

An Introduction to Christian Apologetics

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Classical method of apologetics:

Step One: Establishing the Foundation

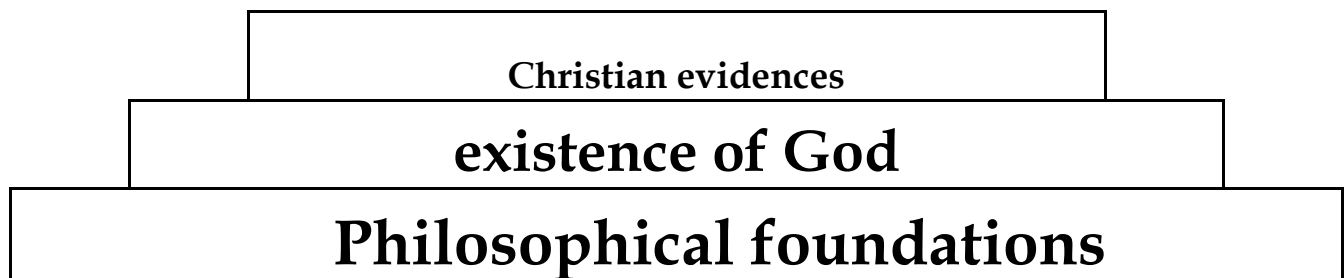
1. Truth about reality is knowable
2. Opposites cannot both be true

Step Two: Establishing the Theistic Worldview

3. The theistic God exists
4. Miracles are possible
5. Miracles confirm a messenger of God

Step Three: Establishing the Evidences for Christianity

6. The NT is reliable
7. Jesus claimed to be God
8. Jesus' claim was confirmed by miracles
9. Therefore, Jesus was God
10. Whatever Jesus says is true is true
11. Jesus affirmed the Bible is the Word of God
12. Therefore, Christianity is true



II. ESTABLISHING THE FOUNDATION: TRUTH, LOGIC, AND REALITY

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”
Socrates

But [Paul] said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.’
Acts 26:25

A. Faith and Reason: the crux of apologetics

“Sophie, every faith in the world is based on fabrication. That is the definition of faith – acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove.”

Professor Robert Langdon, *The Da Vinci Code*

1. Definitions:

Faith:

- a. as _____ (*notitia*)
- b. as _____ (*assensus*)
- c. as _____ (*fiducia*)

Reason:

- a. cannot be defined without being used
- b. three uses of reason for the Christian

- It demonstrates the “preambles of faith” (existence of God, objectivity of history, etc.)
- It analyzes philosophy in order to reveal corresponding concepts in Christian faith.
- It employs logic to oppose illogical attacks against revelation

2. How faith and reason relate:

- Avoiding extremes:
 - Fideism: _____
 - Rationalism: _____
 - faith goes _____ reason, but not _____ reason.

- The balance: **faith and reason are** _____.
- John 17:3, 7-8:
 - “And this is eternal life, that they may **know** You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
 - “Now they have **known** that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have **received** them, and have **known** surely that I came forth from You; and they have **believed** that You sent Me.”
- Faith requires more than knowledge, but not less.
- John 9:35:

B. The truth about Truth

1 “Truth about reality is knowable.”

- Scripture categorically affirms itself to be “the truth” and the “true word of God”
2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 12:6, 119:60; Pr. 30:5; John 17:17
- The Bible declares Jesus Christ to be the very incarnation of truth
John 14:6, 18:27; 1 Jn 5:20; Rev. 3:7, 19:11
 - Thus a correct view of truth is prerequisite to a proper understanding of Christ and the written Word.
- *John 18:38: Pilate said to [Jesus], “What is truth?”*

1. Defining Truth: _____

a. Aristotle:

“If a man says of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, he speaks the truth. But if he says of what is not that it is, or of what is that it is not, he does not speak the truth.”

b. Aquinas:

“Truth is defined by the conformity of intellect and thing, and hence to know this conformity is to know truth.” (Summa Theologica)

c. Adler:

“To speak falsely consists in putting ‘is’ where one should put ‘is not,’ or ‘is not’ where one should put ‘is.’” (Mortimer Adler, *Six Great Ideas*, 33.)

d. Common Sense:

“Truth is _____.”

“Truth is _____.”

