Jesus was "resurrected" by Pilate: introduction to the Yeskovian framework for interpretation of New Testament events

"When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."
- Sherlock Holmes

"The Romans are very effective in moments of crisis at propitiating both gods and men, and in such situations they regard no rite that has this purpose as unbecoming or undignified."
- Polybius

In 1995, a heavy-duty anti-Christian counterapologetic work called "The Gospel of Afranius" [1] by pro-Western liberal Russian paleontologist and popularizer of science Kirill Yeskov came out (in Russian) and was soon even praised in prestigious science journal "Nature" [2] as such, and it became popular and award-winning in Eastern Europe (as noted e.g. by Richard Carrier [3]). (A note on its author's name: "Eskov" is the Latin transliteration and "Yeskov" is the pronunciation spelling - like "Jesus" and "Yeshua".) I (a Ukrainian in the US with a B.Sc. in mathematics from MIT and an MA from UW-Madison) read Yeskov's counterapologetic in my childhood, as the first work on Jesus and New Testament questions that I have ever encountered, and as the result it is in effect my "native religious belief" - I am a "fundamentalist Yeskovian" since childhood (and, on a personal note, I find it more "existentially desirable" than Christianity as it does not contain eternal torture in Hellfire).

Upon coming to the United States to study, I was astonished by the contrasting local religiosity, became interested in the religious debates, and discovered, to my even greater astonishment, that Yeskov's work was never translated into English (I guess that's because of how extremely charged and contrarian it is - at first Yeskov couldn't even publish it in Russian!) and his whole explanatory framework is completely unknown. (Nor does it have any Western "convergently evolved" equivalent either - a very rare situation!) Eventually I decided to take it upon myself to present Yeskov's work to the Western audience, as sort of Yeskovian "Saint Paul" to the Westerners (or Marty McFly - "it's an oldie where I come from"), to which end I translated it into English (the reference [1] is my translation, approved by Yeskov and published on his public writings webpage) and wrote this complementary introductory article, heavily based on [1] (and not self-contained without it) with some additions and clarifications.

In a nutshell, his thesis is the following: Pontius Pilate ordered to stage the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as a "reverse Zersetzung" operation to strengthen and reinvigorate Jesus's sect and supporters,

which constituted a passionate movement unusually tolerant of Roman presence and more comfortable with peaceful coexistence with the Roman authorities than a violent revolt. And indeed, a few decades later Jewish-Christians did not participate in the Jewish War - so his only mistake was not secretly promoting Christianity in Palestine even harder, if that was even possible, which, as will be seen below, is doubtful.

This thesis is fundamentally based on the conjunction of the following two assumptions (and, secondarily, on some direct supporting arguments):

1) Atheism is true (or, less specifically, Christianity is false - miracles are impossible, eternal torture in Hellfire is absurd, and any other such assumption will suffice; in fact, the Yeskovian framework is perfectly compatible with Judaism or Hinduism, not only atheism, and I have seen this work quoted as a respectable source in a Russian-language Jewish forum);

2) The historical evidence and available information actually does indeed lead to the conclusions advocated by Christian apologists, such as death of Jesus on the cross, emptying of his tomb (and that its seal was broken, and that its guards were sent running in terror), the physical sightings (and even a dinner together) by the disciples and many other people, and so forth.

Speaking of the second premise above, a Yeskovian like myself would simply note that Western atheists agree with apologists "in the wrong place" - that these assumptions lead to the conclusion that miracles happened - and consequently debate them about wrong subjects too, that these assumptions are wrong. That is, among the two theses

a) The historical conclusions mentioned above are true,

b) These conclusions imply that miracles happened,

a Western atheist would primarily object to a), whereas we would primarily object to b).

Yeskov's explanation then follows from these two statements as the only possibility, up to minor details, compatible with them. A lot has been said in depth in defence of each of these two premises individually (by the way, each one of them is incompatible with Islam) by people smarter and more knowledgeable than myself, thus I will not spend any more time on either of them in this article; Yeskov, however, is the first person to point out that they do not contradict each other, and in fact, one can get highly nontrivial productive results by accepting them both. (But even someone who doubts either premise may still find [1] and this article to be of interest as explicitly demonstrating that there is no such thing as a proof of God from history. In particular, there have been numerous cases of Western unbelievers converting to Christianity based on erroneously believing that there is such an inference, e.g. Josh McDowell and Lee Strobel, and it is my hope that now this issue can be put to rest - if you or someone you know is in danger of "slipping" like that, introduce them to the Yeskovian framework.)

