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What if the First Columbo Question Makes Someone Feel Ashamed?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about what to do if someone feels ashamed because he can't answer the first Columbo question and whether there are arguments we can use for God's existence based on our experience of the transcendent when we create things or watch a great performance.

* What if someone feels ashamed because he can't answer the first Columbo question, "What do you mean by that?"

* Are there any arguments we can use for God's existence based on our experience of the transcendent and the desires we feel when we create things or watch a great performance?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Kockel and you're listening to Stand to Reasons #STRAskPodcast. Greg, are you ready for your question? I'm ready, Amy. You're going to let this one go.

I think. We'll see what the questions are. This one comes from Neville.

We had a question in our first session of the apologetics training using the tactics material. The question was, what if someone becomes ashamed because they cannot answer a question based on Colombo 1, what do you mean by that? Some answers were given, but I'm not totally satisfied and would like someone to address this for me. Well, the goal is when we ask the first question, what do you mean by that? We're just trying to get clarification of a person's view.

I don't know why a person would be ashamed if they can't answer the question. Certainly it's not our intent to cause the feeling of shame, but I can see how somebody would be troubled. Appropriately so, if they make a statement and they are asked for clarification

and they can't clarify.

I do remember this happening once in a Q&A and actually it was a role play Q&A. These were Christians who were acting like non-Christians. Apparently the person who asked this question maybe had been challenged with it before, but he said, "Well, all of this stuff is just a matter of your own opinion." I said, "Well, I need some more help on that.

What exactly are you getting at here when you say it's a matter of my own opinion?" And he said, and this is what I had predicted to the audience before and I mentioned in the book often happens, he said, "I'm saying it's just a matter of your opinion." I said, "Well, I understood what you said the first time. I'm trying to figure out what you're getting at." Okay, no, let me role play, I mean, explain. For example, they may be saying, "When it comes to religion, you can't know anything, you can just give opinions." Okay, and there is no way to know the truth of the matter.

That could be what they mean when they say that. They might be saying, "Well, you have given your opinion, but you've given us no reasons for your opinion." Okay, that might be something else. Okay? Now, those are very different kinds of challenges and I actually have to be clear on what exactly is the nature of the challenge before I can answer.

If the second I could give more reasons if I hadn't given any, if the first, why would somebody think that you can't know anything about religion? And if they say, "Well, that's because it's just opinion," then I'm going to say, "Well, yes, this is what I'm asking. Why do you think it's just opinion that we can't have knowledge about spiritual things?" All right? Now, in this particular case, even though it was a role play, even though I had anticipated these kinds of responses in my teaching prior, when we did the role play and the person kept repeating the same thing back to me and I properly exemplifying the tactical approach to the rest of the audience, I properly was asking for more information. "Oh, well, it's just your opinion.

What does it you mean by that?" Well, I mean, it's just your opinion. I can't stop there. I got to deal with that.

I said, "Well, I know I understand that. What I want to know exactly what the person got angry. He wasn't role-playing.

He got up and left. He got mad at me and he couldn't answer anything more." And so that conversation ended. I chose another person to raise an issue.

He got up and left. This was the Christian in the role play. I know this sounds really weird.

Maybe I don't go to the bathroom or something, but as I recall, I never saw him again after that. And his manner was gruff. So be prepared that if you ask the question, "What

do you mean by that?" You're going to get, as I point out, often, occasionally maybe the Simon Agarfical response, sounds of silence, all right, that shouldn't shame anybody.

And hopefully your posture isn't a posture that is harsh and so they would feel shamed by not answering. But it should trouble them. If they have an objection but they don't know how to clarify it, then that should trouble them.

And I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I think what you did there, Greg, or what you modeled just now for us is you asked further questions to help them think through. So if he didn't know what you meant by, "What do you mean by that?" You offered him a couple of options.

Did you mean this? Did you mean that? So that's one thing you could do right away. Just ease off a little bit. You don't have to keep saying the same thing over and over.

What do you mean by that? You can actually give them options. Did you mean this? Did you mean that? And so that will help them to maybe relax and think through it a little bit. Sure.

But hopefully you're asking in a way, not Greg in that situation, it sounds like you had no control over him reacting that way. But as long as you're being kind and gentle and clear, they're not going to get upset. But if they are getting upset, they're probably feeling like they're stupid because they can't think of a way to refute what you're saying or they can see where you're going or whatever.

And if that starts happening, you're not going to win by keep pushing your perspective on them over and over and over with questions. The best thing to do is just say, "Don't worry about it. It's okay."

A lot of people haven't thought through all of these things. That's fine. But would you mind if I just shared my perspective with you?" And then you could just take it out of the question so he doesn't feel like he's put on the spot.

