

# Apologetics -4 Dismantling Unbelief

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## 3) The Transcendental Argument in Action

When an unbeliever makes a statement about the world, they will usually employ some aspect of truth, goodness, or beauty. We then ask them why they expect those things in a supposedly godless world. They should either give up those demands and accept a nihilistic, meaningless existence, or they should grapple honestly with a non-material explanation for truth, goodness, or beauty.

Step 1: Identify what the person is assuming about the world in making the statement.

Step 2: Ask for the basis of the assumption.

Step 3: Insist that they either live with their unbelief, which means they cannot have transcendentals; or if they want transcendentals, that they admit what they know to be true, that God exists and provides the basis for those things.

### **Examples:**

How could a good God let there be so much evil in the world?

**Assumes:** Goodness, justice.

How could God send all these people to hell?

**Assumes:** Goodness, justice.

I think no one should force their belief on others.

**Assumes:** There is a right way to live, truth, morality.

There is no absolute truth.

**Assumes:** Absolute truth.

Science disproves God's existence.

**Assumes:** orderly universe, rationality, meaning.

All religions claim to be right. Everyone thinks they are right.

**Assumes:** religions are wrong to claim being right, meaning there is truth and morality.

I don't believe without evidence.

**Assumes:** Rationality, logic, meaning.

Christianity doesn't make sense.

**Assumes:** Rationality, order, meaning.

That's just your truth, your interpretation.

**Assumes:** Absolute truth, Rationality.

You can't say what's right and wrong for other people.

**Assumes:** Morality, truth.

Why should Jesus be the only way?

**Assumes:** Exclusivism is wrong, which means there is right, or morality.

If the world is as you say it is, why should there be \_\_\_\_\_? Why should we expect it?

If reality is as you say it is, where do we get \_\_\_\_\_? Where does it come from?

What is your basis for \_\_\_\_\_?

You say \_\_\_\_\_ is the case, but then you have contradicted yourself. Do you think there is truth/goodness/beauty, or not?

#### **4) The Transcendental Argument and Negativity**

Arguing with an unbeliever in this way has liabilities that we must be aware of.

First, the TAG is a negative argument. It destroys an unbeliever's confidence in his own unbelief. It does not offer anything positive; it only shows him that his pride and self-confidence were misplaced. It reveals that his worldview is contradictory, and no one wants to live with contradictions.

Second, it is likely to disturb and even offend an unbeliever to find out that he has no basis for what he does. He will be angry at the idea that he must assume God to be rational, moral, or loving. His independence is his most cherished possession, and he will be very upset at your telling him that he is borrowing from Christianity.

Therefore, the TAG is there to cast down arguments and pretensions (2 Cor 10:5). It is there to expose that an unbeliever has been suppressing truth (Rom 1:18). But having done that, something positive must be supplied: who this God is, His moral law, our sin, His atonement.

We do not argue "Morality, therefore God", or "Logic, therefore God". We argue, "God, therefore morality", or God, therefore science/ truth/ logic.

From here, there is a wise and judicious use of arguments that explain which God we are talking about, as well as what reasons strengthen our belief.

John Frame:

1. The universe is either ultimately personal or ultimately impersonal.
2. If it is ultimately impersonal, it cannot justify rational discourse, including whatever you may be saying to me.
3. Therefore, if you want to carry on rational discourse, you must presuppose that the universe is ultimately personal.
4. Only the Bible, and views derived from the Bible, contains a consistently personalistic account of the world.
5. Therefore, we should give careful consideration to the Bible and assess its truth on the assumption that a personal God may have inspired it.
6. Pray that God's Spirit would open blind eyes to that truth.

#### **I. Personal or Impersonal Universe**

Granted that the universe contains both persons (such as you and me) and impersonal structures (such as matter, motion, chance, time, space, and physical laws), which is fundamental? Did the impersonal (atoms, chance) bring about the personal (sentient beings). Or did someone Personal bring about both other persons and the impersonal? Did mind create matter, or did matter create minds?

Secular thought generally assumes the latter—that persons are the products of matter, motion, chance, and so on. Secular thought always has a built-in assumption: the impersonal explanation is the better one, the more likely one.

But is that a necessary assumption? The Bible does not hesitate to ascribe the events of the natural world directly to God. He waters the land (Ps. 65:9–11). He sends the lightning and the wind (135:5–7). He spreads the snow, frost, and hail and then sends his word to melt them (147[...])

#### **Consequences:**

If the impersonal is primary, then there is no consciousness, no wisdom, and no will in the ultimate origin of things. This means that reason itself is an unintended accidental consequence of matter. So is morality. So is beauty. Friendship, love, and beauty are all of no ultimate consequence, for they are reducible to blind, uncaring process.

If the personal is primary, then the universe was made with an intentional design, plan, and rationality. Friendship and love are not only profound human experiences, but fundamental ingredients of the whole world order.

A Person made the universe with morality, creativity, love, justice, reason. This Person made Reality and approves or disapproves of our submission or rebellion to His design.

## **II. The Creator is the Absolute Person**

The major religions of the world, in their most typical forms, are either pantheistic (Hinduism, Taoism) or polytheistic (animism, some forms of Hinduism, Shinto, and the traditional religions of Greece, Rome, Egypt, etc.).

Pantheism has an **absolute**, but not a **personal absolute**.

Polytheism has **personal** gods, but none of these is **absolute**. Indeed, although most religions tend to emphasize either pantheistic absolutism or personal nonabsolutism, we “we can usually find both elements beneath the surface.

Pantheism – Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Animism, Spiritism, Scientism



Absolute ✓

Personal X

Polytheism – Hinduism, Shinto, paganism



Absolute X

Personal ✓

Monotheism



Absolute ✓

Personal ✓

Greek polytheism, for example, the gods are personal but nonabsolute. Yet this polytheism is supplemented by a doctrine of fate, which is a kind of impersonal absolute. Similarly, behind the gods of animism is Mana, the impersonal reality. People seem to have a need or a desire for both personality and absoluteness, but in most religions these two elements are separated and therefore compromise each other, rather than reinforcing each other. Thus, of the major religious movements, only biblical religion calls us with clarity to worship a personal absolute

