

24-0821wc Transcript

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24-0821 Wed. Class - Christian Apologetics, p69

Transcript (0:04 - 23:32)

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Teacher: Tom Freed

We looked at Defeater number 4 last week. Faith in contrast to reason and science is for people who believe things without evidence. It is long past time that we move beyond old myths about the supernatural and divine and seek to discover truth using reason and empirical observation.

Did you ever hear that? You know, I believe in science. You know, I don't believe, you guys don't believe in science. It's like, well, we believe in science too, you know.

We have the greatest scientist, the creator of the universe. So one of the unchallenged axioms many moderns subscribe to is the following narrative. Non-religious people have the courage to embrace the cold hard facts that science has presented humankind with.

They have chosen to let go of comforting childish religious beliefs and have grown up taking an adult stance on reality. Like I said, it's kind of unchallenged now that people just accept that, you know, science is right and then everybody who believes in religion is just using purely faith. Well, this might make a powerful coming of age story.

It is based on mistaken assumptions. Scientific methods are not based on reason alone. It is really possible to adopt a theory.

Is it really possible to adopt a theory for discovering truth that doesn't require faith? The initial problem with scientism is that the central claim it makes that science is the only criteria for discovering the truth cannot be justified by science and therefore undermines itself. In this way, the view is ultimately incoherent. A question to ask then in a conversation with someone you ascribe to scientism might be, how can science prove that science is the only source of truth? Can they even use science to prove their own theory? Science can't even do that.

Because modern science is unquestionably an important enterprise in grasping truth, we should be quick to affirm how thankful we are for it, for the countless discoveries and the world-changing

inventions it has made possible. What we take issue with, however, is the claim that science is the only means by which to obtain truth. That's completely false.

It's not the only way to obtain truth. It is likely that the person with this objection to Christianity has embraced what Charles Taylor refers to as subtraction stories, the false narrative that secularism is a neutral position that has left once all religious and supernatural beliefs have been cancelled out. The problem with this narrative is that secularism, in all its variations, actually has its own set of beliefs and values that cannot be proven and therefore requires a type of faith.

As we said before, it takes way more faith to believe in evolution than Christianity. Some of their theories, you know, they go off a lot on faith. For example, two of the assumptions essential to modern science, the rationality of the universe and the reliability of basic cognitive faculties, cannot be proven by science.

They must be first believed. Often people assume that scientific method only uses basic logic and empirical fact to solve a problem. But they are mistaken.

This allegedly neutral methodology cannot actually avoid faith and intuition. Faith has to be placed in intuition and personal experience or some other source beyond science in order to proceed. The scientific method cannot, for example, account for logical and mathematical truths.

It must simply assume them. It cannot prove many basic beliefs we all take for granted, such as the idea that other minds exist and that our memories actually happen. It cannot account for beauty, aesthetic that is outside of its purview.

It cannot make ethical statements. One cannot, through scientific methods, determine if certain actions are morally wrong. Consequently, science cannot account for justice, human rights, or good and evil.

You know, all these people are into social justice nowadays and everything else. If they don't believe in God, then what basis are they going on? Science can't prove morality. It takes more faith to believe in the theory of evolution and Big Bang than it does for Christianity, like I said.

Can they use a scientific method to prove that the universe exploded from nothing billions of years ago? You can't observe that. You can't repeat that. There's a lot of things, you know, they don't use evidence for.

You can't prove anything. Like, I listened to this one preacher who goes to one of these Harvard or Princeton campuses and he debates with these people. And he basically said, which is kind of true, you can't prove anything.

You can't prove that this isn't a dream. You can't prove that, you know, I was up here ten minutes ago. What you can go off of is evidence.

All we can do is take the evidence we have and then use the evidence to figure out what is right. So the Bible is full of evidence. You've got historical evidence, prophecies, firsthand eyewitness testimony, the order of the universe, the fine-tuning of the universe.

I mean, there's tons. Like, the list goes on and on. So we're not just blindly believing, you know, God.

We're not blindly believing Christianity and Jesus. The apostles, they didn't blindly believe. They saw it firsthand.

They saw Him. They gave up on Him. And then when He rose from the dead, their faith was restored.

So, you know, they didn't go off of blind faith, and neither do we. Well, look at today, Defeater number five. I can't believe in God because there's so much evil and suffering in the world.

So have you ever heard that thing, you know, that statement told you? Well, responding to somebody with this objection, the best place to start is to ask them some thoughtful questions like, would you mind telling me more about why you find suffering and evil such an obstacle to believing in God? Or was there a particular time in your life when you remember coming to this conclusion? Their response will likely provide some clues into whether they are struggling more with the more abstract logical problem of evil, with its perceived rational contradiction between the existence of suffering and a loving God, or the more concrete experiential problem of evil, which is related to how people understand and deal with bad things that happen in their own lives. So they could have two different ways they view it. You know, they could think, well, how could God be so good and have all these evil things happen? And you hear that a lot.

