
Atheism & Induction
Greg Bahnsen's Opening Remarks

Tonight's debate is kinda like going to a movie after it's started. Say midway through the screening of the movie in order to understand and assess the conflict or the struggle that you're presently seeing you have to catch up with the background the you haven't seen. Which explains and actually develops what's now going on presently on the screen and I think that's true about tonight's debate as well. You really can't understand and evaluate what you see and hear up here until you look into the unspoken beliefs which are really the context of what's going on.

There's a crucial and a determinative intellectual background to tonight's public conflict between the theist and the atheist, a background which involves radically different underlining philosophies about reality, knowledge, human value and conduct. On the one hand you have the view that says the world is at base matter and motion and over against that the view that says the material world is actually the creation and is controlled by a sovereign and all-knowing personal God. These different ultimate perspectives or world views are the context in terms of which each proponent reasons. What he takes to be relevant, what method and standards of reasoning he employs, how evidence is recognized, how it's assessed and how it's applied.

Mr. Tabash has a fundamental philosophy of life, an underlying world view which he brings his background baggage to the debate tonight. So do I. We each have as yet unspoken beliefs about the nature of reality, human experience, the possibility and methods of knowing, and how we should live our lives. And when all is said and done, these two opposing world views will guide and always be at work in our respective arguments or our appraisals of evidence. For example, atheists can be undaunted when Christians show the historicity of Christ's resurrection, pointing to it and saying, "See there's a miracle!" But you see, given the atheist's naturalist presuppositions, he believes that someday or he can believe someday, scientific explanation of that event is theoretically possible, in which case than it's not a miracle. On the other hand, theists are not dissuaded when atheists point to the evidence of natural disasters or children suffering in the world. For you see, giving their presuppositions God has a morally sufficient reason for ordaining such events, and thus they are not contrary to his goodness and his power given those presuppositions. In both cases the underlying world view is the controlling factor in the reasoning and the conflicting conclusions to which the proponents come and thus progress can be made in the atheist/theist debate, only if we recognize that we all have as it were coming into the movie midway and we must confront the philosophical background to our disagreements. Tonight's debate comes down to a choice between the conflicting world views in terms of which we will be reasoning and arguing tonight.

Now I believe that the existence of the Christian God is an objective reality which is rationally provable. Please note four things though about what I just said: First of all, notice that I am defending Christian theism specifically; I don't believe there is any unambiguous and coherent notion of theism in general. I'll be defending the Christian version of theism. Secondly, our concern here tonight is with the question of the truth of atheism or of theism. Not with psychological motivations, not with subjective desires, or the social functions or the personal character of theist or atheist. The truth about God either way and the truth about devotees to theism or atheism, again either way, maybe happy or it may be sad, it may be useful or counterproductive, it may be corrupting or may be un-nobling, but regardless whatever the truth is, it remains the truth. Thirdly, remember that an argument need not be accepted by everyone for it to be nonetheless conclusive. We must obviously distinguish between proof and

persuasion. Personal persuasion is subjectively qualified, proof is not. We say that something can exist, for instance, cancer, for which the doctor has proof. Something can exist even though a person is unpersuaded that he has cancer and even offers reasons, maybe avidly reasons against the possibility that he has cancer. We are dealing here with proof, not persuasion tonight. And fourthly, many hearers need to disabuse themselves of an old canard that goes something like this: "Faith is believing what you know ain't true. Or faith takes over where reason leaves off." Faith is not something that stands over against reason, whether above reason or contrary to reason or however you wish to put it. Rather reasoning itself rest upon the presupposition of faith and collapses arbitrary without it. Now to make this point I have chosen to look not to what committed Christians have reasoned or said which you might feel is too easy and partisan on my behalf. But rather to have us consider what our hostile opponents have pointed out about a central problem in philosophy. We'll look at an issue treated by David Hume, the eighteenth century Scottish skeptic, and also by Bertrand Russell, twentieth century English philosopher. Both of these men wrote in strong opposition to religious faith and especially to Christianity. The problem we're going to look at for a few moments here is the problem of induction.

