

Jesus: Philosopher and Apologist

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Contrary to the views of critics, Jesus Christ was a brilliant thinker, who used logical arguments to refute His critics and establish the truth of His views. When Jesus praised the faith of children, He was encouraging humility as a virtue, not irrational religious trust or a blind leap of faith in the dark. Jesus deftly employed a variety of reasoning strategies in His debates on various topics. These include escaping the horns of a dilemma, *a fortiori* arguments, appeals to evidence, and *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. Jesus' use of persuasive arguments demonstrates that He was both a philosopher and an apologist who rationally defended His worldview in discussions with some of the best thinkers of His day. This intellectual approach does not detract from His divine authority but enhances it. Jesus' high estimation of rationality and His own application of arguments indicates that Christianity is not an anti-intellectual faith. Followers of Jesus today, therefore, should emulate His intellectual zeal, using the same kinds or arguments He Himself used. Jesus' argumentative strategies have applications to four contemporary debates: the relationship between God and morality, the reliability of the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus, and ethical relativism.

WAS JESUS A PHILOSOPHER AND APOLOGIST?

I had to face the question of whether Jesus was a philosopher and apologist head-on when I was asked to write a book on Jesus for the Wadsworth Philosophers Series. I already knew that Jesus articulated a developed worldview and reasoned brilliantly with His opponents. As I studied the subject carefully, however, I came to appreciate Jesus, the philosopher, more than ever. When Jesus defended the crucial claims of Christianity — He was its founder, after all — He was engaging in apologetics, often with the best minds of first-century Judaism.

Some Christians may be reluctant to label Jesus as a philosopher or apologist because they worry that such a reference may demean the Lord of the universe. One well-known Christian philosopher told me that emphasizing Jesus' reasoning abilities could take away from Jesus as a revelator, a source of supernatural knowledge. I respect his concern but disagree for the following reasons.

Jesus was the incarnation of the Logos — whom theologians call the second person of the Trinity. As Christian philosopher and theologian Carl Henry and others have emphasized, the apostle John used the term *logos* to personalize the Greek view of the wisdom, logic, and rationality of the universe.¹ Our English translations say, "In the beginning was the Word [Logos]" (John 1:1).² Jesus embodies the rational communication (Word) of God's

truth. He is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). We should expect that God Incarnate would be a wise and reasonable person, however much He may cut against the grain of human presumption, pride, and prevarication. Jesus, moreover, was both divine and human. As a human, Jesus reasoned with other human beings. He did not run from a good argument on theology or ethics but engaged His hearers brilliantly.

Jesus was not a philosopher in the sense of trying to build a philosophical system from the finite human mind. He appealed to God’s previous revelation in the Hebrew Scriptures (Matt. 5:17–19; John 10:31) and issued authoritative revelations of His own as God Incarnate. On the other hand, Jesus reasoned carefully about the things that matter most — a handy definition of philosophy. His teachings, in fact, cover the basic topics of philosophy.³ As an apologist for God’s truth, He defended the truth of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as His own teachings and actions.

When we inspect Jesus’ mind in action in several familiar stories from the Gospels, we see that His thinking was sharp, clear, and cogent. Not only should we believe what He taught because He is our divine Master, but through hard work, prayer, and reliance on the Holy Spirit, we should also strive to emulate His intellectual virtues because we are called to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6).

Presenting Jesus as a worthy thinker can be a powerful apologetic tool to unbelievers who wrongly assume that Christian belief is a matter of blind faith or irrational belief. If the founder of Christianity is a great thinker, His followers should never demean the human mind (Matt. 22:37–39; Rom. 12:1–2). In addition, Jesus’ strategies in argument can serve as a model for our own apologetic defense of the truth and rationality of Christianity, which I will discuss.

DID JESUS DEMEAN RATIONALITY?

Jesus engaged in extensive disputes, some quite heated, mostly with the Jewish intellectual leaders of His day. He did not hesitate to call into account popular opinion if it was wrong. He spoke often and passionately about the value of truth and the dangers of error, and He articulated arguments to support truth and oppose error.⁴

Jesus’ use of logic had a particular flavor to it, notes philosopher Dallas Willard:

Jesus’ aim in utilizing logic is not to win battles, but to achieve understanding or insight in his hearers...He presents matters in such a way that those who wish to know can find their way to, can come to, the appropriate conclusion as something they have discovered — whether or not it is something they particularly care for.⁵

