

“An Evaluation of the Debate, ‘Is Belief in God Reasonable?’”

CENTURION EDUCATION FOUNDATION

by

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Should you be an atheist or a believer?

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October 7, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

This paper revolves around the evaluation of the debate between William Lane Craig and Alex Rosenberg. The debate material centers on the topic of the existence of God. Craig comes at the question from an evidential apologetic approach, as a born again Christian. Rosenberg on the other hand approaches the question of the existence of God's existence from a Jewish, agnostic perspective. The debate was held at Purdue University in Indiana, though the debate was likely organized from Craig and Talbot School of Theology in California.

This writer will than evaluate the lines of argumentation of Craig's for their strengths and weaknesses. This writer will than continue with an evaluation of Rosenberg's lines of argumentation, including his weaknesses. This evaluation with conclude with an assessment of which debater won the debate, including reasons for the final conclusion.

An Evaluation of Craig's Line of Argumentation

William Lane Craig gave his opening statement which one might be considered in a lecture format. This outlined format which Craig used was very easy to follow. His points were clear and he explained each one, gave illustrations for each, and then reviewed the argument. He then made a closing statement for each point that he presented. Craig employed a powerful set of words for each argument, "God is the best explanation..."¹ which he used as part of his apologetic argument and is of course a teaching principle, (repetition).

Craig began with the transcendental argument for God. In his outlined format he listed the progression of the argument and that closed that argument with a series of apologetic steps that led to the conclusion that the Creator of the universe is a transcendental, personal Being. The second answer he gave was very similar. The next argument was of interest as this writer believes there is a lot of math equations in the Bible. Craig made the argument that equated math with nature. The following argument dealt with the fine-tuning of universe. Most of the closing apologetic arguments are a three step process which begins with a presupposition and ends with the expected conclusion of the existence of God. The fifth argument was an interesting one as Craig argued that if one has a consciousness of the world than God does exist. The thinking maybe that we are made in His likeness. Craig used this to turn the tables on Rosenberg as Rosenberg argued consciousness awareness. Craig made Rosenberg look silly on this point. The sixth argument that Craig put forth is language that Christians would be comfortable with, which is to say is the moral argument for God. Craig offers the seventh argument which is the historical proofs for the Resurrection of Christ. Craig's last argument he discussed how one can know Jesus Christ in a personal way.

¹ William Craig Lane, Debate: Is Faith in God Reasonable, West Lafayette, IN., Purdue University, 2013.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Craig's Argumentations

The strengths of William Lane Craig's debating style, first is that he is a consummate professional. Craig held a godly and gracious testimony for the Lord throughout the entire event and at every exchange with Rosenberg. Craig is very prepared for his debates. His use of outlines and the PowerPoint on the overhead projector was helpful. This helped him make his case for the existence of God, and to teach his audience. Craig consistently made clear and concise outlines for his argumentation. The outlines had a clear progression of thought. Following the argumentation were his apologetic bullet points that brought the reader or listener to a logical conclusion. The final reason this writer thought Craig had such a good debate is because he was likeable and that made him more acceptable to the unbelievers that watched the debate. Because of the quality presentation that Craig put forth and his positive demeanor there were no weaknesses that one could reasonably make in this debate.

An Evaluation of Rosenberg's Line of Argumentation

Alex Rosenberg responded to William Lane Craig after Craig's first argumentation. In contrast to Craig's very positive presentation Rosenberg got up and just began to rip into Craig in a very negative and angry way. Rosenberg came off as very unlikable although he tried to tell a joke or one-liners, but no one was laughing. Rosenberg had at least thirteen objections to Craig's argumentation. Rosenberg's first objection was that he believed the burden of proof was on Craig and not himself. Rosenberg's second complaint is that Craig's presentation was too much like a lawyer in a court hearing. Third, Rosenberg suggested that the omnipresence of God was inconsistent than God must not exist. Fourth Rosenberg attacked the causation argument.

Rosenberg continued his rant against the fifth argument, the fine-tuning of the universe. The sixth argument relative to God creating the universe out of nothing from Rosenberg seemed to fall flat. The seventh argument was Rosenberg referencing Plato's refutation of the moral argument. Again this seemed to be more of a complaint than any kind of persuasive argumentation. At one point Rosenberg was clearly calling Craig a liar. The retort that may have been the most repugnant was Rosenberg arguing his thirtieth answer to Craig. Rosenberg argued that all suffering must be removed if God really existed. In the middle of that argument he was belittling the attributes of God. Then Rosenberg suggested that, "The problem of evil was the theist problem from Hell."² This was the epitome cynicism and a basic lack of understanding of the character and nature of God. The level of negativity that Rosenberg displayed in this debate hurt his appeal to those that might be sympathetic to his position, but it also made Craig look more reasonable.

² Alex Rosenberg, *Debate: Is Faith in God Reasonable*, West Lafayette, IN., Purdue University, 2013.

CONCLUSION

The Final Assessment of the Craig vs. Rosenberg Debate

This debate was an excellent teaching tool for evidential apologetics. Rosenberg was necessary for this apologetic platform. Craig again put forth a positive argumentation and a pleasant demeanor, which was a good testimony for Christ. The presentation that Craig offered was professional, instructive, and persuasive. It would be this writer's observation that Craig presented himself in such a way that he earned the favor and respect of his listeners. The manner in which Craig conducted himself made it very reasonable for any unbelieving listeners to receive his logic and reasoning on their way to receiving Christ as their personal Saviour.

From this writer's perspective it was clear that Craig was the clear winner of this debate. Craig had the more professional presentation. Craig had well excepted, and well prepared arguments for the existence for God. Craig also conducted himself in a gracious manner and consistently treated Rosenberg with respect. Craig demonstrated that he was superior as an educator. He not only had well prepared notes, but also made them available on the big screen for the audience and viewers to follow along.

INITIAL SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPGY

Craig, William Lane, and Alex Rosenberg. *Debate: Is Faith in God Reasonable*, West Lafayette, IN., Purdue University, 2013.