Among the expectations through which we encounter experience and encounter the world is the expectation that uniformity can be found between the diverse events, things, or experiences in the world. This expectation may in some cases be quite explicit and self-conscious but it need not be. For instance when we learned to drive a car or speak a foreign language we usually pay close attention to what is the regular function of certain parts of the car, or of the grammatical rules and ordinary word usages of the language. But we eventually come to do these things more automatically or more habitually and we no longer consciously think about the expected uniformity in our use of cars or our use of language. Our learning and reasoning tacitly assumes that the universe is such that uniformities are expected and exhibited in similar things even though they are separated by time and space - that the way things happen can be viewed as instances of general laws and what has occurred in the past is a reliable guide for predicting and thus adjusting to the future.

Now this can be described in an elaborate and abstract way, but not many of you are philosophy majors and would not want me to do that. The fact is each of us is very familiar with what I'm talking about from personal experience. We're all quite acquainted with the process of moving from particular facts in our experience to general truths which are exhibited by those particular experiences. For instance, children don't merely conclude from their pain that a particular case of flame is burning them, they usually project that fire in general, or if you will, all fire, any fire, will burn as well. From observed regularities or associations, we infer universal regularity even in the unobserved cases or yet future cases. In popular parlance we say we assume the uniformity of nature. The method of generalizing from observed cases to all cases of the same kind is called induction. The basic guiding principle here is that future cases will be like past cases - that similar things will behave similarly.

So for instance, if certain conditions and events bring about a certain effect today, the same factors will cause a similar effect later. I'll give you a down-to-earth example: Why do we expect toothpaste to spurt from the tube when we squeeze it? You might call this the toothpaste proof of God's existence, okay? We support that expectation in terms of two things: One, our past experience with toothpaste tubes, and two, the belief that nature is uniform - that the future is like the past. Without that second belief, we would not be able to learn from experience. We will not be able to use language, we will not be able to rely on memory, or advanced science. All of which involve observing similarities and projecting them into the future.

Moreover our belief about uniformity or the inductive principle is a very firmly entrenched belief. When scientists found that there were deviations in the expected orbit of Uranus they did not draw the conclusion, "Okay nature is not uniform after all, " that just impelled them to start looking for another

factor as yet unknown that was influencing the orbit of Uranus. They did not give up the inductive principle, but rather hypothesized the body which by the way we now know to be the planet Neptune. And so from toothpaste to the planets we believe in reason in terms of the inductive principle.

Now **David Hume's** question was this, and I quote: "*What is the nature of that evidence which assures us of any real existence and matter-of-fact beyond the present testimony of our senses, or the records of our memory?*" By what logical right, he was asking, do we claim to know that some empirical generalizations are true? What, asked Hume, are we warranted in asserting on the basis of our experiences? And he said to be very strict in his empiricism, "*Only that in the past or in the cases so far observed such and such has been the case.*"

But Hume said we have no basis for projecting that into the future. And I quote him again: "*If you insist that the inferences made by a chain of reasoning I desire you to produce that reasoning.*" Now of course many people make the mistake of responding to Hume saying, "Hey listen. We all assume the future will be like the past." Hume said that he understood that, there is no question that in practice we act that way, but as he said and I quote him again: "*I want to learn the foundation of this inference.*"

And then there are people who say, "Well we know it's very probable although it may not be very certain." But that misses Hume's point as well. Hume knew very well that we don't have certainty about all matters of science. His point is that we have no logical right to affirm on the basis of our past experiences that even probability is true of the natural order. And so that the principle of induction is left without a foundation.

Bertrand Russell, the 20th century philosopher, said that we cannot justify our belief in induction on the basis of the past success we've had in believing that the inductive principle is true because that too assumes that what happened in the past is going to be like the future. Let me quote Russell here: "*The inductive principle is equally incapable of being proved by an appeal to experience. Experience might conceivably confirm the inductive principle as regards to the cases that have been already examined but as regards unexamined cases it is the inductive principle alone that can justify any inference from what has been examined to what has not been examined. All arguments which on the basis of experience argue as to the future or the unexperienced parts of the past or present assume the inductive principle. Hence we can never use experience to prove the inductive principle without begging the question.*"

So now do we have reason for believing the inductive principle? We need to set the Christian worldview, the theistic world view side by side with the atheist world view and ask which one comports with the inductive principle and thus provides the preconditions for science, language, learning, and any intelligible human experience. And I will say it's certainly not atheism. Atheism's view of reality and historical eventuation cannot provide a cogent reason for what all of our reasoning takes for granted. It is debunked by its philosophical arbitrariness at just this point as even men like Hume and Bertrand Russell realize. Accordingly, it is most reasonable to believe in God and entirely unreasonable not believe in God, for God's existence is the precondition of all reasoning whatsoever.