2. Defending Truth

- **Why must Christians defend the nature of truth itself?**

- Short answer: *“If you are earnestly contending for the faith where it is not being attacked, you are not.”* (Philip Melancthon)
- Long answer: see Appendices D, E, F

a. against false definitions

a. Truth is not “_____.”

b. Truth is not “_____.”

c. Truth is not “_____.”

d. Truth is not “_____.”

e. Truth is not “_____.”

f. Truth is not “_____.”

SUMMARY:

- Non-correspondence views are _____.

NB: most of these confuse the nature of truth (definition) with a test for truth. Further, ALL of these actually presuppose the correspondence view above. Thus, the correspondence view is undeniably correct.

- _____ are impossible without the correspondence view
- _____ is impossible without the correspondence view
- _____ is impossible without the correspondence view

b. against false philosophies

AGAINST AGNOSTICISM/SKEPTICISM . . . truth is _____

AGAINST RELATIVISM . . . truth is _____

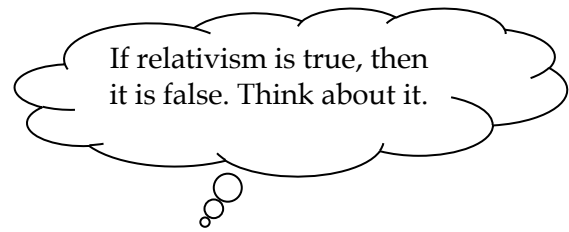
AGAINST PLURALISM . . . truth is _____

Apply the claim to itself:

- “I cannot express a word in English.”
- “No sentence is longer than six words.”
- “I do not exist.”
- “I exist.”
- “There is no truth.”
- “All truth is relative.”
- “There are no absolutes.”
- “All reality is just an illusion.”
- “Truth is just a matter of your perspective.”
- “Beliefs are always historically conditioned.”
- “No one has the truth about reality. Reality is unknowable.”
- “Truth about reality is knowable.”

1. Truth is knowable

- Both _____ and _____ are self-defeating
 - both assume some sort of “idealistic gap”
- a. David Hume – father of modern skepticism (1711-1776)
 1. the mind does not know reality itself, but only the “idea” it has of reality
 2. we do not perceive things that are external, but only certain images and pictures of them imprinted upon the mind, which are called *impressions and ideas*.
 3. if this is true, then it ends in skepticism since the only thing we really know are our own ideas of reality, not reality itself
- b. Immanuel Kant – father of modern agnosticism (1724-1804)
 1. reality is not intelligible in itself
 2. the mind “forms” the content of reality to make it intelligible
 3. thus, we can only know “reality” as it is formed by the mind, not reality itself
 4. thus, we can never know the “thing-in-itself,” only the “thing-as-it-appears”
 5. supposedly we know that there is a “thing-in-itself” but not know anything about that thing as it is in itself; this is self-defeating



2. Truth is absolute

- _____ is self-defeating

- **the argument from cultural and individual differences:**
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

Relativist: "Disagreement means there is no truth."

Realist: "I disagree with you. Therefore, relativism is not true."

- **the argument from tolerance:**
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

Ask the relativist: "Is relativism true only for you, or for everyone?"

Ask the relativist: "Is relativism absolute, or only relative?"

3. Truth is exclusive

- _____ is self-defeating
- if something is true, its opposite is _____

In sum: It is undeniable that "**truth about reality is knowable**" because any claim to the contrary is unaffirmable, or self-defeating.

Appendix D: Why Christians must defend the nature of truth itself

I would argue that is incumbent upon all religions and ideologies that make truth claims to defend the nature and knowability of truth. It is not a burden unique to Christianity, except in a postmodern, anti-Christian culture where Christian truth claims are seen as oppressive and antiquated. Since we minister within such a culture, however, effective witnessing will include the pre-evangelistic phase of the defense of truth.

The truth claims of Christianity presuppose that truth exists, that it is defined as that which corresponds to reality, and that is knowable. One could communicate the gospel of Christ in the most eloquent fashion only to have the audience retort that they do not even believe in truth itself, not to mention the truth claims of the Bible. In the first century, Pilate asked, “What is truth?” Today, many respond “There is no truth,” or that “All truth is relative.” Such deconstructionist ideas must be addressed.

