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GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY

- b. As Christians, our strategy concerns the content, information, and reasons why someone should believe Christianity describes the world accurately, all of which are contained in either defensive or offensive apologetics.⁴*
- 1) Defensive apologetics *answers direct challenges* to Christianity.
For example...
 - a) *It responds to attacks on the Bible's authority.*
 - b) *It answers the problem of evil.*
 - c) *It addresses Darwinian macro-evolution.*
 - 2) Offensive apologetics *makes a positive case* for Christianity.
For example...
 - a) *It provides evidence for the existence of God.*
 - b) *It supplies evidence for the resurrection of Christ.*
 - c) *It presents evidence of fulfilled prophecy.*
- c. Our strategic concerns include a number of contemporary issues.*
- 1) The radical relativism and skepticism of postmodernism which denies the existence of objective truth.⁵ This would include moral relativism (all moral truth is individual or group based) and religious pluralism (all religions are equally valid and “true” for those who believe).
 - 2) The competing views on Jesus' identity
 - 3) The problem of evil
 - 4) The ethical issues of abortion, homosexuality, human cloning, and doctor-assisted suicide
 - 5) The historical accuracy of the Gospels
2. In contrast, tactics literally refer to “the art of arranging,” deploying one's assets, the details of the engagement.
- a. Tactics entail the artful arranging of resources, specifically in maneuvering through conversations. They allow you to:*
- 1) Use your knowledge in creative ways.
 - 2) Choreograph the particulars of your response.
 - 3) Style your response to objections.
 - 4) Employ specific methods in addressing attacks.
 - 5) Guide yourself with sound reasoning, clear thinking, and aggressive advocacy.
- b. Often a clever commander has the advantage over a superior opponent through deft tactical maneuvering.*
- c. Tactics should not be used as:*
- 1) Tricks or slick ruses.
 - 2) Clever ploys to destroy non-Christians, forcing them to submit to your point of view.
 - 3) Attempts to belittle or humiliate to gain notches in your spiritual belt.
- d. Instead, tactics....*
- 1) Enable you to present the truth clearly and cleverly.
 - 2) Help you maneuver to get a footing or an advantage in a conversation, helping you to navigate through the mine fields.
 - 3) Put you in the driver's seat.



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**STUDENT INTERACTIVE**

Break into groups of three or four and share some “war stories” from the last session’s assignment. How did you employ the first Columbo question to initiate conversations, gain information, or clarify a point of view? (5 minutes)

I. *R*EVIEW**A IN THE LAST SESSION WE COVERED . . .**

1. The value of using a tactical approach.
 - a. *Tactics help you get into the driver’s seat and control the conversation.*
 - b. *Tactics help you maneuver effectively in the face of opposition.*
 - c. *Tactics make your engagements with others seem more like diplomacy than combat.*
2. The distinction between tactics and strategy.
 - a. *Strategy involves the big picture.*
 - b. *Tactics involve the actual details of engagement — the orderly, immediate, hands-on choreography of the particulars.*
3. The danger of using tactics.
 - a. *Tactics are not tricks meant to belittle or humiliate non-Christians.*
 - b. *Tactics are clever ways to maneuver toward an appropriate advantage and stay in control of the conversation.*
4. The introduction to the Columbo tactic.
 - a. *The Columbo tactic uses carefully selected questions to go on the offensive in a disarming way.*
 - 1) Questions are a great way to start a conversation.
 - 2) Questions are interactive.
 - b. *The Columbo tactic removes the need for “preaching,” as you can make good headway without actually stating your case.*
 - c. *The first Columbo question is, “What do you mean by that?”*
 - 1) This clarification question provides you with important information about your opponent’s views.
 - 2) This question forces the other person to think more carefully about his or her exact meaning.



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B THE SECOND COLUMBO QUESTION ENFORCES THE BURDEN OF PROOF RULE: “NOW, HOW DID YOU COME TO THAT CONCLUSION?”

1. This question graciously assumes that the non-believer has actually reached a conclusion — that he has reasons for his view and has not merely asserted it *carte blanche*.
 - a. *It will give him a chance to express his rationale, if he has one.*
 - b. *It will also give you more material to work with in addressing his objections.*
 - c. *It ultimately shifts the burden of proof to the other person, which is where it often belongs.*
2. Since many people have never thought through their views and don't know why they hold them, don't be surprised if you get a blank stare after asking this question.
3. Alternate questions are, “Why do you say that?” or “What are your reasons for holding that view?”

**AMBASSADOR SKILLS**

Sometimes the simplest, most effective question you can ask someone is a variation of the question, “How do you know?” This tactic can also take the form of the following questions:

- “Why should I believe what you believe?”
- “What makes you think that's the right way to see it?”
- “I'm curious. Why would you say a thing like that?”
- “Why should I trust that your organization — the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith, the Watchtower — speaks for God?”

**REFLECT A MOMENT**

We can spend hours helping someone carefully work through an issue without ever mentioning God, Jesus, or the Bible. This doesn't mean we aren't advancing the Kingdom, though. It's always a step in the right direction when we help people to discover truth. It gives them tools to assess the bigger questions that will eventually come up.

Further, when we challenge people to think carefully, we acknowledge they bear the image of God. This affirms their intrinsic worth. For a discussion on the value of human beings apart from the cross, see the commentary “Gospel Fodder” at www.str.org.

4. Consider the responses you could make to the following claims.
 - a. “You can never know anything for sure”— *Why should I believe that? Can you give me a good reason why I should believe nothing can be known with certainty?*
 - b. “Morals are just an invention of culture; there are no objective moral rules”— *What would be your evidence for that?*



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2. Well-meaning believers sometimes take the challenge and attempt a head-to-head duel with the professor, but this approach is rarely successful.
3. A basic rule of engagement governs exchanges like these: The person with the microphone wins.
 - a. *Never attempt a frontal assault on a superior force.*
 - b. *The professor always has the strategic advantage, and he knows it.*
 - c. *Don't get into a power play when your're out-gunned.*
4. There's a better way.
 - a. *Don't disengage; instead, use your tactics.*
 - b. *Raise your hand and ask, "Professor, what do you mean by that?"*
 - c. *Next ask, "How did you reach that conclusion?"*
 - d. *Make him — the teacher and the one making the claim — shoulder the burden of proof.*
 - e. *This approach enables you to stay engaged while deftly sidestepping the power struggle.*
5. The “professor’s ploy” comes into play when he responds by attempting to make you shoulder the burden of proof.
 - a. *He may sense your maneuver and respond by saying, "You must be one of those Christians who thinks the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Okay, since I'm a fair man, why don't you prove that to the rest of the class?"*
 - b. *In one quick move, he's cleverly switched the burden of proof back on you, the student.*
 - c. *Don't take the bait!*
 - 1) You aren't the one making a claim; he is.
 - 2) He must defend his own claim. He's the teacher, after all.
6. You can respond to the professor's ploy with dignity and tact.
 - a. *When he shifts the burden of proof on you, calmly respond by saying, "Professor, first, I haven't revealed anything about my views. Second, my views don't really matter right now. You're the teacher and you've made a strong claim about the Bible. I'm just trying to learn your reasons for it."*
 - b. *If he gives an answer, thank him for it and either ask him another question or let it go.*
7. Notice that the burden of proof tactic takes the pressure off you, but still keeps you in the driver's seat.
 - a. *You don't have to be the expert on every subject.*
 - b. *If you keep the burden on the other side when they're making the claim, you don't have to have all the answers.*
 - c. *In fact, you can be effective even when you know very little if you ask the right questions.*

REMEMBER: THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT TACTICAL QUESTIONS YOU CAN EVER ASK ARE, "WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?" AND "WHY DO YOU BELIEVE IT?"



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pletely out of the hot seat. It deftly shifts control of the conversation back to you while shifting the spotlight — and the pressure — back on him. You are no longer under any obligation to answer, refute, or even respond because you’ve already said you need to give the issue more thought.

This is easy. Essentially you’re saying, “Oh, you want to beat me up? Fine with me. Just do it slowly and thoroughly.” This is a move that even the most delicate, retiring, shy, bashful, skittish, timid, or reserved personality can employ with great effect.



Some examples for the Student Interactive:

“The radical religious right is ruining America.”

“Darwin’s finches are a clear-case example of evolution at work.”

“The Bible has been translated and re-translated. The stories about Jesus can’t be trusted.”

“The Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the raising of Lazarus, even the Old Testament miracles—all are freely used for religious propaganda, and they are very effective with an audience of unsophisticates and children.”

—Richard Dawkins

“The most fundamental freedom is the freedom of reproductive self-determination.” —

Gloria Feldt



STUDENT INTERACTIVE



THE HOT SEAT

Break into two teams. Each team should compile a list of three top challenges that put Christians in the hot seat — the more sophisticated, the better.

