

Learning about Apologetics with *The Question of God Podcast*

Peter S. Williams (August, 2025)

The Question of God Podcast is a fictional, 12-episode podcast series featuring students with different views discussing philosophy, science and belief in God, hosted by Sophie Minerva, Professor of Philosophy at NLA University College in Norway. All voices are performed by A.I. The podcast was created by Peter S. Williams (www.peterswilliams.com) and Børge Elliot Bentsen. It is adapted from Peter's book *Outgrowing God? A Beginner's Guide to Richard Dawkins and the God Debate* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020) (www.peterswilliams.com/publications/books/outgrowing-god/). The series is produced and published by BioCosmos (<http://www.biocosmos.no/>) in cooperation with Damaris Norge (<http://www.damaris.no/>). All rights reserved.

The Question of God Podcast is available online:

- The series from Soundcloud @ <https://borgebentsen.podbean.com/>
- and on YouTube @ https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWjgZU_cWLc3QsohLb-5mRUx

Introducing Our Cast of Characters

- Professor of philosophy **Sophie Minerva** is named after the Greek word for wisdom (sophia) and the Roman goddess of wisdom (Minerva). She organises the book club, keeps the discussion on track, and occasionally adds information into the discussion.
- **Thomas** is a student from Sweden who has been much influenced by reading “New Atheist” writers like Richard Dawkins.
- **Douglas** is an American student who consistently represents “classical atheism” in these discussions.
- **Hiromi** is a student from Japan who begins the series as an agnostic about God’s existence. For whatever reason, she is particularly interested in the question of whether love is real or illusory.
- **Astrid** is a Christian student from Norway.

How to Think Wisely about God

Like the book from which the series is adapted, this podcast aims to help people to think wisely (philosophy is basically the quest to find true answers to significant questions by thinking wisely) about the question of whether the Christian God is real, and to do this in an accessible and interesting way by using the format of a fictional dialogue, which is divided into twelve episodes of between around 11 to 24 minutes in length.

The fictional dialogue is a traditional rhetorical format for philosophy, tracing back to the writings of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers such as Plato, Cicero and Seneca. Fictional dialogues were written by Enlightenment-era philosophers such as George Berkeley and David Hume; and they have been written by modern-day philosophers such as Michael Huemer, Peter Kreeft, Robert A. Larmer, John Perry, Charles Taliaferro, and Peter S. Williams.

To help people think wisely about God, the series doesn’t just present the listener with assertions or arguments, but aims to equip them with the tools of “critical thinking” that philosophers use when assessing assertions and arguments. In other words, the series tries to teach people *how to think well* about God (or anything else). Especially in the first seven episodes, the characters discuss foundational subjects in epistemology (the study of knowledge), including logic (the study of argumentation), such as the importance of clear definitions and distinctions, the rules of logic that

distinguish between good and bad arguments, the nature of knowledge, and questions about the nature of faith.

- For an introduction to argumentation, see Williams, Peter S. “A Crash Course in Logic.” (<http://podcast.peterswilliams.com/e/a-crash-course-in-logic/>)

The series also models how people can disagree about an important issue, such as the existence of God, in an agreeable way. The characters in the podcast disagree with each other, but they form a genuine community around a shared interest in the subject, and a shared commitment to seeking truth by thinking well.

Christians are instructed by scripture to be people who should be “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). Because we are called to love our neighbour as ourselves, we should tolerate our neighbour’s right to believe and argue for things with which we disagree. But toleration doesn’t mean celebration. Indeed, one can only tolerate that with which one disagrees: “Tolerance of the views of others [means] that even though we might think those views wrong and will argue against them, we will defend the rights of others to argue their cases.”¹ After all, Proverbs 27:17 says:

As iron sharpens iron,
so one man sharpens another.

Thus, there is a sense in which the philosopher welcomes disagreement; but only *as a means to the end of discovering truth*. The wise make the pursuit of truth a communal activity: “philosophy is best done among groups where there is an authentic spirit of friendship or camaraderie.”² *The Question of God* podcast aims to model this sort of philosophical community and camaraderie between people with different worldviews.

The Question of God Podcast as an Example of Christian Apologetics

The series is an example of “Christian apologetics,” which I would define as:

a spiritual discipline of loving, humble service that tries to use virtue-oriented rhetoric to lead people to be persuaded that a God-centered way of life through faithfulness to Jesus as Lord is a rational, good and beautiful choice to make.