Willard also argues that a concern for logic requires not only certain intellectual skills but also certain character commitments regarding the importance of logic and the value of truth in one’s life. A thoughtful person will esteem logic and argument through focused

concentration, reasoned dialogue, and a willingness to follow the truth wherever it may lead. This mental orientation places demands on the moral life. Besides resolution, tenacity, and courage, one must shun hypocrisy (defending oneself against facts and logic for ulterior motives) and superficiality (adopting opinions with a glib disregard for their logical support). Willard takes Jesus to be the supreme model, as does Christian philosopher James Sire.⁶

Atheist philosopher Michael Martin, in contrast, alleges that the Jesus of the Gospels (the reliability of which he disputes) “does not exemplify important intellectual virtues. Both his words and his actions seem to indicate that he does not value reason and learning.” Jesus based “his entire ministry on faith.”⁷ Martin interprets Jesus’ statement about the need to become like children to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3) as praising uncritical belief. Martin also charges that when Jesus gave any reason to accept His teaching, it was either that the kingdom was at hand or that those who believed would go to heaven but those who did not believe would go to hell; supposedly, “no rational justification was ever given for these claims.”⁸ According to Martin, for Jesus, unreasoning faith was good; rational demonstration and criticism were wrong.

These charges against the claim that Jesus was a philosopher who valued reasoning and held a well-developed worldview are incriminating. The same Jesus who valued children, however, also said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your *mind*” (Matt. 22:37; emphasis added).

Jesus praised children for the same reasons that we customarily praise them. We don’t view children as models because they are irrational or immature, but because they are innocent and wholehearted in their love, devotion, and enthusiasm for life. Children are also esteemed because they can be sincerely humble, having not learned the pretensions of the adult world. The story in Matthew 18 has just this favorable view of children in mind. Jesus is asked by His disciples, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” After calling a child and having him stand among them, Jesus replies:

I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. (Matt. 18:3–5)

The meaning of “become like little children” is not “become uncritical and unthinking” (as Martin claims), but instead “become humble.” Jesus spoke much of humility, as do the Hebrew Scriptures. He never associated humility with stupidity, ignorance, or gullibility.⁹ Jesus did thank God for revealing the Gospel to the humble and not to the supposedly wise and understanding. This, however, does not imply that intelligence is a detriment to believing Jesus’ message but that many of the religious leaders of the day could not grasp it, largely because it challenged their intellectual pride (see Matt. 11:25–26).

Martin also charges that the only reasons Jesus gave to support His teaching are that the kingdom of God is at hand and that those who fail to believe will fail to receive the heavenly benefits accorded to those with faith.¹⁰ Is this true?

First, Jesus often spoke about the kingdom of God while using it as a justification for some of His teaching and preaching (Matt. 4:17). Jesus was admonishing people to reorient their lives spiritually and morally because God was breaking into history in an unparalleled and dramatic fashion. This is not necessarily an irrational or unfounded claim if (1) God was acting in this manner in Jesus' day and (2) one can find evidence for the emergence of the kingdom, chiefly through the actions of Jesus himself.

The Gospels present the kingdom as uniquely present in the teaching and actions of Jesus who Himself claimed that "if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). Since His audience saw Him driving out demons with singular authority, Jesus was giving them good reason to believe His claims. He was not merely making assertions or ungrounded threats while expecting compliance in a childish or cowardly way.

Second, Jesus' use of the concept of God's judgment or reward did not supercede or replace His use of arguments. His normal argument form was not the following: "If you believe what I say, you will be rewarded. If you don't believe what I say, you will lose that reward. Therefore, believe what I say." When Jesus issued warnings and made promises relating one's conduct in this life to the afterlife (see John 3:16–18), He spoke more as a prophet than a philosopher. Whether Jesus' words in this matter are trustworthy depends on His moral and spiritual authority, not on His specific arguments at every point. If we have reason to deem Him authoritative (as we do), however, we may rationally believe these pronouncements, just as we believe various other authorities whom we deem trustworthy on the basis of their credentials and track record.¹¹

ESCAPING THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA

We need to consult the Gospels to determine whether or not Jesus prized well-developed critical thinking. Several examples illustrate Jesus' ability to escape from the horns of a dilemma when challenged. We will look at one.¹²

Matthew recorded a tricky situation for Jesus. The Sadducees had tried to corner Jesus on a question about the afterlife. Unlike the Pharisees, they did not believe in life after death, nor in angels or spirits (although they were theists), and they granted special authority to only the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The Sadducees reminded Jesus of Moses' command "that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him." Then they proposed a scenario in which the same woman is progressively married to and widowed by seven brothers, none of whom sire any children by her. The woman subsequently dies. "Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" they asked Jesus pointedly (Matt. 22:23–28).

