Tactics :

*A Game Plan for Discussing your Christian Convictions*

**Chapters 7-9: Views that Self-Destruct (Suicide Tactic)**

***Sally:*** *“No!” That’s my new philosophy. I don’t care what anyone says, the answer is “No!”*

***Charlie Brown:*** *That’s your new philosophy, huh?*

***Sally:*** *Yes! I mean, No! [pause] You’ve ruined my new philosophy.*

***Law of Non-Contradiction***

*When statements fail to meet their own criteria of validity, they are self-refuting. Your objective is to gently help people see the flaw in those statements.*

*The difficulty is that contradictions are often embedded in larger ideas which make them difficult to recognize (Col 2:8).*

*Listen carefully. Pay attention to the basic premise, conviction, or claim.*

*Then, determine if the claim undermines itself.*

1. *Does the statement satisfy itself?*
2. *Does it possess an internal contradiction?*
3. *By saying it, do they contradict what they are saying?*

*Once you have identified that their claim contradicts itself or their practice of it, ask questions to gently lead them to see that their view is suicidal (self-refuting). Let’s practice:*

**Find the contradiction with these statements:**

* Spoken: “I cannot speak a word in English”
* There are no sentences more than five words in length.
* You can’t know anything for sure.
* There is no truth.
* Never take anyone’s advice on that issue.
* People should never impose their values on others.
* It’s wrong for anyone to criticize another’s views
* You can only know what has been proven by science
* All religions are equally true and valid.
* It’s wrong for missionaries to try to change other people’s religious beliefs.
* God can’t exist because there’s so much evil in the world.
* God used Darwinian evolution to design the world
* Everyone’s view is a product of his own prejudices
* The Bible could not have been inspired by God because men wrote it and men make mistakes

***Objections at Odds (Sibling Rivalry)***

*Sometimes people state objections that are at odds with one another.*

**Examples:**

! Heaven would be a poor place without Ghandi in it. The reasoning here is that Ghandi was a good person. Good people go to heaven; therefore, he should go to heaven. The problem is that the Hindu view is that there is no clear distinction between good or bad.

! Someone complains when people treat others like beasts then states that humans are simply evolved beasts.

There is no way to account for a transcendent standard of objective good without the existence of a transcendent moral rule maker. The question is not whether an atheist can be moral but whether he can make sense of morality in a universe without God.

**Chapter 10: Taking the Roof Off (Reductio Ad Absurdum)**

Sometimes when you press an idea to its logical consequences, the result is absurd. Most people enjoy living in a world filled with morality, meaning, and order; however, many of these people deny that God exists. How can you help them begin to see the flaw in their thinking?

***The point of this tactic is to see if a person can really live in the kind of world he’s affirming. Can he live with the moral or intellectual consequences of his beliefs? In essence, you’re taking his moral or intellectual rules seriously and applying them consistently to show they are inadequate or absurd. The Taking the Roof Off tactic makes it clear that certain arguments prove too much. The goal here is to show that one has to pay too high a price to hold certain views.***

**Roof Removal, Step by Step**

1. By asking questions, find out what the person is claiming as an assertion, principle, or moral rule.

2. Give the idea a “test drive” and see if their principle or claim leads to absurd or unintended consequences.

Does it work in the real world?

3. If you find a problem, point it out using questions that encourage the person to consider the implication of their ideas.

**Example:**

**Natural Tendency**

! **Claim**: Any “natural” tendency or behavior is morally acceptable.

! **Taking the Roof Off**: If (torture, murder, human trafficking...) comes naturally for someone, does that make it morally acceptable?

! **Therefore**: Just because an impulse is natural for someone doesn’t mean it is morally acceptable.