You see, every mature human has “a way of life,” that is, a “spirituality”:

- A spirituality is made up of worldview assumptions (the ideas about reality one believes and/or acts upon), combined with attitudes that lead to actions.

One can also talk about this as trying to virtuously bring together our head, heart and hands.

While the *content* differs (more or less) from one “way of life” to another, this *spiritual structure* remains constant. Because we live in a world of numerous, contradictory spiritualities, we all face the question: “Why follow Jesus? Why be a Christian rather than a Muslim, Atheist, Agnostic, Pagan, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.?” Seeking genuinely persuasive responses to this question can help our own spiritual walk, and it is a way to love our neighbours, known theologically as “apologetics” (the term comes from the Greek *apologia*, which literally means to give “a word back,” as when a lawyer gives a defence speech in court).

¹ J.P. Moreland and Mark Matlock, *Smart Faith: Loving Your God with All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs, CO: Think, 2005), p. 28.

² Charles Taliaferro, *Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2009), p. xi.

As James A. Herrick explains: “when we express emotions and thoughts to other people with the goal of influencing (persuading) them, we engage in rhetoric.”³ Note that on this definition of rhetoric:

- Rhetoric is not about manipulation, but loving service
- Rhetoric includes, but is not limited to, using words to make arguments

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle defined rhetoric as: “*the power to observe the persuasiveness of which any particular matter admits.*”⁴ According to Aristotle, rhetoric has three main dimensions:

Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind [*ethos*] depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second [*pathos*] on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third [*logos*] on the proof... provided by the words of the speech itself...⁵

Interestingly, the apostle Paul advises Christians to use the same three elements of rhetoric in evangelism:

When you are with unbelievers, always make good use of the time. **Be pleasant** [*ethos*] and hold their **interest** when you speak the message [*pathos*]. Choose your words carefully and be ready to **give answers** to anyone who asks questions [*logos*]. (Colossians 4:5-6, CEV)

Rhetoric seeks to persuade people by pointing them to attractive or repellant facts grounded in the objective virtues of truth, goodness and beauty. To say that these virtues or values are “objective” is to say that they are things we *discover*, not things we *invent*. As Christian philosopher John Cottingham explains,

The true is that which is worthy of belief . . . the beautiful is that which is worthy of admiration; and the good is that which is worthy of choice.⁶

(By contrast, the false is that which is not worthy of belief, the ugly is that which is not worthy of admiration, and the bad is that which is not worthy of choice.) The apostle Paul points to the same basic virtues in Philippians 4:8:

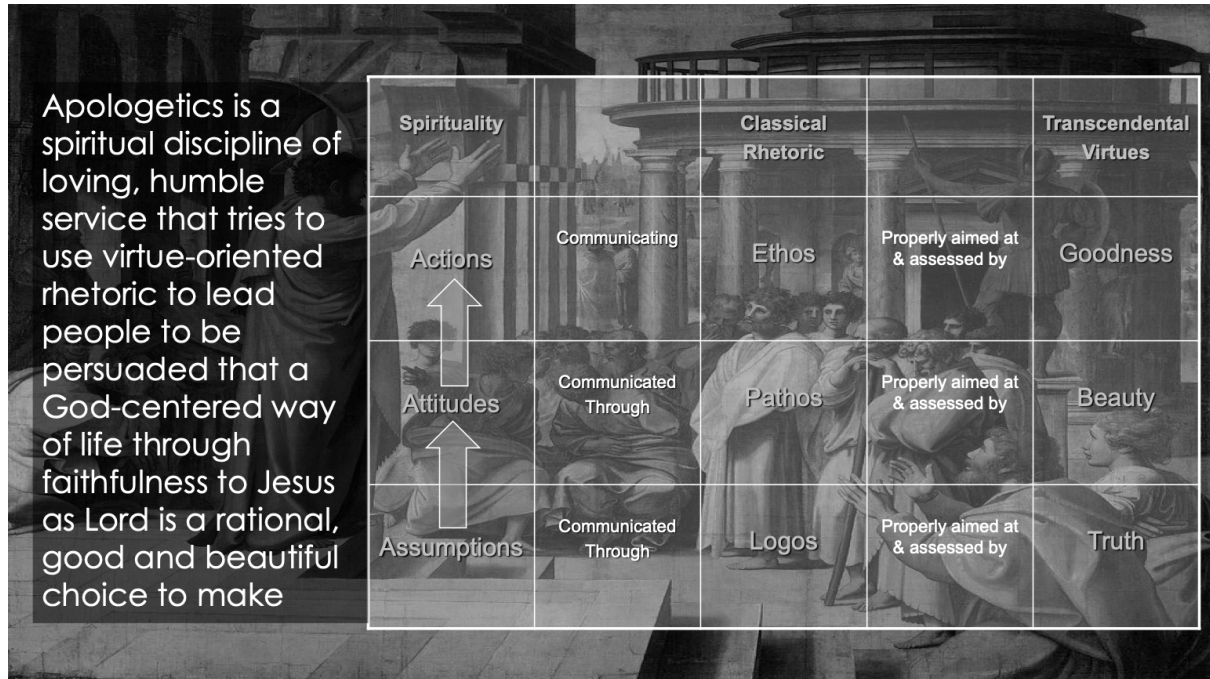
Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is [morally] true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.

