

Version 3: Spring 2026

Introduction + Intellectual Virtue

01 Introduction to Apologetics and Intellectual Virtue

APOLOGETICS IS GIVING A DEFENSE FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE

We all believe things. Sometimes, we find others disagree. Any time we are asked to explain ourselves for what we believe, that is called *apologetics*. This can be over trivial matters. Ask any sports fan who is the Greatest Of All Time (GOAT): LeBron or Jordan? Brady or Manning? Schumacher or Senna¹? You'll get his reasoned defense or, in Greek, his *apologia*.

More often, an *apologia* has weightier subject matter than sports statistics. Originally, the term was used in connection with a formal legal defense against accusations. In 399 BC, Socrates was put on trial for impiety and corrupting the youth of Athens. *The Apology of Socrates* is Plato's version of the trial and the defense that Socrates gave before the Athenian court. Despite the modern connotations of "apology", Socrates did not say he was sorry - quite the opposite².

Early Christians often found themselves in similar situations, being accused of atheism, cannibalism, incestuous dinner parties, disloyalty to Rome, irrationality, and many other improprieties. In response, men such as St. Justin Martyr composed sophisticated *apologiae* to combat these claims. His *First Apology* (ca. 155 AD), addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius and the Roman Senate, sought to defend Christian practice by providing a transparent account of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, Justin argued that Christians should be judged for their actions rather than their label, maintaining that Christ's fulfillment of ancient prophecy and His identity as the *Logos* (Divine Reason) vindicated Him as the true Son of God over against all pagan competitors.

Justin is often credited as the first "Apologetist", but he was not doing anything new. He was simply following the directive and example of the Apostles. In his First Epistle, St Peter says:

"Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to **make a defense [apologia]** to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." - 1 Pet 3:13-16 (ESV)

Every generation of Christians is called to give such a defense. While the cultural questions and social pressures may change, the fundamental necessity remains. The question is not *if* you will be called to give a defense, but rather: Will you be ready?

APOLOGETICS IS THE FRUIT OF INTELLECTUAL DISCIPLESHIP

¹ Answer key for those playing at home: Jordan, Brady, Prost

² This is why when my wife is upset with me, I'll tell her "I owe you an apology" then launch into a detailed oratory argument proving I have done nothing wrong.

One of them, a lawyer, asked Jesus a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” - Matt 22:35-6 (ESV)

In other words, we should love God and follow Jesus with everything that we are. This can be expressed as three areas:

- Discipleship of the Heart - character and showing fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:23-24)
- Discipleship of the Hands - service and meeting material needs (Jas. 2:14-17)
- Discipleship of the Head - intellect and reason (2 Cor. 10:5, Titus 1:9): This includes a well-rounded knowledge of doctrine, theology, history, exegesis, etc.

When spreading the kingdom of God through evangelism, we will encounter a variety of challenges from those who think that Christianity is not something worth believing. Meeting those challenges is the goal of **apologetics**.

APOLOGETICS MUST BE DONE WITH INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE

THE THREE GOALS OF APOLOGETICS

1. Show **that** God is to the atheists.
2. Show **what** God is to the pagans.
3. Show **who** God is to the heretics.

TREAT ALL DOUBTERS AS SINCERE

Some people doubt and disbelieve because they have rebellious hearts. However, this is not always the case. Following the instruction in Jude 22 to be “merciful to those who doubt” and 1 Peter 3:15 to answer with “gentleness and respect”, it is best to **treat all questioners as sincere seekers of truth**. For three reasons:

1. Comfort for Curious Christians: The Bible really is confusing and questions can be a sign of a faith growing into intellectual maturity. We should not confuse growing pains with sin.
2. Sympathy for Sincere Seekers: We should not preemptively judge sincerity, for only the Lord knows their heart and we do not know how God has been working in their life.
3. Opportunity for Ornery Objectors. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Prov. 15:1) Responding to an angry objection with sincerity and gentleness can provide opportunity for introspection and de-escalation of the conversation.

Emotional intelligence (discussed in Module III) is critical for doing apologetics correctly. “If I speak with the tongues of men or angels but have not love, I am a clanging cymbal.” - 1 Cor. 13:1

Apologetics - from *apologia* (Greek) meaning to give a reasoned defense for what you believe

DISCUSSION

Why is gentleness and respect essential when we talk with non-Christians about what we believe? Have you ever seen a Christian do this without gentleness and respect?

HOMEWORK

Read and analyze Acts 17:16-34 where St. Paul delivers a masterful example of apologetics.

1. Who is St. Paul speaking to?
2. St. Paul's core argument is vv. 22-31. Reconstruct his argument in your own words.
3. How does he establish common ground with his pagan audience?
4. How does he challenge their assumptions?
5. Was he successful? Why or why not?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

-  *Thinking About Christian Apologetics* by J. K. Beilby
-  R.C. Sproul: The Task of Apologetics
-  Foundations of Christian Doctrine Part 2: Why Study Christian Apologetics? | Willia...
- See “Apologetics Resources” in the Appendix

KoG

KoG - RE

KoG - Cosmo

KoG - Design

KoG - Moral

New Testament

Resurrection

Delay

PoE

Version 2: Summer 2025

Equipping the Saints: Apologetics

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01 What is Apologetics?

APOLOGETICS IS GIVING A DEFENSE FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE

Apologetics - from *apologia* (Greek) meaning to give a reasoned defense for what you believe

“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to **make a defense [apologia]** to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” - 1 Pet 3:13-16 (ESV)

Apologetics is a fruit of **intellectual discipleship** – not an end of itself!

INTELLECTUAL DISCIPLESHIP IS LOVING GOD WITH ALL YOUR MIND

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02 Can We Know God Exists?

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS BOTH BASIC AND EVIDENTIAL

W.K. Clifford once said “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence”. At first glance, this may seem reasonable. But, upon closer inspection, it collapses into an unsustainable infinite regress: I would need evidence for my evidence and evidence for that evidence and so on. There must be at least some things we know without evidence or we would never know anything! This non-evidential knowledge is called **basic** because it forms the base layer or foundation of our knowledge.

Basic belief - something that is taken to be true upon immediate reflection or awareness; it is not something that is “argued to” but something that is “argued from”

Some examples of basic beliefs include

- I exist
- My back hurts
- The world was not created 5 minutes ago
- Other minds exist outside of my own
- I ate blueberry pancakes for breakfast this morning

These beliefs are formed by properly functioning cognitive faculties such as perception, memory, sense experience, etc. None of them are formed on the basis of argument or evidence, nevertheless, we are warranted in believing them. This is in contrast to **evidential** beliefs.

Evidential belief - something that is taken to be true on the basis of external objective third-person accessible information, i.e. evidence

Some examples of evidential beliefs include

- Water boils at 212°F
- Antibiotics can kill bacteria
- Julius Cæsar crossed the Rubicon on January 11, 49 B.C.
- There are 193 member states of the United Nations
- The defendant's fingerprints were found on the murder weapon

Beliefs can be both basic and evidential support. For example, suppose you purchased breakfast this morning and have a receipt for the meal. The receipt isn't necessary for your knowledge as you are warranted on the basis of your memory alone. If someone asks you what you had for breakfast, you can show the receipt as a piece of objective evidence as opposed to your subjective memory. Several years from now, the receipt can jog your hazy memory. Your

belief about your breakfast can be warranted from both your basic memory and the evidential receipt.

Knowledge of God is much the same way. While there are sophisticated arguments and evidence for the existence of God, you can know God exists in a basic way.

WE HAVE BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THROUGH THE *SENSUS DIVINITATIS*

Human beings show a natural inclination to believe in gods of some sort³. Similar to our cognitive faculties of perception, memory, and sense experience, we can conceive of a cognitive faculty designed by God to lead to direct knowledge of Him. John Calvin called this the *sensus divinitatis*.

“That there exists in the human mind and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity [*sensus divinitatis*], we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead...this is not a doctrine which is first learned at school, but one as to which every man is, from the womb, his own master; one which nature herself allows no individual to forget.” - Calvin, Institutes 1.3.1-3

Various circumstances can activate the *sensus divinitatis*. Gazing deep into the night sky, one may be awestruck at the incomprehensible size and beauty of the universe, then resonate with the Psalmist who wrote ‘the heavens declare the glory of God!’. Following an immoral act, one may be saddled with guilt and awareness of divine disapproval. These immediate beliefs result in a knowledge of God without need of argument or evidence⁴.

Scripture indicates that this knowledge of God can occur early in life. David writes “Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God.” (Psalm 22:9-10, ESV)

Application 1: You don't need evidence to be a rational Christian.

Most believers do not form their belief in God on the basis of a dispassionate evaluation of evidence. You probably know a sweet old grandma who has no formal education or awareness of technical philosophical arguments, yet fervently believes in God. Through the *sensus divinitatis*, God has made a way for Grandma to know Him.

However, some people do not have as strong a sense of God as others. Objective evidence can serve as supplementary support for times when God seems distant or for skeptics who do not trust their sense of God. This is the distinction between knowing that God exists vs. showing that God exists.

³ Studies in modern cognitive science of religion have produced some evidence corroborating a natural inclination or predisposition for humans to form beliefs about gods. See *Born Believers* by J. Barrett and *The Believing Primate* by J. Schloss and M.J. Murray (eds.) for more.

⁴ “Reformed Epistemology” is the technical term for the concept of innate knowledge of God through the *sensus divinitatis*.

Application 2: You don't need a conversion story to be a faithful Christian.

American evangelical culture puts a strong emphasis on Christians having a strong testimonial or intense conversion experience. So much so that some Christians who have not had such experiences begin to doubt the sincerity of their faith. If you are a Christian who has always known God for as long as you can remember, you are perfectly normal. Make Psalm 22:9-10 your own and thank God for His lifelong faithfulness.

WE HAVE EVIDENTIAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THROUGH NATURAL THEOLOGY

God has left testimony to himself in the created world that we may discern through the use of natural reason. This is called **natural theology**.

Natural Theology - knowledge of God acquired through rational reflection of the created world, independent of divine revelation

The central theme of natural theology is that **God is the best explanation of things**. As Francis Turretin puts it

“God, the wonderful artificer of the universe, has so deeply stamped upon all its parts the impression of his majesty that what was commonly said of the shield of Minerva (into which Phidias had so skillfully introduced his likeness that it could not be taken out without loosening the whole work) has a far juster application here. God cannot be wrested from nature without totally confusing and destroying it.”, Francis Turretin, Institutes of Elenctic Theology I.3.1.v

Let's consider two stories about the world: theism and naturalism. **Theism** says that there exists an all-powerful, all-loving, all-knowing God who created the world and everything in it.

Naturalism says there is no God nor anything like God, just a material/physical universe that is indifferent to us.

Many sophisticated philosophical arguments have been developed to show that God exists⁵. For the sake of brevity, we will consider six (6) features (three about our world and three about our minds), that are better explained if God made our world for us and us for our world.

