

TCA:ICT?

Thinking Critically About:

"Is Christianity True?"

Thinking Critically About: “Is Christianity True?”

Podcast #1: Why Should Anyone Care?

Introduction to Your Host

My Name:

Bradley Bowen

My Role:

Your host and guide for this series of podcasts on
Thinking Critically About: “Is Christianity True?”

My Educational Background:

- BA in Philosophy from Sonoma State University (in Northern California).
- MA in Philosophy from the University of Windsor (in Windsor, Ontario, just across the border from Detroit, Michigan).
- Completed all requirements for a PhD in Philosophy from UC Santa Barbara (on the central coast of California) except for completion of my doctoral dissertation.
- Main interests in philosophy: critical thinking, philosophy of religion, and ethics.

The Main Question at Issue

QUESTION 1: Is Christianity true?

This is the main *question at issue* that I will investigate in this series of podcasts.

QUESTION 2: How can we answer Question 1?

In this series of podcasts, I will try to answer Question 1 by *thinking critically* about this question.

QUESTION 3: What is *critical thinking*?

“critical thinking” is (roughly speaking) thinking that is careful, judicious, objective, and fair.

Critical Thinking Defined

Here is an excellent definition of "critical thinking" from two leading experts on critical thinking:

Critical thinking is that mode of thinking--about any subject, content, or problem--in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them.

(The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools, p.1, by Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder)

The Value of Critical Thinking

Here is a brief justification of the value of critical thinking from the same two leading experts:

Everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed, or downright prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends precisely on the quality of our thought. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life. Excellence in thought, however, must be systematically cultivated.

(The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools, p.1, by Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder)

Critical Thinking In These Podcasts

- I plan to make full use of the concepts and tools of critical thinking in my investigation of Question 1.
- When I do make use of a concept or tool of critical thinking, I will point that out and will often provide some *explanation and guidance* about that concept or tool.
- As a result, anyone who listens to these podcasts will be able to *become a critical thinker* or to strengthen their critical thinking skills, habits, and knowledge.

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reasons 1 &2)

QUESTION 4: Why should anyone care about whether Christianity is true or false?

There are at least a couple of reasons that apply no matter whether Christianity turns out to be true or false:

- **REASON 1: To Hold True Beliefs.**
- **REASON 2: To Have Intellectual Autonomy.**

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reasons 3-6)

QUESTION 4: Why should anyone care about whether Christianity is true or false?

There are some reasons that apply if Christianity turns out to be TRUE:

- **REASON 3: To Live a Good Life**
- **REASON 4: To Obtain Eternal Life & Avoid Eternal Punishment**
- **REASON 5: To Gain Greater Confidence in Christianity**
- **REASON 6: Convert to Christianity (for Non-Christians)**

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reasons 7-10)

QUESTION 4: Why should anyone care about whether Christianity is true or false?

There are some reasons that apply if Christianity turns out to be FALSE:

- **REASON 7: Leave the Christian faith & Search for truth**
- **REASON 8: To Gain Greater Confidence in Rejection of Christianity (for skeptics and non-Christians)**
- **REASON 9: Rethink Your Ethics & Values (for Christians)**
- **REASON 10: Consider Skeptical Implications**

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reason 1)

REASON 1: To Hold True Beliefs. We should try to figure out which religion or worldview, if any, is true, because one's religion or worldview shapes much of the rest of one's thinking.

One could simply *start from scratch* and work on constructing a true religion or worldview for oneself. But why re-invent the wheel? Human beings have been trying to create or identify a true religion or worldview for many centuries, and several religions and worldviews have been created or identified. Also, we all have been exposed to at least one or two religions or worldviews that we have either adopted or partially accepted, or consciously rejected, so it is difficult to truly start from scratch.

We should care about whether our beliefs are true, especially our religious or worldview beliefs. One's religion or worldview is important, because a religion or worldview *shapes our thinking* about many different topics and issues that we face, especially in terms of ethics (**How should we live?**), metaphysics (**What kinds of things exist?**), and epistemology (**What can we know and how can we know?**). So, if one's religion or worldview is false, then some of one's most basic assumptions are false, and that means that our thinking is shaped by a number of false assumptions. Thus, it is important to determine which religion or worldview, if any, is true.

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reason 2)

REASON 2: To Have Intellectual Autonomy. We should try to achieve the virtue of *intellectual autonomy*, and that requires that one think critically about one's religion or worldview and about alternative religions and worldviews.