Or maybe they're just struggling, oh, something bad happened to me and I want to know why. It's not right. But we'll first address the experiential problem.

Because as the theologian Herney Noland once commented, for most people the most burning question is how to make it another day, another week, another year. So we will address the logical and experiential problem of evil individually. We have found that the two are often intertwined.

So in actual conversations you will frequently hang back and forth between both. The experiential problem of suffering is not just a Christian problem. It's a human problem, perhaps the human problem.

So suffering and death are experiences that cast a shadow on everybody's lives, no matter what your worldview is. It can be helpful to first start on the inside of the unbelievers' framework, with their distress over suffering, and then move outside of their framework by exploring the various explanations for how we should view suffering and what we should do in response to the wrongs in the world. Let the inside out technique.

This will provide a broader context and give you an opportunity to help them work towards Christianity. Look at a range of traditional options. Contrasting the Christian vision with other views is a good way to make a case for how Christianity best explains common human experiences and provides the strongest resources for living in the midst of suffering.

Well, look at the different views on, you know, I guess you could say worldviews, you know, the different opinions between religious and atheistic. So the evil as illusion view. As a prime example of this view, Buddhism admits there is suffering in the world, but claims that evil is based on a broader illusion.

The reason people suffer is that they have unfulfilled desires. So the solution for them is to subjugate all desire, and in doing so achieve enlightenment. Only when we rid ourselves of desire and detach ourselves from the material world, we will achieve self-transcendence and peace.

So the point is to affirm. Like Christianity, this view affirms that there is a point to suffering. We should expect it, learn from it, and be changed by it.

Moreover, Christians recognize, somewhat similar to Buddhism, that the attachment to material things often does bring suffering. The points to challenge are, Christianity does not teach that evil is an illusion, or that we should seek to overcome suffering by detaching ourselves from the world around us. Instead it teaches that evil is very real, and we should be deeply invested in this world, working to alleviate injustice and overcome evil, both of which are enemy intrusions into God's good creation.

The next look is a fatalistic view. This view is common in ancient Greek and Roman cultures, and is still prevalent in many forms today. A person cannot outrun fate, so they must endure whatever evil befalls them in a stoic sort of way.

Stoic resolution in the face of suffering and death is a path to achieving a legacy of glory and honor. Points to affirm are, Christians also believe that suffering is an inevitable part of life, that it has meaning, and that we should strive to face it nobly. The points to challenge are, Christianity does not glorify suffering as something to seek out, or to face with stoic indifference.

Christians are encouraged to express honestly their grief, weaknesses, and hope in the face of pain and evil. Christianity offers a very different form of noble suffering. There's a lot of stoic stuff out there, if you try not to go on YouTube a lot and come across a lot of it.

Even though it's an old philosophy, many people still go by that. A moralistic religious view, whenever somebody suffers, it is because they have committed a corresponding evil action. A person's lot in life is directly related to the actions they have taken, and this or a previous life, and they receive exactly what they deserve.

Thus the way to avoid suffering is to do good. The points to affirm are, like the moralistic religious take, Christianity teaches that suffering has meaning, and it can have a refining effect on us. Furthermore, the Christian story affirms that, in general, the suffering in the world is rooted in evil rebellion against God.

The points to challenge are, Christianity does not teach that there is some sort of simple cause and effect relationship between sin and suffering, or that suffering is equally handed out to everyone on the basis of their past deeds. Rather, the amount one suffers is not deserved or on balance. It's not fair.

This can be seen both in the life of Job and in the life of Jesus. We can see that we don't always suffer for what we've done. Innocent people suffer.

The reasons we suffer, at least in the short run, are often mysterious. But sometimes we don't know. Sometimes the devil may attack us.

We always blame God, but how often do we blame the devil for when we fall into sin or when evil happens to us? Look at Job. The devil is the one that did everything to him. But look at the cosmic conflict view.

This dualistic view sees the world as locked in a conflict between good and evil forces, neither of which is ultimately sovereign. Think of the celebrated Star Wars movies. The dark side standing

behind suffering and injustice, and the light side of the force standing behind all that is good are doing battle.

The points to affirm are, Christianity also affirms that there is real evil forces at work that cause both injustice and suffering. Humans should stand on the side of good and resist evil. The points to challenge are, the Christian God gives humans real choices and responsibilities, and He is at the same time the ultimate sovereign, and His divine plan cannot be thwarted.

God is more powerful than evil, and in the end ultimately will triumph over it. Also Christianity, rather than seeing the universe in black and white divisions, good and evil, recognize that both good and evil cut through the heart of us all. The secular options are, the secular views of suffering differ from the more traditional views sampled above.