Questions and Rebuttal

BAHNSEN: "Mr. Tabash, on what rational basis do you then, as an atheist, justify belief in the inductive principle?"

TABASH: "I justify belief in anything whether the inductive or deductive principle, pursuant to what my sensory experience aided by scientific tools will demonstrate to me. But I feel no obligation to believe in claims of the supernatural of which there is no evidence, and which violate not only my sense of moral justice as the exclusive club of Christianity portrays itself to be but also..."

BAHNSEN: "I believe your ranging way beyond..."

TABASH: "But also...I...no, it's part of the answer..."

BAHNSEN: "No...the question...looking for the inductive principle..."

TABASH: "Okay...the inductive principle is a question of reasoning from one item to another and in that sense for purpose of discussion tonight, it's no different than the deductive principle. There's absolutely no difference between the two and what you do is induction or deduction builds upon or strips away excess dross based on the physical evidence that you have to work with. That is how you develop your tools for induction or deduction, and they are a sensory imperical manifestation and therefore they do not require recourse to stepping outside the perceptible universe to a postulated supreme being."

Narrator: "Mr. Tabash, you may ask Dr. Bahnsen a question."

TABASH: "Well, Dr. Bahnsen, since you said that it is your purpose to defend Christian theism, I wanted to ask you about the fundamental fairness of a God that would, and it says in the New Testament in many places talk about damnation, hell fire, lake of fire, inflaming vengeance, taking vengeance on flaming fire...all those who believe now Jesus. If in fact Jesus is the only modality to salvation for our eternity, shouldn't God give more direct evidence by directly appearing to each of us? Isn't it fundamentally unfair for instance, for as many Christians, if said, my mother, an Auschwitz survivor, miserable life, dies, and winds up in Hell?"

BAHNSEN: "I'm not sure. Perhaps you've been asleep at the wheel of your studies. The Christian claim is precisely that God has made direct appearance to us and He's done so in any number of ways. First of all, He has done so in every single one of your sensory experiences that you try to appeal to or to make intelligible in your reasoning. He does so because without His existence, you cannot make sense of the inductive principle by which you reason from past experience to the future. I'll rebut your answer in a minute, so I don't want to be unfair to you, but what I was getting at was is that God hasn't left himself without a witness. He testifies to you in the very fact that you're trying to reason and debate tonight and to reason in a uniform fashion. God has appeared in the person of His son Jesus Christ. That's the Christian claim. We can get into that later, but to say "why doesn't God directly appear," is to miss the whole point. God has directly appeared. You wish to know about the fundamental fairness of God. The strange thing about that question is that within the world view of Atheism where all reality is matter and motion, there is no fundamental fairness about anything. That there are no ethical notions whatsoever; there's just matter and motion. Things happen and that's all there is to it. And so for an Atheist to try to raise a moral consideration against God is itself contradictory. It's to give up your world view, presume on mine for a while to get an idea

of fairness, and then turn around and try to use that against my world view as well. God is fundamentally fair because He has given abundant evidence to all men; in their use of science, their use of morality, their understanding of human dignity, God has made Himself abundantly clear to all men and God will not, according to the teaching of Scripture, send anybody to Hell for not knowing better."

Narrator: "Thank you Dr. Bahnsen. Dr. Bahnsen, you may ask Mr. Tabash a question."

BAHNSEN: "Mr. Tabash, in your opening presentation at one point you challenged God to appear and to make Himself known right now. Of course, I am very glad that He has not chosen to do that and bring the Day of Judgment by his appearance in that way, but...And I'm glad for your sake because if He did appear it wouldn't be just an academic matter for you. But I have a question about that...If you don't meet my challenge approach to things...Now I'm just going to ask you to reason in a consistent way. If God exists, deal with this as a hypothesis, I know at this point you don't affirm it, but if God exists, would it be reasonable, would it be true, to His nature, as God, as sovereign, as the one who has final authority and so forth, would it be true to the nature of God to submit to your authority and say "You lay down a test for Me, let Me prove myself to you and then finally, oh thank you, you'll believe in Me." Wouldn't He be God if He submitted to that kind of test?"