An important but often neglected aspect of critical thinking is *intellectual virtue*. One key intellectual virtue is "Intellectual Autonomy":

Having rational control of one's beliefs, values, and inferences. The ideal of critical thinking is to learn to think for oneself, to gain command over one's thought processes. It entails a commitment to analyzing and evaluating beliefs on the basis of reason and evidence, to question when it is rational to question, to believe when it is rational to believe, and to conform when it is rational to conform. (*The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools*, p.14)

In order to be a free and autonomous individual, one must do some serious examination of one's basic philosophical or worldview beliefs. To simply accept the religion or worldview of one's parents or one's community without any serious questioning, without ever considering reasons for and against that point of view, and without ever considering the merits of alternative religions or worldviews, is to allow others to determine some of the most important aspects of one's own self.

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reason 3)

REASON 3: To Live a Good Life. If Christianity is TRUE, then the Christian religion probably provides *the best guidance* to live a good life, a well-lived life.

Matthew 7:24-27 (New Revised Standard Version):

24 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.

26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reason 4)

REASON 4: To Obtain Eternal Life & Avoid Eternal Punishment. If Christianity is TRUE, then it is probably the case that the Christian religion provides the best guidance about how to obtain eternal life, and the best guidance about how to avoid eternal punishment in an afterlife.

John 3:16 (New Revised Standard Version):

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Matthew 25:32-34 & 41&46 (New Revised Standard Version):

32 All the nations will be gathered before him [the Son of Man], and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,

33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ...

41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ...

46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reason 5)

REASON 5: To Gain Greater Confidence in Christianity.

If Christianity is TRUE and we learn this by thinking critically about Christianity, then this conclusion will be based on a solid foundation of evidence and reasons, which would give Christian believers *greater confidence* in the truth of their religious beliefs, and this would also help them to better *explain and justify* their religious beliefs to non-Christians.

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reason 6)

REASON 6: Convert to Christianity (for Non-Christians).

If Christianity is TRUE and we learn this by *thinking critically* about Christianity, then those of us who were not previously Christian believers should give *serious consideration* to converting to the Christian religion, because critical thinkers strive to have true beliefs, especially when it comes to our most basic philosophical assumptions, and because we ought to live our lives in keeping with the beliefs that we have arrived at by careful, judicious thinking.

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reason 7)

REASON 7: Leave the Christian faith & Search for truth.

If Christianity is FALSE and we learn this by *thinking critically* about Christianity, then those of us who were previously Christian believers should give *serious consideration* to leaving the Christian faith and starting a new search for the truth, because critical thinkers strive to have true beliefs, especially when it comes to our most basic philosophical assumptions, and because we ought NOT live our lives in keeping with the beliefs that we have determined to be false on the basis of careful, judicious thinking.

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reason 8)

REASON 8: To Gain Greater Confidence in Rejection of Christianity (for skeptics and non-Christians).

If Christianity is FALSE and we learn this by *thinking critically* about Christianity, then this conclusion will be based on a solid foundation of evidence and reasons, which will give skeptics and non-Christians *greater confidence* in their rejection of Christianity, and this will also help them to better *explain and justify* their rejection of Christianity to Christian believers.

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reason 9)

REASON 9: Rethink Your Ethics & Values (for Christians).

If Christianity is FALSE and we learn this by *thinking critically* about Christianity, then those who were previously Christian believers should *rethink their ethics and values*, because Christianity has shaped much of their previous thinking, especially in relation to ethical principles and their values. Some Christian values might be worth keeping (e.g. “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.”), but other Christian-based ethical principles might no longer make sense (e.g. “Homosexual sex is morally wrong and it should be condemned and discouraged.”).

Why Should Anyone Care? (Reason 10)

REASON 10: Consider Skeptical Implications.

If Christianity is FALSE and we learn this by *thinking critically* about Christianity, then there will likely be some *strong objections* to Christianity that can also be applied to some *other religions*.

For example, if Christianity is judged to be false because one determines that *there is no God*, this would be a major objection to Islam and Judaism as well, though not to Buddhism. Alternatively, if the existence of God is accepted but Christianity is determined to be false because the alleged miracle of *the resurrection of Jesus* is rejected, the reasons for rejecting that alleged Christian miracle are likely to also apply to miracles claimed by other religions.

Closing Remarks

The Next Podcast:

In Podcast #2, I will consider and reply to several objections against my view that: **We should invest some time into careful and judicious thinking about the question “Is Christianity True?”**.

Thank You:

Thank you for listening to my first podcast of the series *Thinking Critically About: “Is Christianity True?”*. I hope that you will join me again for future podcasts as I continue to investigate this important question.

Critical Thinking Has Significant Value:

“...the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends precisely on the quality of our thought. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life.”

(The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools, p.1)

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