

The Trial

Lesson 9

The Internal Critique | continued

Last week we made the point that a good investigator gives due diligence to build a case. Prior to the trial, he collects enough data, asking reasonable questions, so that he is prepared to make his case against his interlocutor clearly and fairly. Similarly, as we lovingly converse with unbelievers, our purpose is to ask enough questions to know adequately what they believe so that we can build our case clearly and fairly.



- Can you summarize their views/positions? Loving your neighbor means you understand and represent their positions and beliefs accurately.
- We can deviate from good listening skills if we're too preoccupied with our response. As data is coming in, you're analyzing it for truth, misappropriated truth, and lies. Try to think less about your response and more about understanding your neighbor.
- James Anderson offers four categories of tests to help us spot truths from lies. They allow us to evaluate worldviews more thoroughly in order to spot alternate explanations.¹ The more we familiarize ourselves with them, the quicker we'll be at spotting inconsistencies in our everyday apologetic discussions.

Being a Good Listener: The Four Tests

1. The Consistency Test

- This test affirms that, "Any worldview that involves inconsistent presuppositions with conclusions (secondary beliefs) cannot be true (at least at those points) because it's a basic rule of logic that no contradiction is true." Thus, in a logical manner, we are looking for self-contradictory truths.

Examples:

- "There are no moral absolutes. It's all relative."
- "I think we'll be rewarded for our good deeds and punished for bad deeds, but I don't believe there are moral absolutes."
- "I don't know about God, but men and women deserve justice."
- "We came from the big bang, and that came from nothing. There was nothing, then there was something."

2. The Coherence Test

- This test asks how worldviews and their subsequent beliefs "stick together" or "unite."
- The ideas within the worldview itself need to support one another and relate to one another. When certain parts have no coherence with the whole, then we see that the coherence of the worldview

¹ Anderson, James. *Why Should I Believe Christianity?* (Christian Focus Publications: Ross-Shire, Scotland, 2016), 41-49.

begins to break down.

Examples:

- Sandra says there is a God and asserts that there are moral laws that are above our opinion unto which we ought to live. Biff believes in God and asserts that moral laws are socially constructed for our good. Sandra is more coherent than Biff if we just asked this question, “What if society changes its position on what is moral?”
- As a Christian, I believe that when a person feels their life no longer has meaning or has become futile due to illness, they should be able to end their life with dignity.

3. *The Explanation Test*

- A proper worldview will not only be internally consistent and coherent between the parts, but it will also be able to explain the reality we all live in. Another way to test this worldview is by asking, “Is it probable?” This would be the power of explanation. Or ask, “Can you explain this?” “What does your belief say about this?”

Example:

- If you give it enough time, monkeys banging on typewriters could produce the works of Shakespeare. “That doesn’t mean we’re justified in thinking a baboon wrote Hamlet. I’m still convinced Shakespeare did that.”²

4. *The Evidence Test*

- This test asserts that if the worldview is true, it must fit with the evidence we have available to us.
- This is the more difficult test because no one interprets evidence in a blind, unbiased manner. We interpret evidence *within* the worldview we believe. Another way to consider evidence is to ask them “what would we expect” to happen with the evidence before us if the worldview were true.

Example

- If Darwin’s theory of evolution holds true that complex organisms are a development of previous simpler organisms of lesser structure, we should expect to be able to reduce organisms to their individual parts in a logical ordering of priority such that those preceding parts will still work without the “new parts.” However, the evidence points to the opposite! What we find in science is that organisms are irreducibly complex.
- Considering these tests and a healthy inquiry, you have a reasonable amount of information to begin the trial. In this sense, you begin to critique their unbelief. Here you begin the next step in your engagement called reversing the burden of proof.

Step 2: *Reversing the Burden of Proof*

- “How did you come to that conclusion?” Some people think that Christians are the only ones who need to answer for their beliefs. This is simply not true. All people must support their stated positions (assertions) with an *explanation* if they are going to be honest, rational, just, and wise. Apologetics keeps challengers to Christianity intellectually and morally honest.

² Koukl, 64.

- If an unbeliever does not have reasons for his position, he needs to be called out for it. This step puts the unbeliever in the hot seat, and if we uphold this step, our job as an ambassador is much easier.
- *The Burden of Proof*: The burden of proof is the responsibility to support a claim. Whoever makes the claim bears the burden. An *argument* is different from an *assertion*. An assertion simply states a point. An argument gives supporting reasons as to why the point should be taken seriously.
- Do not allow yourself to be thrust into a defensive position when the unbeliever makes an assertion. It's not your duty to prove him wrong. It's his duty to prove his view is correct. If they tell the story, let them defend it.
- Our first Columbo question: "What do you mean by that?" allows us to gather information about what they believe. The next Columbo question, "Now, how did you come to *that* conclusion?" helps you to know *what* motivates their assertions. This is designed to enforce the *burden-of-proof* rule.

Other questions you might ask:

1. "Why did you say that?"
2. "What are your reasons for holding that view?"
3. "What makes you think that's the right way to see it?"
4. "I'm curious - why would that idea seem compelling to you?"

This step does three things:

1. It charitably assumes he has actually come to a conclusion - that he has reasons for his view.
 2. It will give him a chance to express his rationale, if he has any.
 3. It will also give you more material to work with in addressing his objections.
- Don't be surprised if you get a blank stare. Koukl writes, "Caught off guard, some will quip, 'I don't have any reasons - I just believe it.' In this situation ask, 'Why would you believe in something when you have no reason to think it's true?'"
 - Don't fall for the popular effort to "shift the burden of proof" by demanding that you defend a view that you have expressed. But if they turn on you by trying to reverse the pressure of them and on to you, simply respond, "Let me think about it."³

³ Koukl, 69.

An Exercise in Listening

“Are you willing to answer a five-to-ten-minute questionnaire that I’m doing for my church course I’m taking? It’s just five questions, and I’m not allowed to answer back. There is no impunity and I can only ask clarifying questions.”

1. Where do you think the world came from?
2. What do you believe about God?
3. What do you believe about Jesus Christ?
4. Where do you believe morality comes from?
5. What do you believe about life after death?