Next, send a volunteer from your team to the front of the room to field challenges by an aggressive member of the other team. The challenger should try to overwhelm the volunteer with points she cannot answer, which places her in the hot seat. Her goal is then to use the first two questions of the Columbo tactic in the fact-finding mode to stay out of the hot seat. The volunteer will have succeeded and won a point for her team each time she successfully deflects the challenger and remains unruffled. The team making claims should not be put down easily, though. Try to keep it realistic, but not obnoxious. (10 minutes)



AMBASSADOR SKILLS

Asking simple, leading questions is an almost effortless way to accomplish balance. You can advance the dialogue and make capital of the conversation for spiritual ends without seeming abrupt, rude, or pushy. Questions are engaging and interactive, probing yet amicable. Most important, they keep you in the driver’s seat while someone else does all the work.

III. *W*HAT MAIN POINTS WERE COVERED IN THIS SESSION?

A FIRST, WE EXAMINED THE SECOND USE OF THE COLUMBO TACTIC: REVERSING THE BURDEN OF PROOF.

1. The burden of proof is the responsibility someone has to defend or give evidence for his or her view, and the person who makes the claim bears the burden.
2. It’s not enough to simply give an alternate explanation.
3. The question used to reverse the burden of proof is, “How did you come to that conclusion?”

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SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH ANSWERS

1. *What do we mean by the term “burden of proof”?*
 - The burden of proof is the responsibility someone has to defend his own view.
2. *What is the burden of proof rule?*
 - The person who makes the claim bears the burden.
3. *What is the second key question of the Columbo tactic?*
 - “How did you come to that conclusion?”
4. *This graciously assumes that the non-Christian has actually come to a conclusion — that he has reasons for his view and has not just asserted it.*
5. *What is the “professor’s ploy”?*
 - Switching the burden of proof back on to the person who hasn’t made the claim.
6. *What is an easy way to stay out of the “hot seat” when someone is coming on strong?*
 - Shift from argument mode to fact-finding mode.
 - Say, “Carefully explain your view and your reasons for it, then let me think about it.”

GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY

1. This week, take another step in developing your Columbo skills in conversation. Use questions one and two (“What do you mean by that?” and “How did you come to that conclusion?” or some variation) to begin engaging others in dialogue. Be prepared to share your experiences with others in class during the next session. If you need help starting a conversation, see “Ten Easy Ways to Start Meaningful Dialogue,” by Steve Wagner, in “Food for Thought” below.
2. Introduce a friend to the two uses of the Columbo tactic that you’ve learned. Describe the main idea of each question and your reasons for using them. Explain to him the value of the Columbo tactic and how it can help him in conversations with others.
3. Review the self-assessment exercise above so you will be able to answer all the questions without the prompts. At the beginning of the next class, you will be given an exercise to demonstrate your mastery of these questions. Be prepared.
4. Skim over the next lesson in this workbook before the next class to prepare yourself for the session. This simple preview will help you understand the material when you cover it next time you meet together.



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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

JESUS AND COLUMBO

It may interest you to know that Jesus used the Columbo tactic in His dealings with other people. It was His habit to go on the offensive by asking probing questions meant to challenge his opponents or trap them in their foolishness. Consider the passages below, for example, and reflect on the ways you might learn from Jesus, the ultimate example of apologetics in action.

LUKE 20:22-26 “Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?’ But He detected their trickery and said to them, ‘**Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?**’ And they said, ‘Caesar’s.’ And He said to them, ‘Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’”

MARK 12:35-37 “And Jesus answering began to say, as He taught in the temple, ‘**How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?** David himself said in the Holy Spirit, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand until I put Thine enemies beneath Thy feet.” **David himself calls Him “Lord,” and so in what sense is He his son?**’ And the great crowd enjoyed listening to Him.”

LUKE 20:2-8 “And they spoke, saying to Him, ‘Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?’ And He answered and said to them, ‘**I shall also ask you a question, and you tell Me: Was the baptism of John from Heaven or from men?**’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, “From Heaven,” He will say, “Why did you not believe him?” But if we say, “From men,” all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.’ And they answered that they did not know where it came from. And Jesus said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’”

MATTHEW 21:28-32 “**But what do you think?** A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, “Son, go work today in the vineyard.” And he answered and said, “I will, sir;” and he did not go. And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, “I will not;” yet he afterward regretted it and went. **Which of the two did the will of his father?**’ They said, ‘The latter.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him. And you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.’”

JOHN 18:22-23 “And when He had said this, one of the officers standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying, ‘Is that the way You answer the high priest?’ Jesus answered him, ‘**If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?**’”

LUKE 7:40-42 “And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ And he replied, ‘Say it, Teacher.’ ‘A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to



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repay, he graciously forgave them both. **Which of them therefore will love him more?** Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’ And He said to him, ‘You have judged correctly.’”

LUKE 14:1-6 “It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely. And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy. And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?’ But they kept silent. And He took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away. And He said to them, ‘**Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?**’ And they could make no reply to this.”

LUKE 10:25-37 “And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ And He said to him, “**What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?**’ And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’ And He said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.’ But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ Jesus replied and said, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’ **Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?**’ And he said, ‘The one who showed mercy toward him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do the same.’”

TURNING THE TABLES

If you’re placed in a situation where you suspect your convictions will be labeled intolerant, bigoted, narrow-minded, and judgmental, turn the tables. When someone asks for your personal views about a moral issue, preface your remarks with a question.

Say, “You know, this is actually a very personal question you’re asking, and I’d be glad to answer. But before I do, I want to know if you consider yourself a tolerant or an intolerant person. Is it safe to give my opinion, or are you going to judge me for my point of view? Do you respect diverse points of view, or do you condemn others for convictions that differ from yours?” Then when you give your point of view, it’s going to be very difficult for them to call you intolerant or judgmental without looking guilty, too.

This response capitalizes on the fact that there is no neutral ground in these kinds of discussions. Everybody has a point of view he thinks is right, and everybody



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judges at some point or another. The Christian gets pigeon-holed as the judgmental one, but everyone else is judging, too. It's an inescapable consequence of believing, explicitly or implicitly, in any kind of truth.

WHEN A QUESTION IS NOT A QUESTION

When is a question not a question? Good question, isn't it? We've been talking about questions you can ask to get things rolling, but sometimes a question is asked of you that is not really a question, but rather a challenge in disguise.

Like this one: “What gives you the right to say someone else's religion is wrong?” I'm used to getting this response from non-Christians, but the last time I heard it was from a fellow believer, a graduate student at UCLA. Implicit in her question was a statement, a challenge, motivated no doubt by her own mixed feelings on the subject. What right did she, as a Christian, have to lay claim to the truth of her faith and thereby claim others were wrong?

Statement-questions like these are hard to answer because they don't entirely make clear the person's intent. You're caught off-guard, mouth open, scratching your head. It was worded like a question, but you're pretty sure it wasn't one. Now what?

Often the best way to navigate these kinds of situations is to simply point out that the question is confusing. Say, “I get the impression you think I've made a mistake here. Where did I go wrong?” This will force the person to rephrase her question in a statement, which is precisely what you want.

As I confronted this issue with the student from UCLA, I explained that the question couldn't be taken at face value. Did she really want to talk about rights? Did she really want to know who I was to make such a claim, what my credentials were, or what authority I possessed to speak on these things? Clearly not. I wasn't laying claim to any authority, nor was I promoting my pedigree, academic or otherwise. The only “rights” I was appealing to were rational rights. I offered an argument, which stands or falls on its own merits, not on the authority of the speaker.

There's nothing magical about this move. It wasn't a one-line zinger that stopped my challenger in her tracks. I wanted her to think about what was really behind her “question,” phrased in the form of a statement, so that I could work with her real meaning.

The most important thing to remember about these questions is that the real statements behind them are strong claims that are open to challenge. For example, the question, “What gives you the right to say someone else's religion is wrong?” can be restated as “No one is justified in claiming one religious view is more true than another”—a statement that requires a defense. And herein lies my point. The statement-question has power only when it remains unchallenged. If you force the implicit claim to come to the surface, the objection loses its luster and you can address the real claim lurking behind the question.

NOT QUICK ON YOUR FEET?

Maybe you don't consider yourself fast enough on your feet to keep up with someone quicker than you in an intense discussion. No problem. Don't feel under pres-



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sure to immediately answer every question asked or respond to every point made.

For tactical reasons, you may want to adopt the posture of a neutral observer. Shift from argument mode to fact-finding mode.