Now, our goal is, you could also, "Look, I'm not trying to make you feel uncomfortable." But the irony of the circumstance is that I did nothing other than what I said I would do in the lecture in a circumstance like this. And I don't know why the person expected something different. Maybe and maybe he wasn't a Christian.

I don't know. I just... Oh, that's possible. Yeah.

I guess it is. It's happened before. You never know what people are going through.

So sometimes you can't predict how they'll respond. So just try to keep the conversation friendly however you can and take pressure up. Greg, I think what you're saying is, "Let them... Don't take them off the hook completely."

They should be thinking about what they weren't able to answer, but you can take the pressure off them if it's clear that the pressure is going to end the conversation." Yeah, they're uncomfortable with it, right? That's a good point, Amy. Okay. Second question comes from David.

"Greg, I know you enjoy woodworking. Me too. It's hard to ignore the connection I feel to God when I'm building things in my shop.

Are there any arguments we can use for God's existence based on our transcendental experiences and desires we feel when we make things or watch a great performance?" That's an interesting question and is often the case here on STRS. It's the first time that I've ever been asked it. I do like my woodworking in principle and in practice in the rare times I get out there, but lately.

I actually... It's not clear to me that we can make a case for God based on satisfaction of doing something. All right? Because I don't know how I would ground my personal satisfaction in doing something as a... In God's existence. I don't know how an evolution would explain it.

I mean, a lot of people will just go there and they wave the wand, but it's not... And I think that chemistry can produce feelings. I don't think chemistry can produce convictions. So this to me is unclear how I could make a case with regards to woodworking, but the second illustration, though, had to do with going to a concert that was moving over... It says a great performance.

A great performance. That's an aesthetic element. That's beauty.

And beauty is not physical. It is a characteristic of something physical, but it is not in itself physical. Okay? It is a kind of assessment of something that's there.

Some people have characterized beauty as goodness expressed itself through a physical thing. All right? Something to that effect. I think it's hard to put one's finger on what beauty is, but it seems to me it's not something physical.

Apparently because there are different opinions about whether a thing is beautiful or not. Well, I'm looking at my microphone here. Well, if I say the microphone is black with a red dot on it and a dial, everybody can see that.

The physical stuff is third person public. If I say it's got a beautiful form, now that's a judgment call about something and somebody made me disagree with that. So in this case, what we're disagreeing with is something that's not physical.

It's something non-physical. Okay? Now, how can there be something that's actually beautiful? I mean, even though there are variations in different people may resonate with different things in terms of being aesthetically pleasing, I do not think it is the case

in an absolute sense that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. That is a relativistic way of approaching the issue of beauty.

And I'll tell you a funny little story that related to this. And that was when I debated John, I can't think of his last name, a professor at the University of somewhere in Canada, okay? It's where they have all the horses and the big rodeo and what is that place in Saskatchewan or wherever it is? Anyway, just a senior moment here. At this, Calgary, thank you, Greg.

At the University of Calgary, I debated a professor on objective morality. I believed in it. I did not, but then he gave an illustration.

He said, "The mountains you see around here are beautiful, but they're not beautiful in themselves. We are just, is the way he put it, we are just smearing the concept of beauty on what we see." So beauty is subjective like relativism is subject, morality is subjective. It was a strange illustration because if you're going to do something like that, you usually want to work with a known quantity.

You're going to say, "It's so obvious that I'm right on this and that morality is kind of like it." But it just doesn't, isn't obvious to me that we're smearing beauty subjectively on something we're seeing. And I mentioned that to the audience. I said, "Look, in Calgary, this is on the plane like Denver.

You got the mountains in the background." And I told the audience, "You just have to ask yourself, when you look at these magnificent mountains surrounding you here, whether your understanding of their beauty is something you're smearing on them or are they actually beautiful in themselves? You just have to decide that." Okay, so that was the point of the next morning. This is on Saturday. The next morning I'm in church and I'm going to speak and I'm being introduced.

And just as I'm being introduced, I think of something about that conversation in that debate and I start laughing, laughing, laughing to myself of something that I could have said, but I didn't and I shouldn't have even if I thought of it then, but it was still funny. And what I could have said is, by the way, Professor, I understand your point about, I think about how beauty is something we smear on. I'm just curious though, have you ever told your wife that she was beautiful? And if you did, did you explain to her that all you're doing is smearing some subjective quality on her, but you're not talking about her at all? Now of course, that would be a very legitimate application of this point, but I would have been in politics for me to mention it in the debate.

It wasn't even necessary. The other illustration was adequate, but it was funny. But I didn't want to have all the audience laughing at the good Professor that could not be sound, but in any event, that's a funny story.

