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Is It Arrogant to Say You Know God Exists?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether it's arrogant for people who believe in God to say they know for sure that God exists and the best way to explain the Trinity to a child.

- * Is it arrogant for people who believe in God to say they know for sure that God exists?
- * What is the best way to explain the Trinity to a child?

Transcript

I'm Amy Holland. You're listening to Stand To Reasons #SDRaskPodcast. Greg Coco is with me today.

Hello, Greg. Let's start with a question from Thomas. An atheist co-worker says, "How arrogant is it for someone who believes in God and Jesus to say they know for sure that God and Jesus exist? How would you respond?" Well, I would ask the question, "How is that arrogant?" I'm not sure I understand why that would be arrogant.

Okay. Does he believe in evolution? Does he have a confidence that for sure this took place? Of course. How arrogant? Well, that seems completely out of place.

Do you think the earth is geocentric or helios? Or the solar system? Will you take a choice? Do you know for sure you think you know? Yes. How arrogant. I don't see how arrogance is when a person is exalting themselves.

Okay. How is it? Now, if a person said, "I am God," I know God exists because I am him. Well, okay, that's not a line.

But if a person just say, "I have good reason to think this is true and I am convinced that it is knowledge, how is saying you are convinced of a view, an example of arrogance?" That's the question. And I think this, it's interesting. Okay, let me just try to break it down a little bit.

The claim is that God exists and the believer knows God exists. Now the first claim is

simply opposite the atheist claim. So both they're making claims and they compete with each other.

I don't know how the claim that God exists could be arrogant if the claim that God does not exist isn't arrogant. Okay. They're just claims about reality.

So then the claim seems to be that if someone thinks they know it, that's arrogant. But plenty of atheists think they know that God doesn't exist. Now some will backpedal a little bit.

They say, "Well, I'm not perfect, but you know, knowledge is justified to believe." In other words, if you think you're right and you have really good reasons to do it, it's fair to call that knowledge. And all of these atheists are writing all these books about why God does not exist. How about this one? "The God delusion, Richard Dawkins, is it fair to say that Richard Dawkins is arrogant in virtue of..." I'm not just talking about his general character.

We're setting it aside now. It's not an issue. "In virtue of his claim that God is a delusion and those who believe in God are deluded." Well, I would say that that's arrogant as a claim.

So why would somebody who said even a theist went as far as to say that God exists and atheists are deluded? I don't see how that would be arrogant either. Look at if somebody who believes a false view, that's it, they are deluded. I don't know what they're mistaken.

That's what a delusion is. Where you think one thing that isn't so and something else is so. This is just a trash talk.

That's all it is. It's just trash talk. That's arrogant.

Well, my question is, and this is the response. What is arrogance? Okay, maybe that's a better place to start. What is arrogance? Help me out here because I don't understand your challenge, your response.

What is arrogance? Well, that's you in your belief. No, no, I'm just trying to figure out what the meaning of the word is. What do you mean by that? Okay, this is the standard move.

It's called Stix and Stones in the new edition of tactics. It's a tactic that when you're called names, you ask for a definition. So when you say arrogant, you mean what? You are high-minded.

You think you're right. Oh, wait, wait. So arrogance is when somebody thinks they're right.

Do you think you're right? Okay, then that would mean by your definition, you would be arrogant too, right? No, I'm not arrogant. Well, so you see how this is nonsense. So what is arrogant? Then I'm going to ask, how does that proper appropriate definition of arrogance apply to me because I have a conviction regarding knowledge of God.

I'm spending more time responding to this than it's worth. This is silly. Okay, ask them what he means by arrogant.

And then ask, how does arrogant arrogance apply to to a confidence in a conviction? And does it apply to every confidence of every conviction that that people have, including atheists? And my golly, atheists are just as outspoken and confident about their views as theists are actually, in many cases, more so. To a per capita, let's put it that way. Great.

That's the question I had written down because I think there might be something hiding behind this claim that you need to bring out. So the question I wrote down is, is after you asked, what do you mean by that? What is arrogance? Is all knowledge arrogant or just spiritual knowledge? And once they answer that, I suspect they think that spiritual knowledge is arrogant because they don't think there is any such thing as spiritual knowledge. I think that's the premise that they're smuggling into this.

That's good. The problem is it's suicidal, of course, because they presume their point of view is true in order to say that your view is arrogant, in virtue of it being false. Okay, however, they are now asserting their view as the true view, which it seems to me from to the Christian.

Now, the Christian thinks the atheist view is false. So then by the same standard, the Christian would be in his rights to say that the atheist now is the one who is arrogant, because he has a false understanding about a spiritual thing. All we're doing is applying the same standards.

