

Ask Skeptics What They Believe and on What Grounds?

"Why do you call me good...No one is good except God alone." (Jesus of Nazareth in Mark 10:18)

One of the most common mistakes we Christians commit in our efforts to persuade others that Christianity is true, is taking **sole** responsibility for naming what it is we believe and offering our reasons as to why we do. This error began to dawn on me a few years ago as I reflected on extended conversations I independently had with two separate family members who were skeptical toward Christianity. It is firstly important to note that our topic was agreed upon in advance. Taking each one out for lunch which was followed by a walk together, I opened our exchanges by stating the following request: *"I am sincerely interested to know what it is that **you** believe."* In both cases they proceeded to rebut core aspects of my beliefs. But what never once happened was an offer to answer my simple question. I take full responsibility for my failure to point out that neglect to them. It was surely not in their interest to refuse me an answer in a flagrant way. Yet by my failure to hold them to the same standard they applied to me I missed the opportunity to shine that light which could have confronted them with the vulnerability of their position through what is called the Socratic method. I am not suggesting that Christians have no obligations of our own on this matter, but rather that challengers to Christian belief likewise have their obligations to substantiate the views they hold as well.

One of the most renowned atheists of the 20th century, Bertrand Russell was once asked what he would say if he found himself standing before God on judgment day should God ask him, *"Why didn't you believe in Me?"* Russell replied, *"I would say, 'Not enough evidence, God! Not enough evidence.'"*¹ The truth of the matter is that when I read though his numerous dismissals of the evidence advanced in favor of God's existence, I find none of his objections to be, in my judgment, rationally decisive. Neither—and to the point of this paper—did his critiques entail a critical exhaustive assessment of his own view in terms of accounting for either the *existence* of the physical realm of nature together with its *features*, or the life, death, and especially resurrection of Jesus Christ.²

The concept of "proof" in which there is no possibility of error, cannot be employed to bolster any "scientific" conclusion for the reason that, in the realm of physical entities and their interactions with each other, nothing can reach that level of certainty.³ Likewise in a court of law, the standard for reaching a guilty verdict in a civil case is *"proof based on a preponderance of evidence"* (more likely true than false)⁴ while, on the other hand, in a criminal case, a the standard of *"proof beyond a reasonable doubt"*⁵ has the capacity to render a *guilty* verdict. Notice the exclusionary qualifiers that are employed in both cases. Similarly, scientific conclusions are reached by the weight of the relevant evidence **only** insofar as **it compares favorably over that of competing hypotheses**. In terms of investigational techniques used for the purposes of reaching a scientific determination, researchers ultimately apply the method of *abduction* only **after** the methods of *induction* and *deduction* have exhausted their contribution to the query. *Abduction* is the term for the investigational program of *multiple-competing hypotheses* in which each respective hypothesis is given a hearing by exhibiting the extent of its capacity to explain the phenomena that is under consideration. Among these "competitors," it is the one with

¹Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/relig-ep/>, pt. 2.

²Bertrand Russell (*Why I am Not a Christian*. (Simon and Schuster, 1957)), despite his assertions to pour through the evidence (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQJ3sgkdCRE>), utterly fails to address the decisive evidence for or against Jesus Christ.

³<https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2017/12/14/theres-no-such-thing-as-proof-in-the-scientific-world-theres-only-evidence/#2b00bcba5392>

⁴https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/preponderance_of_the_evidence

⁵https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/reasonable_doubt

demonstrably *superior* explanatory power which deserves to prevail. I fully agree with Dr. Stephen Meyer's view⁶ that abduction was, in reality, Charles Darwin's investigational method in framing his case for his work, On the Origin of Species.⁷ This is best illustrated by the fact that, even though he never detracted from his unique formulation of evolutionary theory, he stands in bold contrast with his followers by highlighting specific types of evidence which would falsify his position if they were substantiated to be true.

One major criticism that Darwinists hurl at young-earth creationists (YECs) is that the latter limit their critiques to highlighting "weaknesses" of specific Darwinian change-mechanisms, as opposed to substantiating their own (allegedly) superior "scientific" accounting of biological reality.⁸ It is this very charge against YECs which ought also to be applied by Darwinists to themselves in their critique of YEC. And since the central point of this paper urges applying the same standards to both parties to a given debate, this same principle must also apply to the very nature of the evidence itself.⁹ In the same way that Christians are obligated to provide positive evidence of a kind that can be substantiated, so also, it is imperative that the Darwinian appeal to "science" be confirmed by specifically named "evolutionary pathways" which have the capacity to demonstrate their promise, as opposed to merely hypothetical pathways which demonstrate no promise at all.¹⁰ After all, a "scientific" pronouncement consists not of appeals to the latest "scientific consensus," but instead to demonstrable scientific data which, alone, can properly undergird any valid scientific consensus.

The bottom line is that in every social interchange concerning matters of consequence, it is not only proponents, but nay-sayers too, who are obligated to set forth their respective cases. This principle applies not only to the sciences, but also every other academic arena. And it is necessary not only for specialists, but for every social exchange on every occasion by any group of people. Finally, the goal of levelling this playing field is urgent with respect to truth considerations in the advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pastor Gary Jensen, © August 26, 2020
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Berlin, PA, USA

⁶ The Signature in the Cell. (Harper One, 2009), p. 160.

⁷ Harvard Press, 1859, pp. 189, 207.

⁸ Although that ploy is technically valid, it cannot be employed as an excuse to exempt specific constructs from being potentially falsified.

⁹ See my book review of *Creationists' Trojan Horse*, p. 2, par 3, which can be found at my website: www.christianityontheoffense.com.

¹⁰ See my paper, "The Pervasive Employment of Apologetics in the Bible," Ibid.