TABASH: "Absolutely. The reason that I say that is because if I am expected to believe in this entity, then this entity in fairness that has so much power compared to me, assuming that it exists, would be morally obligated to recognize my dilemma in lack of perception and to give me a concrete sign. This entity with its omniscience would have the knowledge to know that with all my struggles in this world, with all my struggles with science and philosophy, I have not been able to see this being and it would

understand that it would have to make a greater demonstration of its existence. And so if God created us, now using your hypothesis, if your God exists and is supposedly a God of mercy, then the very act of mercy would entail a manifestation of its being to us so that we could have concrete proof, particularly, particularly since and I still will fight about this, but I still read the New Testament as providing eternal punishment for those who do not accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. I'm saying that if that's the stakes, if even the finest, most selfless people in the world wind up in some kind of eternal punishment if they reject the gospel of Jesus, which I think is fundamentally unfair to do them, but if that is how it is set up, then I absolutely believe that that God is required to give concrete, manifested evidence of its existence so that we do not make that fatal, eternal mistake. If the stakes are so high, then I think that God is incumbent upon us to show itself. And, if it were not so, then God should not have implanted in me the reasoning facility to look this way. If it's not so, God should not have designed my mind in such a way that the questioning of the God's fairness leads me to this doubt".

Narrator: "Thank you Mr. Tabash. Mr. Tabash, would you ask Dr. Bahnsen a question?"

TABASH: "Dr. Bahnsen, you didn't exactly answer my question last time and I choose to repeat it. About the biblical claims in the book of Thesselonians, the book of Romans, the book of John, only saying that those who believe in Jesus Christ will have ever lasting life, what about all the Awschvist survivors like members of my family who chose not to believe in Jesus or any god after that experience? What about the sincere Buddhist monks, who have simply said, "Yes, I've looked at Christianity but I choose not to be." Will my mother, an Awshvist survivor, will the Dahlia Lama, will the Buddhists all over the world, will the sincere Atheists, will they all wind up in Hell? Or what will be the fate of all of us who really say you know, I simply cannot buy into this and I reject the

gospel of Jesus Christ as being mythology? Will we, as the Bible says so, wind up being damned?"

BAHNSEN: "The answer is yes, you will. Let's explore that just for a moment. In a sense, this question is really version of the challenge that you offered me in your opening statement of God doesn't appear to me right now, if He doesn't accept my challenge, then I'm not going to believe and so forth. When you ask, now what will God do when people reject the evidence that He's given of Himself, do not live according to His character, will not accept His offers of mercy and so forth and despise Him altogether and live unto themselves as though they were God, as though they could issue challenges to Him and say, you meet my criteria, let me play God, and then I'll let you be God after I'm satisfied. When people reject the obvious evidence of God's existence and its a rational necessity to believe in Him and use morality to engage in scientific inference and so forth when people do that, then of course God will be true to His own character. He will say in the end, you will not determine the final end of things I will determine them by my own character. If the doctrine of Hell is not true, then God is not true to his character. Because God says those who will be with me must emulate my character. They must be like me. Now of course He is under obligation to show what He is like, and He has done so. He has done so pervasively, He's done so, as the apostle Paul says, in a way that cannot be avoided by any man, and it is only for that reason that Christian theology teaches that those who end up going to Hell do so by their own perverse choice. Now if God were to say "I'm going to create people and even though they in the face of obvious evidence, despise my character, live unto themselves, and I'm going to let them come into Heaven anyway, God is basically saying they don't have to be like me, my character really means nothing. He's saying I despise you, you have chosen to reject me, now I hope you don't continue to do so Mr. Tabash, but for the moment if you reject God and

then He says you're going to live with me for eternity then He's basically saying I'll not respect your wishes."