Their argument is quite clever. The Sadducees know that Jesus revered the law of Moses, as they did. They also knew that Jesus, unlike themselves, taught that there will be a resurrection of the dead. They thought that these two beliefs are logically at odds with each other; they cannot both be true. The woman cannot be married to all seven at the resurrection (Mosaic law did not allow for many husbands), nor is there any reason why she should be married to any one out of the seven (thus honoring monogamy). They figured, therefore, that Jesus must either stand against Moses or deny the afterlife in order to remain free from contradiction. They were presenting this scenario as a logical dilemma: either A (Moses' authority) or B (the afterlife).

Martin and others have asserted that Jesus praised uncritical faith.¹³ If these charges were correct, one might expect Jesus (1) to dodge the question with a pious and unrelated utterance, (2) to threaten hell for those who dare question his authority, or (3) simply to accept both logically incompatible propositions with no hesitation or shame. Instead, Jesus forthrightly said the Sadducees were in error because they failed to know the Scripture and the power of God:

At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead — have you not read what God said to you, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is not the God of the dead but of the living. (Matt. 22:30–32)

Jesus' response has an astuteness that may not be immediately obvious. First, He challenged their assumption that belief in the resurrection means that one is committed to believing that all of our premortem institutions will be retained in the postmortem, resurrected world. None of the Hebrew Scriptures teaches this, and Jesus did not believe it. The dilemma thus dissolves. It is a false dilemma because Jesus stated a third option: There is no married state at the resurrection.

Second, as part of His response to their logical trap, Jesus compared the resurrected state of men and women to that of the angels, thus challenging the Sadducees' disbelief in angels. (Although the Sadducees did not believe in angels, they knew that their fellow Jews, who did believe in angels, thought that angels did not marry or procreate.)

Third, Jesus cited a text from the Sadducees' own esteemed Scriptures (Exod. 3:6), where God declared to Moses from the burning bush that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus could have cited a variety of texts from writings outside the first five books of the Bible to support the resurrection, such as the prophets (Dan. 12:2) or Job (19:25–27), but instead He deftly argued from their own trusted sources, which He also endorsed (Matt. 5:17–20; John 10:35).

Fourth, Jesus capitalized on the verb tense of the verse He quoted. God *is* (present tense) the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of whom had already died at the time God had uttered this statement to Moses. God did not cease to be their God at their earthly demise. God did

not say, “I was their God” (past tense). God is the God of the living, which includes even the “dead” patriarchs. Matthew added, “When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching,” for Jesus had “silenced the Sadducees” (Matt.22:33–34).

The skill of logically escaping the horns of a dilemma is applicable to many apologetic challenges. Consider one of them; philosophers often argue that making God the source of morality results in a hopeless dilemma. If morality is based on God’s will, they claim, God could will anything — including murder, rape, and blasphemy — and it would be good. This view is absurd. If, on the other hand, we make moral standards separate from God’s will, then God loses His moral supremacy because God ends up “under” these impersonal, objective, and absolute moral standards. The dilemma, then, is this: Either (A) morality is arbitrary or (B) God is not supreme. Since both are unacceptable to Christianity, Christianity is refuted.

One can escape the horns of this dilemma by showing that it is a false dilemma. The source of morality is not God’s will separated from God’s eternally perfect character; rather, divine commands issue from God’s intrinsic being. Since God’s character is unchangingly good, God cannot alter moral standards because He cannot deny Himself (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17). Furthermore, since God is the Creator of the world and of humans, God knows what is best for humans to flourish. His instructions for us are for our blessing as well as God’s own glory (Matt. 5:1-16; Col. 3:17).¹⁴ The dilemma dissolves.

A FORTIORI ARGUMENTS

Jesus was fond of what are called *a fortiori* (Latin: “from the stronger”) arguments, which often appear in pithy but persuasive forms in the Gospels.¹⁵ We use them often in everyday arguments. These arguments have the following form:

1. The truth of idea A is accepted.
2. Support for the truth of idea B (which is relevantly similar to idea A) is even stronger than that of idea A.
3. Therefore, if the truth of idea A must be accepted, then so must the truth of idea B be accepted.

