

Constructing a Comprehensive Case for the Christian Faith

Michigan Christian Convention – April 8, 2016

Seminar Webpage: www.worldvieweyes.org/MCCI6.html

Richard A. Knopp, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.
Professor of Philosophy & Christian Apologetics

Email: rknopp@lincolnchristian.edu
Lincoln Christian University

Introduction

- A. Session 1: The Decline of the Christian Worldview
- B. Session 2: Addressing the Decline: A New Orientation
- C. Session 3: Understanding Alternative Worldviews

I. Some Biblical Directives

- A. **1 Peter 3:15** _____ **DEFEND** [*apologia*] the faith. (1 Peter 3:15; Acts 22:1; 24:10; 26:12; Phil 1:7,16). Cf. *dialogomai* (reasoned discussion) in Acts 17:2-3,17; 18:4,19; 19:8-9; 24:12).

1 Peter 3: 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." 15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer [*apologia*] to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. [NIV] Phil 1:7b "... whether I [Paul] am in chains or defending [*apologia*] and confirming the gospel, all of you share the affection of Christ Jesus."

Alvin Plantinga: "Perhaps the main function of apologetics is to show that ... [we] have nothing whatsoever for which to apologize" ("Christian Life Partly Lived," in *Philosophers Who Believe*, ed. Kelly James Clark [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 69).

- B. **Col. 2:8** "Don't be taken _____ **CAPTIVE** by deceptive philosophies."
- C. **2 Cor. 10:5** "We _____ **DEMOLISH** arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5).
- D. **2 Timothy 2:24-25** "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome but be kind to all . . . with gentleness _____ **CORRECTING** those who are in opposition; if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth"
- E. **Titus 1:9** "He [an elder] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and _____ **REFUTE** those who oppose it."
- F. **Jude 3** "Contend earnestly for the faith."
- G. **Early church** preaching and teaching (e.g. Acts 2:14-36; Acts 7:1-53; Acts 17:16-34).

II. Three Types of Christian Apologetics

1. _____ Apologetics **NEGATIVE**

2. _____ Apologetics **POSITIVE**

3. _____ Apologetics **NEUTRALIZING**

A. **“Negative” Apologetics:** Replying to specific criticisms to show that Christianity is _____ **NOT FALSE.**

1. E.g. The disciples of Jesus were accused of stealing Jesus’ body (Matt 28:11-15).
2. E.g. Festus accuses Paul of being insane (Acts 26:22-32).
3. E.g. The claim that Christians “all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar [the state]” (Acts 17:5-8).
4. E.g. The problem of evil. Accusation: The reality of evil is inconsistent with the reality of an existing God who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good.

B. **“Positive” Apologetics:** Attempting to show that **Christianity is** _____ **TRUE.**

1. **Evidences in nature** (Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:18-32).
2. **Miracles** (1 Kings 18; Ex 10:1-2; Jn 20:30-31; Acts 2:22-24; 1 Cor 15:1-20).
 - a. John 20:30-31 “... these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”
 - b. Acts 2:22-24 “... Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him”
3. **Fulfilled prophecy** (Lk 24:25-27; Acts 17:2-3; 26:22-23; Deut 18:18-22; Is 7:14; Micah 5:2; Zach 9:9; Is 53; Ps 22:1-8; 16:10).
4. **The nature and reliability of scripture.**
 - a. 2 Tim 3:14-17 “... all Scripture is inspired by God”
 - b. 2 Pet 1:20-21 “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”
 - c. John 10:34-36 “... and the Scripture cannot be broken.”
5. **Social benefits** of the Christian way (Titus 3:8; Gal 6:9-10; 1 Tim 5:8).
6. **Personal experience.**
 - a. John 9:25-30 “... One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.”
 - b. Paul’s testimonies to the Jews (Acts 22), to Felix (Acts 24:10-23) and to Agrippa (Acts 26).

C. **“Neutralizing” Apologetics:** Attempting to show that **other worldviews are** _____ **PROBLEMATIC** or _____

UNLIVABLE.

1. Biblical precedent.

- a. 2 Cor 10:5 “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God”
 - b. Titus 1:9-11 “... able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”
 - c. Rom 1:21 “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”
2. Apologetic advantage: It does not employ _____ **SCRIPTURE** in its method.