First, it is undeniable that truth exists. For to claim that “There is no truth” is to say either a) it is true that there is no truth or b) since there is no truth then the statement itself is not true. Either way the statement is false. Furthermore, the statement itself minimally implies the truths of being (someone existed who made the statement), time (“there” is uttered before “is” and “is” before “no,” etc.), and unity (four separate and distinct words conveying one thought). Thus, the statement “There is no truth” is self-defeating and loaded with implicit truths that contradict its own claim.

Second, when the Christian claims that the Bible is true, he is claiming that its propositions correspond to the way things really are. For instance, the Bible claims there really is a God, who really created man, that man really is sinful and can really find redemption only in Christ. Thus, if the nature of truth is anything except “that which corresponds to reality,” then the Bible’s claims are empty. Furthermore, Christian truths could not “trump” falsehoods from other religions, for falsehood does not exist apart from the correspondence view. Ironically, all non-correspondence views (pragmatism, feelings, coherence, etc.) implicitly claim to correspond to reality. In other words, rival views must employ the correspondence view in order to deny it, which means correspondence is undeniably true. The Christian apologist should also point out that all truth, if it is true, is exclusive and absolute by nature regardless of whether it is $2+2=4$ or the deity of Christ. Because of the very nature of truth itself, the claims of Christianity are no more exclusive and absolute than any other truth claims, religious or non.

Third, the Christian should demonstrate that not only does truth undeniably exist and that the correspondence theory is undeniably true, but also that truth is undeniably knowable. The agnostic might concede the first two points, but then reject the knowability of truth. By claiming that truth cannot be known, however, the agnostic has made a truth claim. Thus, his position is self-defeating. Furthermore, one must know some truth about reality in order to claim that no one can know truth about reality. Again, agnosticism is hung by a noose of its own making. It is legitimate to question how man knows or how much man knows, but it is self-defeating to question if man knows.

Appendix E: Why Truth Matters

Because this is such a foundational issue, one must consider some of the consequences of rejecting the correspondence view of truth. First, as already noted, any non-correspondence view relies upon the correspondence view to make its claim and as such is self-defeating. Secondly, without the correspondence view, there would be no way to differentiate between truth and non-truth. In fact, a lie would actually be a logical impossibility using any non-correspondence view. Third, no factual

communication would be possible without a correspondence view. All communication ultimately depends on something being literally or factually true.

The most popular myth concerning truth today is that “all truth is relative.” Two things, however, should be immediately evident about such a statement. First, if “all truth is relative,” then the very statement itself is either relative or not true. In either case it need not be taken seriously. Secondly, the statement itself is supposedly describing (corresponding to) reality. Thus, for its own promotion it depends on the very correspondence view it seeks to demote.

Ultimately, nobody lives as though “all truth is relative.” Everyone subscribes to absolutes in everyday life for none of us could function without them. What a person is usually implying when he says “all truth is relative” is that moral and religious truth is relative. But even that amounts to an absolute truth claim about the moral and religious realm, and ironically, the claim supposes to correspond to reality. As such it too is self-refuting. Furthermore, by what standard does one adjudicate between what the great agnostic Immanuel Kant called the phenomenal and the noumenal realms which supposedly separate moral and religious truth from “everyday” truth? Even Kant must have had some knowledge of the noumenal to argue that it is unknown and unknowable. Thus to imply that moral and religious truth is in a different category than “everyday” truth is to beg the question as to what standard one uses to differentiate the two.

Another ramification of one’s view of truth has to do with how the Bible links earthly, elemental facts with heavenly, spiritual values. The fact/value dichotomy advanced by Kant does violence to the plain teaching of Scripture. The resurrection is a literal historical event (fact) with enormous spiritual consequences (value). To deny the historical fact is to reject the Christian faith (1 Cor. 15:17). Riding upon just the one historical fact of the resurrection are the weighty spiritual values of forgiveness (1 Cor. 15:17), justification (Rom. 4:25), vindication of Jesus’ claims to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4), and the final judgment (Acts 17:31).

Nor is it suitable to say that the Biblical writers merely intended to tell the truth about such historical facts but were in fact mistaken. The values that they attached to the facts would then be meaningless and unjustifiable propositions. Moreover, how could one who holds an intentionalist view of truth pretend to know that a proposition in the Bible was false (though intentionally true) unless he somehow knew that it did not correspond to known facts? He is inevitably trapped in a caldron of self-refutation. He, like all others who reject the correspondence view, is forced to use the correspondence view to attempt to deny it.