I've thought about this topic a lot because I play the flute and I play in a wind ensemble. And sometimes there have been times when I've been in a concert and I'm overwhelmed as I look around and as I listen and I see the creativity of what man has created, the instruments, the music, the way all this fits together of the creativity and the noble nature of man in terms of our abilities and what we can do. And I'm completely overwhelmed and to me every time that makes me worship God because I see what he has created and I see the reflection of the image of God in man.

And so that is one thing. The second thing is I think what can happen is that when you see beauty, you get a glimpse of God. So neither of these things are really propositional things that I would argue I would make.

However, when you encounter beauty or you encounter creativity, you're encountering certain things that you process differently than maybe a propositional argument. So I think about Lewis here and he talks about how beauty, glimpses of beauty are what spurred him on towards God, his desire to regain that perception of beauty and this knowledge of other worldliness and something greater than the physical world. And that kind of, that played a big part in his conversion.

So what I usually do, like when I'm playing in a concert, as I will pray that as we play, people will glimpse that beauty and be drawn to God. So maybe this isn't something that you can turn into an argument that you make separate from beauty. Beauty is meant to be apprehended, to be experienced and to be tasted.

So maybe what you do is you bring beauty into the world and you let God move people to recognize that there's something greater than the physical properties of that thing that has been created or is reflecting something greater. By the way, beauty has no evolutionary function. There is no sense that anyone has made a case that beautiful things, the ability to apprehend beauty or however you want to characterize it, can be something that is chosen by natural selection to help you get your genes into the next generation.

Now, by the way, I know some people have argued that animal coloration attracts the opposite sex of that animal species. That might be true. But I don't have any reason to believe it's because there's beauty there.

We behold beauty. I don't think that the opposite sex of a canary beholds beauty, they behold something that appeals to them. Now, by the way, I don't necessarily even buy that explanation.

If you're Darwinist, though, everything has to be explained by that mechanism. Okay? I don't think there's a kind of category error there. If you notice, by the way, sometimes it's the male that is the brightly plumaged swan.

We have in Northern Wisconsin, in lots of places, we have now turkeys. Well, all the females are drab-looking. The male has the big fan and all the stuff to make it look pretty to the females.

But I think there's some species where it's the opposite. The male is drab and the female is more colorful. I think from a design perspective, this may serve a purpose in bringing them together.

But that doesn't mean that they are beholding beauty. And they wouldn't have come together if both of them looked drab. So even in that, I don't see the necessity of that at all.

It does not seem, even from a Darwinian perspective to all of this coloration, et cetera, it doesn't seem to be necessary for function. And meeb is all look alike. You know, of course that's asexual reproduction, so maybe that doesn't work.

But there's a lot of creatures that do bisexual or... Is that the right word? It's heterosexual reproduction. And there's no big difference between the male and the female in terms of their looks. Okay, a lot of fish are like that.

Anyway. And why would the beauty... I mean, even if you were to say that it's beauty that's tracked in the opposite sex, why would we appreciate that as beauty? We're not part of that whole... We're not part of their species. That sexual dance, right.

And even things like flowers, you know, smells can be beautiful and cause you to think of greater things than this material world. Sites can be beautiful. Sounds can be beautiful.

There's all sorts of things that give us a glimpse of something great, something good and true and beautiful. And transcendent. That's easier.

Yes, transcendent. What I'm talking about is a response to a physical thing. Although it's not always, I'm just thinking.

We could have ways of thinking. A poetry. A poetry... Yeah, okay.

If you're thinking of the words in your mind, I guess. But there are arguments that I've heard to me that are so elegant. Bill Craig has a way of doing this, creating arguments that are really, really elegant in themselves.

And the elegance of mathematics, that is an aesthetic quality of something that is not physical. Maybe that's the best... Pardon me, example is mathematics. Those who are deep into that kind of stuff can see the beauty and the elegance of these mathematical relationships.

But that's not a physical object. And the response and the math is not physical and the beauty of it is not physical. Both of these transcend the physical universe.

I had an experience like that one time looking at a chessboard as I was playing a chess game and thinking about the strategy even. The perfection of this strategy was so beautiful to me that I was overwhelmed. That's the only time that ever happened to me in a situation like that.

But I think that's probably similar to the math thing, the beauty of rationality, of perfection, of goodness, of a right order of things. All these things are reflections of God. And so we just need to pray that people will recognize them and search for the source of that.

Well, thank you, Greg. Thank you, Neville and David for your interesting questions. If you have a question, send it to us on Twitter with the hashtag #STRS or you can go through our website.

Just make sure that you choose, I have another question on our contact page and make sure you put in #STRS so we know it's for the show. And then we'll put it in the list for consideration. We love hearing from you.

We love your questions. Go do that. If you've been putting it off, go send us your questions.

We love to have as many as possible to choose from. Thank you for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocoa for Stand to Reason.

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