III. Examples of “Neutralizing” Apologetics

A. A general strategy

1. Expose the worldview’s position and its _____ **LOGICAL** implications.
 2. Contrast the worldview’s logical implications with the _____ **CLAIMS** and actual _____ **BEHAVIOR** of its advocates.
 3. Compassionately confront with probing _____ **QUESTIONS**.
- (See Mark 11:27-33)

B. Applying the general strategy **to Pantheistic Monism** (and **New Age**).

1. Consider the worldview content and its **logical implications**.
 - a. Everything is ultimate “ONE” (Monism).
 - b. The physical world is “illusory.”
 - c. Language and logic are deceptive.
2. The **claims** and **behavior** of Pantheists and New Agers.
 - a. Follow the “right” duties (including moral duties) as prescribed by *dharma*, the principle of order in the universe.
 - b. Eliminate all desire (Buddhism) by following the “right” 8-fold path (Buddhism) or “fulfill one’s duties in the “right way” for good karma and to fulfill one’s desires” (Hinduism).
 - c. Improve the human condition (e.g. peace, well-being).
3. Key questions
 - a. If everything is “ONE,” how can there be an ultimate “right” or “good”?
 - b. If everything is “ONE,” then “evil” itself cannot be justified or explained.

C. Applying the general strategy **to naturalistic worldviews** (e.g. Secular Humanism, Existentialism, Nihilism).

1. E.g. Naturalistic worldviews: Everything is reducible to impersonal, non-purposeful matter.
 - a. Yet, some naturalists claim human freedom and uniqueness.
 - b. How can reason itself be justified in a purely random or law-determined universe?
 - c. How can this view consistently justify moral criticism or explain acts of love or altruism?
 - d. If consistently applied, what could Naturalism lead to?

<p>Will Provine (Professor, Evolutionary Biology, Cornell University): “There’s no human free will. If you believe in evolution, you can’t hope for there being any free will. There’s no hope</p>

whatsoever of there being any deep meaning in human life. We live; we die; and we're gone."
(Cited from video interview, "Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed" with Ben Stein)

2. A Naturalistic worldview is _____ **INCONSISTENT** with the actual claims and behavior.
3. A Naturalistic worldview is _____ **UNLIVEABLE** if it were consistently applied.

IV. Focus on the Core: Some Critical and Comparative Concerns

A. The matter of MEANING.

1. Key questions
 - a. What gives you meaning in life?
 - b. What is the *basis* for meaning? Is it just whatever we want it to be?
 - c. Is there any *ultimate* meaning to life? If not, have you really thought about what that means for you, or your family? If no ultimate meaning, why should we *care* about anything?
2. Candid comment by atheist Alex Rosenberg.

"The love of stories comes to us in a package that also includes the illusion of free will, the fiction of an enduring self, and the myth of human purpose. A scientific worldview has to give up all of that.... So, individual human life is meaningless, without a purpose, and without ultimate moral value" (Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (Kindle Edition, p. 19).

B. The matter of MORALITY.

1. How do you decide what's right or wrong?
2. Is what is morally "right" or "wrong" totally determined by an individual? By a society? By a nation?
3. Are there any moral principles that should be true for everyone?
4. If morality is just relative to an individual, or a society, or a nation, why do people morally condemn the actions of other societies or nations? Why, for instance, would people so strongly condemn racism, or the systematic extermination of a people group, or infanticide, or suicide jihadists?
5. If nothing is morally right or wrong for everybody, are you willing to live with the implications of that?
6. If there are moral rights and wrongs for everybody, where did we get this sense of moral obligation that is greater than any individual or society?

C. The matter of MORTALITY.

1. Impending death:
 - a. An unavoidable signal that the Spirit can use to direct us toward God.
 - b. But how are we using reality of death, if at all, for *ourselves*?
 - c. How are we using it, if at all, for *others*?
2. Key Questions
 - a. Often used question: "If you were to die five minutes from now, would you go to heaven?"
 - b. "When you die, what do you think will happen?"
 - c. Referring to someone else's death: "What do you think they thought of death?"
"One year ago, do you think they expected to die now?"

- d. Does death prompt you think any more, or any differently, about life and how you live it? Why? How?

D. The matter of **MATTER**: The Origin of the Universe.

- I. The possibilities
 - a. It's eternal.
 - b. It's self-generating. It caused itself.
 - c. It's just one of a possible *infinite* number of universes (multi-verse).