**Jesus uses the “Taking the Roof Off” tactic:**

*But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “This man casts out demons only by Beelzebub the ruler of the demons.” And knowing their thoughts He said to them, “Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and any city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then shall his kingdom stand?” (Matthew 12:24-26)*

**Claim:**

**Taking the Roof Off:**

**Therefore:**

**Let’s Practice “Taking the Roof Off”:**

**Claim: I was born that way. (If it is natural, it must be right!)**

Taking the Roof Off:

Therefore:

**Claim: Any behavior is okay as long as I’m not hurting anyone.**

Taking the Roof Off:

Therefore:

**Claim: Morals are relative and have to do with personal preference.**

Taking the Roof Off:

Therefore:

**Claim: We are governed only by the natural process of evolution.**

Taking the Roof Off:

Therefore:

**Claim: “I’m personally against abortion, but I don’t believe in forcing my view on others.”**

Taking the Roof Off:

Therefore:

**Claim: Capital punishment is wrong because Jesus would forgive.**

Taking the Roof Off:

Therefore:

**Claim: Evil and good exist in a polarity, balancing each other out**

Taking the Roof Off:

Therefore:

**TACTICS Chapter 7-10 Appendix (Cheat Sheet)**

***“The world is an illusion, and we’re each part of the illusion.”*** This is a basic Hindu claim that says all of “objective reality” is really just an illusion. But if we’re part of an illusion, how can we know that’s true? Can members of a dream know they’re in a dream? Does Charlie Brown know he’s a cartoon character? This Hindu concept that the world is an illusion contradicts the idea that I can know I’m part of an illusion. Therefore, this central doctrine self-destructs.

***“God doesn’t take sides.”*** When someone says God doesn’t take sides, he thinks that this is the view God Himself holds. In a way, this is just another way of stating that God would be on his side on the issue of God taking sides, which contradicts his statement.

***“God can’t exist because there’s so much evil in the world.”*** When we hear this challenge, it’s important that we ask what the person means by “evil.” Don’t let them give you examples—ask what qualities those examples have that make them intrinsically bad. Why would we call them evil instead of good? At its core, the existence of evil implies an objective moral standard of perfection that has in some way been violated. As C.S. Lewis once observed, “A man does not call something crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.”4 Only God can be the true standard of moral perfection. Since God’s existence is necessary to make the notion of evil intelligible, the existence of evil cannot be invoked as a proof God does not exist. It proves just the opposite.

**CONDEMNING CONDEMNATION**

The following dialogue was taken from an actual radio show broadcast on February 11, 1995, and demonstrates the self destruction of the claim, “It’s wrong to condemn anyone for anything.”

**LEE:** I’m not a homosexual, but I think that it’s wrong to condemn anybody for anything.

**GREG:** Why are you condemning me, then? [Suicide tactic]

**LEE:** What?

**GREG:** I said, why are you condemning me if you think it’s wrong?

**LEE:** I’m telling you because a lot of Christians condemn people.

**GREG:** Well, you’re condemning me because I just condemned homosexuals as wrong.

**LEE:** Yes, I am. You are supposed to love everybody.

**GREG:** Wait a minute, you just said it’s wrong to condemn people, and now you are condemning me. So I’m asking, why are you doing the same thing that you say is wrong when I do it? [narrating the argument]

**LEE:** No, I’m not. [Then the light begins to dawn.] Okay, let’s put it this way. I’m not condemning you, I’m reprimanding you. Is that better?

**GREG:** Then my comments about homosexuals are simple reprimands as well.5

**YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT?**

I once saw a sign in a restaurant that read, “You are what you eat.” I pointed out to the waitress that this was true only if we are nothing more than our bodies. Further, if we are what we eat, we can’t be anything until we’ve eaten something. But we can’t eat something until we are something. Therefore, it can’t be true that we are what we eat. The waitress looked a me and said, “You’ll have to talk to the manager.”