And vice versa, Yeskov's explanation naturally entails truth of premises 1) and 2), both simultaneously - in particular, that apologists are simply right in their historical conclusions (which is accepted without question both in Yeskov's original work and in this article; on a somewhat personal note, just one example among many of something that convinces me of premise 2 is the incident at Antioch, a petty and embarrassing quarrel between Paul and Peter by influence from James, honestly described by Paul - this is hardly anything but truth, but then it follows that Peter existed and Paul closely interacted with him, and the information concerning Peter's and James's sightings, among others provided by Paul, has to be taken seriously; or simply take the obvious point that a "chain of mass hallucinations" simultaneously doesn't fit the evidence and is even more unlikely, and besides that it doesn't even begin to explain the empty tomb). Due to this to a Westerner, a believer or not, Yeskovianism must look most literally outlandish. (Yeskov does admit, unlike any Western atheist, that one does really need to go extra hundred thousand miles if one wants to adequately address the historical points of Christian apologists - but with an emphasis on "if", with there being nothing wrong with saying "I don't know", as the truth of their final conclusions can be evaluated without diving into their arguments.) Being utterly alien to the discussion, however, is of course not an argument for falsity; and if one is worried about "flimsiness" (to use William Lane Craig's word describing, in his view, a shared feature of all counter-proposals to the resurrection) of Yeskov's objection, a short reflection will convince one that it is actually the most indestructible objection possible, since a combination of conspiracy and coincidence can bend reality arbitrarily and explain any story, no matter how strange.

An important remark is in order. As the saying goes, "man will readily believe in the impossible, but almost never in the improbable", and in the case of the origin of a major religion, this is particularly misguiding: new efficient viruses typically appear precisely through rare and unlikely mutations, but since they spread, we hear about them, no matter how unlikely those mutations were (another related example: someone out there somewhere winning a ten-digit jackpot is something that happens not too frequently, but it does happen and we do hear about those remarkable cases, precisely because they are remarkable; in either case we can *expect* to hear about things that are *unlikely*). Moreover, in the case of religions, one should not underestimate the rationality of their followers, especially first and early followers - there had to be something that really *gets* normal human beings with adequate rationality (or at least one, but in a way that then gets others), and that cannot be a ho-hum one-liner. (To put it bluntly, the single most fundamental obstacle for Western atheists is the trap of thinking that their opponents are not very intelligent. Not really - other than for young-earth creationists. It's more that life is actually really hard and tricky - containing everything possible; don't underestimate reality! - and people make mistakes. Not all of which are forgivable, however.) For example, Buddha was a raja's son in a "Truman show", talk about "that's *ridiculous*!" Thus, while Christians wrongly accuse atheists of an anti-magic bias (but in reality the explanations for "magic tricks" such as those of David Copperfield are precisely extremely convoluted and highly non-obvious rather than "it was simply a miracle, don't overcomplicate it"), one does need to steer clear of anti-ridiculousness

bias. By the very nature of these things (not just Christianity), any explanation for them that is not ridiculous (which, needless to say, is utterly different from miraculous) is just not going to really cut it and not how things work. There is simply no qualitative difference between extremely unlikely sequence of changes in the hosts and DNA/RNA needed to produce a new powerful virus and extremely unlikely events and circumstances needed to produce a new powerful mental virus. To drive this point home, there is in fact a direct analogy between the origin of Christianity and that of the recent pandemic coronavirus, with clandestine deliberate enhancement procedures (Pilate) followed by an unlikely and unforeseen "escape from the lab" (Paul).