E.g. **Stephen Hawking**: "Bodies such as stars or black holes cannot just appear out of nothing. But a whole universe can. . . . Because there is a law like gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing.... Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going" (*The Grand Design*, 180).

E.g. **Alex Rosenberg**: "Why is there a universe at all? No reason at all. Why is there a multiverse in which universes pop into existence for no reason at all? No reason at all! It's just another quantum event. What science and scientism tell those who hanker for more is 'Get over it!'" (*The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (pp. 38-39).

- d. Generated by something or someone *outside of space and time*.
2. Big Bang cosmology: The universe _____ **BEGAN** (cf. Gen 1:1).
 - a. Initially strongly opposed.
 - b. Eventually accepted (1965-ff).

- "What we found is evidence for the birth of the universe.... It's like looking at God" (George Smoot, leader of the Cosmic Background Explorer project).
- "For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries" (Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, p. 116).

E. The matter of **LIVING matter**: The Origin of Life

- I. Candid comments
 - a. **Fred Hoyle** estimated the chances of life originating on earth: 1 in 10 to the _____ **40,000th** power!
 - (1) Number of estimated atoms in the visible universe: 10 to the _____ **80th** power.
 - (2) "Panspermia Hypothesis": Life came to earth from elsewhere in the universe.

Fred Hoyle: "Life could not have originated here on the Earth. Nor does it look as though biological evolution can be explained from within an earthbound theory of life. Genes from outside the Earth are needed to drive the evolutionary process. This much can be consolidated by strictly scientific means, by experiment, observation and calculation" (*The Intelligent Universe*, 242).

- b. **George Whitesides**, Professor of Chemistry, Harvard.

"Most chemists believe, as do I, that life emerged spontaneously from mixtures of molecules in the prebiotic Earth. How? I have no idea. . . . On the basis of all the chemistry that I know, it seems to me astonishingly improbable" (*Chemical & Engineering News* 85 [2007]: 12-17).

- c. **Francis Crick**, co-discoverer of the DNA molecule in 1953.

"An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense . . . [the origin of life] is 'almost a miracle.' ...

Every time I write a paper on the origin of life, I swear I will never write another one, because there is too much speculation running after too few facts" (*Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature*, 88, 153).

2. DNA and the information for life
 - a. One gram of DNA can store 700 terabytes of data (= 14,000 fifty-gigabyte Blu-ray discs!)
 - b. Four "bases": A,G,C,T (3 billion pairs in humans).
 - c. A "triplet" of three consecutive bases gives the code for each specific amino acid to form a protein.
 - d. 20 different amino acids are thereby "instructed" to form proteins (from 40-27,000 amino acids for ONE protein).
 - e. Even "simple" organisms have many proteins (e.g. E. coli has 4,300 proteins).
 - f. Each human cell has DNA (which, if stretched out, would be approximately 6 feet long). By consequence, a human's DNA (with 100 trillion cells) would reach **113 BILLION** miles.

F. The Matter of Life's Necessary Conditions: The Universe Began **JUST RIGHT.**

1. Expansion rate of universe "must be fine-tuned to an accuracy of one part in 10^{55} " (Hugh Ross, in Moreland's *The Creation Hypothesis*, p. 163).
2. The ratio of proton mass to electron mass (1,836 times heavier).
3. Ratio of number of electrons to number of protons:
 - a. Must be accurate to 1 in 10^{37} power.
 - b. Hugh Ross illustration of piling coins to the moon (see Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos*, p. 109).
4. Strength of gravity in relation to other primary forces. (See Robin Collins in Strobel's *Case for a Creator*, pp. 131-132.)
5. Impact on scientists

Fred Hoyle (agnostic/atheist): "A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a superintellect as monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature."

Arno Penzias (Nobel in physics): "Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, one with the very delicate balance needed to provide exactly the conditions required to permit life, and one which has an underlying (one might say 'supernatural') plan" (quoted in Margenau and Varghese, eds., *Cosmos, Bios, and Theos*, p. 83).

Antony Flew (at age of 81 converted from atheism to theism. He had "to go where the evidence leads"): "I think the most impressive arguments for God's existence are those that are supported by recent scientific discoveries.... I now believe that the universe was brought into existence by an infinite Intelligence. I believe that this universe's intricate laws manifest what scientists have called the Mind of God" (*There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, p. 88).

6. Biblical claims (Isa 45:18; Ps 19:1-2; Rom 1:20)

Isa 45:18 "For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited)" (NASV).