**TO ERR IS HUMAN**

A common attack on the Bible goes like this: Man wrote the Bible. Man is imperfect. Therefore, the Bible is imperfect and not inspired by God. This attempt fails for two reasons. First, the conclusion doesn’t logically follow because the first premise subtly presumes what it’s trying to prove—that the Bible isn’t inspired by God.What’s at issue is whether natural man is solely responsible for the Bible or whether God worked through men and inspired the text. Since the first premise presumes the conclusion, the approach is circular.

Second, the argument commits suicide because it presumes that if man is capable of error, he will always err—that he couldn’t have been involved in any sound or accurate enterprise, like writing the Bible. But if that were true, this argument itself would have to be false, because it, too, comes from an errant human. Taken at face value, this objection is self-refuting. It doesn’t follow that if man is capable of error, he always will err. It’s not enough to dismiss the Bible simply by noting that “man wrote it.” This, in itself, proves nothing.

**THEISTIC EVOLUTION: DESIGNED BY CHANCE?**

The neo-Darwinian synthesis entails a particular mechanism that determines— this is an important word—which changes are reproduced in the next generation. This mechanism is called natural selection. In natural selection, specific circumstances in the environment allow a particular individual to survive and reproduce, passing its mutated genes on to the next generation. Serendipitous conditions in nature make the “choice,” not God. If nature is selecting, then God is not selecting. The two are at odds with each other. What could be more obvious? Either God designs the details, or nature shuffles the deck and natural selection chooses the winning hand. The mechanism is either conscious and intentional (design), or unconscious and unintentional (natural selection). Creation is teleological; it has a purpose, a goal, an end. Evolution is accidental, like a straight flush dealt to a poker rookie. Theistic evolution is the belief in design by chance. That’s like a square circle— there is no such thing. Blending evolution with creation is like putting a square peg in a round hole. It just doesn’t fit.

**FREEDOM, RATIONALITY, AND KNOWLEDGE**

Some hold that everything in life is determined by prior physical conditions and there is therefore no freedom of the will. This would also be the case if there is no soul. If there is no first-person center of our existence that exercises free will, then all of our “choices” are merely inevitable results of blind physical forces. Here’s the problem. Without freedom, there can be no rationality. None of us would be able to choose his beliefs based on reasons—we would hold our beliefs because we’d been predetermined to do so. That’s why it’s odd when someone tries to argue for determinism. His conviction could not be based on reasons—the merits of the view itself—but on prior conditions that caused his belief. He’d be “determined” to believe in determinism, while others would be “determined” to disagree. Therefore, if there is no free will, no one could ever know it. Every one of our thoughts, dispositions, and opinions would have been predetermined instead of chosen for good reasons. Still others limit the area of knowledge to those things that can be empirically tested. To them, all knowledge is based on observation. But is this a truth they have observed? Further, have they observed “all knowledge” in order to know what all knowledge is like?

**CAN GOD MAKE A ROCK SO BIG HE CAN’T LIFT IT?**

This is a pseudo-question. It’s like asking, “Can God win an arm wrestling match against Himself?” or, “If God beat Himself up, who would win?” or, “Can God’s power defeat His own power?”

The question is nonsense because it treats God as if He were two instead of one. The phrase “stronger than” can only be used when two subjects are in view, like when we say Bill is stronger than Bob or my left arm is stronger than my right arm. Since God is only one, it makes no sense to ask if He is stronger than Himself. That’s why this is a pseudo-question. It proves nothing about any deficiency in God because the question itself is incoherent. The goal of this person’s objection is to show that there are some things God can’t do, thus undermining the Christian concept of an omnipotent Creator. This illustration, however, miscasts the biblical notion of omnipotence, and is therefore guilty of the straw man fallacy. The only way it could even begin to make sense is if it attempted to pit one aspect of God’s ability against another—in this case, His

creative ability against His ability to lift. Omnipotence doesn’t mean that God can do anything, however. The concept of omnipotence has to do with power, not ability per se. In fact, there are many things God can’t do. He can’t make square circles. He can’t create a morally free creature who couldn’t choose evil. He can’t instantly create a sixty-year-old man (not one that looks sixty, but one that is sixty). None of these, though, have to do with power. Instead, they are logically contradictory and therefore contrary to God’s rational nature.