Our world is contingent.

Consider why anything exists. Most things in our day-to-day life have some kind of external explanation for why they exist. Why is there a stain on the couch? Because someone spilled chocolate milk. Why is there a couch? Because it was manufactured by IKEA. And so on. Now consider the totality of everything that exists, a “blob of everything”. Does the blob of everything have an external explanation? Well, no. By definition, there is nothing external to the blob, else it

⁵ Dr. Chad McIntosh is working to create a comprehensive taxonomy of all the arguments defended in print in peer-reviewed philosophical literature. Thus far, he has cataloged 150+ individual unique arguments grouped into 14 families. For details, see McIntosh CA. Nontraditional arguments for theism. Philosophy Compass. 2019;14: e12590. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12590> and his companion website camcintosh.com/theistic. The formal arguments in this booklet have been pulled from Chad's work.

wouldn't be the blob of everything. So, we have an interesting paradox: everything that exists has an external explanation but everything-that-exists doesn't have an external explanation.

Things that have external explanations or depend on something else for their existence are **contingent**. Things that are explained in and of themselves or are independent of anything else for their existence are **necessary**. Can the whole of contingent things be explained by other contingent things? It seems not. Consider a thought experiment: moonlight comes from reflecting sunlight, that is, moonlight depends on the sun. What if instead of the sun, there was another moon which reflected light from another moon which reflected light from another moon and so on for infinity? This does not explain where the light is coming from. Similarly, contingent things depending on other contingent things which depend on others and so on does explain existence. There must be a terminus in something that does not depend on anything else, that is, a necessary being.

God, especially the Christian God, has always been understood as the self-sufficient, eternal, uncreated ground of being (see Psalm 90:2; 102:25-27, Isaiah 40:28, John 1:1-3, Acts 17:24-25)⁶. In the philosophical literature, theism remains the most robust and coherent account of necessary existence⁷.

We can summarize this argument from contingency as follows⁸:

- (1) For any particular concrete things, there is an explanation of the fact that those things exist.
- (2) Considering all the concrete things that exist, if there is an explanation of the fact that those things exist, then there is a necessary concrete being.
- (3) Therefore, there is a necessary concrete being.

Our world is fine-tuned.

The fundamental constants and parameters of the laws of physics appear to be exquisitely balanced to allow for the existence of life. Even slight variations in these values, such as the strength of gravity, the electromagnetic force, or the initial conditions of the Big Bang, would render the universe inhospitable to any form of life. For example, if the expansion rate of the Big Bang was slower by 1 part in 10^{60} , the universe would have collapsed on itself and cosmic evolution would have never started; no chemistry, no planets, nothing⁹.

Naturalism says that the universe is ultimately indifferent to our existence; however, that means the probability of a life-permitting universe on naturalism is incomprehensibly low. Theism says that there is a cosmic designer who purposefully ordered the universe to allow for our existence.

⁶ Islam also shares this view of Allah, see Quran 2:255, 7:54, 20:111, 112:1-4.

⁷ Alexander Pruss, *Infinity, Causation, and Paradox* pg. 192

⁸ Alexander Pruss and Joshua Rasmussen, *Necessary Existence*, ch. 3.

⁹ This is a rough description of the fine-tuning of Λ . See "List of Some Fine-Tuned Parameters" in the Appendix for more technical explanation and additional examples.

We can summarize this argument from fine-tuning as follows¹⁰:

- (1) The laws and constants of nature as we know them are fine-tuned, i.e. vanishingly few will permit intelligent life.
- (2) If naturalism is true, a life permitting universe is enormously improbable – ultimate reality (nature) is indifferent to our existence.
- (3) If theism is true, a life permitting universe is not improbable – ultimate reality (God) desires a world with creatures such as ourselves.
- (4) Therefore, the existence of a finely-tuned life permitting universe is strong evidence for theism over naturalism.

Our world is discoverable.

The remarkable intelligibility and discoverability of the physical world has been noted by numerous scientists and others. Philosopher Mark Steiner concludes that the universe “looks ‘user friendly’”. Several of the free parameters that govern the livability of our universe also discover its discoverability. For example, the cosmic microwave background (CMB) is a field of low-level radiation emitted from the Big Bang. It is a critical tool to our understanding of the universe and has been called the “Rosetta stone of cosmology”. However, if it were less intense by one part in 1 billion, it would not be detectable and we would (literally) be in the dark about the origins of our universe.

We can summarize this argument from discoverability as follows¹¹:

- (1) The values of certain physical constants fall within the discoverability-optimality range within the life-permitting range.
- (2) If naturalism is true, it is enormously improbable that our universe would be discoverable – ultimate reality (nature) is indifferent to our ability to learn about the world.
- (3) If theism is true, it is not improbable that our universe would be discoverable – ultimate reality (God) desires us to learn about His creation.
- (4) Therefore, the discoverability of our universe is strong evidence for theism over naturalism.

Our minds are physically reliable.

There is remarkable alignment between our mental states and physical states. Our subjective experiences are consistently correlated with our physical bodies and behaviors in ways that appear surprisingly well-coordinated. For example, the experience of pain corresponds to bodily damage and motivates us to avoid harm, while feelings of pleasure align with beneficial

¹⁰Luke Barnes "A Reasonable Little Question: A Formulation of the Fine-Tuning Argument." *Ergo* (2019)

¹¹Robin Collins, "Fine-Tuning for Discoverability," in Walls and Dougherty (eds.), *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 89-107.

activities. We take this for granted but we have to appreciate that from the outside world, our subjective experiences might as well be hallucinations in our head.

This “psycho-physical” harmony – where our conscious experiences provide us with appropriate motivations and information that align with our physical needs and actions – is unlikely to have arisen by chance under a naturalistic worldview. Instead, it is more plausibly explained by the existence of a designer who intentionally created this connection between mind and body.

We can summarize this argument from psycho-physical harmony as follows¹²:

- (1) Mental states are connected to physical brain states by psycho-physical laws which correspond to physical reality (i.e. there is psycho-physical harmony).
- (2) If naturalism is true, it is enormously improbable that our mental states would correspond to physical reality – ultimate reality (nature) is indifferent to what goes on inside our minds.
- (3) If theism is true, it is probable that our mental states would correspond to physical reality – ultimate reality (God) desires us to have meaningful interaction with the world around us.
- (4) Therefore, psychophysical harmony is strong evidence for theism and against naturalism.

Our minds are rationally reliable

We are able to form beliefs and cognitively reason our way to the truth about a great many matters, even complex abstract truths like metaphysics and calculus. It is rather peculiar that we should have cognitive faculties that lead us to true beliefs. If our cognitive faculties evolved solely through natural selection, their primary function would be to produce behaviors that help us survive, not necessarily beliefs that are true. Our cognitive faculties would not be helping us identify beliefs that are true, but beliefs that are adaptive (if they are helping form our beliefs at all). This undermines our confidence in the truth of any belief. As Charles Darwin noted,

"With me the horrid doubt always arises, whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy" - Charles Darwin, *Letter to William Graham July 3, 1881*¹³

We can summarize this argument from rational reliability as follows¹⁴:

- (1) Our rational cognitive faculties are reliable for producing true beliefs.

¹² Brian Cutter and Dustin Crummett, “Psychophysical Harmony: A new Argument for Theism,” Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion (2022).

¹³ For the context and history of this quote, see Wollen, Amos. "Darwin's 'horrid' doubt, in context." History and philosophy of the life sciences 43.1 (2021): 22.

¹⁴ Alvin Plantinga in *Knowledge of God* (Blackwell, 2008), pp. 1-70, Tyler McNabb, *Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge, 2018)

- (2) If naturalism is true, it is enormously improbable that our rational cognitive faculties would be oriented to forming true beliefs – ultimate reality (nature) is indifferent to what we believe.
- (3) If theism is true, it is probable that our rational cognitive faculties would be oriented to forming true beliefs – ultimate reality (God) desires us to come to true knowledge.
- (4) Therefore, our having reliable rational cognitive faculties is strong evidence for theism over naturalism.

Our minds are morally reliable

Some humans have arrived, or are able to arrive, at a body of moral belief that is largely accurate and complete. For example, we know kicking babies for fun is wrong. But if naturalism is true, the content of our moral intuitions is explained by biological-evolutionary processes or social conventions adopted for pragmatic reasons. If this is the case, our moral intuitions were selected for their utility, not their truth, and therefore we have no reason to think they are true. On the other hand, if theism is true, then God, who is the foundation of morality, has shaped our minds to come to true moral knowledge. As St. Paul says,

“When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” - Romans 2:15 (ESV)

We can summarize this argument from moral knowledge as follows¹⁵:

1. We have moral knowledge (e.g. we know kicking babies for fun is wrong).
2. If naturalism is true, it is enormously improbable that our moral intuitions closely correspond to moral truth – ultimate reality (nature) is indifferent to our moral beliefs and motivations.
3. If theism is true, it is probable that our moral intuitions closely correspond to moral truth – ultimate reality (God) desires us to have the correct moral beliefs and motivations and has inscribed the moral law on our hearts.
4. Therefore, moral knowledge is strong evidence for theism and against naturalism.

Conclusion: God is the best explanation

Let's now review our stories of theism and naturalism in light of these six features.

In the theistic story, there is a necessarily existing God who is the foundation of all contingent reality. He created the universe and precisely fine-tuned it so that we could live in it and discover the mysteries of his creation. He fashioned us to be rational and moral creatures who can seek

¹⁵ McKay, Noah D. "Moral knowledge and the existence of god." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 94.1 (2023): 25-42.

after Him. Thus, the crowning achievements of humanity, such as our scientific advancement and moral growth, are reflections of He who made us to image Him.

In the naturalistic story, these features become confusing. Either there is a necessarily existing something or all of reality terminates in brute inexplicability, both of which are bizarre. A universe that is ostensibly indifferent to us just so happens to be finely-tuned for our existence and for our scientific inquiry. In the vast array of possible mind-body configurations, we just so happen to evolve into minds that track physical truth as well as nonphysical moral truths. Thus, we are either incomprehensibly lucky or experiencing illusions fobbed onto us by evolutionary history.

In conclusion, the naturalistic story raises more questions than it answers whereas the theistic story gives a coherent explanation for the world and our place in it. Turretin's assessment is vindicated: God cannot be wrested from nature without totally confusing and destroying it. Therefore, God exists¹⁶.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Beginner (B), Intermediate (I), Advanced (A)

Reformed epistemology

- “Recent Work in Reformed Epistemology” by A. Moon in the Appendix
- “Plantinga Animated Videos” by Center for Philosophy of Religion on YouTube (B)
- *Knowledge and Christian Belief* by Alvin Plantinga (B)

Natural theology

- *How Reason Can Lead to God* by Josh Rasmussen (B)
- *A New Theist Response to the New Atheists* ed. by Vallier & Rasmussen (I)
- *Is God the Best Explanation of Things? A Dialogue* Josh Rasmussen & Felipe Leon (A)

¹⁶ A note of intellectual honesty: The narrative I provide here may seem triumphalist. Do I really think that naturalism is hopelessly confused and incoherent with zero good arguments? No, of course not. What I've presented here is a version of “strict naturalism” that is representative of popular or lay-level atheism (e.g. Richard Dawkins, Bill Maher, Carl Sagan, etc). For discussion of sophisticated theistic and naturalistic explanations, see *Is God the Best Explanation of Things?* by J. Rasmussen & F. Leon; chapters 6-7 cover varieties of theism and naturalism including more plausible alternatives to the “strict naturalism” I've discussed here.