³ James A. Herrick, *The History And Theory Of Rhetoric*, 4th edition, 5.

⁴ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, Trans. H.C. Lawson-Tancred (Penguin Classics, 2004), 70.

⁵ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, Trans. H.C. Lawson-Tancred (Penguin Classics, 2004).

⁶ John Cottingham, “Philosophers are finding fresh meanings in Truth, Goodness and Beauty.” *The Times* (June 17, 2006).



- For an video introduction to this holistic view of apologetics, see [Williams, Peter S. "Introducing Christian Apologetics."](#)

Apologetics is a very broad theological discipline, encompassing the full breadth of rhetoric as communicated by various media, and ranging over a very broad range of subjects, from philosophy to natural science, from history to archaeology. However, epistemology (including logic), is obviously a foundational component of apologetics with respect to the attempt to persuade people of the inadequacy of non-Christian worldviews and the adequacy of the Christian worldview.

Work Assignment

Listen to *The Question of God* podcast (taking an episode at a time might be wise!), taking notes relating to the following questions:

- When is the series focused on teaching epistemology and logic?
- What topics does the material on epistemology and logic cover?
- How does the series build on what it teaches about *how* to think well (epistemology and logic) when trying to persuading listeners about *what* to think about God?
- When is the series giving arguments that defend Christian beliefs against objections?
- When is the series giving positive arguments for the truth of Christian beliefs?
- How does the series engage with goodness and beauty as well as with truth?

Episode Outlines

- 1) This podcast series is about "The Question of God - Has Our Civilization Outgrown God?" The title refers to British atheist Richard Dawkins' 2019 book *Outgrowing God*. The title suggests the book's main message, namely that our modern world has outgrown belief in God. Is it true? Four students are discussing the book together with philosophy professor Sophie Minerva in a coffee shop. This first episode is about vocabulary and definitions when talking about God.
- 2) Socrates said that every meaningful discussion begins with the definition of words. In this episode the students will discuss more about words and belief positions on the question of God. There are really only three possible basic positions to take, and the students represent all three of them. Thomas is shocked to hear Douglas' blatant dismissal of deeper meaning in life, even if he is an atheist himself.