All the traditional views claim that in some way suffering has real meaning, that it is something we should learn from, grow through, or even be transformed by. Most traditional views also add that this current life is not the end of the story. Current secular views, however, deny both of these points and posit that suffering is meaningless and there is no life after we die.

So from our secular perspective, if there is such a thing as meaning or a meaningful life, it can only be found in this life and is rooted in the happiness and fulfillment we create for ourselves. Because suffering has no transcendent meaning or purpose, it should be avoided and eradicated at all costs. That's why probably you see nowadays all those safe spaces and parents not wanting their kids to have any pain or anything else.

They think only you should have joy and happiness, that there is no place for suffering. There are two general secular responses for how to live in the face of the common human problem of suffering. The secular pessimistic take and the secular optimistic take.

The secular pessimist, that view is there is no meaning, no purpose, and no morality in the universe. God is dead and so is his meaning. One day we will all cease to exist.

We are the accidental byproduct of a mechanistic universe that is generally hostile towards life. While no one in their right mind wants to suffer, at the end of the day we must admit that we live in a cruel world where suffering is both meaningless and ultimately inescapable. We can see how depressing that view is.

I mean, that's probably why so many people are suicidal nowadays. You think, well, there's nothing to live for. Oh, God, I'm on this earth for no reason and why not just die? I mean, what would it matter? The points to affirm are we suggest you admit this view has a certain unflinching consistency to it.

Indeed, if the universe will eventually suffer heat death, in the end nothing will be remembered and our lives won't matter. You can also affirm the sober experiential realism this view holds. This world can be cruel and human achievement will never be able to eliminate suffering or prevent future extinction.

The points to challenge are this view is basically unlivable. We all automatically live as if there is meaning in the world. Even a hardened and pessimistic secularist like John Gray admits that although other animals do not need a purpose in life, humans cannot do without one.

Humans will assign meaning, purpose, and morality to the day trials of life. It is simply what we do. But basically all humans, no matter what, assign purpose, even if they don't believe in God or afterlife.

We'll look at the secular optimist. This view affirms that because there is no transcendent meaning in the world that we can discover, we are left to create our own meaning. The gospel of secular optimist is that we have been liberated from conforming to some external source of truth or meaning and are free to determine what is good and meaningful for ourselves.

A representative of this position explains, secularists see the universe without apparent purpose and realize we must forge our own purposes and ethics. But although the universe is purposeless, our lives aren't. We make our own purposes and they're real.

Often this take is accompanied by an idealism regarding humans' ability to overcome suffering. Rather than waiting for any kind of deity to act on our behalf or placing our hope in an afterlife in which all will be made right, we must, as a humanist manifesto states, save ourselves. We can see that in the world.

People look to themselves to get out of problems or better themselves. They don't look to God. What points to a firm heart is important to avoid accusing a secular optimist of having no meaning in their life.

If you did, they would just scoff. I have a caring relationship with my wife. I am raising my kids to be kind and moral people.

I create jobs in my business and I volunteer in several charity organizations. I sacrifice and in some sense suffer for all these things because each has great meaning and value. These are all commitments we should affirm rather than denigrate.

Also, while some of the non-secular views surveyed above have too often led to a passive resignation to evil, Christians can agree with optimistic secularists that humans should indeed work to combat the evils of the world. The points to challenge are, first is the lack of cognitive rationality. If we create our own web of meaning and significance, what happens when they're all gone? If our meaning and significance will disappear with humanity's destruction, what do any of our efforts really matter in the long run? One popular response to these questions is that we should simply not ask them.

We shouldn't think about them. Just live your life now the best you can and don't spend time thinking too deeply about the distant future. I think that's what a lot of people do in this world.

They don't think far ahead. They just think about the present time. We would suggest, however, that if a view about the world encourages people not to think about certain inescapable aspects of life, namely death and suffering, it's rational merit should be called into question.

Second, this view is thin experientially. If meaning is a sign only within the confines of this life, then what happens when the sources of that meaning, family, career, friends, begin to go bad? What happens when in the inevitability of life, the delicate filaments that compose the web of meaning we've constructed for ourselves are torn or disintegrate altogether? Well, that's a great point. If you just live for your family, friends, job, et cetera, what happens if you get a divorce or you lose your job? Then all your meaning of life goes down the drain.

As a Christian, you still have faith in God. You still know that he'll pull you through. So when this happens, our very concept of meaning and significance itself will be threatened, undermined, and destroyed.

We'll probably stop here. We'll look at a Christian view next time. This objection is a little bit longer, so we'll finish it up next week.

I'll close with a prayer. Thank you, Lord, for another day. Thank you for all of us getting here safe.

And those on the phone listening in, thank you for blessing us. Thank you for answering our prayers and helping us with our problems. Thank you for being long-suffering when we do sin and patient with us.

Help us through the week. Help us to have a good attitude and talk to others about you. We get the chance in Jesus' name.

Amen.