Try this. Say something like, “Interesting point. I’d like to hear more. Let me ask some questions about your view and your reasons for it so I understand you. Then let me think about it. We can talk more later.” This shows you take the other person’s view seriously, and it also buys you valuable time.

Ask probing questions with the Columbo tactic, but don’t try to win your case just then. Take notes if you need to. Make sure you understand the challenge or the objection clearly. Then do some work on your own — maybe even enlisting others in the process — and come back prepared.

If your discussion was just part of a chance meeting, you may not be able to revisit the topic with the same person, but you’ll be prepared next time the issue comes up.

This is a wonderful way to completely take the pressure off you. It’s not a retreat tactic; it’s just a different type of engagement. It greatly reduces your anxiety level, strengthens your own confidence, and prepares you to be more effective next time around. — Greg Koukl, “In the Presence of Hostile Witnesses,” *Solid Ground*, March–April 2001.

TEN EASY WAYS TO START MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE

Steve Wagner, Stand to Reason

The key to entering a meaningful conversation is to look for opportunities, then start the conversation by building a bridge with a friendly opener. The following list gives helpful tips for striking up conversations with non-believers.

1. Be alert to circumstances where people might like to talk.
 - a. *Waiting rooms (doctor’s office, car repair, DMV)*
 - b. *Social events (receptions, dinner parties)*
 - c. *On-campus locations (central quad, classes, library, computer center, student union)*
 - d. *Lunchrooms*
 - e. *Instant messenger forums*
 - f. *Chat rooms or web forums*
 - g. *Coffee shops*
 - h. *Carpools*
2. Ask a question: “What do you think about . . . ?”
3. Show interest: “Can I ask your opinion about something?”
4. Ask for help: “There’s something on my mind. Do you have a few minutes to talk?”
5. Express concern: “I can’t believe this happened!”
6. Express amazement: “Did you hear about . . . ?!”



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B IN THIS SESSION WE WILL . . .

1. Examine the third use of the Columbo tactic: exploiting a flaw or a weakness in another person’s view.
2. Learn specific ways to improve our use of Columbo.
3. Learn how to defend against the Columbo tactic when someone else uses it against us.



AMBASSADOR SKILLS

When someone’s cherished view is at stake, it’s not unusual for them to raise empty objections — objections that initially sound worthwhile, but simply can’t be defended once examined. The probing questions of the Columbo tactic often show the lack of substance behind the bluster. As with the emperor and his new clothes, all it takes is for one person to say, “You’re naked,” and the game is up.

Don’t settle with always being on the defensive. Go on the offensive and dismantle the other person’s viewpoint by asking penetrating questions. That is key to the Columbo tactic: placing the burden of proof on your opponent.

II. THE THIRD STEP IN THE COLUMBO TACTIC: EXPOSING A WEAKNESS OR A FLAW

A KNOWING WHAT A PERSON BELIEVES AND WHY HE BELIEVES IT — THINGS YOU LEARNED FROM THE FIRST TWO STEPS OF THE COLUMBO TACTIC — ALLOWS YOU TO ASK NEW QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE A PERSON’S IDEAS. THIS IS THE FINAL STAGE OF COLUMBO.

1. The first two questions are somewhat passive.
2. The third Columbo question takes you on the offensive in an inoffensive way.



B THE CONVERSATION MAY ALERT YOU TO SOME WEAKNESS, FLAW, OR CONTRADICTION IN THE PERSON’S ARGUMENT THAT CAN BE EXPOSED AND EXPLOITED.

1. There is no special formula for making this discovery.
2. You’ll uncover it by listening carefully and then thinking about what was said.

C THE KEY TO THIS STEP IS PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, “HOW DID YOU COME TO THAT CONCLUSION?”

1. Are there any blatant weaknesses in the view?
2. Do the conclusions follow from the evidence?



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F LET'S CONSIDER HOW TO RESPOND TO THE ABOVE CHALLENGES.

1. When they say, “You shouldn’t push your morality on me,” you can ask, “Why not?”
 - a. *It’s going to be hard for them to answer this without contradicting themselves.*
 - b. *When they say you shouldn’t push your morality on them, they’re pushing their morality on you.*

2. When they say, “You’re intolerant and arrogant,” you can ask, “What do you mean by that?” (the first Columbo question).
 - a. *Asking this question flushes out their definition of “intolerant” or “arrogant,” exposing what I call the “passive-aggressive tolerance trick.”*
 - b. *Here’s the way it usually looks:*
 - 1) “You’re intolerant and arrogant.”
 - 2) “What do you mean by that?”
 - 3) “I mean you think you’re right and everyone who disagrees with you is wrong.”
 - 4) “Tell me, do you think **your** views are right?” [Of course he does; that’s why he believes what he believes.]
 - 5) “Help me out here. Why is it that when I think I’m right, I’m intolerant, but when you think you’re right, you’re just right? What am I missing?”

3. When the professor says, “The Bible is just a bunch of myths and fables,” you can ask, “How did you come to that conclusion?”
 - a. *The professor has probably assumed, because of his naturalistic philosophy, that miracles are impossible. Therefore, prior to evaluating any evidence (i.e., a priori¹, he has determined that any “historical” references to miracles are myths or fables.*
 - b. *Since modern day science is based on naturalistic philosophy, too, he thinks science has proved — instead of assumed — there are no miracles.*
 - c. *Since science can only measure the natural world, it cannot draw any conclusions, even in principle, about the supernatural world.*
 - d. *In using this logic, the professor has made what’s known as a “category error.”²*
 - e. *You can follow up the claim that science has proved miracles don’t exist by asking, “Would you explain how the methods of science can disprove the supernatural?”*

4. When they say, “That’s just your interpretation,” you can ask, “What do you mean by ‘just’?”
 - a. *Your goal is to find out if they believe all interpretations are equally valid and yours is just another in the long line of alternatives.*
 - b. *If this is what they believe, then you’re free to interpret their words any way that then strikes your fancy, an “interpretation” that is just as good as any other.*
 - c. *You can challenge this view by making some drastic claim — for example, by taking them for a skinhead who thinks all Jews and homosexuals should be put in prison. When they object, follow up by saying, “That’s my interpretation of what you’re saying. If you disagree, that’s just your own interpretation. All interpretations are equally valid, aren’t they? Or could it be that some interpretations are more accurate than others?”*



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- e. Can you clear this up for me? If partial-birth abortion is morally acceptable, on what grounds do we condemn infanticide, since the only difference between the two is the baby’s location — partially out of the womb or completely out — and location seems irrelevant to the baby’s value?
- f. Can you help me understand this? If there is absolutely no evidence for abiogenesis (life from non-life — life arising initially from inanimate matter) and much evidence against it, how can we say that Darwin’s theory of evolution is a fact?

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The following dialogue is an example of one student’s gentle use of the third step in the Columbo tactic. It’s found in the fine critique of evolution, *Icons of Evolution*, by Jonathan Wells.

TEACHER: Okay, let’s start today’s lesson with a quick review. Yesterday I talked about homology [how different organisms show remarkable similarity in the structure of some of their body parts]. Homologous features, such as the vertebrate limbs shown in your textbook, provide us with some of our best evidence that living things have evolved from common ancestors.

STUDENT (RAISING HAND): I know you went over this yesterday, but I’m still confused. How do we know whether features are homologous?

TEACHER: Well, if you look at vertebrate limbs, you can see that even though they’re adapted to perform different functions, their bone patterns are structurally similar.

STUDENT: But you told us yesterday that even though an octopus eye is structurally similar to a human eye, the two are not homologous.

TEACHER: That’s correct. Octopus and human eyes are not homologous because their common ancestor did not have such an eye.

STUDENT: So regardless of similarity, features are not homologous unless they are inherited from a common ancestor?

TEACHER: Yes, now you’re catching on.

STUDENT (LOOKING PUZZLED): Well, actually, I’m still confused. You say homologous features provide some of our best evidence for common ancestry. But before we can tell whether features are homologous, we have to know whether they came from a common ancestor.

TEACHER: That’s right.

STUDENT (SCRATCHING HEAD): I must be missing something. It sounds as though you’re saying that we know features are derived from a common ancestor because they’re derived from a common ancestor. Isn’t that circular reasoning?⁵



N O T E S

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

SHEEPISH IN SEATTLE

Once in a restaurant in Seattle, I got into a chat about religion with the waitress who was serving my table. My general comments were met with an approving nod until I said, “When it comes to religion, people believe a lot of very foolish things.” Then a shadow of disapproval crossed her face.

“That’s oppressive, not letting people believe what they want to believe,” she said.

Now, much can be said about this simple remark. For example, notice how she felt that just challenging a view was a threat to personal liberty, a “forcing” of my beliefs on others. I ignored that problem, though, and zeroed in on a more fundamental flaw. I asked a simple question — a variation of the first Columbo question.