3.1 Dr. Bahnsen's rebuttal

BAHNSEN: "By way of rebuttal of what you've heard from Mr. Tabash so far in our evening's debate, about all Mr. Tabash has demonstrated is that he personally does not like the Christian god. But we really have to ask, please do so no matter what side of this issue you're on, the fact that he's told you he doesn't like things in the Bible. and he doesn't think this is right and so forth, how in any way is that philosophically relevant to our debate? That's what I want to know? How is it at all relevant that Mr. Tabash doesn't like the Christian god? Now it would be relevant to the debate if his implicit assumption is this: If I don't like something, then it doesn't exist. But that would be intellectually childish, wouldn't it? It's kind of like the child who gets angry at his restrictive father and pulls the covers up over his head and says "You don't exist, because I don't like you." Or throws a temper tantrum because he doesn't like spinach and its experience. And so spinach doesn't exist. I mean, do we really think that way? Do we assume that because we don't like something about God, that He can't be God? Well, if we don't assume that, then actually, most of the time Mr. Tabash took was wasted because all he's told us is a piece of autobiography; *he* doesn't like God. I also think, by the way, that he's greatly misjudged and distorted what God says in the Bible. I mean, you present these little events out of context and not telling the whole story, he tries to make God look like a real meanie. But, I mean, that's a standard thing. Criminals never think the police have done fair by them and Mr. Tabash is a criminal in the universe and when he talks about God, he's going to make Him out to be a meanie and there's no doubt

about that. You see, the point is there are people in this world that I don't happen to like one bit. I'm sorry to admit that, I try to love everybody, but there are some people who are real asses, you know? But is the fact that I don't like them one bit affect their reality? You're talking, "You don't exist because I don't like you," I mean that's just about all you've heard, and that's just not philosophically cogent or sound. In the tabloids that were passed out about the debate tonight, Mr. Tabash is quoted in a way that is similar to something he said in the debate all ready. He says, " If the God of the Bible actually exists, I want to sue Him for negligence for being asleep at the wheel of the universe while my grandfather and uncle were gassed to death at Awsvitch. And let me, before I deal with you as a philosopher, deal with you as a person. I think it's tragic that that happened and I don't want you to think for a minute that it's just a matter of playing debate games when we talk about this but since you've raised it I want to respond to that. You have to understand that if the God of the Bible does not exist you have lost all principle moral complaint about what Hitler did to your relatives. In a godless universe, what one animal does to another animal is ethically irrelevant. You see, there is no rational basis for moral indignation or outrage in a godless universe. There is no moral obligation. What happens in a world where it's matter and motion just happens. Period. See, we're left, on the atheist conception, we're left with Mr. Tabash's feelings and desires. We're left with his feelings, verses the feeling and desires of say, a Hitler. And neither one of them in a godless universe have any more right than the other. Indeed, as a staunch defender of liberalism and a supporter of personal freedom, Tabash really should, in terms of his atheist world view, defend Hitler's freedom to do whatever he wanted to do. In a godless world, might makes right. Hitler had the might to kill your relatives and you have no complaint with that. Of course, you really do have a complaint, you refuse to see the foundation of that. I have a complaint and you should join me in making that complaint based on the character of God. My main point here is that moral absolutes do not comport with a materialistic view of the universe, the atheist view of the universe. It

makes no objective sense to call Hitler evil if this is a godless universe. I mean, a certain bag of biological stuff, that is subject to the laws of laws of chemistry and physics, did certain things to other bags of biological stuff on the atheist universe. There's no moral consideration here at all. Mr. Tabash has used what is often called in philosophy of religion the problem of evil against the Christian world view. But he has to understand that in order to use that argument from evil he must first be able to show that his own judgments about the existence of evil are meaningful. Which is precisely what his unbelieving world view cannot do. Logically speaking, the question is how the atheist can make sense of taking evil seriously, not simply as something inconvenient, not simply as something unpleasant, not simply something contrary to your desires. The moral indignation which we feel about Awschvist and other kinds of evil in this world just doesn't comport with theories of ethics which atheists dispose. Theories which prove to be arbitrary, or subjective or relativistic in character upon analysis. Usually, atheists try to argue that evil is based on human reasoning and human choices and thus in the final analysis it is relative to the individual or culture. When the atheist professes that people determine ethical values for themselves rather than having them based on the absolute, unchanging character of God who has made Himself known to all men, the atheist implicitly hold that those who commit evil are not really doing anything evil given the values that they have chosen for themselves. Given the values chosen by Hitler, who can complain? He didn't do anything evil. The atheist must secretly rely upon the Christian world view in order to make sense of his argument against God based on Awsvist and other things of that nature. That is to say, anti-theism, presupposes theism in order to even make its case. The problem of evil, you see, is a logical problem for the unbeliever, not the believer."