03 Can We Trust the New Testament?

In the previous section, we discussed belief in a generic creator God. To get to Christianity specifically, we need to discuss his self-revelation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Almost everything we know about Jesus comes from the documents collected into the New Testament.

THE NEW TESTAMENT IS EARLY

When it comes to ancient history, we are often dealing with spotty sources. For example, we have five main sources for the life of Alexander the Great, all of which were composed between ~300-500 years after his death¹⁷. By comparison, the entire New Testament was composed within less than 100 years after Jesus. The dating for the books is highly debated, below are the generally accepted ranges in scholarship.

Date (AD)	Book	Date (AD)	Book
40-60	James	62-66	Titus
48-55	Galatians	50-70	Mark
50	1 Thessalonians	65-68 or 90-110	2 Peter
51	2 Thessalonians	60-80	Matthew
54	1 Corinthians	60-80	Luke
55	2 Corinthians	60-80	Acts
57	Romans	90-100	John
60-62	Colossians	90-100	1 John
62	Philippians	90-100	2 John
62	Philemon	90-100	3 John
62	Ephesians	60-90	Jude
62-64	1 Peter	90-96	Revelation
60-70	Hebrews		
62-66	1 Timothy		

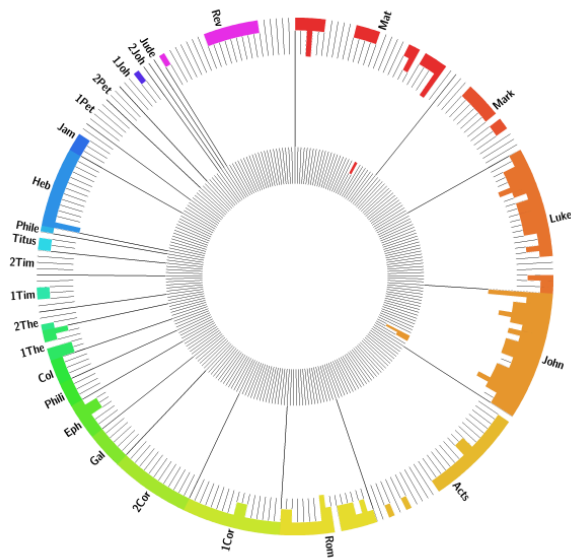
Even if we accept the “late” date of 70 A.D. for Mark, that is only 40 years removed from Jesus’s ministry and well within living memory. Additionally, we have several epistles which predate Mark. Unfortunately, we do not have any of the original copies of the New Testament documents. All we have are copies of copies of copies, none of which agree with each other. How do we know that the text we have today is the same text as the original?

THE NEW TESTAMENT IS TEXTUALLY TRUSTWORTHY

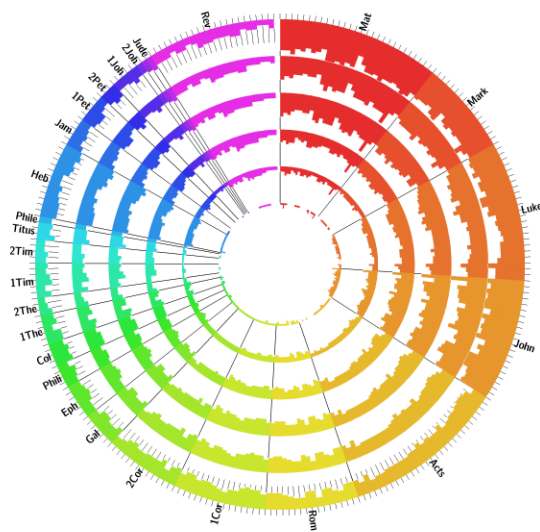
Before the printing press, written works were hand copied, producing manuscripts. There are approximately 5,800 Greek manuscripts of New Testament documents, including everything

¹⁷ Alexander died in 323 B.C. Our sources are Arrian’s *Indica* (ca. 125 A.D.), Plutarch’s *Life of Alexander* (ca. 100 A.D.), Quintus Curtius Rufus *Historiae Alexandri Magni* (ca. 50 A.D.), Diodorus Siculus *Bibliotheca Historica* (ca. 40 B.C.) and Justin’s *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus* (ca. 200 A.D.)

from a tiny fragment up to entire codices of all 27 books. The earliest fragment is P52, a small piece of papyrus containing 9 verses from the Gospel of John, dated to ca. 125 AD (or about 30 years after it was written). The earliest near-complete collection of all 27 books is Codex Sinaiticus, dated to ca. 330 AD (or about 230 years after the final book was written). Since there is variance in manuscript coverage, how much and how early individual books can be reconstructed varies. The image below shows which chapters of which books have manuscript attestation in the 100s AD (inner circle) and the 200s AD (outer circle).



The Gospel of John has the highest coverage with double (nearly triple!) attestation of the whole gospel. Some of the minor epistles have no attestation at all. There are more manuscripts of Luke than the Pauline epistles, but they are more fragmentary. As we go later, the coverage gets better. Below is a chart starting in the 200s AD (inner circle) going out one century at a time to the 700s AD (outer circle).



To put this into perspective, some of the most important sources for 1st century Rome are Tacitus's *Annals* and *Histories*, both of which only have a single damaged manuscript from the 11th century. Another major source, Josephus's *Antiquities*, only has about 150 Latin copies, all from the 11th-14th century. The only other work of antiquity with remotely the same textual basis as the New Testament is the *Iliad* with around 2,000 Greek manuscripts, the earliest fragment coming about 300 years after the original composition.

When we compare the manuscripts together, no two are exactly alike. There are textual variants, and lots of them, approximately 500,000 non-spelling variants¹⁸. The vast majority of the variants are so minor as to not even be worth mentioning. Two representative examples:

"But I say to you, love your enemies, [bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you], and pray for those who [spitefully use you and] persecute you." - Matt. 5:44 (some manuscripts omit the bracketed text)

And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those [who preach the gospel of peace,] Who bring glad tidings of good things!" - Romans 10:15 (some manuscripts omit the bracketed text)

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the variants are easily identified from the original. The modern critical text is what underlies most modern English translations (e.g. ESV, NIV, NASB). If you look in the footnotes, you'll occasionally find textual critical notes where the translators note a variant reading of a particular verse. There are three major variants that every reader of the New Testament needs to know: Woman Caught in Adultery (Jn. 7:53–8:11), the Long Ending of Mark (Mk. 16:9-20), and the Comma Johanneum (1 Jn. 5:7-8).

The earliest and best manuscripts of John do not include the famous story of Jesus delivering the woman caught in adultery from stoning. In some manuscripts, the story is relocated elsewhere in John and sometimes moved to Luke, indicating it is a floating story. The consensus of scholarship is that it was not original to the Gospel of John. Most modern English translations will bracket it or include a note to this effect.

Likewise, the earliest and best manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark do not include the longer ending but stop at verse 8. Some manuscripts include a short ending. There is intense debate as to whether the original ending was lost or if later scribes were simply unsatisfied with Mark's abrupt ending. The consensus of scholarship is that the longer ending was not original to the Gospel of Mark. Most modern English translations will bracket it or include a note to this effect.

In the *Textus Receptus*, the Greek manuscript underlying the King James Version of the Bible, 1 John 5:7-8 reads

"For there are three that bear record [in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth], the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." (1 John 5:7-8 KJV)

¹⁸ Gurry, P. (2016). The Number of Variants in the Greek New Testament: A Proposed Estimate. *New Testament Studies*, 62(1), 97-121.

The section in brackets is the “Johannine Comma” which has a strikingly explicit reference to the Trinity. The earliest and best manuscripts of 1 John do not include the bracketed text but only reference the Spirit, water, and blood as witnesses.

Some people will argue that variants like this prove the New Testament is unreliable, but it's quite the opposite. Because we have so many early manuscripts, we are able to root out these textual accretions with a high degree of certainty. Consequently, we can be highly confident that the text in our New Testament is the same as the originals¹⁹.

THE NEW TESTAMENT IS HISTORICALLY AUTHENTIC

The Gospels share many features with the genre of Greco-Roman biography²⁰, a standard form of ancient literature meant to tell the story of notable people. Authors of these biographies and related histories often emphasized the importance of eyewitness accounts, as did the Gospel authors. Compare this passage from Polybius with the opening of Luke's gospel.

“This I considered to be the best starting-point, because in the first place, Aratus's book terminates just at this period and I had decided on taking up and carrying on the narrative of Greek affairs from the date at which he leaves off, and secondly because the period following on this date and included in my history coincides with my own and the preceding generation, so that I have been present at some of the events and have the testimony of eyewitnesses for others.” - Polybius, *Histories* 4.2.1 (ca. 120 B.C.)

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” - Luke 1:1-4 (ESV)

However, the biographers did not cite their sources the way we do today. Ancient historians prioritized the uninterrupted flow of their narratives. They avoided constant first-person interjections like “I saw” or “I learned” as impractical and disruptive. Instead, they employed various techniques that subtly implied firsthand observation or thorough investigation. These techniques maintained the narrative's momentum while continuously reminding the reader of the historian's research process. Notice how Plutarch subtly mentions his source for Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon.

“Withdrawn and silent, [Caesar] spent a long time mentally torn between two alternatives, and even at this late stage his intentions fluctuated wildly to and fro. Then he spent an equally long time voicing his doubts to those of his friends who were with him (who included Asinius Pollio), with a tally of all the troubles that their crossing of the river would initiate for the whole world, and with reflections on how the great tale of it would be their legacy to subsequent generations.” - Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 32.6-8

¹⁹ For more, see Elijah Hixson & Peter Gurry (eds.), *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism* (2019)

²⁰ Richard Burridge, *What are the Gospels?* (2004)

Similarly, the Gospel authors strategically include personal names in the narrative that indicate their eyewitness source.

“And [Jesus] said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”” - Luke 24:17-18 (ESV)

Traditionally, Simon Peter has been attributed as the primary eyewitness behind Mark’s gospel. His name is prominent throughout at key points in the narrative from the beginning (Mark 1:16) to the end (Mark 16:1-7). Mark uses similar strategies when describing the resurrection as Plutarch describes crossing the Rubicon. Both events are crucial to the narrative, yet inspire skepticism in the reader. The chief source of the work (Caesar for Plutarch, Peter for Mark) does not provide the eyewitness testimony, so a third-party attestation is required (Pollio for Plutarch, Mary & Mary & Salome for Mark).

