

OpenTheo

When Atheists Say, “That’s Not Evidence”

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to reply when atheists respond to the evidence you offer by saying, “That’s not evidence,” and how Christians can say we have free will to choose God when we’re threatened with Hell if we don’t choose God.

* How should I reply to atheists who respond to any evidence I offer by saying, “That’s not evidence”?

* How can Christians say we have free will to choose God when we’re threatened with Hell if we don’t choose God?

Transcript

Welcome to Stanch Reasons #STRSQPodcast with Greg Cogle and Amy Hall. I'm Amy Hall and with me is Greg Cogle. That's not that word.

I'm Amy. Hi, Greg. Okay.

We're going to start with the question from John. It seems all my answers to skeptics/atheists get the same reply. Probably learn from a book.

That's not evidence. How would you reply to that? Well, I'm not surprised and because what it displays, I don't know if it's from a book or not, but what it displays is just an unwillingness to countenance realistically and honestly, the countenance of view contrary to theirs. All right.

I've written about this in Street's March, the charge that there is no evidence and it's just false. Now, there's a difference between evidence and compelling evidence. All right.

Let's just say there was a murder. Okay. And it happened wherever it happened.

Excuse me. Turns out I was close by and I also had a motive. The fact that I was close by and had a motive turns out to be evidence against me.

Now, it's not conclusive evidence, but it is a piece of a case that could be made against me. Now, if it turned out that I had, even those close by, that I had a powerful alibi that would overwhelm those particular pieces of evidence, but evidences are pieces that lead to a conclusion, at least potentially. And if the evidence is good and there's enough of it, then you are justified, preponderance of evidence, or beyond a reasonable delta, two different criteria, one civil, the other criminal.

But nevertheless, as these things add up, the chances that one outcome was the case and that one individual was probably guilty increases increases increases until you're justified by looking at the pieces of evidence as they fit together in coming to a conclusion that more likely than not preponderance of evidence that person did it, or yes, he did it beyond a reasonable doubt. Okay. So when a person says there's no evidence, sometimes they mean, I'm not convinced by the evidence you've given me.

Okay. So the question, I think at this point would be kind of our standard opener. What do you mean by that? Well, that's not evidence.

What do you mean? That's not evidence. And that you're basically asking, why would this not be considered a piece of evidence as part of a larger case? And the case that we're usually making is a case that's called abductive reasoning, where we are reasoning from the evidence, from the pieces of information or facts or whatever we can offer to the most reasonable conclusion. So what is the most reasonable explanation given the evidence or the pieces of information that we have regarding this issue? Okay.

That's abductive. I'm trying to think of the other phrase that issues the an inference to the best explanation. Okay.

So when I say, well, I believe in God because and in Christianity, because it's the best explanation for the way things are, that I look at the way things are. And I say, here's how the Christian worldview explains that. What is why are humans unique? Okay.

Well, they're made the image of God. Well, what's wrong with it? Whether broken because of a rebellion's God. Okay.

So we know humans are special. We know that there's something wrong with them. Now, we have a way of explaining that an atheist can't do either because there isn't anything wrong.

If they're just molecules clashing in the universe, they know standards, for example. And there and there can't be something wrong with the world and there can't be something wrong with human beings per se because again, the standard's not there. So the fact that we have explanations to think these particulars that seem like obvious details of the of the world gives us an opportunity to be building a case.

So for persons that well, that's not evidence. Well, why isn't it? And I suspect they're

going to say because it's not conclusive. But of course, you don't conclude things generally from one piece of evidence.

Most of the time you are piecing evidential elements together to form a conclusion. Most of the time about ever just virtually everything. And so what would count as evidence is another question that one could ask.

And the unfortunately, the answer is always astronomical. Well, if God would write my name in the sky while I'm standing there looking there, if you come and stand in front of me and say, I exist. I mean, it's a ridiculous standard.