One final aspect of truth that should be noted is its inherent narrowness. A charge is often levied against the Christian faith that its view of truth is too narrow. As many relativists and pluralists pontificate, narrow-minded Christians should be more open to other religious and moral “truths,” however contradictory to reality or the Christian faith they are. The apologist should not be alarmed at this charge, however, but rather confidently demonstrate that truth is narrow regardless of where it is found. No one ever indicts his math teacher for being too narrow when he asserts that two plus two equals four and nothing else. A little reflection on the breadth of numbers that lay between 0 and infinity demonstrates just how narrow the answer to $2+2$ is!

Truth is inherently narrow. If the non-exclusivist can decisively prove that truth itself is in fact broad, only then can he justifiably charge the Christian faith with being too narrow. But unless he can first prove that truth itself is broad, he has no basis for indicting Christianity for its narrowness. But since truth is in fact very narrow, something that claims unequivocally to be the truth would in fact be a lie if it did not at the same time exclude all opposing propositions.

Accordingly, Jesus is most justified in proclaiming Himself to be the Truth (John 14:6) and thus rejecting all other “saviors” as thieves and robbers (John 10:8). His followers are likewise justified in

proclaiming that there is “salvation in none other” (Acts 4:12) and that all roads do not in fact lead to eternal life (Rev. 20:15). For us to preach any less is not only tantamount to unfaithfulness as a witness of Christ, but is also to summarily discard the fundamental reality of the nature of truth.

Appendix F: Truth and Evangelism

The very first of the Ten Commandments is the command to worship the one true God alone (Exod. 20:3). Related to that command, repeated warnings are given to abstain from any practice that from the Divine perspective constitutes idolatry (Exod. 20:4-6, Lev. 19:4, Ps. 16:4, Isa. 42:17, Mic. 5:13-15). There is only one God and He reserves the right to receive proper worship from His creatures and to condemn those who reject Him and His commands (see Gen. chs. 6-8 and 19; 2 Kings 17:29-36 and Jer. 25:6-11).

The New Testament teaches explicitly that Jesus Christ is the one true God incarnate and that exclusive salvation belongs to Him (John 1:14; Rev. 7:10). Simeon declared upon seeing the child Jesus that his eyes had seen God’s salvation (Luke 2:30; see also Titus 2:11). At the dawn of His ministry, Jesus reiterated the Old Testament command to worship the one true God (Matt. 4:10). John tells us that Christ Himself was God the Son and that He declared God the Father to the world (John 1:1, 18). Jesus later claimed that only those who explicitly put their trust in Him would see eternal life (John 5:24, 17:3, Matt. 11:27, Luke 12:8-9). The message preached by the apostles was one of exclusive salvation in Christ alone (Acts 2:38, 4:12, 10:43, 16:31, 17:31, 26:18). In Romans, the Apostle Paul argues that only the gospel has the power to save (1:16), that the heathen are condemned by their suppression of the light of general revelation (1:18ff), and that the Jews are condemned by their disobedience to the Law (2:12-13). Hence, Jew and Gentile alike are guilty before God and can only find salvation through explicit faith in His Son (3:10-24, 6:23, 10:9ff). Through Paul’s other letters, God reveals that those without Christ are likewise without hope (Eph. 2:12), that Christ Himself will execute the vengeance of God on those who do not obey the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8-9), that Christ is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim 1:17, 2:5), and that the Old Testament foreshadowed the salvation that is found only in Christ (2 Tim. 3:15). Additionally, the general epistles and the Revelation declare that God has made His final and full revelation in Christ (Heb. 1:1-2), that Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (5:9), that he who denies Christ is a liar devoid of a saving relationship with God (1 John 2:22-23, 5:12), and that the eternal Lake of Fire awaits those whose names are not written in the Book of Life (Rev. 20:15).

Furthermore, the major creeds and confessions of the Church, from the Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds to the Augsburg and Westminster Confessions, have continually affirmed that there is one God, Maker of heaven and earth, who sent His one and only Son to die for sinful man, and that only by faith in Him can one be saved from eternal separation and torment in hell. The position of the Church has historically been to affirm the clearly Biblical position of the salvific exclusivism of the Christian faith.

Scripture categorically affirms itself to be “the truth” and the “true word of God” (see Ps. 119:142; John 17:17). Jesus declared that He alone was the very incarnation of truth (John 14:6). Thus a correct view of truth is prerequisite to a proper understanding of Christ and the written Word.