Now, this is not a two coquay error or fallacy. Two coquay is saying, well, you're doing it too. It is a point to show that if it is sauce for the goose, it is sauce for the gander.

But if it is not sauce for the gander, it is not sauce for the goose. All right. If it's a bad way of arguing, it's a bad way of arguing in both directions.

All right. And so, no one would ever properly and comfortably apply this to an atheist view, certainly not the atheist as a way of thinking. Then why is it legitimate to do the same thing, the same kind of arguing to the theist of some other Christian? So where I think I would ultimately take this, assuming that what he's really saying is that you are making claims about things that aren't not only that they aren't real or false, but it's the kind of thing that is not true or false.

And I think that is where he is thinking. I think that's where most of our society thinks in that religion is something that can be true for me, but not true for you, because it's not

actually part of reality. It's just what we like or it's a story we tell ourselves to make us happy and to give us meaning.

So if you follow that up with, is it just spiritual knowledge? And is that because you don't think spiritual claims are actually about reality, like a claim about gravity would be about reality, then at least you can get to the point where they understand the claim you're making. Because what you can say is, I want, I just want to make sure you understand. I'm not saying I like Christianity, therefore I'm right.

And therefore I know it. The claim is that this is actually something true about reality for which I have reasons, and therefore I know it. There's a mistake that some atheists make.

I think even Peter Rogosi in his tactics book for atheists that I wrote about, and that belief is an epistemology. Belief is a way of knowing, and that's what we think. But belief isn't a way of knowing.

It's a response to something that we have reason to know. It's an act of trust in what something we believe is so. But excuse me, I just want to make one clarification.

And that is to what you said, Amy, because when you're talking, there's a difference between talking to a post-modern type person and an atheist. Okay, they have different epistemologies. The reason that a lot of people think that spiritual things aren't true, like you said, is because this is pluralistic.

It's true for you, not for me, and all this other stuff. But generally, that's not the way the atheist approach it. An atheist doesn't say that his atheism is true for him, because he's not a relativist with regards to knowledge.

He thinks he's right, and he thinks we're wrong. So what he's doing now is he's judging our worldview from the perspective of his worldview. No spiritual things are true, because my view is true.

Right? That's different from saying, you're arrogant for saying your way is right, because other people have other views that are just as right for them. Okay, does that make sense? Okay, so like when we're dealing with two different groups of people, one are the like, true for me, not for you, crowd when it comes to spiritual things. And then you, that's kind of like a more relativistic thinking person.

But atheists generally are not like that. They're cast in a enlightenment, modernist mold. And they believe in reason and rationality.

And they believe reason and rationality dictate atheistic materialism. And so they are right on the merits, and we're just flat out wrong. But neither case does the, I mean, certainly, especially with atheists, I think your assessment was really right on Amy, with

people who are more pluralistic in their views.

Why don't you say you're right for you, and said you're right for everybody? But for atheists, especially they are objectivists when it comes to the question of truth. And that's why the charge that this is arrogant is really odd. And my suspicion is, as he's picked this up from pluralistic crowd, and he's not even being true to his, excuse me, his own epistemology, if you will.

Let's go into a question from Ralph Anderson. What is the best way to explain the Trinity to a child? I was asked today, and all I could think to say as an example was that dogs are different, different persons, yet they still are basically dogs, same essence. Yes, that was the best I could do, bad right? Well, part of the problem is that whenever you try to make illustrations, you always fall off of one side or the other of orthodoxy.

And people say it's like water, that can be, it's all water, H₂O, but it can be ice or steam or whatever. And well, that's a good illustration for modalism. It's modalism.

It's kind of a funny video. The bull is a better video. Anyway, so, or else if you try to talk about one individual three distinct centers of consciousness, this sounds like a three headed beast.

And so now you have this, this picture in your mind that's gross grotesque. Bill Craig took heat once for using that as an illustration. Although I think there's a part from the picture in one's mind of this foul creature, even so it does seem to capture something about the Trinity.

Trinity is one being a single nature that has three centers of consciousness. All right. And that's what the three heads of the one thing is in the, you know, obscene sounding illustration represent.

So if I was talking to a child, and the way of arguing this before, or counsel on this before is you don't try not to use illustrations because illustrations are inadequate. God is unique. And this is why descriptions are better.

And that's what we find in the scripture. We find there's one God. We find that Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit are distinct individuals.

They talk to each other. They interact like individuals do. And yet each is fully God because of the prerogatives that are shown to them and the characteristics that they have.

Now that's complex for a kid. I realize that. But the point I'm making is as we are, we are declaring the kinds of things that scripture declares, and we expect those things that change to fall into the meter as a child is able to manage it.