“When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary [the mother] of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him...When they looked up (*anablepsasai*), they observed (*theorousin*) the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw (*eidon*) a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look (*ide*), there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see (*opsethe*) him, just as he told you.”” - Mark 16:1,4-7 (ESV)

Notice the emphasis on the women “looking”, “observing”, “seeing”, etc. Mark is drawing our attention to their role as witnesses. Further, Mark concludes with emphasis on Peter as a bookend to Peter at the introduction, reminding the reader of the Petrine grounding of his gospel. This literary activity is a sign of historical authenticity²¹.

A second indicator of historical authenticity is the distribution of personal names throughout the narratives. Specific names tend to be popular in particular geographical areas over certain periods of time. In the USA from 1954-1998, “Michael” was the #1 name for baby boys (except 1960 where it was #2) and had an unbroken streak in the top 10 from 1943-2016. That’s over 70 years of total Michael domination. Chances are you know a Michael or two, but how many do you call just “Michael”? You probably have “Michael from work”, “Michael from church”, “Plumber Mike”, “Mikey B.”, or “[Last Name]”. These clarifiers disambiguate which Michael you’re talking about, e.g. “I asked Michael from church and Michael B. what they thought about this Sunday School booklet”²².

If I were to ask you to write a fictional story set in the 21st century USA, you’d probably be able to pick a pretty convincing list of character names – just go through your phone contacts and

²¹ For more see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* 2ed. (2017)

²² This is a true story. I know too many Michaels. Did you know that in Japan, the stereotypical name for an American is Michael? There’s even a song called “So Many Mike” by Japanese band Peeland-Z. Please don’t name your children Michael, together we can end the Michaelomania.

you'll have a representative sample. But imagine if you had to write a story set in Germany in the 15th century. That's a much harder task if you're not intimately familiar with the time and geography. You would have the challenge of not only avoiding anachronistic names but distributing the names of your characters according to popularity.

We have a lot of data regarding the popularity of names among different Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean in the 1st century. The names that were popular among the Roman Jews were different from those in Egypt and Judea. If the Gospels were authentic documents written to describe the world of 1st century Judea, we would expect the cast of characters to fit the naming conventions of the time and place. This is exactly what we see.

The most popular Jewish male name in Judea was Simon, accounting for roughly 7% of all boys. When we look at the 79 named men in the Gospels, 8 of them (10%) are Simon. Further, each one is introduced with a disambiguator: Simon Peter, Simon the Zealot, Simon the Leper, Simon of Cyrene, Simon the Sorcerer, Simon Iscariot, Simon the tanner, and Sim(e)on called Niger. Conversely, when rare names are mentioned, it is uncommon for the gospels to disambiguate. We can see this in the list of the 12 disciples in the Gospel of Matthew. Parentheses denote the popularity ranking.

"The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon (#1), who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James (#11) the son of Zebedee, and John (#5) his brother; Philip (#61) and Bartholomew (#50); Thomas and Matthew (#9) the tax collector; James (#11) the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus (#39); Simon (#1) the Zealot, and Judas (#4) Iscariot, who betrayed him." - Matthew 10:1-4 (ESV)

All of the most popular names have disambiguators and those without are all rare; this pattern is a mark of authenticity.²³ Conversely, many gnostic gospels purporting to be from the disciples do not pass this test. The Gospel of Judas contains names like Adam, Babelo, and Yaldabaoth which were common among Egyptian Jews but not those in Judea.

Additional Resources

- Wes Huff's "Can I Trust the Bible?" series on YouTube (B)
- *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament* by Craig Blomberg (B)
- *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (2ed.) by Richard Bauckham (I)
- *Myths & Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism* by Hixson and Gurry (eds.) (I)

²³ For more see Van de Weghe, Luuk. "Name Recall in the Synoptic Gospels." *New Testament Studies* 69.1 (2023): 95-109 and van de Weghe, Luuk, and Jason Wilson. "Why Name Popularity is a Good Test of Historicity." arXiv preprint arXiv:2403.14883 (2024).

04 Did Jesus Rise From The Dead?

Early Christians were Second Temple Jews who believed Jesus was the messiah because he was resurrected from the dead. The origin of this belief and the community founded around it is best explained by the historical fact that Jesus was actually resurrected from the dead. As St. Paul says “if Christ is not raised, then your faith is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14). Conversely, if Christ has been raised, it is extremely difficult to see how any other worldview besides Christianity could be true. Therefore, the resurrection is a compelling argument for the truth of Christianity. Let’s start our discussion by introducing the world of Second Temple Judaism.

SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM AND THE MYSTERY OF A CRUCIFIED MESSIAH

The First Temple (Solomon’s Temple) was constructed ca. 950 B.C., as the central place of Israel’s worship until it was destroyed ca. 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar II’s Babylonian empire. Jews were carted off into exile until the Persian Empire toppled Babylon with Cyrus the Great issuing an edict for the Jews to return home and rebuild the Temple. Due to his role in restoring the national fortunes of the Jews, Cyrus is designated as the Lord’s anointed one or “messiah” (Isaiah 45:1).

The Second Temple was completed ca. 515 B.C. and stood as the central identifier for Judea even after its destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D. It wasn’t until the Bar Kochba revolt (ca. 135 A.D.) that the Jews lost hope of rebuilding their Temple and turned to Torah as their center of devotion. The failure of Simeon bar Kochba signaled the shift from Second Temple Judaism to Rabbinic Judaism. Thus, “Second Temple Judaism” refers to Judaism from approximately 500 BC to 150 AD.

Solomon’s Temple had a visible manifestation of the glory of God (1 Kg. 6:11-13), but the Second Temple did not (Ezra 3:12-13). The Jews largely felt abandoned by God, under the dominion of foreign empires, and still in spiritual exile. The Old Testament prophets (chiefly Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) taught that the exile and return were contingent on the Jews’ disobedience and repentance, respectively. Some Jews became disillusioned because they had repented and had returned, yet they were still under the dominion of foreign empires. In response, an apocalyptic school of thought emerged which held a much more fatalist perspective. They believed everything was out of our hands, demonic forces were at work, and there’s nothing they could do until the end of the world. Apocalyptic literature flourished during the Second Temple period. Many influential and pseudepigraphical works were written under the names of Biblical characters including 1-3 Enoch, Apocalypse of Abraham, Apocalypse of Moses, and many more.

In 167 B.C, the Greek emperor Antiochus IV launched an intense anti-Jewish campaign. He laid siege to Jerusalem, robbed the Temple treasury, and converted it into a shrine for Zeus. As Josephus reports

“For Antiochus the unexpected conquest of Jerusalem, the looting, and the wholesale slaughter were not enough. His psychopathic tendency was exacerbated by resentment at what the siege had cost him, and he tried to force the Jews to violate their traditional codes of practice by

leaving their infant sons uncircumcised and sacrificing pigs on the altar. These orders were universally ignored, and Antiochus had the most prominent resistors butchered." — Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Book 1.34–35

It was under the oppression of Antiochus that Jewish hope in the resurrection began to become more pronounced. There were vague hints at resurrection in the Old Testament (e.g. Ezek. 37 and Dan. 12), but it became much more pronounced in the Second Temple period as illustrated in the story of the Mother of Seven Martyrs:

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king [Antiochus IV], under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. 2 One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, "What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors."...10 After [the first and second brothers were killed], the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, 11 and said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again." 12 As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing. 13 After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. 14 When he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!" - 2 Maccabees 7:1-2,10-14

In response to Antiochus, Judah Maccabee led a successful military revolt that culminated in an independent Jewish state (the Hasmonean kingdom) that lasted for a century until Rome took over Judea in 63 B.C. The success of the Maccabean revolt is celebrated in the holiday of Hanukkah. Messianic expectations were heightened as Judah Maccabee became the new face of restoring Judea's national fortunes, much like Cyrus had before.

When Jesus arrived on the scene ca. 30 A.D., Judea was a client state of Rome under the vassal king Herod. The Jews were hoping for a messiah in the vein of Judah Maccabee to overthrow their Roman oppressors, restore the Temple to pure Yahweh worship, and re-establish an independent Jewish empire. Thus, the label of "messiah" was political dynamite and hence the disciples inquiry in Acts 1:6: "Lord, at this time will you restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Two major parties dominated the politico-theological scene.

Sadducees were broadly the "establishment" group. They were in charge of running the Temple operations. Naturally, they were mostly content with the Roman/Herodian government that put them in power. They did not believe in the resurrection, rather, they taught that all the dead descend into the realm of Sheol ("the grave") never to return to physical life again.

Pharisees were broadly the "populist" group, observant of Temple, but more concerned with applying Torah to daily living; in this way, they were the precursors to Rabbinic Judaism. In

general, they hoped for a messiah to overthrow the imperial overlords, restore the kingdom of God in Judea, and taught the doctrine of resurrection.

Jesus aligned closer with the Pharisees in teaching a doctrine of resurrection as illustrated in his debates with the Sadducees (Luke 20:27-40) and his followers' expectation in the general resurrection at the end of days (John 11:21-24). But he aligned more with the Sadducees in prioritizing the written Torah over the oral Torah (Mark 7:8).

Jesus did not fulfill the messianic expectations that most people had. Rather than cleansing the Temple of Romans, he cleansed it of Jews. Rather than overthrowing Rome, he said pay taxes to Caesar. Rather than leading an armed revolt, Jesus told his disciples to put their swords away. Ultimately, Jesus was willingly crucified by the very oppressive empire everyone was hoping he would overthrow. As for being the messiah, Jesus might as well have been the polar opposite of Judah Maccabee.

In 66 A.D., the Jews got their new Judah Maccabee in a man named Simon bar Giora. He was a revolutionary leader in the First Roman-Jewish War and hailed as a messiah. Unfortunately, things could not have ended more disastrously for him. The Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. and bar Giora was publicly executed in Rome at the temple of Jupiter. Despite initial military success, his messianic career ended - as all other messianic careers - with his death.

But now, we have a mystery. Because even though bar Giora's messianic career was over, there were still some Jews clamoring about saying that Jesus of Nazareth was the messiah. A messianic movement led by a crucified criminal would be weird enough on its own, but even more mysteriously, Jesus's own brother, James, was hailing his dead brother as the messiah.

Political and messianic movements of the era routinely ended with the violent death of the central figure. Survivors of the movement then faced a choice: (i) give up or (ii) find a new messiah, typically a high ranking member or family member of the leader²⁴. Had the early Christians wanted to find a new messiah, James was the obvious candidate; he was a great and devout teacher and the central figure in the early Jerusalem church. But, he never took up the messianic mantle. As Josephus reports, James died as the brother of the "so-called messiah". That James was skeptical during Jesus's earthly ministry and only endorsed Jesus's messianic status after the crucifixion is even more peculiar. Something truly unique must have happened.