Consider Jesus’ argument against the Pharisees concerning the rightness of His performing a healing miracle on the Sabbath:

I did one miracle [on the Sabbath], and you are all astonished. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment. (John 7:21–24)

Jesus' argument can be laid out simply:

1. The Pharisees endorse circumcision, even when it is done on the Sabbath, the day of rest from work. (Circumcision was performed eight days after the birth of a male, which sometimes fell on the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath.) This does not violate the Sabbath laws, because it is an act of goodness.
2. Healing the whole person is even more important and beneficial than circumcision, which affects only one aspect of the male.
3. Therefore, if circumcision on the Sabbath is not a violation of the Sabbath, neither is Jesus' healing of a person on the Sabbath.

Jesus' concluding comment, "Stop judging by appearances, and make a right judgment," was a rebuke to their illogical inconsistency while applying their own moral and religious principles.

Jesus argued in a similar form in several other conversations regarding the meaning of the Sabbath. After He healed a crippled woman on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler became indignant and said, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath!" Jesus reminded him that one may lawfully untie one's ox or donkey on the Sabbath and lead it to water. "Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" Jesus' argument looks like this:

1. The Jews lawfully release animals from their confinement on the Sabbath out of concern for the animals' well-being.
2. A woman's well-being (deliverance from a chronic, debilitating illness) is far more important than watering an animal.
3. Therefore, if watering an animal on the Sabbath is not a Sabbath violation, then Jesus' healing of the woman on the Sabbath is not a violation of the Sabbath.

Luke recorded that when Jesus "said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing" (Luke 13:17, see 13:10–17).

A wise apologist will make good and repeated use of *a fortiori* arguments. Here is an example from comparative religion. Many reject the Gospels because they are ancient documents that are supposedly historically unreliable. Many of these same people, however, trust ancient Buddhist and other Eastern religious documents. Besides giving good reasons to trust the Gospels, we can use the following *a fortiori* argument concerning their trust in Eastern texts. The Buddhist scriptures were not written down until about 500 years after the life of the Buddha (563–483 B.C.). Buddhist scholar Edward Conze notes that while Christianity can distinguish its "initial tradition embodied

in the ‘New Testament’” from a “continuing tradition” consisting of reflections of the church fathers and councils, “Buddhists possess nothing that corresponds to the ‘New Testament.’ The ‘continuing tradition’ is all that is clearly attested.”¹⁶ If people trust ancient and poorly attested Buddhist documents, *how much more* should they trust the Gospels, which are far more firmly rooted in verifiable history?¹⁷ The apologist then hopes that those who read the Gospels as historically reliable will discover their incompatibility with, and superiority to, Buddhist teachings.

JESUS’ APPEAL TO EVIDENCE IN ARGUMENT

Despite the frequent portrayal of Jesus as a mystical figure who called people to adopt an uncritical faith, He frequently appealed to evidence to confirm His claims. John the Baptist, who was languishing in prison after challenging Herod, sent messengers to ask Jesus the question: “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Matt. 11:3). This may seem an odd question from a man the Gospels present as the prophetic forerunner of Jesus and as the one who had proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus, however, did not rebuke John’s question. He did not say, “You must have faith; suppress your doubts.” Nor did He scold, “If you don’t believe, you’ll go to hell and miss heaven.” Instead, Jesus recounted the distinctive features of His ministry:

Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me. (Matt. 11:4–6; see also Luke 7:22)

Jesus’ works of healing and teaching are meant to serve as positive evidence of His messianic identity, because they fulfill the messianic predictions of the Hebrew Scriptures.¹⁸ What Jesus claimed is this:

1. If one does certain kinds of actions (the acts cited above), then one is the Messiah.
2. I am doing those kinds of actions.
3. Therefore, I am the Messiah.

This logical sequence is called a *modus ponens* (way of affirmation) form of argument and it is a handy tool of thought: If P, then Q; P, therefore, Q. The argument appeals to empirical claims — Jesus’ mighty works — as its factual basis. The acts Jesus cited point out His crucial apologetic credentials as the Messiah, “the one who was to come.”

On another occasion, Jesus again healed on the Sabbath and the religious leaders again challenged Him for breaking the sacred day by working. He responded, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” Jesus’ disputants viewed His statement as blasphemy because “not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:17–18). Ancient Jews sometimes referred to God as Father, but not with the possessive “my Father” since

they thought this suggested too close of a relationship between the Creator and the creature.