“So, are you saying I’m wrong?”

She balked, unwilling to commit the same error she had just accused me of making. “No, I’m not saying you’re wrong. . . . I’m just trying to understand your view.”

I chuckled. “Be honest; admit it. You think I’m wrong. If you don’t think I’m wrong, then why are you correcting me? If you do think I’m wrong, then why are you oppressing me?”

It was clear that she believed some people could be wrong — me, in this case. Like many who espouse this confused sense of tolerance, the waitress couldn’t play by her own rules. Mine was a simple question that gently boxed her in.

After this, she stammered for a moment and then replied, “All religions are basically the same, after all.” Notice that this comment had little to do with my original question. It was a parry — a stock retort. But she had just made a claim, and now it was her job to defend it.

“All religions are basically the same? In what way?” I asked.

This question had a remarkable effect on her. Her jaw fell slack, and her face went blank. She didn’t know what to say. She had obviously never looked closely at other religions. If she had, she’d have known they are worlds apart. Why would she have made this claim, then? I suspect she’d gotten away with it many times before.

“Consider this,” I said. “Either Jesus is the Messiah or He isn’t, right?”

She nodded. So far, so good.

“If He isn’t the Messiah,” I continued, “then the Christians are wrong. If He is the Messiah, then the Jews are wrong. So, one way or another, somebody’s right and somebody’s wrong. Everyone can’t be right at the same time, can they?”

After stumbling around a bit, the waitress offered a diversion. “Well, no one can ever know the truth about religion.”

This is another assertion that should never go unchallenged, so I calmly asked,



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“Why would you believe a thing like that?”

The turn-about caught her by surprise. She was used to asking this question, not answering it! I was violating the rules, and she wasn’t prepared for the role change.

I waited patiently, not breaking the silence, not letting her off the hook. Finally, she ventured: “But the Bible’s been changed and retranslated so many times over the centuries.”

This was another dodge. It had nothing to do with the issue. Even if the Bible vanished from the face of the earth, some knowledge of God would still be possible, it seemed, at least in principle.

But I chose a different tack. “Oh? Have you actually studied the transmission of the ancients documents of the text of the Bible?”

Once again, the question stalled her. She couldn’t defend her own assertion. “No, I’ve never studied it,” she said. This was a remarkable admission, given her confident contention just moments before, but she didn’t seem the least bit bothered.

I didn’t have the heart to say what I might have in a case like this — “Then what you’re saying is you’re sure about something you really know nothing about.” Instead, I simply said that I’d studied Bible transmission enough to know that the academic results were in, and there was no reason to believe the Bible had been corrupted in the way she thought.

One by one, her options evaporated and she began to get uncomfortable. “I feel like you’re backing me into a corner,” she complained.

I wasn’t trying to bully her intellectually, but rather challenge her politely with fair questions. She was beginning to feel trapped because that’s what careful questioning does: By eliminating foolish options, it forces a person down the narrow corridor of truth.

Note what happened here. I said some people are foolish in their thinking on spiritual matters, and she responded by saying mine was an oppressive view. She then proved my point by serving up her standard menu of muddled, foolish religious challenges. With each claim she made, I asked a simple question.

She was speechless not because I was clever, but because, I suspect, she had never before been challenged to defend her own claims. I asked why I should swallow any of this, and she complained she was being cornered.



N O T E S

II. THE SUICIDE TACTIC

A THE SUICIDE TACTIC MAKES CAPITAL OF THE TENDENCY MANY ERRONEOUS POINTS OF VIEW HAVE TO SELF-DESTRUCT WHEN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY.

1. These self-destructive views are commonly called self-refuting statements.
2. These views commit suicide on their own, and all you need to do is point that out.
3. For example, consider the dialogue in a *Peanuts* cartoon.
 - *Sally*: “No!” *That’s my new philosophy. I don’t care what anyone says, the answer is “No!”*
 - *Charlie Brown*: *That’s your new philosophy, huh?*
 - *Sally*: *Yes! I mean, No! [pause] You’ve ruined my new philosophy.*
4. Statements that commit suicide have within them the seeds of their own destruction.
 - a. “*I cannot speak a word in English*” is self-refuting when spoken in English.
 - b. “*There are no sentences more than five words in length*” is a sentence that has more than five words.
 - c. “*You can’t know anything for sure*” is a truth skeptics are pretty sure about.

GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY

Philosopher J.P. Moreland points out that every statement is about something.¹ For example, the sentence “Dogs have fleas” is about dogs. Sometimes statements include themselves in what they refer to. The statement “All English sentences are short” is about all English sentences, including itself. When a statement fails to satisfy its own criteria of validity, it is self-refuting. It can’t possibly be a true statement.

Suicidal statements have within them the seeds of their own destruction. They cannot satisfy their own standard. This is why the minute you utter them, they become false. Even when such statements initially appear true, they’re still false.

This holds true for all self-refuting statements. If the exact same reasons used against your view also defeat the reasons themselves, then the view is self-defeating; it commits suicide. The person using such arguments can’t even recommend his own advice. For example, when someone says “You shouldn’t make moral judgments,” he is making a moral judgment (the word “shouldn’t” is your clue).



N O T E S

**REFLECT A MOMENT**

Even God Himself can't cause self-refuting statements to be true. These kinds of statements are irrational, and since rationality is part of God's essential character, he cannot violate His nature and make contradictory statements become true. This is not a limitation on God's power in any way because power is not the relevant factor here: No amount of raw power can make a contradictory statement true. Suicidal ideas, therefore, are false of necessity. They can't be true in any possible world.

B HERE'S WHY THE SUICIDE TACTIC WORKS.

1. The Suicide tactic works because it trades on a fundamental rule of logic: the law of non-contradiction.
 - a. *The law of non-contradiction states that two contradictory statements cannot be true at the same time.*
 - b. *“A” cannot be “non-A” at the same time, in the same way.*
2. All suicidal views express or entail contradictions.
 - a. *They make two different claims at odds with each other.*
 - b. *The contradictions — “A is the case” and “A is not the case” may be explicit or implicit.*
 - 1) Explicit contradictions are usually obvious.
 - a) *“I never, never repeat a word. Never.” The contradiction: I don't repeat a word. I do repeat a word.*
 - b) *“There are no absolutes. Absolutely.” Contradiction: There are no absolutes. There are absolutes.*
 - c) *“This page intentionally left blank.” Contradiction: This page is blank. This page is not blank.*
 - d) *“I used to believe in reincarnation. But that was in a former life.” Contradiction: I don't believe in reincarnation. I do believe in reincarnation.*
 - e) *“I'll give you three good reasons you can't use logic to find truth.” Contradiction: He wants to use logic to disprove logic.*
 - 2) Implicit contradictions often are hidden and require further reflection to see.
 - a) *“My brother is an only child.” Contradiction: My brother has a sibling (me). My brother is an only child, he has no siblings.*
 - b) *“I never tell the truth.” Contradiction: It's true that I never tell the truth.*
 - c) *“Always go to other people's funerals, otherwise they won't go to yours.”— Yogi Berra. Contradiction: If you don't go to a person's funeral, they will some how decide, after death, not to go to yours.*
 - d) *“Ask me about my vow of silence.” Contradiction: I've taken a vow of silence, but let me tell you about it.*
 - 3) Sometimes suicide is more subtle.
 - a) *Radio caller: “You shouldn't be correcting Christian teachers on the radio.” (Then why is he calling my radio program to correct me?)*
 - b) *“You shouldn't force your morality on me.” (Why not? Are you telling me it's wrong to say that other people are wrong?)*



N O T E S



Here are some sample responses for the Student Interactive.

- *“It’s wrong to condemn anybody for anything.”* When you say people are wrong for condemning others, aren’t you condemning them?
- *“Everyone’s view is a product of his own prejudices.”* Is this view merely a product of your own prejudice? Why, then, should we take it seriously?
- *“Consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds.”* Do you hold this view consistently? If not, then consistency is sometimes a virtue. If so, then you are small-minded.
- *“God doesn’t take sides.”* This person presumes that God agrees with his side on the question of whether or not God takes sides.
- *“You are what you eat.”* On this view, in order to “be,” we must first eat. Yet we cannot eat unless we already exist. This view refutes itself, not to mention reduces us to mere bodies.
- *“The world is an illusion, and we’re each part of the illusion.”* This is a Hindu belief that claims we cannot experience true reality. Yet if everything is an illusion, including each of us, how can we know we are partaking in it?
- *“The Bible could not have been inspired by God because men wrote it and men make mistakes.”* If men always make mistakes, then this idea itself must be mistaken, having come from an errant human.
- *“God can’t exist because there’s so much evil in the world.”* Since this objection assumes an objective standard of good and evil, God must exist. There would be no other adequate explanation for morality.
- *“God used Darwinian evolution to design the world.”* Darwinian evolution, by definition, is a non-directed process driven by mindless, natural processes. Design, on the other hand, is purposeful. The idea that something is designed by chance is contradictory.