As an interlude before diving into the material, a few historical notes on the origins of Yeskov's work might be of interest. It and Yeskov's story is similar to but more intense than that of "The Case for Christ" by Lee Strobel, and, in my opinion, no less worth of a movie on its own. Yeskov's inalienable close personal friend, who he deeply respected and with whom he worked together, shoulder-to-shoulder, every day (who, completely coincidentally, later became a celebrity of his own as a rock star and poet - his name is Sergey Kalugin), earnestly and sincerely tried to persuade and convert Yeskov, arguing based on the resurrection of Jesus. Yeskov embarked on a quest to prove him wrong - with striking similarities to the case of Lee Strobel and his wife. After four years of intense research (Yeskov describes the moment when he got the idea itself in a dramatic scene [4]) he published this book and gave the first signed copy to his friend, and remained a staunch unbeliever ever since - but now, finally, to his friend's satisfaction. This work soon proved fundamental in his career and helped launch him to the status of a celebrity writer (outside of Russia he is well-known to Tolkien fans), major liberal pundit and thought leader, and communicator and popularizer of science - so much so that it is fair to say that now he is the most direct Russian analog of the likes of Richard Dawkins (I myself first became his fan as a child after reading his popular book on evolutionary biology and paleontology, and then I saw "The Gospel of Afranius"), Bill Maher, and Phillip Pullman; but even his Live Journal nickname, and a part of his fan email address, is "afranius", in fond memory of this fundamental work - to the framework of which we now return.

Direct evidence

The most direct piece of evidence for an impersonation (and not by a twin!) is the appearance on the Lake of Gennesaret, where the disciples didn't recognize Jesus - as John tellingly remarks, even after they arrived ashore, "And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?", for they knew it was the Lord." This speaks for itself. And this, as [1] notes, is also an ultimate example of something that is overwhelmingly more likely true than not by the embarassment criterion, a strong argument in favor of premise 2 (not only 1) above on its own, as well. (The reason they had no problem identifying him as Jesus in this case, besides his words, is because they already knew from their and others' previous experience that resurrected Jesus can shapeshift somewhat; [1] infers that in fact resurrected Jesus was played by two actors - one a closer lookalike, and one better prepared doctrinally.)

The second (and last) bit of completely "unsubtle" evidence is the fact that the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his own mother Mary, who he cared about so much when dying on the cross, is absent - it is not recorded in Paul's list of appearances, or in John's Gospel (written by someone who lived with Mary for years and took care of her), or in the other Gospels. But this is truly off, if he resurrected, and incomprehensible by both mind and heart - on the other hand, of course, an actor trying to fool the subject's own mother that he is her son would be something most prohibitively risky (and not too necessary).

Besides this, Yeskov shows how the detailed structure of the appearances (their order, circumstances, and witnesses) is extremely naturally explained by his framework, while being left to "God's wisdom" on the traditional approach. There are also many other subtler arguments in favor of the Yeskovian framework in [1] - for example, Pilate not executing the tomb's guards for its emptying in violation of the corresponding rules, contrasted in particular with Herod following the rules and executing Peter's guards after his disappearance (and, as a side remark, it stands to reason that the force that enabled Peter to escape has to be the force that emptied Jesus's tomb - and that the suspiciously non-supernatural-looking "angels" seen by women at the tomb and another one that freed Peter have the same "boss").

Another bit of direct evidence (for someone agreeing with premise 2 but not necessarily 1) comes from the behavior of the guards of the tomb. Of course, among the earthly powers no one but the Romans had the ability, physical or legal, to open the sealed and guarded tomb. On the other hand, if the guards really saw an angel descending from heaven to open the tomb (they wouldn't abandon their assigned post, the penalty for which is death, because of something like a natural-looking earthquake, for example) and/or it miraculously opening by itself and Jesus walking out of it alive, etc, there would be no force that would be able to make them profusely lie about it or take the bribe to conceal the truth - they would fall on their knees, literally or figuratively, and become one of the primary witnesses for the truth of Christianity (note that in this case they could also be sure that they are not insane since more than one person saw the same things). Thus by exclusion it had to be the Romans after all, however exactly that happened ([1] gives a detailed account and concludes that the guards were not "in on it") - and, as has been extensively argued in the apologetic literature, the force that made the tombstone roll off is the force that resurrected Jesus.

And for someone agreeing with premise 1 another thing to consider is the sheer implausibility of this story being this (extensively, intensively, and essentially) phantasmagorical, in records this early and/or direct, "naturally" - for example, contrast this with paucity of the miracles of Muhammad. If deliberate shenanigans are not excluded (and why would they be?), this is a strong suggestion that at least some things here were "planted", in one way or another. And if there are any things here that are planted, then, in turn, it is more plausible than not that most if not all of the most fantastic and crucial ones are.