And as one wag put it, if God stood in front of you, you wouldn't go to God, you would go to a psychiatrist. So this part of what part of the problem here is the standard that's being used by the skeptic. It's unreasonable.

What are other things that they believe? I think they believe in Darwinian evolution based on what? Well, the fossil record, that's not evidence. DNA, that's not evidence. I mean, we could say the same thing to every point they're making, but what they do to defend evolution is they put together a case based on pieces of evidence that link together that in their mind secure the conclusion.

This is what we're doing as well, abductive and in an inference to the best explanation. Again, the problem here is psychologically, volitionally, an unwillingness to acknowledge any evidence against their view, anything that could count against their view. That's volitional.

And rational is that they are making a demand for proof that they don't make on hardly anything else that's important in their life, nothing else. Except for this one. Okay.

So we have a lack of reason in the approach, all right, from the people who are the smart folk, the critical thinkers, the rational people, and are not following, willing to follow evidence where it leads, they just dismiss it out of hand. And in using an epistemic method, a method of knowing that they would never use for anything else that their life depended on. And that's the issue.

So I would ask the question, what do you mean and get clarification of why they're dismissing this as evidence and then find out what would count as evidence for them and then ask them, is this the kind of demand that you make regarding any other important issue in your life? You know, including atheism, of course, the question could always be asked, what is the evidence for atheism to, you know, and the fact is they don't produce any. They think it's the default position, but any of that, what were you going to say? I'm sorry. No, I was saying that's not how they treat their atheism either.

Although I suspect they would say that's the default position that they don't need evidence for that because that's just the default. But of course, that's not. I don't want to

get too off topic.

They would have to have a reason. But even have to have a reason for it to be the default position is my point. Yes, exactly.

Because atheism is not just a lack of knowledge about God. It entails a whole bunch of things about reality and about morality, about the existence of everything, about all sorts of things that require evidence. So they might be under the impression that they don't actually need evidence for atheism.

They only need evidence for theism. And that's not the case, which is why Greg, you're talking about giving different bits of evidence regarding different aspects of reality that all build together to make this case. So I agree with you, Greg, that the best thing to do here is just to ask questions to find out what they mean by that's not evidence.

Have them define evidence, have them explain why this doesn't count. Why it's not enough. All those things, Greg, I think that's great.

If it may be even asked, let me let go ahead. I'm sorry. I was just going to speak to that.

That issue of lacking a belief in God. And this is this is a, in my view, an intellectually dishonest cover for atheists. Oh, I merely lack a belief about God because if they affirm that God does not exist, that's making that's making an assertion, which requires a defense.

If they just lack a belief about God, then they don't have to defend it. And so they, this is where they are trying to dodge any burden of proof responsibility. You know, I talk about this in detail in Street Sports, which by the way is available for preorder already on Amazon.

It'll be out in June. So just saying, but I cover this. This is one of the dodges that atheists use.

And here's the key to understanding the problem. Yes, they lack a belief in God, but they do not lack a belief about God. Let me say that again.

They lack a belief in God. They don't believe in God, but they do have a belief about God and the belief about God that they have is that he doesn't exist. That's why they're called atheists.

And this is why they write books and do podcasts and get in debates. Nobody debates about things. They don't, they have no belief about that there's no, they have no conviction, no belief, whatever.

This is silly. There'd be nothing to write about. I have no belief about the best rugby team in England.

I lack a belief because I know nothing about it. All right. They don't just lack a belief in God.

They lack a belief in God because they believe there is no God. That's the key. Now, incidentally, if they want to just define atheism as lack of belief in God, then they're welcome to that definition.

But there is another definition for atheism, the standard one, the classical one, that also applies to them. So yes, they are atheists in that they lack a belief in God, their boutique definition, but they are also atheists in the standard sense that they hold a belief that God does not exist. If I were an atheist, I would never go this direction because it parged me, but it just strikes me as so intellectually lame that anybody can see right through this.

