

Self-Refuting Statements #4

Review:

This series is about how to have meaningful interactions with our friends that God can use to get them to think.

Session #1: We have opportunities, and we need to take advantage of them and ask, “What do you mean by that?”

Session #2: We talked about the burden of proof, and when a person makes a claim, they should be able to give evidence as to why they believe as they do. So we can ask, “How did you come to that conclusion?”

Session #3: We discussed using questions to help a person see the inconsistencies in the claims they make. But to do this well, we need to practice and get used to common inconsistencies in our culture.

Introduction:

Today, we are going to examine statements that commit suicide. In other words, this tactic examines the tendency of many erroneous views to self-destruct.

- I. Self-refuting statements
 - A. These views defeat themselves all on their own. All you need to do is point that out.
 - B. For example:
 1. “I cannot speak a word in English” is self-refuting when spoken in English.
 2. “You can’t know anything for sure” is a truth skeptics are pretty sure about.
 3. “You shouldn’t make moral judgments” is making a moral judgment.
 - C. So self-refuting statements fail to satisfy their own criteria of validity. They can’t satisfy their own standard.
 - D. The suicide tactic, pointing out self-defeating statements, works because of the law of non-contradiction.
 1. This law states that 2 contradictory statements cannot both be true at the same time.
 2. Either one claim is true & one is false or they are both false, but both claims can’t be true.
 - a. All dogs have long hair
 - b. That dog is a German short hair
 - c. Either the first statement is false or the second statement is false but since they contradict they can’t both be true.

E. Examples of **explicit** contradictions which are easier to see.

1. "I never, never, never repeat a word."
2. "There are no absolutes." But this is an absolute statement.
3. "I'll give you three good reasons you can't use logic to find truth."

Contradiction: He wants to use logic to disprove the use of logic.

F. Examples of **implicit** contradictions which are often hidden and harder to see.

1. "My brother is an only child." My brother has me as a sibling, so he isn't an only child.

2. "I never tell the truth." It's true that I never tell the truth.

3. "Ask me about my vow of silence." Contradiction: If I've taken a vow of silence, I can't tell you about it.

G. How to recognize a point that commits suicide.

1. First, identify the basic claim or premise.
2. Next, ask yourself if the claim undermines itself.
 - a. Does the statement satisfy its own requirements?
 - b. Are there internal contradictions?

H. Exercise: See if you can point out the self-refutation.

1. Anthropology professor to a Christian student: "You shouldn't be a missionary because it's wrong to try to change other people's religious beliefs." (This is the professor's beliefs, and he's trying to change yours.)

2. "All religions are equally true & valid." (If two religions contradict each other, they can't both be true. If all religions are true, then Christianity is true, yet it claims all other religions are false. If Christianity is true, then other religions are false or other religions are true and Christianity is false but they can't all be equally valid and true.)

3. "You can only know what has been proven by science." (That statement isn't a statement of science but a philosophical belief, so how can you know it?)

4. "There is no absolute truth." (Contradiction: We cannot know truth, and yet we know this statement is true.)

I. How would you use questions to expose the suicidal tendencies of the following self-refuting statements?

1. "It's wrong to condemn anybody for anything." (If I disagree with your statement, are you going to condemn me?)

2. "Everyone's view is a product of their own prejudices." (Are your views a product of your prejudices? Then why should I listen to your views?)

3. “God doesn’t take sides.” (Do you think God would be on your side of this belief and not my side of this belief if I believe God does take sides? Then God does take sides)

4. “The world is an illusion, and we’re each part of the illusion.” (If I’m just an illusion, how would I know that I’m just part of an illusion?)

5. “God can’t exist because there’s so much evil in the world.” (What do you mean by evil? (1st Columbo question) What makes things intrinsically bad? Why would you call them evil instead of good? Would the existence of evil imply an objective moral standard that defines what is good? The fact that we have a sense of evil is proof that a moral God does exist.)

II. Sibling Rivalry suicide

A. Sometimes objections come in pairs that are logically inconsistent with each other. This puts them in rivalry.

B. This doesn’t mean both objections are false, but it does cut your task in half because both can’t be true at the same time.

C. For example, take this conversation with a Hindu man about Gandhi:
HINDU MAN: Is Gandhi in heaven? Heaven would be a very poor place without Gandhi in it.
CHRISTIAN: Well, sir, you must believe in heaven, then, and apparently you have done some thinking about what would qualify someone for it. Tell me, what kind of people go to heaven? (Note his friendly tone, and his use of a variation of Columbo #1.)

HINDU MAN: Good people go to heaven.

CHRISTIAN: But this idea of a good person is very unclear to me. What is good? (continued use of Columbo #1.)

HINDU MAN: (*in typical Hindu fashion*) Good and bad are relative; there is no clear definition.

CHRISTIAN: If that is true, sir, that goodness is relative and can’t be defined, how is it you assume Gandhi is good and should be in heaven?

D. The “sibling rivalry”
1. Gandhi is good, and there is an objective standard of good & evil (OR)
2. Morality is relative, and Gandhi cannot be called “good” in any ultimate sense.

3. Since these both can’t be true at the same time, there is a sibling rivalry suicide.

Conclusion:

1. Always be alert for points of view that self-destruct.
2. Ask yourself the question: Does that position have points that contradict itself? Does the claim satisfy its own requirements?
3. When you discover a self-refuting position, ask a question that points out the contradiction, and let them sink their own ship.

Small group:

Practice responding to these self-refuting statements:

1. “The Bible could not have been inspired by God because men wrote it and men make mistakes.” (The conclusion – Bible not inspired – does not follow the premise that man wrote it because he makes mistakes. Does man always make mistakes? If so, then this statement would have to be wrong. Just because man wrote the Bible doesn’t prove it’s not inspired. Was man solely responsible for writing the Bible? 2 Peter 1:21)

(If the reason we can’t accept the Bible is inspired is because man makes mistakes, then how do you know you aren’t mistaken?)

2. “God used Darwinian evolution to design the world.” (The mechanism of creation is either conscious & intentional (design) or unconscious & unintentional (natural selection) and random. Creation had a purpose, goal and an end. Evolution is accidental. Theistic evolution is belief in design by chance. That’s like a square circle; there is no such thing.)

3. “I believe you shouldn’t judge other people.”
(if I disagree are you going to judge me?)

4. “You can’t know anything for sure.”
(Are you sure about that?)

5. “You can only know truth through experience.”
(What experience taught you that truth?)

6. “Never take anyone’s advice on that issue.”
(Should I take your advice on that?)

7. “Only science gives reliable truth.” (What scientific evidence led to this conclusion?)
This is not a statement of science but of philosophical belief