Comparable occurrences

Random rogue prankers, for no reason more serious than just to mess with people for fun, have created infamous "crop circles", sometimes so extremely elaborate and subtle that they have even fooled some specialists as being humanly impossible to create.

Stasi, East Germany's secret police, had a secret Zersetzung program for non-conspicuously downtrodding and "psychologically degenerating" political undesirables, which included religious sects (e.g. Jehova's Witnesses). It was highly individually tailored and among other things casually went to absolutely ridiculous(-by-design) lengths to mess with the target's mind, often profoundly, precisely because nobody in their sane mind would believe that a secret agent broke into their house without leaving a trace just to reset their alarm clock, or make a kitchen towel vanish, or move a minor item from one place to another, etc - and yet that is precisely what happened. (By the way, I myself have once gaslighted a person, just as a prank, to the point of unrelenting distress and him completely seriously thinking about aliens. I know how easy it is to deliberately melt someone's mind. For closure it must be added that I did a reveal, not to worry - and this article is another one.) One can only imagine what could happen if we merely "change the sign" without changing the approach or methods, if instead of psychologically downtrodding a politically undesirable sect they decided to "uptrod" a politically desirable one. Or rather, one doesn't need to imagine anything here - one can simply open the Bible and read about it.

Polybius notes that one of the two main reasons for Senate's decision to wage war against Dalmatians in mid-second century BCE was psychological, "to renew eagerness and enthusiasm of their own people" [5, p. 233] (as "they did not wish the men of Italy to be in any way made effeminate by the long peace"). It is known that the Romans weren't above dirty manipulations for the sake of the Empire, e.g. as [5] notes many times, they often made alliances with the enemies of those who they wanted to attack next, to have a noble pretext - defending allies - for initiating this attack; in this case, again, psychological considerations were important (p. 236): "they took care not to *appear* to be responsible for unjust acts or aggression, but always to *seem* to be acting in self-defence". (For example, with Rome's encouragement King Massinissa attacked Carthage, forcing it to defend itself and enter a war with him, a Roman ally, which gave Rome a formal pretext to invade and destroy it.)

The activity of Roman special forces, particularly in the ridiculously tense atmosphere of pre-Jewish-War Palestine (viscerally presented in [1]), is also a fact - as Josephus notes, "spies were everywhere in the cities and villages, laying in wait for all sorts of gatherings", some people were "disappeared", etc.

Stalin's famous doppelgangers demonstrate that the secret service can find and train a lookalike of a person of interest, as close as needed, given enough time. (In fact, if Pilate's men had the idea of Jesus's doubles for a long time, not only would the recognition be smoother but we would probably see records of "teleportation miracles" - Jesus being seen in different places within short intervals of time, i.e. test runs of these doubles - so it can be inferred that the "resurrection" was prepared in haste and not planned even weeks in advance. By the way, even

if exactly perfect recognition was required, we could assume, following a suggestion by R. G. Cavin, that Jesus had an identical twin brother, switched with another baby in the cradle, so that no one knew about him, but the Romans found him and used him as the impersonator. While implausible, the only reason we can be sure this is actually impossible - that nothing like this happened - *is because the Bible itself indicates that it didn't*, in other words, because this is directly counterfactual steelmaning. However, this non-example helps emphasize the point that *combination of conspiracy and coincidence can explain any strange story* without recourse to miracles.)

It is no secret that Russians have disinformation troll farms operating in English for the Western audience (and the US government has acknowledged operating such in Arabic and other middle-Eastern languages) for the advancement of their political interests (or, more precisely, of Putin's will). It would be strange if the Romans didn't do anything similar - e.g. spreading favorable rumors via "active measures". In particular, a rumor and special measures (speaking of which, everyone knew that Jews were particularly into religion, so one way to try to get to them was through religious stuff) campaign by order of Pilate in support of a particular favorable Messiah candidate brings to mind the memories of the recent example of Putin ordering his hackers to nontrivially support Donald Trump during the 2016 US presidential election campaign, with tangible consequences. But even just the underappreciated possibility of some information in the Gospels deriving from deliberately planted rumors ([1] contains detailed arguments for some specific examples of this) is something that would already have serious consequences for New Testament studies - to say nothing of the fact that once one internalizes this one thought, the rest of the Yeskovian framework soon follows with unstoppability of an avalanche.