FIVE KEY FACTS FOR THE RESURRECTION

1. **Crucifixion:** Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. **Empty Tomb:** Jesus's tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers on the Sunday following his crucifixion.
3. **Appearances:** Very shortly after Jesus' death, groups and individuals had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and had appeared to them.

²⁴ Incidentally, this is what happened with the Maccabean revolt; Judah took up the mantle of revolt after his father was executed by Antiochus IV.

4. **Origin of Christian Belief:** Christians proclaimed Jesus as the resurrected messiah despite strong theological and political predispositions to the contrary.
5. **Martyrdom of Witnesses:** Witnesses of the resurrection were willing to suffer and die for their belief.

Evidence for the Crucifixion

That Jesus was crucified is easily the most historically certain thing we know about him. Nearly every single book and letter in the New Testament references the crucifixion²⁵. In fact, we have two independent attestations to the crucifixion outside of the New Testament, both from highly reliable historical sources for 1st century Judea.

“Therefore, to squelch the rumor, Nero created scapegoats and subjected to the most refined tortures those whom the common people called “Christians”, [a group] hated for their abominable crimes. Their name comes from Christus, who, during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate. Suppressed for the moment, the deadly superstition broke out again, not only in Judea, the land which originated this evil, but also in the city of Rome.” - Tacitus, Annals 15.44 (ca. 117 AD)

“At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man, *[if indeed one should call him a man]*. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among men of Greek origin. *[He was the Messiah]*. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. *[For he appeared to them on the third day, living again, just as the divine prophets had spoken of these and countless other wondrous things about him]*. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out.” - Josephus Antiquities 18.63-64 (ca. 95 AD)

*[bracketed text] indicates likely interpolations into the original text

Evidence for the Empty Tomb

The primary argument persuasive to most historians for the empty tomb is that the first witnesses are women. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and a few other women are consistently identified as the first ones to find the tomb and proclaim the resurrection (Mk. 16:1-8, Lk. 24:1-11, Mt. 28:1-7, Jn. 20:1-8).

Women as first witnesses is unlikely to have been fabricated because the general cultural expectation of the time was that women were considered unreliable witnesses and not valuable testators. Josephus describes the rules for admissible testimony in court: “Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex” (Antiquities 4.219). For the purposes of evangelism and persuading others, telling your audience that women were the principal witnesses would be embarrassing and reduce the resurrection to an old wife’s tale. We can see indications of wanting to downplay the women’s role in finding the tomb. When Paul

²⁵ James, 2 Peter, 2&3 John, and Jude are the only ones that don’t reference the death of Jesus.

lists the witnesses in 1 Cor 15:3-8, he puts Peter first and doesn't mention women. Given the purpose of Paul's argument to persuade his audience the resurrection is not some idle woman's tale, excluding the women makes sense for his rhetorical purpose. In the reverse, inventing women as the first witnesses would not make sense. Later fictional accounts, such as the pseudepigraphal Gospel of Peter, add in Roman male witnesses prior to Mary Magdalene going to the tomb. The simplest explanation is that the women were the first ones and this was an embarrassing historical fact for the prevailing attitudes at the time.

Evidence for the Appearances

The primary evidence for the post-mortem appearances comes from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Cor 15:3-8, Paul recounts the gospel using a creed which lists witnesses to the resurrection. This creed is widely regarded to be one of the earliest pieces of Christian literature, likely composed within 5 years of Jesus's death and delivered to Paul during his initial trip to Jerusalem following his conversion ca. 36 AD.

"...he appeared to Cephas [Peter]": While the appearance to Peter is not narrated in the Gospels, this is on solid historical ground given Paul's proximity with Peter (Gal 1:18) and corroboration with another independent tradition in Lk. 24:34, "the Lord has risen indeed and he has appeared to Simon!" and Peter's own proclamations in Acts 2:32, 3:15, 5:32, 10:39ff.

"...then to The Twelve": In addition to the aforementioned earliness and Paul's proximity with the disciples, appearances to The Twelve are independently attested in Mt 28:16-20; Lk 24:36-43; Jn 20:19-29; Jn 21:1-14; Acts 1:3-8; Lk 24:50-51.

"...then to more than 500 brethren": One of the more peculiar passages, it is likely that Paul is saying to his audience that these are witnesses to be questioned regarding the resurrection. There is no independent attestation in the Gospels, so the nature of the appearance is largely unknown.

"...then he appeared to James": It is likely that neither James nor any of Jesus's brothers followed him before the crucifixion (Mk. 3:21.31-35; Jn. 7:1-10). Yet, James became a pillar of the early Church, even being martyred. If James was doubtful of Jesus initially, the crucifixion would have only confirmed that Jesus was a false prophet. Such a turnaround demands explanation; a post-mortem appearance of Jesus would certainly provide that explanation and Paul's personal proximity with James (Gal. 1:19, 2:9) is good indication this tradition is reliable.

"...then to all the apostles": This account is not narrated in the Gospels. Acts 1:3 references Jesus appearing to the apostles over a period of 40 days which may be what this is alluding to. Like the appearance to the 500, this is somewhat shrouded in mystery.

"...last of all, he appeared to me [Paul]": The crown jewel of the evidence, Paul is a firsthand, eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus and recounts how his Damascus road experience changed him from a persecutor of the Church to one of its greatest Apostles.

In addition to Paul's list, we can add Mary Magdalene as a historically reliable witness. There are two independent attestations in Mt. 28:9-10 and Jn. 20:11-18. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, it is unlikely she would be invented as a witness.

Evidence for the Origin of Christian Belief

The early Christian movement arose as a mutation within Second Temple Judaism. There are several significant changes in belief that lead us to ask what caused the change. For brevity, we will focus on just three.

Resurrection moved from the peripheral to the central: While the Pharisees and Sadducees argued amongst themselves over this peripheral issue (see: Acts 23:1-10), the early Christians exhibited a unanimous belief in resurrection as the very center and foundation of belief. 1 Cor 15 showcases that resurrection is "of first importance" and without resurrection, a Christian's faith is "in vain".

Resurrection event is split in two: As 2 Macc 7 and John 11:21ff. highlight, the Jewish (i.e. Pharisaical) understanding of resurrection was a single event in the far future. But, in 1 Cor 15:20-28, Paul speaks of Jesus as the "firstfruits" of a future resurrection.

Resurrection as messianic vindication: Messianic expectations were politically charged and militaristic. No Jew ever conceived of the messiah being killed by the oppressors, let alone resurrected. As mentioned, the resurrection was a general event in the far future, not something an individual could experience now. Messiah and resurrection were previously unconnected concepts, but the early Christians hailed Jesus as the messiah because of his resurrection.

Evidence for Martyrdom of the Witnesses

Church tradition holds that all the apostles except John were martyred; however the historical evidence is spotty. We have really solid early evidence for Peter, Paul, James son of Zebedee, and James brother of Jesus. Less reliable evidence for Thomas, less still for Andrew, and the remaining apostles are far too late to be reliable. However, we can be confident that all of them engaged in mission work and were willing to suffer for it.

Paul: Martyred in Rome by beheading under Nero (64-67 AD).

Peter: Martyred in Rome by crucifixion under Nero (64-67 AD).

James, son of Zebedee: Martyred in Jerusalem under Herod Agrippa I (41-44 AD).

James, brother of Jesus: Martyred in Jerusalem by stoning (62 AD).

Thomas: Probably martyred in India.

Andrew: Plausibly martyred in Greece.

John son of Zebedee: Died of old age.

No historically reliable information is available for the fates of Phillip, Matthew, Thaddeus, Bartholomew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Matthias²⁶.

THE RESURRECTION IS THE BEST EXPLANATION OF ALL THE FACTS

Alternative accounts to the resurrection have been proposed to explain what really happened on Easter. Do any of them withstand scrutiny? Here are some of the more popular alternatives, critically examined.

Conspiracy: The disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb and lied about the appearances. One of the oldest theories that even shows up in Matt 28:12-15

- Does not account for conversion of Paul and James (unless they are added as conspirators which strains credulity)
- Does not explain why the disciples would invent the story about the women discovering the tomb
- Does not explain why the disciples sincerely believed in the resurrection even unto suffering/martyrdom; liars make poor martyrs
- Deeply implausible that the disciples would fabricate a resurrection given the typical route for failed Messianic movements was to just find a new Messiah
- Makes several unevidenced assumptions regarding the disciples intentions, state of mind, resources, and motivations

Apparent Death: Jesus appeared to die on the cross, but survived and resuscitated in the tomb.

- Does not account for conversion of Paul
- Absurd that a person could survive a crucifixion without immediate medical attention
- Does not explain the origin of belief in resurrection given that Jesus would be half-dead in need of medical attention
- Ultimately, it raises way more questions than it answers. What happened to Jesus when he died “for real”? Why would the disciples persist in resurrection belief after this second death? Why do the disciples only mention a 40 day sojourn with the risen Jesus?

Wrong Tomb: Women went to the wrong tomb which is why it was found empty.

- Does not account for conversion of Paul, James, or the other appearances to the disciples
- Does not explain the origin of resurrection belief; bodies go missing all the time, but that doesn't mean they were resurrected

²⁶ Summary results from Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles* (2016, Routledge)

- Selective with the evidence. It takes the visit to the tomb as historical but not the women noting its location; the messenger's words "He is not here" are literal, but not the explanation: "he is risen!".

Hallucination: Disciples had hallucinatory visions of Jesus after his death.

- Poor explanation of Paul and James, why would they have independent hallucinations?
- Does not account for empty tomb
- Poor explanation for belief in resurrection as post-mortem visions of the dead were confirmations of their death, not reversals of it. We see this play out in Acts 12:14-16: Peter is miraculously saved from execution; when he goes to visit his friends, they initially think it is "his angel" coming to tell them of his death.
- Appearances of Jesus do not fit the mold of hallucinatory experiences nor post-bereavement visions as there are multiple occurrences over a protracted time period to groups and individuals, including enemies like Paul
- Peter having an individual bereavement vision is plausible; however Paul (especially) and James having such experiences is deeply implausible. Even if they did, such visionary experiences implausible to produce belief in physical resurrection as stated above
- Heavily relies on unevidenced assumptions regarding psychological states of Paul and Peter

Resurrection: Jesus bodily rose from the dead, left behind an empty tomb, and appeared to many.

- The main hang-up with this hypothesis is that it is a miracle claim. Many scholars methodologically reject the miraculous from historical investigation
- Skeptics may protest there is an unevidenced assumption that God exists. However, we prefaced this discussion with several arguments
- Answers many of the pressing questions concerning Christian origins such as "why did this messianic movement persist after the death of its founder?" and "why did the early Christians radically modify their praxis and worship to include Jesus?"

