



“College education is not as sudden as a massacre, but it is more deadly in the long run.”
— Mark Twain

“Education is the period during which you are being instructed by somebody you do not know, about something you do not want to know.”
— G. K. Chesterton

“The university is not engaged in making ideas safe for students. It is engaged in making students safe for ideas.”
— Clark Kerr

“Education is the process of driving a set of prejudices down your throat.”
— Martin Fischer

Evidence & Explanations

- Suppose it's hot in this room.
- Suppose further that, as an explanation of this fact, I put forward the theory that there's a big, sweaty elephant sitting in the back of the room giving off heat.
- Now suppose you point out to me that, since you don't see the elephant, my theory must be false.

Must I give up my theory?

- Well, given the evidence you've cited, I *might* give it up.
- But I don't *have* to give it up.
- I *could* modify my theory in order to take account of the evidence which you cited in order to refute it.
- So I might suggest that, while there's a big, sweaty elephant in the back of the room, it happens to be an invisible elephant.
- Thus, I can hang onto my theory despite evidence which seems to refute it.

What lessons should we learn from this?

First, it's *always* possible to get past the evidence.

Second, how we respond to the evidence depends in large part on what commitments we bring to the table.

Example

- Suppose that, on returning to my car in the seminary's parking lot, I discover both that one of its windows is broken and that my copy of *No Line on the Horizon* is missing.
- Now, being something of a cynic, I conclude that some U2-starved seminary student has broken into my car and stolen my CD.
- Suppose, however, that two friends, Charity and Kirk, offer their own explanations of both the broken window and my CD's disappearance.

Example

- Charity, who has an overly optimistic view of people, refuses to believe that my CD was stolen, suggesting instead that a friend broke the window and removed it to save it from the hot Texas sun.
- Kirk, an X-Files fan who believes that the "alien autopsy video" was real, suggests that an alien space ship flew close to my car, magnetically attracting the CD, which broke the window as the ship attracted it.

Example

- Which of these explanations—mine, Charity's, or Kirk's—is most plausible?
- Well, that depends on whose assumptions you share.
- If you're a cynic like me, you're likely to go with my explanation.
- But, if you share Charity's unfailing optimism or Kirk's affinity for alien phenomena, you're likely to go with one of their suggestions.

Example

Thus, what one finds plausible (or implausible) depends on one's background beliefs.

What does this mean for those of us interested in Christian apologetics?

First, it means that there are no sledgehammer arguments for the truth of the faith.

- If one is deeply committed to rejecting Christianity, no argument can prevent one from doing so.
- So, if you can't convince someone to accept Christianity, it doesn't follow that you're an apologetic failure.
- Nor does it follow that your reasons for believing are bad ones.

What does this mean for those of us interested in Christian apologetics?

Second, it means that there are no sledgehammer arguments *against* Christianity.

- In principle, we can *always* avoid the force of any argument directed against the faith.
- Moreover, we'll be *right* to reject such arguments.

Modernism

That recent period of Western intellectual history characterized by

- 1 optimism about human reason,
- 2 belief that humans eventually will be able to understand—and control—the universe,
- 3 confidence that things are getting better, and
- 4 an emphasis on the individual.

Postmodernism

The rejection of modernism characterized by

- 1 pessimism about human reason,
- 2 belief that, while humans wreak havoc on the environment, they will never completely understand or control it,
- 3 loss of confidence in progress, and
- 4 an emphasis on community.

Three Postmodern Tendencies

- Skepticism
- Relativism
- Anti-Realism

Skepticism

Skepticism is the view that, with respect to some subject, one should refrain from having beliefs about that subject.

- Moral skepticism: One should refrain from having beliefs about morality.
- Religious skepticism: One should refrain from having beliefs about religion.
- Global skepticism: One should refrain from having any beliefs whatsoever.

Relativism

Relativism is the view that, with respect to some subject, there are no truths about that subject.

- Moral relativism: There are no moral truths.
- Religious relativism: There are no religious truths.
- Global relativism: There are no truths.

Anti-Realism

Anti-realism is the view that one's descriptions of the world, though useful for one's purposes, don't necessarily describe the way the world really is.

- Think color.
- Think models.
- So you have your 'truth' (or model of the world) and I have my 'truth'; and, as long as our 'truths' work for us, that's all that matters.
- Don't confuse 'truth' with truth.

How should we respond?

Each of these views self-destructs.

Still, we can learn from our opponents.

- The skeptic reminds us of our intellectual limitations.
- The relativist and the anti-realist show us that, even though our view is true, it isn't the only view which one can use to make sense of the world.

So where are we?

Neither we nor our opponents have sledgehammer arguments to offer.

Moreover, our opponents' views might model the world adequately *from their point of view* (in the sense that they allow them to achieve their purposes).

So is there a point to apologetics?

Yes.

- There are at least two important tasks which apologists have before them—one positive and external, one negative and internal.
- External apologetics is directed toward unbelievers; internal apologetics is directed toward believers.

External Apologetics

- Although unbelievers can always modify their views to avoid the evidence for Christianity, we can push them to continue modifying their views until they become queasy about them.
- Example: Couldn't we gather evidence which would make Charity's view hard to sustain?

Internal Apologetics

- Of course, as we attempt to make them queasy about their beliefs, unbelievers will be trying to make us queasy about our beliefs.
- So one important task of the apologist is to serve the church by responding to attempts to make Christians queasy.

Faith & Reason

What should we do when faith and reason seem to clash?

- Schaeffer's Principle: All truth is God's truth.
- Our minds have been created by God to know both Him and truth.
- Thus, faith properly employed cannot conflict with reason properly employed.

Faith & Reason

What should we do when faith and reason seem to clash?

- But, of course, we can misunderstand and misuse both faith and reason.
- We are finite and capable of misunderstanding.
- Moreover, sin has damaged us.

Advice to Christian students

Learn to think Christianly.

- Take an introductory logic course.
- Read works by Christian thinkers to see how their faith influences their thinking.
- Learn to articulate basic Christian truths clearly.

Advice to Christian students

Learn to contend for the faith without being contentious.

- Remember that your professors aren't omniscient.
- Remember that your professors know *much* more about their subject than you know.
- Remember that you aren't taking courses in order to set your professors straight.