What about...

The usual approach by apologists to a counterproposal to the resurrection - and the Yeskovian framework is a counterproposal to *everything*, not just the resurrection, so this applies only more so - is to point out some inconsistency with existing evidence and information, and that, indeed, debunks it. Thus, below, miscellaneous things will be considered with the intent of showing how they fit into the framework while being consistent with known information.

...miraculous healings?

I am more skeptical than Jesus Seminar about the possibility of there being this many people with neurosomatically healable diseases. One very legitimate-looking example of this is Ananias healing Paul's temporary blindness - but this is probably the only actual example of this in the New Testament. If the resurrection was fake, then it inevitably follows that the same is true for everything else - in particular, Jesus never actually healed anybody (a standard technique intimately familiar to someone from the former Eastern Block like myself and Yeskov - multiple repetition of a falsehood makes people think, it can't all be wrong, right? - but it's simply equally untrue every time), and the explanation is fake cripples and sufferers, "miraculously healing" upon coming in

contact with Jesus (as a side effect also increasing his own faith in himself in the process), as memorably scoffingly portrayed in a very similar context (minus the "healer" not being in on it) in antireligious Soviet movie "St. Jorgen's Day" - [6] - watch this, and then read Acts 3:1-10. And some reports could be simply exaggerated and misinterpreted (e.g. the woman who touched Jesus's clothes believing she'd feel better, feeling better as a placebo effect, with essentially her pre-existing faith more than anything else getting manifested and reported in the end - or the daughter of Jairus, who simply was nowhere near dead; by the way, in both of these cases Jesus himself comments along these lines; and there is just not much certainly happening when we're told that Jesus cured Peter's mother-in-law of fever and she got up and served them - there could've just been not that much fever and she could've just been nice, "I'm good, young man, let me help you around!") - or, again, fake-witnessed/rumored. Speaking of fake witnesses, there is no reason they couldn't get creative with "visual demonstrations" too, e.g. presenting to others the "miraculously produced" fish and bread in "support" of their claims that Jesus miraculously fed many people (that's what I would do, at any rate). By the way, could this added "convincing power" of this "miracle" be the explanation why it "happened" several times? Likewise, the very reason why there is such an amount of healings here - by contrast, Muhammad, John the Baptist, Moses, or any other prophet is not known for this - is because it is an easily stageable "miracle", and one that speaks to people and adds popularity.
Note how it is explicitly indicated that Jesus didn't perform many miracles while in his home town because of their lack of faith; indeed, it would be both the riskiest and least efficient to try to recruit and activate fake cripples and miracle witnesses among Jesus's kin and acquaintances (who, in particular, saw him grow up and work as a carpenter, all without miracles) rather than random strangers in dynamic places where people come and go and don't know everybody.
In short, there was a force behind his miracles - but it wasn't God.

...the disciples' expectations?

The very reason that the guard was put at the tomb is because everybody, even the Sanhedrin, knew that Jesus promised to resurrect (and the women later "recalled his words", and John even believed in the resurrection when he merely saw the empty tomb) - more precisely, Jesus believed that the Messiah would resurrect on the third day "according to [his understanding of] the Scriptures", and that he was the Messiah. It's not that the disciples believed in this (the first part) - clearly, they considered this bit an outlandish embarrassment (before the appearances; I would even say they were expecting it less than the followers of Rebbe Schneerson do - who, by the way, was also even more unusually Gentile-positive - and nicer overall - than Jesus, even doing Noahide outreach) - but when somebody promises to resurrect *and then actually shows up* that's quite something, isn't it? (In turn, what could have influenced Jesus's mind to the point that he would actually believe he can resurrect is seeing people magically heal in droves upon him touching them.)

...the resurrections of Lazarus and of the widow's son?

Echoing Renan, [1] explains the resurrection of Lazarus as a staging by the sisters of Bethany - at the instigation of Judas (see below), since it is more likely that this, too, was a Roman staging and not a completely independent one.

The resurrection of the widow's son does not appear to have any reliable witnesses (like John in the case of the resurrection of Lazarus), and given that it doesn't even appear in two out of three synoptic Gospels (nor in the Gospel of John) it is simply a rumor.