Instead of denying this conclusion, Jesus made six other statements that reinforce their conclusion that He was, in fact, “making himself equal with God:”

1. He acts in the same manner as the Father by giving life to the dead (John 5:19–21).
2. He judges as a representative of the Father and with His authority (5:22, 27).
3. If He is not honored, God the Father is not honored (5:23).
4. The one who believes in Jesus believes also in God (5:24–25).
5. Like God (see Deut. 30:19–20), He has life in Himself (5:26).
6. He is in complete agreement with the Father, whom He perfectly pleased — a claim no Jew in the Hebrew Scriptures ever made (5:30).

Jesus, however, did not leave the matter only with His assertions. He moved to apologetics by appealing to evidence to which His hearers would have had access:

1. John the Baptist, a respected prophet, testified to Jesus’ identity (John 5:31–35).
2. Jesus’ miraculous works also testified to His identity (5:36).
3. The Father testified to Jesus’ identity (5:37).
4. The Scriptures likewise testified to His identity (5:39).
5. Moses testified to who Jesus is (5:46).

Jesus reasoned with His intellectual opponents and did not shrink from issuing evidence for His claims.¹⁹ He did not simply make statements, threaten punishments to those who disagreed, or attack His adversaries as unspiritual. He highly valued argument and evidence.

Christian apologetics marshals many kinds of evidence in the rational defense of Christian truth. We need not believe the gospel through blind faith. In denying these facts, however, Robert Millet, formerly dean of religious education at Brigham Young University, has defended Mormon claims, despite their admitted lack of evidence, by saying that “Christian faith is dependent upon acceptance of a divine miracle that took place on Easter morning, for which there is no evidence.”²⁰ He argues, therefore, if Christian belief in the Resurrection is without evidence, but is acceptable, then the Mormon “leap of faith” is justified, too.

This is an *a fortiori* argument; but it is false that there is no evidence for Jesus' resurrection. Jesus' teaching, as well as the history of apologetics, argues against this kind of fideism (faith against or without objective evidence) that Millet wrongly associates with Christianity and rightly associates with Mormonism. The apostle Paul himself cited the many witnesses who saw the resurrected Christ, some of whom were still living at the time he wrote (1 Cor. 15:5–8). Contemporary philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig has written widely on the historical evidence for Jesus' resurrection. He also publicly debates those who deny this truth. The evidence includes the general historical reliability of the Gospels, as well as the specific and well-attested individual facts of the empty tomb, the many appearances of Jesus to various people at different times, and the apostles' proclamation of the Resurrection despite the fact that it went against what they themselves had expected of the Messiah. Other explanations for belief in the Resurrection, such as it being a hallucination or a myth created later, simply do not fit the facts.²¹ Since belief in Jesus' resurrection should be, and is, based on historical evidence, Millet's argument that key Mormon doctrines require no evidence is refuted.²²

JESUS' USE OF *REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM* ARGUMENTS

Philosophers and other debaters use *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. The term means "reduction to absurdity." When successful, they are a powerful refutation of an illogical position. The argument takes one or more ideas and demonstrates that they lead to an absurd or contradictory conclusion. This proves that the original ideas must be false. For such an argument to work, the logical relationship between the terms must hold and the supposed absurdity must truly be absurd. Consider Jesus' apologetic use of *reductio ad absurdum* in defending His identity as the Messiah.

Jesus asked the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" The reply was, "The son of David." Jesus responded, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" By quoting Psalm 110:1, Jesus appealed to a source that the Pharisees accepted. He concluded with the question: "If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" which, as Matthew recorded, silenced the audience (see Matt. 22:41–46). The argument can be stated as follows:

1. If the Christ is merely the human descendent of David, David could not have called him "Lord."
2. David did call the Christ "Lord" in Psalm 110:1.
3. To believe Christ was David's Lord and merely his human descendent (who could not be his Lord) is absurd.
4. Christ, therefore, is not merely the human descendent of David.

Jesus' point was not to deny the Christ's ancestral connection to David, since Jesus Himself is called "the Son of David" in the Gospels (Matt. 1:1), and Jesus accepted the

title without objection (Matt. 20:30–31). Jesus rather showed that the Christ is not *merely* the Son of David. Christ is also Lord and was so at the time of David. By using this *reductio ad absurdum* argument, Jesus expanded His audience’s understanding of who the Christ is and that He himself is the Christ.²³

Jesus employed another *reductio ad absurdum* when the Pharisees attempted to discredit His reputation as an exorcist by charging Him with driving out demons by the agency of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. In other words, Jesus’ reputation as a holy wonderworker was undeserved. What seemed to be godly miracles really issued from a demonic being. In response to this charge, Jesus took their premise and derived an absurdity:

Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? (Matt. 12:25–27)

We can put it this way, step-by-step:

1. If Satan were divided against himself, his kingdom would be ruined.
2. Satan’s kingdom, however, is not ruined (since demonic activity continues). To think otherwise is absurd.
3. Therefore, (a) Satan does not drive out Satan.
4. Therefore, (b) Jesus cannot free people from Satan by satanic power.