And by the way, this is true with all kinds of things and children, you know, we tell the kids, I know it doesn't make sense to you right now, but you'll understand this later. Yeah. I know you understand.

So anyway, we tell it to kids. So this is one of those things. Now, having said that, I'm going to give an illustration that I think is the best illustration that I could think of if you're given to doing that, because I don't think it falters badly.

Although it is, it captures the concept, not the thing itself. So I want you to think of a cube. Okay.

And in a cube, you have three dimensions. What's interesting about a cube is each dimension fully subsumes the whole thing, even though the dimensions are distinct. So if you have a cube and you take away its depth, the cube disappears, the whole thing disappears, you have an abstract idea of a two dimensional plane, but the thing is no longer there.

If you take away its height, the same thing happens. If you take away its width, the same thing happens. So in the case of a cube, you have one thing, and this would be parallel to one nature, yet you have three distinct aspects of it that without which the thing wouldn't exist at all.

So we could say the width is fully the cube, in one sense. We can say that the whatever is fully the height is fully the cube, etc. Even telling you this illustration, which I think captures it much better than a whole lot of others, I'm still uncomfortable with it.

And there's a simple way, and we answered this once Amy, we did a Q and A at reality or rethink in the past, how could there be three and one? How could that be three and one? That's a contradiction. I said, how many people in your family? Four? You have four people in your one family? Yes. So you have four and one.

Is that a contradiction? No. Why? Because the four are different than the one. Right.

Now I made points to point out, I'm not giving an illustration of the Trinity because the Trinity isn't like that. That's the Mormon view. All right.

Not the Christian view. However, well, it's three and one for the Mormons. But the point I'm making is that it, you cannot fault the Trinity in virtue of contradiction the way you just attempted to do.

Okay. So that's the best I could do. So rather than offering an illustration, would you say then that just going through the the biblical discussion of Jesus is God, Holy Spirit is God, Father is God, but they also interact with each other.

So they are three persons and kind of maybe give it in the context of what the Bible says

about who they are. What do you think kids would appreciate that, Greg? Yeah, I think so older, older kids would understand that better. If I were just working with the kid, I would say, here's what you have to think of, honey, you have to think of one being that inside that individual being, there are three different minds interacting with each other.

Three different minds interacting with each other. You know, there's this, again, to kind of maybe use a little bit of an awkward example, there are conjoined twins, very famous. Now they're older, I remember when they were kids, they're probably in their 20s, maybe even 30s, conjoined twins that are conjoined, they share their legs and their arms, but they split a little bit at the chest with two different heads, and they are completely independent individuals in one body.

They're completely different individuals. They have separate souls that are in one body. They walk together, their hands one operates one side of the body and one the other, but you can watch them on videos, you know, and they all work together in harmony there, both sides.

And there's, again, it's a little bit garish. Amy's smiling awkwardly right now, like, oh, like, you don't think about it. But if you're looking for something that is kin to the Trinity, this might be helpful as long as we have a clear theological definition in our minds.

It's so hard. Like, I'm so nervous about using illustrations, especially with kids, because putting an idea in their head that could be difficult to get out. Because now if you have two persons, you know, conjoined twins, they have different personalities.

They have different gifts. So now you have too much difference because there's not a perfect parallel right. Yeah.

But we also, there are differences, and this is a little bit of a challenge, in what way is the son different from the father? They share the same nature, but there are differences. And the two ways that and the spirit as well, but the two ways that these have been distinct, distinguished is the economic Trinity. They do different things.

They have different roles. And also, the son proceeds from the father and the spirit spirates from the father and the son. So there's, this is how they've tried to make them distinct.

But that's always a struggle. If you have three persons in one, then in what sense is the, are the persons genuinely distressed? What's different about them if they share the same nature? And this is a fair question. And ultimately, this is hard to explain to adults.

So good luck with your kids. Do the best you can. And you can say, look, this is because God is so different from everything else that we see, it's hard for us to imagine exactly what it's like, what it's like to be God.

Because we, we just have nothing to compare it to. He is completely other. He is, he's not like any of his creation, except in these, these certain ways, but like in terms of being a Trinity, he's not like anything in the creation.

So my heart goes out to you, parents. Good luck to you. And I guess one other thing, you might want to read some books about it.

Fred Sanders has written books on the Trinity. Really? So you have a better understanding and that might help you to communicate it better to younger people. Just keep in mind, these are things that make more sense as kids grow older, just like a whole bunch of other things that you teach them.

Well, thank you, Rolf. And thank you, Thomas. And if you have a question, send it to us on Twitter with the hashtag #STRS or you can send it through our website, go to our contact page, choose, I have another question, and then make sure that you put hashtag #STRS in your question so that I know that it's for this podcast.

We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

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