...Judas?

An own man inside the organization of interest is obviously a good idea. For example, in this case it cannot be financially supported overtly - however, if that man is its treasurer, then it can still be directly supported financially (say, he can lie that he is accepting donations from known open sympathizers like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea). Another example is that he could then be the direct organizer of most miracles (or at least he would be named as such), so that if things go south, the responsibility would lie on a single overzealous dishonest disciple promoting his adored teacher too much, and the conspiracy would not be uncovered further to its far more sensitive and consequential layers. And so on (intel, communications, protection, "witnessing miracles" - only a disciple in the boat could "witness" Jesus walking on water, if it wasn't started as a more indirect "I saw a guy swear he saw..." rumor - and so forth).

This also gives a fundamental explanatory advantage for the motive of his betrayal: from the beginning he wasn't with Jesus by his heart's calling, but for years on end he was betraying and lying to his own people, hired by foreign occupiers. No surprise that a person under this much psychological pressure and acting with extreme bad faith could eventually defect to his own natural camp - the Sanhedrin, maybe under some additional push ([1] speculates that he was about to get busted by the sisters in connection with the resurrection of Lazarus).

...the voice of God the Father that Peter, John, and another apostle heard?

One will be no doubt surprised to read these words in this article, especially after the above, but this is the one miracle of Jesus that has nothing to do with the Romans - and everything to do with the miracles of Muhammad. (As one can see, correctly explaining this whole story is very challenging indeed and requires nontrivial flexibility of mind.) The detailed explanation is given in [1], in a nutshell it is as follows. Joseph, who was simply Jesus's actual father, legal and biological (however, following a suggestion in [1] one can hypothesize that Jesus might have a close maternal-side ancestor who was a Roman soldier named Panthera; if true, this could nontrivially contribute to Jesus's heightened tolerance towards the Romans - which is the ultimate factor that got this story started), was one of the two people speaking to Jesus, "Moses and Elijah", and later, when leaving, he briefly addressed the disciples too - from inside of mountain fog, and Peter misunderstood who the words belonged to. This is a "natural miracle", a "miracle by

misunderstanding", that one expects to occur once in a while among people with very religious mindsets in the story of any intense guru. For example, here we can substitute Jesus with Muhammad, who has two comparable examples of "public miracles" - namely, splitting of the Moon, and a public conversation with angel Gabriel, the latter witnessed firsthand even by caliph Umar. The former can be explained as Muhammad pointing towards a picturesque illusion of the Moon's disc being "split" into two parts by a dark silhouette of something in-between, not visible by itself (say, the trunk of a date palm, or whatever) - "fancy, right?" - and the religious followers gasping thinking he's showing them that he has split the Moon (plus in later retellings, the distance between the two halves could grow more and more). The latter can be explained as a stranger paying Muhammad a visit and "deeply agreeing" - "man, you're so right, respect!" - with it being now no less religiously-minded Muhammad himself who misinterpreted him as Gabriel. The most important point here is that *this* is the normal expected natural "intensity of miracles per unit time". Now open the Gospels.

...passing through the walls?

Suddenly appearing in a dark room as if one teleported through the walls (a natural enough interpretation for someone capable of resurrecting!) is no miracle. Consider furthermore the reliability of attention (and/or memory, etc) of somebody pertaining to something secondary when *seeing resurrected Jesus for the first time*. It is well-known in astronomy that stars and other objects right next to a particularly bright star are very hard to see and study; the obvious perceptual analog of this effect hasn't been mentioned enough, on the other hand.

...John's fish?