AMBASSADOR SKILLS

Here is how the Suicide tactic worked out for me in a debate with Dr. Marv Meyer at Chapman University entitled, “Is Truth True?” I defended the resolve, “Objective truth exists and can be known.” Dr. Meyer took the opposing view arguing that nothing can be known, which is a contradiction (he knows he can’t know). Dr. Meyer’s efforts were doomed to failure from the start. By merely showing up to defend this view, he implicitly conceded my claim before he even said a word. Further, every vote for Dr. Meyer was a vote that his view was objectively true and mine was false. In other words, every vote for Meyer was really a vote for me.



AMBASSADOR SKILLS

One goal of the Suicide tactic is to show the ambiguities—even double-standards—in the claims of others. When someone says “There is no truth,” it’s clear he believes some truths, just not others. When he says, “It’s wrong for you to push your morality on others,” he can’t think it’s always wrong or he wouldn’t be doing it to you just then. The Suicide tactic forces your opponent to address this inconsistency. How does he know what’s true and what’s false? Under what circumstances might we legitimately “force” morality on someone? Do those circumstances apply here?

STUDENT INTERACTIVE



STOP THE SUICIDE

In teams of four or five, you will play a game that helps you expose the suicidal tendencies of self-refuting statements. When you receive the challenge, teams will have 2 minutes to discover how the challenge is self-refuting. The first team to shout “Suicide!” must explain how it commits suicide and give a sample response that exposes the flaw. If they fail to explain it, the next team gets a chance to prove it.

REFUTE THE FOLLOWING CHALLENGES:

- *“It’s wrong to condemn anybody for anything.”*
- *“Everyone’s view is a product of his own prejudices.”*
- *“Consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds.”*
- *“God doesn’t take sides.”*
- *“You are what you eat.”*
- *“The world is an illusion (“Maya”), and we’re each part of the illusion.”*
- *“The Bible could not have been inspired by God because men wrote it and men make mistakes.”*
- *“God can’t exist because there’s so much evil in the world.”*
- *“God used Darwinian evolution to design the world.”*

Note: A complete analysis of these challenges can be found in “Going Deeper: Information for Self-Study” below and “Food for Thought: Mass ‘Suicide’” at the end of the chapter.

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GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY

Most of the challenges listed above are analyzed at the end of the chapter, in “Food for Thought: Mass ‘Suicide,’” but a few are included below for further study.

“The world is an illusion, and we’re each part of the illusion.” This is a basic Hindu claim that says all of “objective reality” is really just an illusion. But if we’re part of an illusion, how can we know that’s true? Can members of a dream know they’re in a dream? Does Charlie Brown know he’s a cartoon character? This Hindu concept that the world is an illusion contradicts the idea that I can know I’m part of an illusion. Therefore, this central doctrine self-destructs.

“God doesn’t take sides.” When someone says God doesn’t take sides, he thinks that this is the view God Himself holds. In a way, this is just another way of stating that God would be on his side on the issue of God taking sides, which contradicts his statement.

“God can’t exist because there’s so much evil in the world.” When we hear this challenge, it’s important that we ask what the person means by “evil.” Don’t let them give you examples — ask what qualities those examples have that make them intrinsically bad. Why would we call them evil instead of good? At its core, the existence of evil implies an objective moral standard of perfection that has in some way been violated. As C.S. Lewis once observed, “A man does not call something crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.”⁴ Only God can be the true standard of moral perfection. Since God’s existence is necessary to make the notion of evil intelligible, the existence of evil cannot be invoked as a proof God does not exist. It proves just the opposite.

① LET’S EXAMINE “SIBLING RIVALRY” SUICIDE.

1. Sometimes objections come in pairs that are logically inconsistent with each other. This puts them in rivalry.
2. This doesn’t mean that both objections are false, but it does cut your task in half, because both can’t be true at the same time. Also, it may expose the potential irrationality of the person making the challenge.

3. Consider the following examples.

a. *Prakesh Yesudian of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) in India talked to a Hindu who held two inconsistent views.*

HINDU MAN: Is Gandhi in Heaven? Heaven would be a very poor place without Gandhi in it.

PRAKESH: Well, sir, you must believe in Heaven, then, and apparently you have done some thinking about what would qualify someone for it. Tell me, what kind of people go to Heaven? [Note his use of Columbo tactic #1]

HINDU MAN: Good people go to Heaven.



N O T E S

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

MASS “SUICIDE”

CONDEMNING CONDEMNATION

The following dialogue was taken from an actual radio show broadcast on February 11, 1995, and demonstrates the self-destruction of the claim, “It’s wrong to condemn anyone for anything.”

LEE: I’m not a homosexual, but I think that it’s wrong to condemn anybody for anything.

GREG: Why are you condemning me, then? [Suicide tactic]

LEE: What?

GREG: I said, why are you condemning me if you think it’s wrong?

LEE: I’m telling you because a lot of Christians condemn people.

GREG: Well, you’re condemning me because I just condemned homosexuals as wrong.

LEE: Yes, I am. You are supposed to love everybody.

GREG: Wait a minute, you just said it’s wrong to condemn people, and now you are condemning me. So I’m asking, why are you doing the same thing that you say is wrong when I do it? [narrating the argument]

LEE: No, I’m not. [Then the light begins to dawn.] Okay, let’s put it this way. I’m not condemning you, I’m reprimanding you. Is that better?

GREG: Then my comments about homosexuals are simple reprimands as well.⁵

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT?

I once saw a sign in a restaurant that read, “You are what you eat.” I pointed out to the waitress that this was true only if we are nothing more than our bodies. Further, if we are what we eat, we can’t be anything until we’ve eaten something. But we can’t eat something until we are something. Therefore, it can’t be true that we are what we eat.

The waitress looked at me and said, “You’ll have to talk to the manager.”

TO ERR IS HUMAN

A common attack on the Bible goes like this: Man wrote the Bible. Man is imperfect. Therefore, the Bible is imperfect and not inspired by God.

This attempt fails for two reasons. First, the conclusion doesn’t logically follow because the first premise subtly presumes what it’s trying to prove — that the Bible isn’t inspired by God. What’s at issue is whether natural man is solely responsible for the Bible or whether God worked through men and inspired the text. Since the first premise presumes the conclusion, the approach is circular.

Second, the argument commits suicide because it presumes that if man is capable of error, he will always err — that he couldn’t have been involved in any sound or



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accurate enterprise, like writing the Bible. But if that were true, this argument itself would have to be false, because it, too, comes from an errant human. Taken at face value, this objection is self-refuting.

It doesn't follow that if man is capable of error, he always will err. It's not enough to dismiss the Bible simply by noting that “man wrote it.” This, in itself, proves nothing.

THEISTIC EVOLUTION: DESIGNED BY CHANCE?

The neo-Darwinian synthesis entails a particular mechanism that determines — this is an important word — which changes are reproduced in the next generation. This mechanism is called natural selection.

In natural selection, specific circumstances in the environment allow a particular individual to survive and reproduce, passing its mutated genes on to the next generation. Serendipitous conditions in nature make the “choice,” not God. If nature is selecting, then God is not selecting. The two are at odds with each other.

What could be more obvious? Either God designs the details, or nature shuffles the deck and natural selection chooses the winning hand. The mechanism is either conscious and intentional (design), or unconscious and unintentional (natural selection). Creation is teleological; it has a purpose, a goal, an end. Evolution is accidental, like a straight flush dealt to a poker rookie.

Theistic evolution is the belief in design by chance. That's like a square circle — there is no such thing. Blending evolution with creation is like putting a square peg in a round hole. It just doesn't fit.

FREEDOM, RATIONALITY, AND KNOWLEDGE

Some hold that everything in life is determined by prior physical conditions and there is therefore no freedom of the will. This would also be the case if there is no soul. If there is no first-person center of our existence that exercises free will, then all of our “choices” are merely inevitable results of blind physical forces.

Here's the problem. Without freedom, there can be no rationality. None of us would be able to choose his beliefs based on reasons — we would hold our beliefs because we'd been predetermined to do so.

That's why it's odd when someone tries to argue for determinism. His conviction could not be based on reasons — the merits of the view itself—but on prior conditions that caused his belief. He'd be “determined” to believe in determinism, while others would be “determined” to disagree.

Therefore, if there is no free will, no one could ever know it. Every one of our thoughts, dispositions, and opinions would have been predetermined instead of chosen for good reasons.