So I, in the book, I have some ways of dealing with that, explain the problem, and then some questions that you can ask the atheists to help them to see that this dodge is not really intellectually defensible. It's anyway. Okay.

Let's go on to another question from Jason. How can one call it free will when the results for not choosing to believe in God or hell? Yeah, free will, but if you don't believe in me, you will be punished for eternity. Why can't I choose not to have free will then? It's like setting up a challenge for my kids.

I know most will fail with eternal consequences. Well, this, well, first of all, you can't choose not to have free will. All right.

That makes no sense. It's contradictory. The choice entails a measure of freedom.

And secondly, this is confusion, the confusing freedom with consequences. In other words, a person is what the question presumes is, it's not really free for me unless there are no consequences for me to choose. Okay.

Look at you can, you can choose to have, uh, to eat poorly. And then you get fat. Oh, that wasn't my free choice because I never wanted to get fat.

Well, wait a minute, you made choices that led to this consequence. And you knew they would lead to this consequence. It is no less free because the consequence is one you don't like.

And if you don't like being fat, then you say, okay, in order to be skinny, I can't do what I want. I have to, what, choose other things. Yes, that's right.

You're exercising your will in a different direction to have a different consequence. So, so this is another, you know, I don't know if Jason is offering this for himself or he's offering it because it's been challenged. He's had a challenge.

This has nothing to do with freedom. It has to do with consequence. And there are all kinds of consequences to our free choice.

Now, if you want to exercise your freedom to give a negative consequence, okay, there you go. Then you live with that. Or you can exercise your freedom to have a positive consequence.

But what the demand seems to be is, I want to exercise my freedom in such a way is that there is no negative consequence to any choice that I make or else I'm going to complain that it's not really free. Sorry, you're not going to get out that way. It still is free.

It is your choice. You are making the choice and there are consequences to the choices you make. And by the way, that's life.

That's not just eternal life. It's all of life. Okay.

If a person is aware that they have options and they choose one option rather than the other regardless of the consequences, then their choice is free. I don't know how it's not determined. It may be influenced by the consequences.

You may have a reason for choosing one thing over another. But just because you have the reason avoiding the consequences, for example, doesn't mean your choice isn't free. A reason is that in virtue of which a person chooses.

Okay. Reasons are not choosing for reasons is not an example of determinism. By the way, I got that from Bill Craig, William Linkrick.

Okay. We have reasons. The reason we choose freely might be to avoid a negative consequence.

That doesn't mean the choice isn't free. We have a reason that in virtue of which we choose, that doesn't determine the choice. It influences why we choose what we choose.

I think one problem that might be happening here is he doesn't understand the nature of what hell is or what this choice is or why people go to hell. So there's kind of this because we all understand the concept of, let's say, a jail in our society, you are supposed to do X, Y, Z. If you don't do X, Y, Z and you do do something else, you go to jail. We understand that.

We don't say, well, that's crazy. You're just now people don't have free will because you're telling them not to murder and they're going to put them in jail if they murder. Well, that sounds so odd to us.

Good illustration. We understand that's how things work. So I think what might be happening here is that this person who's making this objection doesn't understand the

nature of hell.

And what hell is there to do is to punish evil. If you do something wrong, you will be punished for it because you have done something morally wrong and therefore you will be punished. Now, how does choosing Jesus come into this? Well, if you are joined to Jesus, he will take your punishment and you will be forgiven.

So it's not simply that, well, either you follow me or I'm going to put you in hell. It's, hey, you are going to hell because you have done all of these wrong things, but there's there's a chance for a pardon if you have faith in me, if you have faith in Christ and you have all of your sins forgiven. So I think maybe with if someone brings this up, I think what you have to do is explain the nature of what's going on so that they don't think it's just, hey, you can choose me or hell.

And so therefore I'm going to force you to choose me. No, that's such a good point. And I do think there's a lot of confusion there, you know.