Summary

There are five major historical facts regarding the fate of Jesus. Naturalistic hypotheses to explain these facts have been largely unsuccessful. Early Christians proclaimed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. This resurrection hypothesis provides the best explanation, but will likely receive pushback because of its miraculous nature. Arguments for the existence of God can raise the prior probability of God's existence and thus reduce resistance to supernatural explanations.

Additional Resources

- “Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus” by N.T. Wright in the Appendix
- “The Late Twentieth-Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses to Jesus' Resurrection” by Gary Habermas in the Appendix
- Surprised by Hope by N.T. Wright (B)
- The Son Rises by W.L. Craig (B)
- The Resurrection of Jesus: a New Historiographical Approach by M. Licona (A)
- The Fate of the Apostles by S. McDowell (I)
- The Resurrection of God Incarnate by Richard Swinburne (A)
- *Christian Origins and the Question of God* Vol. 1-3 by N.T. Wright (A)

05 Was Jesus a Failed Prophet?

“When you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” - Mark 13:29-31 (ESV)

“It is clear from the New Testament that they all expected the Second Coming in their own lifetime. And, worse still, they had a reason, and one which you will find very embarrassing. Their Master had told them so. He shared, and indeed created, their delusion. He said in so many words, “this generation shall not pass till all these things be done.” And He was wrong. He clearly knew no more about the end of the world than anyone else.’ It is certainly the most embarrassing verse in the Bible.” - C.S. Lewis, *The World’s Last Night*

THE PROBLEM OF DELAY

One of the most serious objections to Christian faith concerns the delay of Jesus’s second coming (or “parousia” in Greek). Here is a standard presentation of the problem.

It has been nearly 2,000 years since Jesus said “this generation shall not pass away” and yet the world continues on just as it has since then. Jesus was a failed apocalyptic prophet. He thought that he was ushering in the immediate end of the world with certainty. As this didn’t pan out, cognitive dissonance caused early Christians to reinterpret and rewrite Jesus’s prophecies to spare him the embarrassment. But, traces of Jesus’s original proclamations can be found in the gospels through the tools of Historical Criticism. In conclusion, Christianity is just another mistaken Domsday Cult that happened to spectacularly fail upwards.

We will defuse this objection by arguing that Jesus’s prophecies were (i) conditional and (ii) partially fulfilled.

JESUS WAS A CONDITIONAL APOCALYPTIC PROPHET

Jesus Was Apocalyptic

As discussed previously, apocalypticism was a school of Jewish thought that developed during the Second Temple period. Apocalypse comes from the Greek word “apokalypsis” which means “revelation” or “uncovering”. The Book of Revelation in the Bible is called the “Apocalypse of John”. Apocalyptic Jews wrote several texts, usually pseudepigraphical, pretending to have come from figures such as Enoch, Moses, Abraham, etc.

Apocalyptic literature is not the same as apocryphal literature. The Apocrypha refers to seven (7) books, all from the Second Temple period, that are included in the Roman Catholic canon but not the Protestant canon²⁷. None of them are considered apocalyptic works. Further, apocalyptic literature isn’t necessarily heretical as the canonical book of Daniel and parts of Zechariah are definitively apocalyptic.

²⁷ Full list: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, 1 & 2 Maccabees, and Baruch

A major theme in apocalyptic literature is the end of the world, hence why we today associate “apocalypse” with the end of the world. Was Jesus apocalyptic? Resoundingly so. Compare the following from 1 Enoch and the Gospel of Matthew.

“All the kings and the mighty and the exalted and those who rule the land will fall on their faces in his presence; and they will worship and set their hope on that Son of Man, and they will supplicate and petition for mercy from him. But the Lord of Spirits [God] himself will press them, so that they will hasten to depart from his presence” - 1 Enoch 62:9-10

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left... “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” - Matthew 25:31-33, 41

Jesus Was Conditional

There are several passages in the Gospels which emphasize the conditionality of the Second Coming (Matt 23:39, Mark 13:10,35,), parables about vigilance in delay (Matt 25, Luke 12), and comments that the date is unknown (Mark 13:32). How do we know this conditionality is authentic to Jesus and not later Christian authors trying to save face?

Because this kind of conditionality was the norm in ancient prophecy, even when it wasn’t explicit. Today, our understanding of prophecy is about fatalistic predictions of the future. We think about tragic characters like Macbeth, Odysseus, and Oedipus Rex who cannot escape their prophecies. Trying to run away from a prophecy only fulfills it. Now, this makes for great literature, but it is not how ancient societies viewed their prophets.

Prophets were meant to bring about ethical change in their audiences. If they prophesied disaster but there was no disaster because the people repented, that’s not a failed prophet - that’s a great prophet! This is exactly what happens in the book of Jonah. Jonah does not tell Nineveh to repent, he says, without qualification, “forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed” which prompts repentance from the people. Conversely, if a prophet foretells good things, but the people sin, God will delay the fulfillment. God explicitly states this his how He operates in Jeremiah 18

“If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.” - Jeremiah 18:7-10 (ESV)

While Jesus was clearly apocalyptic, he was just as clearly Jeremianic. His prophecy while cleansing the Temple is nearly verbatim from Jeremiah. Many of Jeremiah’s prophecies were conditional, delayed, and partially fulfilled. Thus, we have strong reason to think that Jesus understood himself in the mold of Jeremiah and that their prophecies would be expected to operate similarly.

JESUS'S PROPHECIES HAVE BEEN PARTIALLY FULFILLED

We should not get so focused on the conditionality and partial fulfillment that we lose sight that they were indeed partially fulfilled. Several significant events include the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-21), the Resurrection (1 Cor 15:20-23), the Ascension (Acts 7:54-60), the destruction of the Temple, and the growth of the Church. Like stepping stones in a river, they are not meant to be the stopping point, but tangible points of contact that carry us forward to the ultimate consummation of the Kingdom. Jesus promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church, thus we go forward in confidence praying earnestly "thy Kingdom come!"

WE CAN HASTEN THE SECOND COMING

In conclusion, the time of Jesus's return is variable and he understood his own prophecies in this conditional way. Because the Second Coming is conditional, we can actually play a role in speeding its arrival.

"Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." - 2 Peter 3:11-13

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- The Last Days According to Jesus by R.C. Sproul (B), also available as a lecture series on YouTube
- When the Son of Man Didn't Come by C. Hays and C. Strine (eds.) (I)
- The End of the Ages Has Come by Dale Allison (A)

06 Why Does God Allow So Much Suffering?

The problem of evil is perhaps the most serious and perennial objection to Christianity.

It's important to distinguish between the "Emotional" problem and the "Intellectual" problem. The emotional problem concerns a person's dislike, anger, and frustration expressed towards a God who would permit suffering, especially personal suffering. The intellectual problem concerns whether it's plausible to think that God and suffering can coexist.

We are mostly focusing on the intellectual problem. So, the following logic-chopping discussion might seem cold and academic to someone in the midst of suffering. Likewise, emotionally sensitive responses will seem sentimental and squishy to someone concerned with the intellectual problem. It's important to exercise emotional intelligence to identify which problem the person you're talking to is bringing to the table.

Here is a version of the intellectual problem inspired by atheist philosopher William Rowe²⁸.

- (1) If God exists, he has good reasons for permitting evil (i.e. no gratuitous evil)
- (2) If we don't see God's reasons, then there probably aren't any reasons
- (3) We don't see any reason for God to permit evil
- (4) Therefore, God probably doesn't exist

We will discuss three responses: one that accepts all the premises, one that denies (2), and one that denies (3).

RESPONSE 1: COUNTERBALANCING EVIDENCE (aka THE MOORE SWITCH)

Premise (1) is probably true²⁹, but we can actually flip the argument on its head as follows.

- (1*) If God exists, he has good reasons for permitting evil (i.e. no gratuitous evil)
- (2*) God exists
- (3*) Therefore, he has good reasons for permitting evil

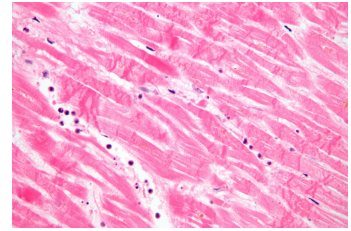
The argument is valid and (1*) is identical to (1). So, why think that (2*) is true? Recall that we provided positive evidence for God in the natural theology section. Additionally, there are non-evidential ways of knowing God such as the *sensus divinitatis* which may independently justify theistic belief. We can grant that evil on its own makes more sense in the naturalist story, but contend the evidence for gratuitous evil is weaker than the reasons to believe God exists. Therefore, the evidence for theism outweighs this evidence for naturalism.

²⁸ *The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism* by William Rowe (1979)

²⁹ Some philosophers dispute (1), e.g. Bruce Russell (atheist) & Peter van Inwagen (Christian)

RESPONSE 2: INSCRUTABILITY (aka SKEPTICAL THEISM)

Inscrutability targets premise (2). Premise (2) is a *noseeum* inference, i.e., “it doesn’t seem to me that X, therefore X is probably false” where X is any statement. But, is this always a valid way to reason?



Example 1: Look at the image to the right. Does it seem to you that this tissue is necrotic? Chances are you don’t have the histological training needed to identify necrotic tissue from healthy tissue, thus they look indistinguishable. Just because you don’t see evidence of necrosis doesn’t mean you can conclude the tissue is healthy.

Example 2: I’m in Galveston with a 5 gallon bucket. I scoop some water from the Atlantic Ocean. I see no whales in my bucket. Can I infer that there are no whales in the Atlantic Ocean? No, whether or not there are whales in the Atlantic Ocean, my bucket will look the same. My bucket is not the right size

Example 3: Some models in particle physics predict that protons might be unstable and decay over an incomprehensibly long timescale, estimated to be on the order of 10^{40} years. For reference, our universe is approximately 13.8 billion years old. If you replayed the entire history of the universe from the Big Bang to today 10 billion times for every second that has elapsed since the Big Bang, that would only be 0.1% of 10^{40} . Even if these decays happen, there is absolutely no way we would ever hope to observe them in our lifetimes. Therefore, we cannot conclude on this basis alone they do not happen.

We can reason based on appearances only when we are in situations where the differences would appear to us. Sometimes we may not notice a difference because the difference is too small (or too big) for us to notice, we don’t have the right tools to investigate, our background information isn’t sufficient, and many more. Thus, we cannot immediately infer that because we don’t see it, therefore it’s not the case.

To put it more technically³⁰: On the basis of cognized situation *s*, human *H* is entitled to claim ‘It appears that *p*’ only if it is reasonable for *H* to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if *p* were not the case, *s* would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her.

If God has a reason (or reasons) for permitting suffering, is that the kind of thing we would expect to be able to detect?

Given the massive complexity of the world, we are really not in a position to know the full causal ramifications of any given event. Some evils that God permits may have purposes that manifest themselves many centuries after our lifetimes or bring about goods that we cannot know about. However, God is in the epistemic position to know these kinds of things.

³⁰ Wykstra, Stephen, 1984, “The Human Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of ‘Appearance,’” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 16: 73–94.