The Pharisees also practiced exorcism, moreover, and if Jesus cast out demons by Satan, then the Pharisees must grant that they too might be driving out demons by Satan (Matt. 12:27). The Pharisees themselves, however, must reject this accusation as absurd. Jesus, therefore, cannot be accused of exercising satanic power through His exorcisms. Jesus marshaled two powerful *reductio* arguments in just a few sentences.

Reductio ad absurdum arguments are powerful tools for defending Christian truth. Those who claim that morality is entirely relative to the individual think this view defends tolerance, avoids dogmatism, and is preferable to the Christian belief in moral absolutes. The statement, however, that (1) “all morality is relative” logically implies that (2) anyone’s belief is right if it is right for them and that there is no higher standard to which one is accountable. Relativism, however, leads to many absurd conclusions such as: (3) Osama bin Laden’s morality is right for him, so we should not judge it, and (4) Nazi morality is right for the Nazis, therefore, we should not judge it. In other words, moral relativism is reduced to moral nihilism, but moral nihilism is absurd and is, therefore, false. By contrast, Christian morality is far more compelling.

PUTTING ON THE MIND OF CHRIST

This brief article does not do justice to the wealth of Jesus' philosophical and apologetic arguments across a wide variety of important issues. Our sampling of Jesus' reasoning, however, brings into serious question the indictment that Jesus praised uncritical faith over rational arguments and that He had no truck with logical consistency. On the contrary, Jesus never demeaned the proper and rigorous functioning of our God-given minds. His teaching appealed to the whole person: the imagination (parables), the will, and reasoning abilities.

For all their honesty in reporting the foibles of the disciples, the Gospel writers never narrated a situation in which Jesus was intellectually stymied or bettered in an argument; neither did Jesus ever encourage an irrational or ill-informed faith on the part of His disciples. With Jesus as our example and Lord, the Holy Scriptures as our foundation (2 Tim. 3:15–17), and the Holy Spirit as our Teacher (John 16:12–15), we should gladly take up the biblical challenge to outthink the world for Christ and His kingdom (2 Cor. 10:3–5).

NOTES

1. See Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1979), 3:164–247.
2. All Bible quotations are from the New International Version.
3. See Douglas Groothuis, *On Jesus* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002), chaps. 4–7.
4. See John Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 18.
5. Dallas Willard, "Jesus, the Logician," *Christian Scholars Review* 28, 4 (1999): 607.
6. James Sire, *Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 203.
7. Michael Martin, *The Case against Christianity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 167.
8. *Ibid.*
9. See Matt. 23:1–12; Luke 14:1–14; 18:9–14.

10. Martin, 167.
11. On the claims and credentials of Jesus, see Douglas Groothuis, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996; Wipf and Stock reprint, 2002), especially chaps. 13–14.
12. Another example of Jesus escaping the horns of a dilemma is found in Matt. 22:15–22. See Groothuis, *On Jesus*, 26–27.
13. See Groothuis, *On Jesus*, chaps. 1 and 3.
14. See James Hanick and Gary Mar, “What Euthyphro Couldn’t Have Said,” *Faith and Philosophy* 4, 3 (1987): 241–61.
15. See, for example, Luke 11:11–12; 12:4–5; 6–7; 24; 27–28; 54–56; 13:14–16; 14:1–6; 18:1–8.
16. “Introduction,” in *Buddhist Scriptures*, ed. Edward Conze (New York: Penguin Books, 1959), 11–12.
17. The Buddhist texts are so far removed from the time of the Buddha and so riddled with myths that, outside of giving the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, they are likely not trustworthy at all.
18. See Isa. 26:19; 29:18–19; 35:4–6; 61:1–2.
19. See Sire, 191–92.
20. Quoted in Lawrence Wright, “Lives of the Saints,” *The New Yorker*, 21 January 2002, 51.
21. See Paul Copan and Ronald Tacelli, eds., *Jesus’ Resurrection: Fact or Figment: A Debate between William Lane Craig and Gerd Lüdemann* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).
22. For a revealing history of Mormonism, see Richard Abanes, *One Nation under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002).
23. See also Acts 2:29–36; 13:39; Heb. 1:5–13.