

How Does Green Taste?

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When my son was seven years old, we would have some very “creative” discussions about games, sports and even having him be my helper when I worked around the house. However, it is our periodic philosophical conversations that I am learning to treasure. One day Andrew engaged me in a dialogue that went something like this, “Dad, how do they get those big fire engines out of the desert when they get stuck?” I said, “What do you mean, what are fire engines doing in the desert?” Andrew replied, “That is not my question! I want to know how they get the big fire engines that got stuck in the desert, out of the desert.” I said, “Well, they get very large tow trucks and tow them out.” Of course, this was even more of a problem in Andrew’s mind, as he retorted, “Wait a minute, the fire engines got stuck because they were so big, why wouldn’t the large tow trucks get stuck?” At this point I knew I was in trouble. I said, “Look Andrew, you are asking the kind of question that really has no meaning.” He looked at me and said, “What do you mean?” Now it was time to really stump him by asking him to answer an unanswerable question, so I said, “Andrew,

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tell me, what color is time?" Without a moment of hesitation he bounced back and answered, "Oh, time! Time is red!" Then I remembered that he was thinking of the clock in his room that has a red LCD. I said, "O.K., tell me, how does green taste?" Again, as if he had answered this question a million times he quickly replied, "Oh, green--yuck!"

I suddenly thought of all the green vegetables that he hates to eat, especially peas. I had to think fast, so I tried one more question, "Andrew, what does the invisible man look like?" He stared at me and I thought I had him until he said, "Hey, how should I know, I never saw him!" Well, this was

it, I have been able to successfully answer all kinds of antagonistic questions in open forum settings and now I had finally met my match. I said, "Andrew, daddy doesn't know how they get those big fire engines out of the desert, when you grow up will you explain it to me?" He simply said, "Sure dad!"

Welcome to the next logical fallacy called the "category mistake." It is committed by confusing two distinct categories such as seeing and tasting. For example, "What color do apples taste like?" Color is a product of sight and is irrelevant to the sense of taste. This seems like a clear-cut fallacy that ought not to be committed by any rationally consistent thinker, yet just the opposite is true. Category

mistake questions are meaningless questions and yet we think that they can be answered. Let me give you two examples of meaningless questions. The first example is, "Who made God? This question confuses the finite with the infinite. Only finite things or entities have a beginning and come to be or were made. An infinite entity, such as God, does

not have a beginning. Therefore, the question is a meaningless question. The second question is, "Can God create a rock big enough for Him not to be able to lift it?" This question was posed to me by a high school student in an open forum setting. I asked him, "How big do you

want God to make this rock?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I am asking you a simple question, how big?" He said, "As big as it takes so He cannot lift it?" I asked him, "Can you do something that you cannot do? In other words, can you draw a square circle for me?" He said, "No, that is impossible." I said, "Thank you! You have just answered your own question. You see, you want God to make a rock so big that He cannot lift it, but that rock would have to be infinitely big. However, anything that is created, like a rock, is by definition a finite thing. A rock is not an infinite thing, the finite and the infinite are in two distinct categories. It is impossible to create an infinite, physical thing. It is as impossible as making a square circle. Even if

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God could make a rock so big that He could not move it, He could destroy it and create it again to be moved to wherever He wanted."

This fallacy does not only appear in question form, but it also emerges in propositions. It is habitually committed by those who hold to the popular view of moral relativism. Many people think that just because a behavior becomes socially accepted, the behavior is automatically right or true. They wrongly assume that popular opinion determines ethical standards. This is necessarily not the case because a judgment assumes two positions and an objective standard. That is the only way to classify one position as more correct than another or to believe that a behavior is actually improving. C.S. Lewis stated it very succinctly:

"If things can improve, this means that there must be some absolute standard of good above and outside the cosmic process to which that process can approximate. There is no sense in talking of 'becoming better' if better means simply 'what we are becoming' -- it is like congratulating yourself on reaching your destination and defining your destination as 'the place you have reached'" (Lewis, God in the dock, p.21).

Lewis also concluded:

"There is such a thing as a real Right, *independent of what people think*, and that some people's ideas get nearer to that Right

than others" (Lewis, Mere Christianity, p.25, emphasis added).

This fallacy is not new. Jesus recognized it in his day and confronted it in Matthew chapters 5-7. The religious leaders lowered the divine standard (objective ethic) to a human standard (subjective ethic) in order to appear to have "good morals" and to rid themselves of feelings of guilt. They said that the act of adultery was to be considered morally wrong, while Jesus said that a preoccupation with lustful thoughts was immoral. Jesus knew that a preoccupation with lust alone would damage a marriage relationship, even if it were not physically consummated. Jesus defended the belief that ethics must be objective and transcendent. He was making it clear that we do not create ethical standards—we discover them. The transcendent, objective view of ethics is the only philosophically justifiable view to hold, to believe otherwise is a category mistake. I know you will see this to be true if you think about it.