Consider an analogy to a parent. Just as we expect a small child to be “in the dark” to the reasons her parents have for allowing her to suffer justified pain (e.g. medical treatment at the doctor), so we should expect that we will be “in the dark” to the reasons God has for allowing our justified suffering.

Inscrutability concludes that due to our cognitive limitations in capacity and frame of reference, we are not in a position to perceive if God has a reason. We cannot infer from “I don’t see a reason” to “there is no reason”, therefore, premise (2) is false.

RESPONSE 3: THEODICY

Theodicy targets premise (3), arguing that we actually can see at least some of God’s reasons for permitting evil. There is a veritable cornucopia of theodicies on offer in the philosophical literature. As good Reformed folks, we believe God has revealed himself in Scripture; thus, we will put higher premium on theodicies corroborated by the Bible.

Interestingly, scripture combines the ways of Theodicy and Inscrutability, weaving together the following three themes³¹.

- God aims at **great goods** (either for humanity, or for himself, or both).
- God often intends these great goods to come about **by way of various evils**.
- God leaves created persons **in the dark** (in the dark about which goods are indeed his reasons for the evils, or about how the goods depend on the evils).

Here are some examples of great goods:

Soul Building: Rather than create human beings with pre-installed virtues, God created us to grow in response to trial. Moreover, some virtues cannot be cultivated without hardship, e.g. there is no courage where there is no danger. (Heb 12:5-11; Rom 5:3-5; 2 Cor 4:17; Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-7; cf. Prov 10:13, 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-24, 29:15; Ps 119:67-71)

Need for Natural Laws: God has created a universe governed by natural laws which are regular, predictable, and understandable. Some suffering is a result of these laws, e.g. the same gravity that governs the heavens will kill you in a high fall. (Gen 8:22; Jer 33:25)

Free Will: God allows for the good of uncoerced moral choice. Creatures who freely choose to commit evil cannot be stopped without overriding their free will. (Dt 30:19; Mt 23:37)

Justice: Suffering is just punishment and/or natural consequence for moral evil committed individually, corporately (e.g. the exile), and covenantally in Adam, i.e. the wages of sin is death. (Gen 3:14-19; Rom 1:24-32, 5:12, 6:23, 8:20-21; Isa 29:5-6; Ez 38:19; Rev 6:12; 11:13; 16:18). Importantly, Scripture emphasizes not all suffering is punishment. This is the core thesis of Job, lamented in Psalm 73, and taught by Jesus in John 9:2-3.

³¹ Greg Welty, “The Problem of Evil” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-problem-of-evil/>

Divine Manifestation: Suffering results in the good of manifesting truths about God and his character. (Exo 14:17-8; Jn 9:1-41) The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. (WSC Q7)

Several instances in scripture show how God works through evil yet leaves the participants in the dark as to His ultimate ends. Joseph did not know why he was sold into slavery and thrown into prison. The Hebrews did not know why God tarried 400 years to deliver them from Egypt. Job did not know why the calamity befell him. These are just a few. Oddly enough, the greatest good of the Christian story is the greatest evil: the crucifixion of the holy Son of God.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: JESUS AS THE ANSWER AND DEFEAT OF EVIL

Consider the crucifixion of Jesus through the lens of our threefold Theodicy.

- **Great Goods**: redemption of God's people and glorification of God through the display of his justice, love, grace, mercy, wisdom, and power (Col 1:15-23; Rom 5:6-11; Heb).
- **Ordained Evils**: Jewish plots (Mt 26:3-4, 14-15), Satan's promptings (Jn 13:21-30), Judas's betrayal (Mt 26:47-56; 27:3-10; Lk 22:22), Roman injustice (Matt 26:57-68), Pilate's cowardice (Mt 27:15-26), and the soldiers' brutality (Mt 27:27-44).
- **In The Dark**: Jewish leaders, Satan, Judas, Pilate, and the soldiers are all ignorant of the role they play in fulfilling the divinely prophesied redemptive purpose by the cross of Christ. (Acts 4:25-29; 1 Cor 2:8)

Ultimately, it is the Christian story that not only explains evil but provides its defeat. The Christian story confirms our experience of suffering as something truly wrong and that God has done something about it.

God is not distant, but enters into our suffering and sympathizes with us. (Heb 4:15-17) He has defeated evil through the cross (1 Cor 15; Col 2:15) and promises a restoration of all things (Rev 21). Rather than a mere intellectual puzzle or experience to be endured, evil is an intruder that will ultimately be removed for harmony to be restored in the Kingdom of God. In the meantime, we pray thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Why Is There Evil in the World (and So Much of It?)* by Greg Welty (B)
- Ch 10 of *Knowledge and Christian Belief* by Alvin Plantinga (B)
- *Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'* by Alvin Plantinga (I)
- *The Evidential Argument from Evil* ed. by Howard-Snyder (I-A)

Epilogue: What Next?

Dear reader,

It is my hope and prayer that this material has served you well in growing in the strength and admonition of the Lord. This booklet is not designed to be the end of your journey, but the beginning. There are many, many questions that we did not address and much deeper study available for the topics that we did. It may seem so overwhelming and daunting. “Where do I start?”

My encouragement for you is to follow your own path. What is that one question that you feel too scared to ask? That’s where you start. No matter the question, God can take it. But don’t go alone. God has placed you in a community of fellow travelers, each with our own questions, doubts, and fears. We’ll be with you.

“Yeah, okay, but for real, how do I get started?”, you ask. Fair enough. First, keep a list of the questions you have. That will help you direct your study. Second, figure out what kind of learner you are. There are tons of books and papers cited in this booklet, but don’t go filling up your bookshelves with books you’ll never read (like me). If you prefer audio or video lectures, there are a ton of media resources available on the internet.

In the appendix, I’ve included a fairly detailed list of resources to help get you started. I’ve also included a few essays on other issues not discussed (for example, Old Testament topics). And as always, you can just talk to me directly. My email is zacharytlawson@gmail.com or you can just talk to me at church.

Zachary

Appendix

A1 - Rules for Arguments

These are the common rules of inference for formally constructing arguments. When evaluating or making arguments, check that they follow the rules!

Modus Ponens

$p \rightarrow q$	If p is true, then q is true	If Socrates is a man, then he is mortal.
p	p is true	Socrates is a man.
$\therefore q$	Therefore, q is true	Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

Modus Tollens

$p \rightarrow q$	If p is true, then q is true	If it is raining, then it is wet outside.
$\sim q$	q is false	It is not wet outside.
$\therefore \sim p$	Therefore, p is false	Therefore, it is not raining

Elimination

$p \vee q$	Either p is true or q is true	Either Schrödinger is alive or dead.
$\sim p$	p is false	Schrödinger is not alive.
$\therefore q$	Therefore, q is true	Therefore, Schrödinger is dead.

Transitivity

$p \rightarrow q$	If p is true, q is true.	If you can lift more than Jay, you can lift more than Zach.
$q \rightarrow r$	If q is true, r is true.	If you can lift more than Zach, you can lift more than Ada.
$\therefore p \rightarrow r$	Therefore, if p is true, r is true.	Therefore, if you can lift more than Jay, you can lift more than Ada.

Fallacy! Converse Error

$p \rightarrow q$ If Socrates is a man, then he is mortal.

q Socrates is mortal.

$\therefore p$ Therefore, Socrates is a man.

INVALID! Socrates could be a mortal cat.

Fallacy! Inverse Error

$p \rightarrow q$ If Socrates is a man, then he is mortal.

$\sim p$ Socrates is not a man.

$\therefore \sim q$ Therefore, Socrates is immortal.

INVALID! Socrates could be a mortal cat.

False Premise!

$p \rightarrow q$ If you are reading this, then Earth is round. **UNSOUND!** This premise is false.

p You are reading this.

$\therefore q$ Therefore, Earth is round.

Common Forms of Arguments

Deductive arguments follow by logical necessity to an airtight conclusion.

1. All men are mortal. (Premise)
2. Socrates is a man. (Premise)
3. Therefore, Socrates is mortal. (Conclusion)

Inductive arguments use probability to infer a likely conclusion.

1. Milk went up in price. (Premise)
2. Dairy contains milk. (Premise)
3. All dairy products probably increased in price. (Conclusion)

Abductive arguments attempt to provide the best explanation for a set of data.

1. Uranus's orbital pattern consistently deviates from its predicted pattern.

2. Other planets have the same orbital discrepancy due to gravity from nearby planets.
3. Another planet whose gravity is affecting Uranus's orbit would explain the discrepancy.
4. Therefore, there is probably another planet beyond Uranus.

Conditions of a Good Argument

Valid arguments have premises and conclusions that follow the rules of inference. If an argument uses fallacious reasoning, it is invalid, even if all the premises are true.

Sound arguments have premises and conclusions that are all true. If an argument uses false premises, it is unsound, even if it uses valid reasoning.

A2 - Apologetics Resources

Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These scholars come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

Starter Pack

Basic introductory books written for beginners

- How Reason Can Lead to God by Joshua Rasmussen
- Knowledge and Christian Belief by Alvin Plantinga
- Surprised by Hope by N.T. Wright
- On Guard by William Lane Craig
- Is There A God? by Richard Swinburne

Intermediate Pack

Scholarly versions of the starter pack books

- Warranted Christian Belief by Alvin Plantinga
- The Resurrection of the Son of God by N.T. Wright
- The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach by Mike Licona
- Reasonable Faith by William Lane Craig
- The Existence of God by Richard Swinburne

Online Resources

- The Analytic Christian (YouTube channel) - interviews with philosophers, theologians, experts
- Worldview Design (YouTube channel) - Josh Rasmussen's work, excellent series on cosmological arguments
- Truth Unites (YouTube channel) - Gavin Ortlund's work on apologetics, theology
- Majesty of Reason (YouTube channel) - Joe Schmid, agnostic philosopher of religion
- Ratio Christi at Texas A&M University (YouTube channel) - me, lol
- PlantingaVideos.com - Short animated summaries of Alvin Plantinga's key ideas with bibliographies to go deeper

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy - online peer-reviewed resource from Stanford University
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy - online peer-reviewed resource from University of Tennessee - Martin

Collections and Anthologies

- The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology ed. by Craig & Moreland
- Two Dozen (Or So) Arguments for God ed. by Walls & Dougherty
- A New Theist Response to the New Atheists ed. by Vallier & Rasmussen
- Theism and Atheism: Opposing Arguments in Philosophy ed. by Koterski & Oppy

Debate Books

The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.
(Proverbs 18:17).