The point just made also applies when considering the strength of John's focus on and recollection of the fish - in light of seeing resurrected Jesus right there. But besides that, it is very suspicious when the author of the number of the beast, 666, which he self-admittedly received directly from God, writes with precision over sixty years after the fact that there were exactly 153 fishes. John might've compensated natural uncertainties of memory with a bit of divine inspiration here, too (plus a bit of theological understanding - surely there should've been a dramatic difference before and after the suggestion). Note how to harmonize his belief in a massive catch with Peter dragging it successfully, John casually postulates another miracle - miraculous firmness and resistance to tearing of the net (mentioning which further attests to his sincerity, by the way, albeit such an additional confirmation is really not needed). A simpler explanation is that there wasn't anything in the net that could tear it. The sequence of events was more likely than not like this: the disciples didn't catch much (but perhaps not exactly nothing either), and when "Jesus" appears, as a conversation starter he suggests trying to fish in a different place. After the first catch in a new place, John, very helpfully, "realizes" who the stranger is, and the rest is history (and if they didn't haul the net into the boat it's certainly not because it was physically impossible - Peter later dragged it alone without any problems - but because after hearing John's startling announcement they, like Peter, naturally dropped

interest in fish and immediately started going to the shore; John might've even seen the moment somebody was starting to pull the net in - followed by his "realization" and announcement - and then dropped it, and John misinterpreted it).

...Paul?

When discussing Paul, the best framework to understand what happened is that someone out there somewhere at some point of time became a passionate preacher of Christianity to everyone they met, and put like this, it is not improbable - even though particular individual circumstances that would lead to this would be; again, it is not improbable that someone out there wins a lottery, and at the same time it is true that any particular such win story would be unlikely. Say, another possibility how it could have happened to someone else, an "alt-Paul", is his only beloved little daughter having a desperate medical condition, full of suffering, and then being indeed-unlikely "healed in the name of Jesus" - that could get a person. And yet another possibility is having an equivalent of Lee Strobel's experience; speaking of which, as was mentioned before, the origin of Yeskovianism itself is such an unlikely mutant branching origin event! (And so am I, apparently.)
An even heavier case is Muhammad, who most definitely also had visions and "communications from above", even more impressive than those of Paul, and started passionately preaching monotheism - another example of the sheer force of "someone out there somewhere at some point of time wins a lottery" effect.

Note, by the way, that the relative ease with which there appeared someone who preached Christianity *to Gentiles* has to be evaluated in the context of the general relatively Gentile-tolerant nature of Christianity from the start (imagine someone trying to directly sell "raw uncooked" Moses to Gentiles, for example - that's just a contradiction of terms), which is what got the whole thing started and what got Jesus "resurrected" in the first place, so these things are not uncorrelated.

...Rome's knowledge?

Careful containment of crucial information on a need-to-know basis is essential when dealing with sensitive matters. For example, when I interned as an analyst at a hedge fund, our Options team had no idea what the Futures team down the hallway was doing, and vice versa; I imagine it is not very different in the intel. There is simply a nonzero chance that the Emperor wasn't aware of this, especially of the operational details (though he might've been told about a tacitly supported movement - or maybe not even that, the Romans were no strangers to having a conspiracy that their boss didn't know about, just ask Julius Caesar).

...corroborating physics arguments?

W. L. Craig recalls his surprise at the fact that, when he traveled to the Soviet Union and presented there his Kalam cosmological argument for God (1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause; 2. The Universe began to exist; 3. Therefore, the Universe has a cause) the overwhelming

reaction was simply to deny premise 2, and that was the end of the conversation. Myself being just such a "Soviet atheist", that is precisely my reaction too (and among religions, Jains concur) - what do you mean the world as a whole had a beginning? you can't get rid of time! - and I find it useful to briefly list some explicit possible models of the whole eternity of natural history, if nothing else to stop Craig's often-repeated claims that they are physically impossible - how can something obvious be impossible?

One very easy folklorish counterexample that somehow, almost unimaginably, escaped Craig's attention, is that of production of Universes by budding from "quantum foam" (simplifyingly illustrated e.g. in [7]) in another past-eternal empty macroscopically flat and static progenitor Universe. There are no entropy issues here since whether the newly forming Planck-scale "bubble" successfully disconnects and then evolves into a new Universe (via quantum-tunneling to a state with inflation, for example - this idea is well-known too; likewise their "string landscape" parameters might then set randomly, etc), or dissolves back, either way it vanishes without a trace from the point of view of the mother-space, which remains "ever-fresh". (I emailed the one "dissenting Soviet atheist", A. Vilenkin, and even he acknowledged in his reply to me that a macroscopically static flat empty Universe may well be eternal.)

