injunctions? I am arguing that it cannot be reduced to personal preferences or societal consensus. You've mentioned examples of people having a moral sense apart from theistic belief, as if this were a refutation of my position. But Tom, it is not. I am *not* saying that non-Christians do not think rationally. I'm asking the question: What would have to be true of the world in order to justify our everyday assumption regarding morality, logic, science, values, etc?

The TANG argument misunderstands the Christian doctrine of God. God cannot violate his character or change his essential nature¹. When logic is properly conceived and applied, it reflects the consistency that has already characterized God's thoughts. We, as creatures created in his image, can thus reflect his thinking on a finite scale. Thus, the example that Dr. Martin provides of God possibly changing things around arbitrarily is a straw man. One cannot go about arguing against a *generic* concept of God. I defend the *biblical* God. Thus, arguments against such a God must be familiar with the nature of the *biblical* God.

¹ Num. 23:19; Mal. 3:6; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 1:11-12; 6:12; Jam. 1:17

Tom: The uniformity of nature has nothing to do with God... I don't believe many deductions can be taken as certain by themselves, but when many deductions from differing perspectives come together to the same conclusion, the certainty becomes undeniable. The uniformity of natural law certainly falls under this sort of irrefutable deduction.

Joe: In order for your comments on scientific "deduction" to make sense to me, I'll have to reread it while inserting the word "inductions" where you write "deduction." Science works off of the inductive principle. Deductive conclusions are not 100% certain if built on inductively constructed premises. But read this way, your comments become viciously circular. We can justify belief in induction because induction has never failed us before? But that's an inductive argument! That's the same as saying we can ground the uniformity of nature in the uniformity of nature. It's like saying, "We believe that the future is going to be like the past because it has always been like the past before." This is not a scientific statement; you've made a bold declaration of faith! Your comments are circular in two senses. First, in the sense that I've noted above, and second, because they assume that there's no such thing as miracles that have ever taken place. But, isn't part of the very thing we're arguing over? You're boldly assuming naturalism in order to establish naturalism. I submit to you that you indeed, in your heart, know God. No, this doesn't necessarily mean you're blatantly lying to me, but only that there's a strong possibility of self-deception occurring. You know these things exist because you are created in the image of God, and because his stamp of his creatorhood is clearly impressed into your very nature.

I have attempted to demonstrate that your reason for denying God's right as your King is not rooted in intellectual difficulties. The ultimate issue here is not that you cannot believe in God, but that you *will not* believe in him.

Tom: *[Closing Statements]* Your transcendental argument is just another more clever and harder to refute explanation for Christianity. I would have to concede that your gift of the word and skills in field of debate don't permit me any reasonable chance of influencing you in any way... all I've got is something in my heart that tells every fiber of my being that Christianity stinks. Something at its core is false.

Why all the ambiguity? All it would take to make a believer out of me, and all of the world, is one more global divine intervention. I hope in my years to come I can put my instincts into the form of a more intelligent argument than what I have presented so far. I believe all we have in life is the progression of human thought, and TAG doesn't require that. It seems to have done all the thinking for us.

You once asked me if I'm a materialist. I guess you could say so. I think everything has a physical explanation, but of course I don't believe all physical explanations have been accounted for, nor do I believe they will be anytime soon. There is simply too much in our universe and our minds to have it explained in the mere 50,000 years of intelligent thought our species has known thus far. Again, your skill with the written word is too cunning for my 19 years of experience to compete with. All I have is what you would call faith; faith that your worldview is complete and wrong, and that mine is very much incomplete but at least heading in the right direction. Thanks for a good discussion.

Joe: *[Closing statements to readers of the original conversation online]*: To the readers of this post, I ask a series of questions. Were Tom's objections to Christianity really based upon logic, reason, and superior moral reasoning? Was the real issue at hand that we Christians operate on "blind faith" while atheists reason from "the facts"? Or, perhaps, is it one type of faith against another type of faith? I submit to you that in this conversation is the collision between two antithetical worldviews. This is the difference between blind faith and faith in the objective revelation of God's word.

I have argued that unless the Triune God of the Bible lives, there are no such things as objective moral values, no uniformity to nature (making the start of science impossible), no human dignity, or laws of rationality to be violated in intelligent debate. Tom, on the other hand, has brought to the facts a philosophy that he would have us believe he derived from the facts. But this is not so. Have we attempted to argue consistently from within our worldviews? Yes, I believe that we both have. But I assert that Tom has had to borrow from my worldview in order to launch an attack against it. I, on the other hand, argue that unless my worldview is already true then rational discourse doesn't even make sense; it is not intelligible. I've tried to present arguments that prove the truth of the Christian worldview from the impossibility of the contrary. This is what is called a transcendental negative argument.

I would, in closing, like to make one thing perfectly clear. I do not claim to be wiser, more intelligent, or more righteous than any of those with whom I speak. I did not cleverly work my way up the philosophical ladder to figure out the existence of God. God has revealed himself in Scripture. I examine myself and my world in light of this Word. I, too, once rejected God's word, and thus am no better than anyone. If anything, I have been humbled because of his gracious and sovereign love for me — love that I did not and still do not deserve. God, through

his Spirit, has given me new eyes to see the world with the lenses of Scripture.

I thank you for your time, and Tom for his cooperation.

Closing Comments to Current Readers

My hopes for my current readers regarding this dialogue are: 1) that the confusion and repetition of concepts will not turn off close analysis of what's going on there; and 2) that the jargon used will not hinder understanding. Now, I'd like to interpret what has happened in these last few pages.

The transcendental apologetic formulated by Cornelius Van Til is largely unknown by most unbelievers. Those of the evidentialist camp are far better at popularizing their arguments than are the presuppositionalists. Because of this, most unbelievers don't know what to do with a transcendently oriented apologetic argument. It offends their sensibilities, but a cogent or informed refutation is difficult to construe. I believe that evidentialists have too often argued what I call "second order" arguments. I define these as arguments that work from common grace benefits (beliefs in design, morality, science, logic, etc.). Now, there's nothing wrong with building on shared premises, that is until the unbeliever self-consciously argues epistemologically. When this happens, a "first order" argument is needed (arguments that challenge the unbeliever to account for the intelligibility of such notions).

First order arguments can easily expose the rationalist/irrationalist dialectical tension in non-Christian thought. Tom sought to construct a worldview based upon naturalism, stating, "I think *everything* has a physical explanation." This is rationalism in the Van Tillian sense; Tom explicitly says "everything." But, exposing his irrationalist streak, he added, "But of course, I don't believe all physical explanations have been accounted for, *nor do I believe they will be anytime soon.*" Here Tom engages what Francis Schaeffer called an "upper story leap." Though without proof, or any rational explanation on his own basis, he insisted that such necessary concepts (love, justice, rationality, the uniformity of nature, morality, etc.) must, *and one day will*, be explained naturalistically. This is irrational belief that runs contrary to the worldview he espoused.

In closing, I offer the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:20-24:

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but

we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
(1Cor. 1:20-24 NASB)