Still others limit the area of knowledge to those things that can be empirically tested. To them, all knowledge is based on observation. But is this a truth they have observed? Further, have they observed “all knowledge” in order to know what all knowledge is like?



N O T E S

CAN GOD MAKE A ROCK SO BIG HE CAN'T LIFT IT?

This is a pseudo-question. It's like asking, "Can God win an arm wrestling match against Himself?" or, "If God beat Himself up, who would win?" or, "Can God's power defeat His own power?"

The question is nonsense because it treats God as if He were two instead of one. The phrase "stronger than" can only be used when two subjects are in view, like when we say Bill is stronger than Bob or my left arm is stronger than my right arm. Since God is only one, it makes no sense to ask if He is stronger than Himself. That's why this is a pseudo-question. It proves nothing about any deficiency in God because the question itself is incoherent.

The goal of this person's objection is to show that there are some things God can't do, thus undermining the Christian concept of an omnipotent Creator. This illustration, however, miscasts the biblical notion of omnipotence, and is therefore guilty of the straw man fallacy. The only way it could even begin to make sense is if it attempted to pit one aspect of God's ability against another — in this case, His creative ability against His ability to lift.

Omnipotence doesn't mean that God can do anything, however. The concept of omnipotence has to do with power, not ability per se. In fact, there are many things God can't do. He can't make square circles. He can't create a morally free creature who couldn't choose evil. He can't instantly create a sixty-year-old man (not one that looks sixty, but one that is sixty). None of these, though, have to do with power. Instead, they are logically contradictory and therefore contrary to God's rational nature.

RELATIVISTS' INCONSISTENCY

A person can wax eloquent in a discussion on moral relativism, but he will complain when somebody cuts in front of him in line. He'll object to the unfair treatment he gets at work and denounce injustice in the legal system. He'll criticize crooked politicians who betray the public trust and condemn intolerant fundamentalists who force their moral views on others. Yet each of these objections is a meaningless concept in the twisted world of moral relativism.

TAINED THOUGHTS

C.S. Lewis cites an example of self-refutation in his book of essays *God in the Dock*. In response to the Freudian and Marxist claim that all thoughts are tainted (either psychologically or ideologically) at their source, Lewis writes:

If they say that all thoughts are thus tainted, then, of course, we must remind them that Freudianism and Marxism are as much systems of thought as Christian theology or philosophical idealism. The Freudian and the Marxian are in the same boat with all the rest of us, and cannot criticize us from the outside. They have sawn off the branch they are sitting on. If, on the other hand, they say that the taint need not invalidate their thinking, then neither need it invalidate ours. In which case they have saved their own branch, but also saved ours along with it.⁶



N O T E S

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

Break into groups of three or four and share some “war stories” from last session’s assignment. Did you discover self-refuting statements in the things you read, the statements you heard, or in the conversations you held with others? (5 minutes)

I. **R**EVIEW**A IN THE LAST SESSION WE COVERED . . .**

1. First, we learned the nature of self-refuting claims.
 - a. *Suicidal views express contradictory concepts.*
 - b. *Suicidal views are necessarily false; they can’t be true in any possible world.*
2. Second, we learned how to recognize when someone else’s view self-destructs.
 - a. *First, we pay attention to the basic premise, conviction, or claim.*
 - b. *Then, we determine if the claim undermines itself. We ask, “Does the statement satisfy its own requirements?” Does it have any internal contradictions?*
3. Third, we examined the following examples of popular ideas that commit suicide and learned how to respond to them.
 - a. *“It’s wrong to try to change other people’s religious beliefs.”*
 - b. *“All religions are equally true and valid.”*
 - c. *“You can only know what has been proven by science.”*
 - d. *“There is no truth.”*
4. Finally, we learned how to recognize “Sibling Rivalry” Suicide.
 - a. *This kind of suicide happens when pairs of objections oppose each other because they are logically inconsistent.*
 - b. *We can eliminate at least one of the objections by pointing out the conflict.*

B IN THIS SESSION, WE WILL LEARN A TACTIC CALLED “TAKING THE ROOF OFF.”

1. You will see how some points of view logically lead to unacceptable conclusions.
2. You will learn how to recognize those arguments and how to reduce them to their absurdity (*reductio ad absurdum*).
3. You will see how man’s rebellion against the truth makes this tactic possible.
4. You will consider specific examples of popular ideas that lead to counterintuitive consequences and learn how to exploit them by “taking the roof off.”

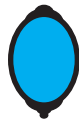


N O T E S

II. THE “TAKING THE ROOF OFF” TACTIC

**A THE “TAKING THE ROOF OFF” TACTIC IS A SIMPLE TECHNIQUE USED WITH GREAT SKILL BY DR. FRANCIS SCHAEFFER.**

1. Consider the tactic in brief.
 - a. First, you adopt the other person’s viewpoint for the sake of argument.
 - b. Next, you press him to the logical — and absurd — consequences of his view.
2. This tactic is also known as *reductio ad absurdum* (or simply *reductio*): reducing the argument to its absurd conclusion or consequence.

**REFLECT FOR A MOMENT**

The point of this tactic is to see if a person can really live in the kind of world he’s affirming. Can he live with the moral or intellectual consequences of his beliefs? In essence, you’re taking his moral or intellectual rules seriously and applying them consistently to show they are inadequate or absurd. The Taking the Roof Off tactic makes it clear that certain arguments prove too much. The goal here is to show that one has to pay too high a price to hold certain views.

**B HERE’S HOW TO TAKE THE ROOF OFF SOMEONE’S ARGUMENT, STEP BY STEP:**

- 1) First, reduce the point of view to its basic premise, assertion, principle, or moral rule.
- 2) Second, give the idea a “test drive” and see where it goes by asking...
 - a. *If I follow this principle consistently, what would be the result?*
 - b. *Do any absurd consequences result when this view is consistently applied?*
 - c. *Does the rule have other unintended consequences that seem counter-intuitive?*
- 3) Third, invite the person to consider the implications of his or her view and the truth that follows from the *reductio*.

**REFLECT FOR A MOMENT**

Here’s why this tactic is so effective. As a point of fact, man is made in the image of God and must live in the world God created. Consequently, every person who is a non-theist must live with a contradiction between what he says he believes and what is actually true.

In a very real sense, every man who denies God is living on borrowed capital. He enjoys living as if the world is filled with morality, meaning, order, and beauty, yet he denies the existence of the God who grounds these things and makes them possible.

Because of this, non-Christians live in a contradictory world that creates a point of tension between what they believe and what is actually true. Man has erected as a defense a subconscious self-deception — a “roof,” so to speak — to protect him



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sion, the suffering children in India must continue to suffer so that happy children in America can continue to be happy.

THE BASIC PREMISE: Evil and good exist in a polarity, balancing each other out.

THE REDUCTIO: Children must suffer in India to maintain a balance with the children in America who are happy.

THE TRUTH: It is not true that evil and good must coexist so they can balance each other out.

That’s Taking the Roof Off— moving a person to the logical — and absurd — conclusion of what he believes. As Francis Schaeffer once said, “We confront men with reality; we remove their protection and their escapes; we allow the avalanches to fall.”⁵



IV. *W*HAT MAIN POINTS DID WE COVER IN THIS SESSION?

A IN THIS SESSION, WE LEARNED A TACTIC CALLED TAKING THE ROOF OFF.

1. First, we learned to adopt the other person’s viewpoint for the sake of argument.
2. Next, we learned the value of pressing him to the logical — and absurd — consequences of his view.

B WE LEARNED THREE STEPS TO EMPLOY THE TAKING THE ROOF OFF TACTIC.

1. First, we reduce the point of view to its basic premise.
2. Second, we give the idea a “test drive” to determine whether any absurd consequences result when this view is consistently applied.
3. Third, we invite the person to consider the implications of her view and the truth that follows from the reductio.



C WE LEARNED WHY THIS TACTIC WORKS.

1. Man is made in the image of God and must live in the world God created.
2. Every person who denies this fact lives in a contradiction that creates a point of tension.
3. To protect himself, man has erected a self-deception — a “roof” — to shield himself from the logical implications of his beliefs.
4. We try to remove that roof to deprive him of his false sense of security.

D FINALLY, WE LEARNED A NUMBER OF WAYS TO APPLY THIS TACTIC TO SPECIFIC CHALLENGES.



N O T E S

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Unfortunately, most people hold to beliefs they haven't considered carefully and that often lead to absurd consequences. The following vignettes tackle a number of those views by employing the Taking the Roof Off tactic. Notice the multitude of ways this tactic can be used.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The dialogue below employs three tactics — the Columbo tactic, the Suicide tactic, and the Taking the Roof Off tactic — and concerns the problem of evil. Many people reject a belief in God because of the evil they see in the world. If you're a relativist, though, this objection commits suicide. As it turns out, the presence of evil in the world is one of the best evidences in favor of, not against, the existence of God.