So I went to the philosophical side, you went to the theological side and the theological side is actually the more important one here because the fact is we are lawbreakers. And when you see it from this perspective, what God is offering is something wonderful that is a pardon for the crimes we have all committed. So, and the person is saying, it's the criminal saying to the governor, oh, this is not fair.

If I don't take your pardon, I'm going to jail. What a jerk. Huh? But that's really what it amounts to.

The issue here is justice and God has made a rescue for us, for the penalty from the penalty of our own rebellion against him. And then people turn their nose up to it and they say, well, that's not really freedom. You know, okay, well, okay, nevertheless, nevertheless, all is said and done, it doesn't change reality.

You may still think someone may still think, oh, well, that's not really free because if I don't accept his pardon, then I'm going to punish for my crime. That's nonsense. Well, okay, you fine.

You're welcome to that. Guess what? You're still going to be punished for your crimes. And you're foolish if you don't take advantage of the pardon that is free, that is being offered you.

And being punished for your crimes is not an arbitrary thing. We're actually talking about justice. We're actually talking about the right thing that should happen if you've committed moral crimes, which we all have.

So if you can explain this as a matter of justice, it's not just this arbitrary, hey, do this or this, either choose me or have punishment. No, it's, first of all, don't do evil because if

you do evil, you will be punished. And guess what you have done evil and now you need a pardon.

So I think so much of this just comes back to people not understanding what we're talking about. And that's kind of on us because I think as Christians, we haven't done the best job of explaining what our position is. So if you can just help them understand the basics of what's going on here in terms of justice and mercy, this might go a long way with someone who has this objection.

You know, I agree with you, Amy, that we need to do a better job. But sometimes even when we do a really good job, our view gets mischaracterized. This is like a straw man.

And I don't know, you probably remember the atheist dog who called me on the show when we did an hour together and we've had other conversations, of course, and to him, it's just carrots and sticks. That's it Christianity. You do what I say, you get a carrot.

You don't do it. I say you get a stick. That's the threat of hell without any without any willingness to engage the issue themselves, that the substance of the issue.

And again, I think, you know, it's hard to me, it's irresponsible in terms of rational thinking. It's just irresponsible to disparage Christianity in that way when it doesn't you don't have to look far to know that the the the program is quite a bit different than carrots and sticks. Though, you know, that doesn't make Christianity true, but it does so though, is the way it's characterized oftentimes just unfair, even when Christians are clear as you were just were about the justice issue.

And I'm just going to throw one more thing out out there because this isn't when it comes to whether you do this or be punished. Yes, that's a matter of justice, but this isn't just about justice. This is also about what we were created to do and where we will thrive.

And that is with God. So it's not only that it's a matter of justice. If you go to hell, if you don't get a pardon, it's also the fact that God is calling us.

God is is sending the gospel out into the world because it is better to be with God. That's who we were created to be with. We were created to be in relationship with God.

That's actually he's he's trying to, well, I want to be careful the way I put this. He's by by giving people the gospel and saying and warning people against hell. He's also pointing to where the joy is and parents do this with their children.

They'll they'll tell them to do what's right and they'll make a case for what's right and they'll say, but if you do what's wrong, you will be punished. And there are two sides to that. There's the rewards for doing what's right and there's the justice for doing what's wrong.

And so again, this is something I think that gets lost, especially with people who see this as merely carrots and sticks. What gets lost is the idea that it is actually a joy to be with God. There's actually reward just in being with God.

He is the reward. He's who we were created to be with. So I don't want to lose sight of that either.

And there are so many when you talk about people making it into a straw, man, there's so many parts of this that they miss. So hopefully we can help people understand that a little better. Well, thank you, Greg.

Thank you, John. Thank you, Jason. We appreciate hearing from you.

And if you have a question, send it on Twitter with the hashtag #STRask or go through our website. And we'd love to answer your question in the future. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cokal for a stand to reason.

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