Narrator: "Thank you, Dr. Bahnsen. Now Mr. Tabash, will you now give your seven minute rebuttal".

TABASH: "Well, with all due respect I believe that it is Dr. Bahnsen who is just being autobiographical, the only thing is rather than his personal sense of what should and shouldn't be, he is using an ancient book which to me is filled with great moral flaws and also has no evidentiary basis for belief. Now Dr. Bahnsen says that without God I have no basis for the moral complaint against Hitler. I submit that with God I have an even greater moral basis because there is an even larger problem and that is how can an omniscient, omnipotent being that is supposed to be full of mercy and justice sit by while innocent people to the millions are tortured and gassed to death by Nazi Germany. And so, not only that but if you compound that horror with the fact that the decent people who were the victims of that Holocaust are supposed to after going through the Holocaust go into an eternal Holocaust because they didn't accept Jesus, you have the most monstrous conception of God. Now, if I have or if we as human beings according to Dr. Bahnsen and other Christian theists, have the intelligence to, in their view, apprehend and understand that the Bible reveals such great moral truths, I submit that we also have the intelligence to see beyond the illusion, to wake up from the myth and superstition and say, "Hey wait a minute, what is this God that takes so many decent millions of people and just because they didn't pray the right way, or pray through the right figure, the right intermediary, they wind up eternally damned?" What is this God who opens the pit of Hell to all those who simply adopted the wrong theology or sincerely adopted no theology? This is not, this is not a god that many of us want to worship, and if God is the designer of the intellectual capacities that we all used to analyze issues of philosophy then God is also unavoidably the designer of the thought processes in my head which lead me to reject the Christian god of the Bible. And so what kind of an impossibly ridiculous being is this to plant in my head the seeds of rejection knowing that He plans for me eternal punishment because I have extricized the rejection for which He inclined me in the first way by the way my thought processes have been composed? This is a

very cynical dangerous being that makes many of us in such a way that we sincerely can't accept certain postulates and then tosses us into a lake of fire for eternity because we followed those very inclinations which He, the Christian God, Himself, itself, placed in us. This is not a god that is worthy of believing. And it's not a question of whether Dr. Bahnsen's autobiography prevails, it's a question of when human beings collectively look at and analyze what it means by morality we do have some independent right to assess a situation for ourselves. If the God of the Bible had not stayed the hand of Abraham and if the God of the Bible had made Abraham kill his son Isaac unto an offering I think we should be able to say that that was wrong. When God instructed the ancient Israelites to wipe out to the last breathing person every Hittite without taking into account the innocent children among them to be spared, I think that was a problem. I think that if the Sodom and Gomorra story is true that it is not possible that there wasn't some innocent children in either of those two cities that didn't deserve to survive even if the adults were irremediately wicked. I also think that and again showing the absurdity of Biblical mythology, that it was very cruel of God to turn Lot's wife in to a pillar of salt merely for looking back at Sodom and Gomorra. Particularly the poor woman ...low sodium diet. So I think that when you look at the fact that the types of supernatural absurdities which occur in the Bible would be believed in no other context but there is a kind of sewygenerous modality of suspended credulity that comes to the Bible that we compartmentalize the normal analytic process that we use to confront and to deal with every other facet of the human condition but when it comes to the Bible we suspend our rational analytic capacity and accept the most outrageous fairy tales and horror stories as actual truth which we would not do in any other context it tells us something and it gives us a legitimate basis for doubt. It would be more appealing to believe ability if those things set forth in the Bible were the types of phenomena which we saw manifested in all other areas of human life. If supernatural events were a daily occurrence if the appearance of angels and supernatural beings were something that accompanied our daily

experience that is something that would make the Bible more believable but to say that in an imperical universe, that the only acceptance to the standard laws we live with every day is the biblical account of truth I think is a very very weak argument. And so I submit that the evil supernaturalism of divine retribution for failure to pray the right way is an anathema to justice and that this God does not, in fact, exist."

Narrator: "Thank you Mr. Tabash...We will now have a three minute intermission. During this intermission if you feel like you would like to write down a question for Dr. Bahnsen and Mr. Tabash, would you please write it down and pass it to the center aisle and we will have ushers collecting them."