CHRISTIAN: You said earlier that you don't believe in God or any moral absolutes. Now you're asking me how God can exist when there is so much evil in the world. Is that right? [Columbo question #1]

NON-BELIEVER: That's right.

CHRISTIAN: So you do believe in evil?

NON-BELIEVER: Of course. That's the reason for my objection.

CHRISTIAN: This may sound like a silly question, but what is this evil you're talking about? Can you define it for me? [Again the use of the first Columbo question, "What do you mean by that?"]

NON-BELIEVER: You know, famines, earthquakes, murders, disease, rape, pillaging, that kind of thing.

CHRISTIAN: So, you're concerned about human evil and natural evil, right?

NON-BELIEVER: Something like that, yes.

CHRISTIAN: You mentioned earthquakes, disease, famine . . . all of which are natural evils. Aren't you an evolutionist?

NON-BELIEVER: Of course! You don't think I'm a creationist, do you?

CHRISTIAN: No, of course not. But that raises a question for me. Why is a "natural" thing like a tidal wave or an earthquake evil? You wouldn't call a two-foot shore break evil, would you?

NON-BELIEVER: No, but tidal waves and earthquakes cause damage; people get killed.

CHRISTIAN: So what? Should that matter? [This begins the Taking the Roof Off tactic.] Living things die every day, making food for other living things. That's the balance of nature, isn't it? It's the beautiful thing about "mother nature." Any city wiped out by the tidal wave becomes food for crabs and starfish who are better adapted to survive underwater and eat the refuse that comes their



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way. From the crabs’ perspective, tidal waves are great. The same thing happens when someone gets AIDS.

So, what’s your complaint? It seems to me that, from an evolutionary perspective, one organism beats up on another in its struggle to survive. One man’s funeral is another worm’s smorgasbord. What’s wrong with that? We try to kill the virus; the virus tries to kill us. No judgments. It’s all part of the chance of the dance. You’d probably call killing a typhoid germ good, but if it kills you, that’s bad. Isn’t that kind of a self-centered view of natural evil where humans are concerned?

NON-BELIEVER: But I don’t want to die!

CHRISTIAN: Neither do I, but now we’re talking about our personal desires, not the moral problem of earthquakes and disease.

NON-BELIEVER: You aren’t suggesting a germ and a human being have the same value.

CHRISTIAN: Oh, I’m not suggesting it at all. I don’t believe they do. But I have a reason why I don’t believe that, a justification for viewing bugs one way and human beings another. What I’m trying to figure out is how you could possibly believe that a human death is ultimately more “evil” than the death of a virus if evolution is true and chance rules the universe. [Again, this is an extension of the Taking the Roof Off tactic.] Any suggestions? Can you clear this up for me? [And a movement back to Columbo question #3.]

NON-BELIEVER: I don’t get it.

CHRISTIAN: My question is simple. If we live in a chance universe of blind cause and effect where no God exists, how can you refer to some accidents of nature as evil — not just unpleasant or disliked, but evil? That’s a moral judgment, isn’t it? Is nature immoral? [Again, a use of the Columbo tactic #3.]

NON-BELIEVER: I don’t know how to explain it.

CHRISTIAN: Well, maybe we can do better with human evil.

NON-BELIEVER: Right, Hitler and drive-by killings and stuff. How can your God allow that?

CHRISTIAN: I need to ask you another question just for my clarification. You’re saying those things like genocide and drive-by shootings are evil? [Employing the use of the “What do you mean by that?” question.]

NON-BELIEVER: Of course they are!

CHRISTIAN: What I’m trying to understand is this: Is that only your opinion, or does your moral view apply to everyone else? [Request for further clarification]

NON-BELIEVER: That’s evil to me. That’s my truth.

CHRISTIAN: So, ultimately, those things are only evil from your perspective?

NON-BELIEVER: That’s my opinion.



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CHRISTIAN: Okay, I accept that. But if that's so, I don't really understand your objection. If I've got it right, your objection to God goes something like this: "I don't believe in God because there's evil in the world, and evil is whatever I define it to be." It sounds to me like you won't believe in God because some things happen that you don't like, but those things might be okay for others. You don't like killing (that's your moral truth), but others might think it's fine. Nazis liked killing Jews, for example. So, there's no right or wrong here, only different feelings about it. [Taking the Roof Off again.]

NON-BELIEVER: No! I think what the Nazis did was terrible.

CHRISTIAN: You mean it was truly wrong, immoral in some objective sense, regardless of who did it and when they did it?

NON-BELIEVER: To me, it was wrong. In my opinion, that was evil.

CHRISTIAN: See, this is what confuses me about your question. You say that what the Nazis did was evil, and you're asking why God allows that kind of evil. Then you say that evil is only a matter of opinion. So it sounds like you're asking, "Why does God allow something that's against my opinion?"

Let me put my question another way. It sounds to me like you're saying, "I can't believe in God because stewed cabbage exists." I say, "What's wrong with stewed cabbage?" You say, "I hate the stuff." The fact is, I personally agree with you about stewed cabbage, but many people think it's great. However, just because you don't like stewed cabbage doesn't mean God's can't exist. So I'm asking, how can you say God can't exist just because you didn't happen to like the Nazis? A lot of people loved them. [Again, the third use of the Columbo tactic.]

It seems to me that your objection says more about your personal tastes than it does about God's existence. What am I missing here?

NON-BELIEVER: But murder and vegetables are two different things!

CHRISTIAN: How so?

NON-BELIEVER: Come on. It's self-evident.

CHRISTIAN: I agree entirely, and that's my concern. [Notice that up to this point the Christian hasn't argued any point yet. He has simply questioned the non-believer's position.]

I hold that there are objective moral principles, not laws that we make, but laws that are outside of mere personal opinion. For example, say I made up a law that all property within a twenty-mile radius of my house belonged to me and you lived fifteen miles away. I could pass out fliers announcing that everyone on "my" property has to move. Would you move? No, because I have no authority. But if the state decided to put a freeway through your backyard, you'd begin looking for a new place to live because the state is a legitimate authority for that kind of thing. It seems to me that there can only be a binding moral principle ("It's wrong to murder or steal") if a legitimate authority is involved.



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In the same way, evil — real evil, the kind that creates these dilemmas for us — must be defined by some objective standard outside of us before we can really beef about it. And the minute we’ve agreed to that, we have to acknowledge that there must be a legitimate authority outside of our own feelings (God?) that makes sense of the existence of evil before we can complain about it. Ironically, the kind of human evil you’re talking about — oppression, murder, violence — only happens when specific moral absolutes are rejected and men begin treating other men like mere animals. That invariably happens whenever men or governments contend there is no God to whom we must answer.

NON-BELIEVER: I don’t follow you.

CHRISTIAN: Sure you do, you just don’t like where it’s leading.

NON-BELIEVER: Well, now you’ve got me all confused.

CHRISTIAN: (Smiling good-naturedly) No, I think you were confused when we started. You’re just now discovering it!

ABORTION FOR RAPE VICTIMS?

If we allowed an abortion in the case of rape, it would send a terrible message. That message would be that when someone reminds you of something extremely painful, you can eliminate them. But you can’t kill another human being just because their existence makes your life physically or emotionally burdensome.

TROTTING OUT THE TODDLER⁶

Virtually every argument for abortion could equally justify killing newborns. If it’s wrong to take the life of innocent human beings on one side of the birth canal, it seems wrong to take their lives on the other. Conversely, if abortion is justifiable, then euthanasia would be acceptable for the same reasons. A 7-inch journey down the birth canal cannot miraculously transform a non-human tissue mass into a valuable human being we should shelter and protect.

That’s why when discussing abortion we use a version of Taking the Roof Off called “Trotting Out the Toddler.” When we talk with someone who holds this view, we can say, “Do you realize that the principle you’re advancing not only takes away the rights of the fetus, but also of the newborn? Wouldn’t newborns also be in danger if, for example, something like self-awareness is what makes humans valuable?”

When someone says, “Women have the right to choose,” respond by trotting out the toddler again.⁷ Ask, “Should a woman have the right to choose to kill her two-year-old child?” Since both the unborn and the toddler are human beings, the same moral rule should apply to each. One way out is to argue that the unborn is not a true human being, but this is scientifically unsound.

At the University of New Mexico a student said we should abort children to save them from future child abuse. STR speaker Steve Wagner “totted out the toddler.” “And we should also kill two year olds for the same reason,” he asked, “to save them from future child abuse?”