One can further add many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics on top of this, which would remove any unrealized contingencies and make this model exactly homogeneous with time (so then it only appears to us different at different times because we look at it from different places and "branches" - just like, a world with nothing but a flying spinning wheel is actually exactly the same at all times, and we only detect complex motion because of looking at it under different angles at different times). So, exactly one overall world of all possibilities, (thus) exactly the same at all times, and (thus), being never-changing, it is also automatically eternal. Done!

And that's not even remotely the only possible way it could be. Say, another obvious counterexample is one with a past-eternal phase of contraction - namely as a 2+1-dimensional contracting compactified empty Milne space; it has to be two-dimensional and empty because otherwise it is subject to various instabilities, but in 2 dimensions vacuum is famously automatically rigid, in particular, there are no gravitational waves or gravitons (hence the interest of physicists in the BTZ black hole, for example) - no room for instabilities and nothing that can blueshift, and the contraction would proceed just fine. After that, once it reaches the Planck scale and quantum gravity kicks in, so that it no longer meaningfully contains classical space, it could be a seed for a new Universe - say, if the "space atoms" idea is correct, this could be likened to a thin solid film thawing into a liquid voluminous droplet, only with space itself being the film and the droplet. This is naturally handwavy, as quantum gravity is not well-understood, but the relevant past-eternal phase is not quantum-gravitational, and in any case good luck indeed to an apologist trying to positively prove this wrong.

And these counterexamples can just be continued (e.g., extremely in a nutshell, as this is getting superfluous, another one is two particles approaching each other from past-eternity, and when they finally collide, Big Bang), they are a dime a dozen - unlike the correct explanation for the resurrection of Jesus, which the available information specifies uniquely up to minor details.

...existential problems?

I don't actually know, to be honest, if it's theoretically possible for someone to ever wake up with a new body. Seems unlikely. But if it is, I bet that the first thing they would see is technicians in labcoats - like near the beginning of the movie "Avatar". And come to think of it, would these future people want to give the undeserved gift of another shot at life to someone hate-preaching fire and brimstone (and anyone else known for spoiling people's lives)? Talk about getting *cancelled*! And for all you know - remember, everything is recorded these days - this might indeed be what will decide your ultimate fate: one politically incorrect tweet or pronouncement, or any other record of being an unpleasant guy, and you're out forever!

(Just like with Yeskov's explanation, I find it hard to believe that no atheist has ever put forward this obvious "reverse Pascal's wager" before, but I guess there is always a first guy to do something.)

Final comments

The maximum task of this article is to present (to the Western audience) the framework capable of finally establishing what really happened in this story; as one can see, Yeskovianism has a uniquely comprehensive "anti-theology". The minimum task is to prevent reoccurrence of the absurd claims that the resurrection of Jesus (or any miracle) can be demonstrated from historical evidence. These claims have already vanished where I'm from; hopefully, now this effect can be replicated in the West.

I want to add two more personal notes. Firstly, as a response to the efforts by his Evangelical nurse to last-chance convert him, on his deathbed my dear atheist grandpa explicitly rejected Jesus and mocked Christianity. Thus I am certain that he is not going to Heaven, no matter what - obviously - so I am not so much worried about myself not going to Heaven either; on the other hand, falsity of Christianity dawned on me as by far the lesser evil to hope for. If somebody convinced me that Jesus was resurrected, after all, then it would be by Satan.

Secondly, speaking for all atheists. Intellectual defenders of the Christian faith such as W. L. Craig and M. Licona (unlike, for example, most Muslims) do absolutely have the basic crucial concept of "too much" - for example, things like The Gospel of Matthew's mass resurrection of holy people (disbelieving in which got Licona fired), the talking donkey from the book of Numbers, Noah's Ark, young-earth creationism, "firmament", literalism of Genesis (let alone Apocalypse), and so on and so forth are "too much" for them - but resurrection, ascension (by the way, where? to Saturn? "to infinity and beyond"?), walking on water, feeding of the five thousand, and so on *ad nauseam* are "not too much"?

It should not be hard for them to understand, therefore, that someone else might draw the line a little differently, and consider these things "too much" as well - and that's putting it very politely; apologists should not confuse lack of engagement with undefeatability, the reasons for it are far more prosaic.

Conclusion

In short, as youtubers say, "It was just a prank, bro. Relax."

> "Don't worry, honey, I can explain *everything*!"
> - the punchline of a racy joke about Stephen Hawking

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