**RELATIVISTS’ INCONSISTENCY**

A person can wax eloquent in a discussion on moral relativism, but he will complain when somebody cuts in front of him in line. He’ll object to the unfair treatment he gets at work and denounce injustice in the legal system. He’ll criticize crooked politicians who betray the public trust and condemn intolerant fundamentalists who force their moral views on others. Yet each of these objections is a meaningless concept in the twisted world of moral relativism.

**TAINTED THOUGHTS**

C.S. Lewis cites an example of self-refutation in his book of essays *God in the Dock*. In response to the Freudian and Marxist claim that all thoughts are tainted (either psychologically or ideologically) at their source, Lewis writes: If they say that all thoughts are thus tainted, then, of course, we must remind them that Freudianism and Marxism are as much systems of thought as Christian theology or philosophical idealism. The Freudian and the Marxian are in the same boat with all the rest of us, and cannot criticize us from the outside. They have sawn off the branch they are sitting on. If, on the other hand, they say that the taint need not invalidate their thinking, then neither need it invalidate ours. In which case they have saved their own branch, but also saved ours along with it.6

**CONSISTENTLY INCONSISTENT**

Someone famous once said, “Consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds.” He probably thought himself profound, but the statement commits suicide. A simple question reveals the error: Do you hold that view consistently?

If he does, then he, too, would be small-minded in denigrating consistency. If he doesn’t, then consistency isn’t always the hobgoblin of small minds. Either way, the statement fails; consistency itself can’t be faulted.

**Taking the Roof Off** *Examples and Answers***:**

**THE BASIC PREMISE:** Any “natural” tendency or behavior is morally acceptable.

**THE REDUCTIO:** If gay-bashing is “natural” for me, then it’s okay.

**THE TRUTH:** Just because it’s natural doesn’t mean it’s moral.

**THE BASIC PREMISE:** Any behavior is okay as long as I’m not hurting anyone.

**THE REDUCTIO:** Peeping Toms, sexual assault while someone is unconscious, and necrophilia, all survive this test, but they are immoral.

**THE TRUTH:** The minimalist ethic is not an adequate moral system.

**THE BASIC PREMISE:** There are no objective moral obligations.

**THE REDUCTIO:** Stealing (or any other behavior) is not objectively wrong.

**THE TRUTH:** There must be some moral absolutes.

**THE BASIC PREMISE:** We are governed only by the natural process of evolution.

**THE REDUCTIO:** The strong are permitted to oppress the weak.

**THE TRUTH:** Evolution is not an adequate explanation for morality. God must exist to ground obvious ethical rules.

**THE BASIC PREMISE:** Abortion should be legal, even though the politician personally believes it kills an innocent baby.

**THE REDUCTIO:** Mothers should be allowed to kill their children in spite of our personal disapproval.

**THE TRUTH:** The “modified pro-choice” position is barbaric. What kind of person champions the right to kill what they actually believe is an innocent human child?

**THE BASIC PREMISE:** If Jesus would forgive, then we have no right to punish.

**THE REDUCTIO:** No punishment of any kind would be justified, neither capital punishment nor imprisonment.

**THE TRUTH:** The fact that Jesus would forgive does not mean that government’s should not punish.

**THE BASIC PREMISE:** There is no truth.

**THE REDUCTIO:** There is no reason to go to college. There is no obligation to be tolerant of those who disagree.

**THE TRUTH:** If we have an obligation to be tolerant, then objective truth must exist.

**THE BASIC PREMISE:** Evil and good exist in a polarity, balancing each other out.

**THE REDUCTIO:** Children must suffer in India to maintain a balance with the children in America who are happy.

**THE TRUTH:** It is not true that evil and good must coexist so they can balance

each other out.