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“I hadn’t thought about that,” the student responded. And that’s the point. People don’t think their ideas out to the logical conclusions. It’s our job to help them see their mistakes.

WERE YOU EVER AN UNBORN CHILD?

It doesn’t seem to make sense to refer to yourself as a former sperm or egg. Does it make sense, though, to talk about yourself before you were born? Did you turn in your mother’s womb or kick when you were startled by a loud noise? Did you suck your thumb? Were those your experiences or someone else’s?

If you were once the unborn child your mother carried, then you must accept an undeniable truth: Killing that child through abortion would have killed you. Not a potential you. Not a possible you. Not a future you. Abortion would have killed you.

This is why abortion is tragic: It kills more than a human body. It kills a valuable human being.

CARING FOR THE KIDS

A standard objection to the pro-life view is that pro-lifers have no right to oppose abortion unless they’re willing to care for the woman and her child. If you’re confronted with this challenge, take a moment to restate the claim without the spin. What’s actually being asserted is amazing, when you think about it.

“If I understand you right,” you could say, “you’re saying I can’t object to the killing of unborn children unless I am willing to care for those children? Is that right?” Then ask, “Do you really believe that I can only object to the killing of children if I’m willing to raise them myself? Why would you believe a thing like that?”

It simply does not follow that because one objects to the killing of innocent human beings, he must be willing to care for those that survive. Imagine, for example, how bizarre it would sound if someone argued, “You have no right telling me not to beat my wife unless you’re willing to marry her,” or, “Unless you are willing to hire ex-slaves for your business, you have no right to oppose slavery.” (Indeed, slave owners used this very argument a 150 years ago.) In the same way, abortion is not justified if pro-lifers fail to care for those (both mother and baby) involved in a crisis pregnancy.

As a point of fact, though, there are more crisis pregnancy centers — pro-lifers who are willing to care for those involved in crisis pregnancies — than there are abortion clinics in this country. Roughly 4,000 national and international pro-life service providers are dedicated to the well-being of mothers in crisis who choose life for their children. They provide medical aid, pregnancy support, housing, baby clothing, cribs, food, adoption services — even post-abortion counseling services — and all at no cost.

NO REALITY, REALLY

Here is the response of an STR regular to an atheist who continued to sidestep meaningful conversation by chanting the post-modern mantra, “There is no reality, only perception of reality.” Notice how she takes the roof off, forcing him to confront the logical consequences of his view:



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“For thousands of years, people have been debating ideas, evaluating claims, making progress in knowledge, discovering true things about the world. We have developed medicines, explored space, and created amazing transportation and communication devices.

“We’ve done this because we have believed in reality, thought it was worth knowing, and thought it was possible to know. People have disagreed, discussed, and worked things out peacefully in countries where it has been allowed.

“If your view becomes, for the first time, the dominant view and nobody will discuss, communicate, or evaluate ideas, then beware. If that happens, the only recourse people will have to get their ideas across will be force. If you combine that with atheism — if there is no God to hold you accountable for violently oppressing people — the results will be disastrous. Be careful what you wish for.”

Her clear, direct, and honest approach convinced him to come to the table and at least consider the evidences for Christianity.

“UNNATURAL” ADOPTION

The line of reasoning that justifies homosexuality because it is a “natural” desire for those born that way annihilates the argument for adoption rights by homosexuals. If homosexuality is right because it’s natural, then adoption must be wrong because it’s unnatural. If nature dictates morality, and the natural consequence for homosexuals is to be childless, then it’s unnatural — and therefore immoral — for homosexuals to raise children. Artificial insemination of lesbians or adoptions by homosexual couples would be wrong by their own reasoning. The same principle governs both issues.

DON’T PRAY FOR ME

British evangelist John Guest tells the story about the college student who said, “I don’t want God in my life. I want to do my own thing.” John said, “Can I pray for you about that?” Then he put his hand on his shoulder and prayed, “God, you just heard what this man said. Please answer this. Don’t have anything more to do with him. Remove your protection from Him.” He knocked Guest’s arm off his shoulder and said, “Stop that!”

CLIMATE CONTROL

A chorus of voices charges that Christians, through their moralizing about homosexuality, are promoting a climate of hate. The phrase of choice is “less than.” By claiming homosexuality is evil, Christians demote homosexuals to a “less than” status. If a homosexual is “less than,” he is the appropriate object of scorn, hatred, and physical abuse.

This is twisted logic. In Los Angeles, KABC talk show host Al Rantel — himself a homosexual — noted that this kind of thinking would make Alcoholics Anonymous responsible every time a drunk gets beat up in an alley. It simply does not follow that moral condemnation of homosexuality encourages gay-bashing.

Such a tactic is equally dangerous to those who use it. According to them, taking a moral position is called hate. But their own objection to hate is also a moral posi-



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tion. Are those who demonize Christians for their views equally guilty of hate-mongering? Clearly, this kind of attack is not really about principle, but politically-correct politics.

“LIFE A BEAUTIFUL CHOICE? IT’S NOT SO BEAUTIFUL FOR AN UNWANTED CHILD.”

Believe it or not, a pastor made this comment. I had to ask myself, “Why isn’t an unwanted child’s life beautiful?” Presumably, the answer is, “Because he’s unwanted.” But this alone doesn’t make anyone’s life miserable. There’s more to it than this. What makes an unwanted child’s life miserable? Other people do. Unwanted children are unhappy because of the way they’re treated.

This pastor’s startling admission amounts to this: “If we let this child live, we’re going to treat him so badly and we’ll make life so miserable for him, he’ll wish he were dead.” It’s an admission that he would rather kill a child than do what is necessary to give that child a meaningful life. Is this a good argument for abortion? Do you see what kind of people we’re becoming?

MORALITY FROM NATURE?

It’s common of late to justify one’s “sexual orientation” by an appeal to nature. The claim “I was born this way” is all that’s needed to stem moral criticism of homosexuality. But why settle for this approach? Why think that the state of nature is an appropriate guide to morality?

Seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes noted famously, “Life in an unregulated state of nature is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” It was precisely this fact, according to Hobbes, that caused humans to enter into social contracts, gladly accepting the moral constraints of civilization to its alternative, the law of nature. Morality, as an extension of that contract, is a way of protecting ourselves from the brutality of living in a world where people simply did what came naturally.

Since living according to nature would justify all kinds of barbarism, how does it make sense to invoke the natural state of things to justify anything morally?

Behavior that’s “natural” is the very thing morality is meant to protect us from. Morality that counters one’s natural inclinations rather than approves of them is our only refuge from a life that is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

EARTH DAY FOR EVOLUTIONISTS?

Has anyone else but me noticed an inherent contradiction in the underlying convictions that drive annual Earth Day celebrations? The vast majority of those who attend such fetes are Darwinists who believe humans have a moral obligation to protect the environment. But why?

For millions of years, Mother Nature has spewed noxious fumes and poisonous gasses into the atmosphere and littered the landscape with ash and lava. Indeed, the most “natural” condition in the universe is death. As far as we know, the life on Earth is completely unique; death reigns everywhere else.



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Species have passed into extinction at a steady rate from the beginning of time, the strong supplanting the weak. Why shouldn't they? Each is in a struggle to the death for survival. It is a dance of destruction that fuels the evolutionary process as each creature seeks to exploit every other for its own benefit. That's evolution.

No locust swarm stops short of denuding a field because it ought to “leave a bit for the crickets. After all, we all have a right to be here.” The logic of naturalism and the rules of evolution dictate that human beings rape our environment, just as everything else does, rather than protect it.

The moral obligations underpinning Earth Week activities simply do not follow from the naturalistic worldview that embraces Darwinism. It follows, rather, from a theistic worldview in which God has created man as unique and given him responsibility over the Earth to care for it. Earth Week makes sense for Christians, not for Darwinists.

CHRISTIAN “FAITH” VS. KNOWLEDGE

For many Christians, faith and knowledge are diametrically opposed. The more evidence you have, they claim, the less faith is involved. The more bizarre and unbelievable the claim, the greater the faith needed. The greatest faith, then, would be the one farthest removed from reason or evidence.

Two odd conclusions follow from this kind of thinking.

First, apologetics — giving evidence in defense of faith — would actually be detrimental to one's faith. Yet Peter tells us to always be ready to give an *apologia*, a defense, for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15).

Second, if faith and knowledge are inversely proportional, then the more evidence we can find against Christianity, the better. Indeed, believing something you knew to be false would be a great virtue, biblically. God would be most pleased, on this view, with those who knew the resurrection never happened, yet still believed.

The apostle Paul called such a person pitiful, however:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. . . . And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:13–14, 17–19)

According to Paul, if we believe contrary to fact, we believe in vain and are fools.