- 3) Dawkins says we should think carefully about how we understand reality. Instead of blindly believing what we have inherited or heard from our family or culture, we should think for ourselves. Thomas totally agrees with this. Hiromi agrees but points out that Dawkins in his book is not following his own rule very well.
- 4) This time the students are discussing the topic called epistemology, the study of knowledge. How can we gain knowledge about something? Is true knowledge even possible? Douglas points out that Dawkins is promoting a specific philosophical view called scientism. Hiromi agrees, but Thomas thinks Douglas is too harsh. Astrid mentions several things people need to believe in order to reason at all - things that cannot be proven scientifically. Knowledge and beliefs seem to be intertwined.
- 5) What exactly are faith and belief? Are they the opposite of knowledge? What is meant by the terms "basic faith", "blind faith" or "enlightened faith"? Dawkins makes a distinction between blind faith and evidence-based faith or beliefs. Thomas likes that. But then Astrid asks about the faith in logic and reason, is that a blind faith? It seems there's a lot of beliefs we cannot do without. Hiromi also need to believe in true love. Thomas notices that.
- 6) This time the students are discussing what it means to think critically, and how is critical thinking practised in Dawkins' book. There are different views. Douglas says that critical thinking means analysing, evaluating and reflecting on things that are being said. There is a big difference between claims and arguments. Critical thinking also means to discover logical contradictions. Self-contradictions can never be true. Thomas thinks the concept of an almighty God is self-contradictory, but Astrid disagrees.
- 7) What do the concepts of paradoxes and contradictions mean? What is the difference? This relates to the question of God. Astrid is giving a summarised version of the five arguments for God given by the famous medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas, which almost gives Thomas a brain-meltdown. Almost. By the way, Astrid thinks Dawkins is making a category-mistake by comparing polytheistic gods with the Creator God of monotheism. Hiromi discovers the true meaning of worship. She also wants to know if the concept of the Trinity is a paradox or a contradiction. Thomas thinks it's a contradiction, but Douglas and Astrid disagree.
- 8) The students discuss the concepts of science and faith, and the relationship between them. Professor Sophie asks if we can say that science and faith are different paths to knowledge? Does science provide more "certain" knowledge than faith does? Dawkins seems to think so. Hiromi thinks Dawkins reveals a bias against religion. Douglas points out that scientific beliefs are built upon other beliefs, so the "different path" idea is a misunderstanding, he thinks. Douglas thinks the state must be neutral in religious matters. Astrid is not so sure that is possible. Are human rights issues neutral?
- 9) What is the concept of evolution about? What is the evidence for it? Dawkins claims in his book that although the world looks designed, it really isn't. He argues for this by pointing to what he considers flaws in the design of biological organisms. Thomas tries to defend this view, but the other students are sceptical. Even Douglas, his fellow atheist, is picking apart this argument. Sophie reminds the students to be aware of the different meanings of the word evolution. Hiromi even introduces a new word to the group: devolution. What on Earth is that?
- 10) How do we recognise design? And how might design relate to evolution? Douglas starts by giving a summary of what Dawkins says about this. Does evidence in the natural world point to design? Douglas and Thomas don't think so, but they back different arguments against the design hypothesis. Hiromi's scepticism against the no design hypothesis is growing. She is interested in biology and brings a lot of information to the discussion, including the concept of irreducible complexity.
- 11) The topic in this episode is whether science points to atheism or naturalism as the best explanation of the universe. The students touch on the phenomenon of the Big Bang, cosmic fine-tuning, and the idea of a multiverse. Astrid argues that the probability of a life-permitting universe is astronomically low, to put it mildly. What is the difference between a universe coming from nothing and a universe created from nothing? If God created the universe, asks Thomas, where does God come from?
- 12) The four students and their professor have come to their twelfth and last meeting in the coffee shop discussing Richard Dawkins' book *Outgrowing God*. The topic this time is Dawkins' response to cosmic fine-tuning, and whether the claim in his book is correct - has our civilisation really outgrown God? Or have we rather outgrown Dawkins' views? Has atheistic naturalism as a worldview become more questionable in the recent years as science discovers more about the cosmos? Thomas, Astrid, Douglas and Hiromi summarize their views after studying Dawkins' book.

Click here for a list of recommended resources by episode: https://www.peterswilliams.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/The-Question-of-God-Podcast_Resources.pdf

Interview with the Creators

In this two part interview from Damaris Norway's *Snakk om Tro* (Talking about truth) podcast, Professor Lars Dahle talks to philosopher Peter S. Williams and producer Børge Bentsen about their recently released podcast series, *The Question of God*:

Introducing The Question of God Podcast Series – A Conversation with Peter S. Williams and Børge Bentsen (part I): <http://podcast.peterswilliams.com/e/introducing-the-question-of-god-podcast-series-a-conversation-with-peter-s-williams-and-b%C3%B8rge-bentsen-part-i/>

Introducing The Question of God Podcast Series – A Conversation with Peter S. Williams and Børge Bentsen (part II): <http://podcast.peterswilliams.com/e/introducing-the-question-of-god-podcast-series-a-conversation-with-peter-s-williams-and-b%C3%B8rge-bentsen-part-ii/>