- Knowledge of God - Alvin Plantinga v. Michael Tooley
- Is God the Best Explanation of Things? A Dialogue - Joshua Rasmussen v. Felipe Leon
- Is There A God? A Debate - Kenny Pearce v. Graham Oppy
- Jesus' Resurrection: Fact Or Figment? - William Lane Craig v. Gerd Ludemann
- God and Cosmology - William Lane Craig v. Sean Carroll
- A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties? - William Lane Craig v. Erik Wielenberg

Reformed Epistemology

- Knowledge and Christian Belief by Alvin Plantinga
- Warranted Christian Belief by Alvin Plantinga
- Recent work in reformed epistemology by A. Moon, reprinted in Appendix A2.1
- "Reformed Epistemology," by Anthony Bolos & Kyle Scott, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Religious Epistemology by T.D. McNabb
- Reformed Epistemology and the Problem of Religious Diversity: Proper Function, Epistemic Disagreement, and Christian Exclusivism by J. Kim (I)

Cognitive Science of Religion

- Born Believers: The Science of Children's Religious Belief by J.L. Barrett
- Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds by J.L. Barrett
- The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, And Theological Reflections On The Origin Of Religion by J. Schloss & M.J. Murray (eds.)

Moral Arguments

- Interview with Eric Sampson on Arguments for Moral Realism
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KICGOHpz7A>
- “God and Morality” YouTube playlist by The Analytic Christian
- “Can We Be Good Without God?” by William Lane Craig, reprinted in Appendix A3.1
- “A Dozen Moral Arguments” on MoralApologetics.com, reprinted in Appendix A3.2
- The Morals of the Story: Good News About a Good God by D. Baggett & M. Baggett (B)
- Baggett & Walls Moral Trilogy (I-A)
 - Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality
 - God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning
 - The Moral Argument: A History
- God & Moral Obligation by C.S. Evans (I)
- Finite & Infinite Goods by R. Adams (A)
- The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism by T. Cuneo (A)
- “The moral argument” in Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology by M. Linville (A)
- Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism by D. Enoch (A)
- Justice: Rights and Wrongs by Nicholas Wolterstorff (A)

Cosmological Arguments

Kalam/First Cause

- The Kalam Cosmological Argument (article) by W.L. Craig, reprinted in Appendix A4.1
- “Why Did the Universe Begin?” in On Guard by W.L. Craig
- Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology by W.L. Craig & Q. Smith (debate)
- The Kalam Cosmological Argument (2 Vols.), ed. Craig & Copan

- “The kalam cosmological argument” in Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology by W.L. Craig & J. Sinclair
- Infinity, Causation, & Paradox by Alexander Pruss
- The Kalām Cosmological Argument: A Reassessment by Jacobus Erasmus
- Escaping the Beginning? by Jeff Zweerink (beginner level overview of Big Bang cosmology and alternatives)

Contingency

- NecessaryBeing.com - quiz built by Alexander Pruss
- How Reason Can Lead to God by Joshua Rasmussen
- “The Leibnizian cosmological argument” in Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology by Alexander Pruss
- The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment by Alexander Pruss
- Necessary Existence by Alexander Pruss & Joshua Rasmussen
- Theism and Ultimate Explanation: The Necessary Shape of Contingency by Timothy O'Connor
- On The Ultimate Origination Of Things by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (classic)
- Is there a God? A Debate by Graham Oppy and Kenneth Pearce (debate)
- Is God the Best Explanation of Things? by Rasmussen and Leon (debate)

Teleological/Design Arguments

- “Why is the Universe Fine-Tuned for Life?” in On Guard by W.L. Craig
- Just Six Numbers by M. Rees
- A Fortunate Universe by L.A. Barnes & G. Lewis
- The Works of His Hands by Sy Garte
- Where the Conflict Really Lies by Alvin Plantinga
- Modern Physics and Ancient Faith by Stephen Barr
- God, the Multiverse, and Everything by Rodney Holder
- God, Design, and Fine-Tuning (article) by Robin Collins, reprinted in Appendix A5.3

- “The teleological argument” in the Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology by Robin Collins
- God and Design ed. N.A. Manson
- The Anthropic Cosmological Principle by Barrow & Tipler
- Cosmological Fine-Tuning Arguments: What (If Anything) Should We Infer From the Fine-Tuning of Our Universe for Life? by Jason Waller

Resurrection of Jesus

- The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus by M. Licona & G. Habermas (B)
- The Resurrection of Jesus: a New Historiographical Approach by M. Licona (A)
- Surprised by Hope by N.T. Wright (B)
- Christian Origins and the Question of God series by N.T. Wright (A)
 - Vol.1: The New Testament and the People of God
 - Vol. 2: Jesus and the Victory of God
 - Vol. 3: The Resurrection of the Son of God*
 - Vol. 4: Paul and the Faithfulness of God
- “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” in On Guard by W.L. Craig (B)
- “Part V: De Christo” in Reasonable Faith by W.L. Craig (I)
- Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus by W.L. Craig (A)
- The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy by W.L. Craig (A)
- The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History by Dale Allison
- The Resurrection of God Incarnate by Richard Swinburne

Other Related Issues

- Did Jesus Exist? by Bart Ehrman (B), note: Ehrman is an atheist
- The Historical Jesus: Five Views ed. J.K. Beilby (I)
- Jesus and the Eyewitnesses (2 ed.) by Richard Bauckham
- The Fate of the Apostles by Sean McDowell

Problem of Evil

- “What About Suffering?” in On Guard by W.L. Craig
- The Problem of Pain by C.S. Lewis (classic)
- A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis (classic)
- God, Freedom, and Evil by Alvin Plantinga
- The Problem of Evil ed. by Adams & Adams
- The Evidential Argument from Evil ed. by Howard-Snyder
- Calvinism and the Problem of Evil ed. by Alexander & Johnson
- The Problem of Animal Pain by Trent Dougherty
- Excusing Sinners and Blaming God by Guillaume Bignon
- Skeptical Theism by Perry Hendricks
- Non-Identity Theodicy: A Grace-Based Response to the Problem of Evil by Vince Vitale

Bible Difficulties & Related Issues

- On the Reliability of the Old Testament by K.A. Kitchen
- The Historical Reliability of the New Testament by Craig Blomberg
- Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism ed. By Hays & Ansberry
- Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament by John Walton
- Did God Really Command Genocide? by Copan & Flanagan
- Confronting Old Testament Controversies by Tremper Longman III
- Making Sense of Old Testament Genocide by Christian Hofreiter
- Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory by Gijsbert van den Brink
- Reading Genesis Well by C. John Collins

A3 - Recent Work in Reformed Epistemology

Andrew Moon (2016) Recent work in reformed epistemology. *Philosophy Compass*, 11: 879–891.

doi: 10.1111/phc3.12361. Obtained via <https://philarchive.org/rec/MOORWI-2>; see <https://philpapers.org/help/terms.html> for Terms & Conditions.

Youtube interview on paper: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXVTD52ufDA>

1. Introduction

Reformed epistemology, roughly, is the thesis that religious belief can be rational without argument. Much has been written on this topic, so I will narrow my discussion in two ways. First, I will focus on *theistic* belief, and not on more detailed religious beliefs, such as Christian belief, Islamic belief, and so on.³² Second, I will focus on literature that has appeared since Alvin Plantinga's (2000) influential *Warranted Christian Belief* (henceforth, 'WCB'), the most thorough defense of reformed epistemology. Earlier literature has been sufficiently surveyed elsewhere, and I wish to draw attention to less well known literature.³³

In section 2, I provide some background and two arguments by Plantinga for reformed epistemology. In section 3, I present a third argument by Plantinga for reformed epistemology and how it has influenced recent religious debunking literature. In sections 4–6, I discuss three objections to Plantinga's third argument, which arise from the following three topics: skeptical theism, cognitive science of religion, and basicity. In section 7, I explain how reformed epistemology could be undergirded by other, nonPlantingan epistemological theories. In section 8, I give a formula for how to object to reformed epistemology, using the Great Pumpkin Objection as an example.

2. Some Background and Preliminary Arguments

Reformed epistemology arose in response to what Plantinga calls the *evidentialist objection* to theistic belief.³⁴ Roughly, it states,

- 1) It is rational to believe in theism only on the basis of a good argument.
- 2) There is no good argument for theism.
- 3) Therefore, it is not rational to believe in theism.

³² Most of the religion-specific literature has been in response to reformed epistemology as applied to Christian belief, discussing issues about sin, the Holy Spirit, and more, which I will not address in this paper. Reformed epistemology has also been applied to Islamic belief (Baldwin (2010) and Baldwin & McNabb (forthcoming)), Advaita Vedanta Hindu belief (Christian (1992) and McNabb (2015)), and to Neo-Confucian belief, (Tien (2004)).

³³ See Bolos & Scott (2016) for an excellent survey, and Bergmann (2015a) and Beilby (2007) for helpful introductory articles. For discussions of reformed epistemology in the context of religious epistemology more generally, see Smith (2014) and Dougherty & Tweedt (2015). For books on reformed epistemology, see the influential Plantinga & Wolterstorff (1983), the popular-level Plantinga (2015a), and Beilby (2005).

³⁴ This should not be confused with the more general view named 'evidentialism' in mainstream epistemology, which states that a belief's justification depends solely on the believer's evidence, where 'evidence' is understood to include more than just arguments. See Tweedt & Dougherty (2015) and Long (2010, 377) for more on the distinction.

The evidentialist objection is an example of what Plantinga calls a *de jure* objection, which concludes that it is not rational to believe in God. This is to be distinguished from what he calls a *de facto* objection, which concludes that there is no God. The former is a claim about believers or their beliefs; the latter is a claim about God. Someone who espouses a *de jure* objection but not a *de facto* objection might say, "Whether or not there is a God, the believer irrationally believes in God when she has no good argument for theism."

A natural reply to the evidentialist objection is to argue, against premise 2, that there *are* good arguments for theism. For example, one could defend one of the traditional arguments for God's existence, such as the cosmological or design arguments. Plantinga proposed another reply. Perhaps, *contra* premise 1, one can rationally believe in God *even if* one has no good argument for it. In other words, perhaps the belief can be *properly basic*. Roughly, a belief is *basic* when it is not held on the basis of an argument. However, not all basic beliefs are *properly basic* (that is, both basic *and* rational). My friend Gambler has no good argument for his belief that his next gamble will win; he believes because of wishful thinking. This belief, though basic, is not properly basic. On the other hand, when I stub my toe and believe that *I feel pain*, this belief is both basic and *properly basic*. It is rational and not held on the basis of an argument.

So far, I have talked loosely as if rationality is the only positive epistemic (or intellectual) property. As Plantinga's epistemology matured, he began to more precisely distinguish between different positive epistemic properties, such as justification, rationality, and warrant (to be described below). Then, instead of talking about a belief's being properly basic *simpliciter*, he would make the qualification that the belief is properly basic *with respect to some positive epistemic property*. For example, a belief can be properly basic with respect to rationality (i.e., be both basic and rational), or it might also be properly basic with respect to warrant (i.e., be both basic and warranted). This led Plantinga to conclude that *de jure* objections may come in different forms, depending on which positive epistemic property that theistic belief is claimed to be lacking.³⁵

In WCB, Plantinga argues that theistic belief can be properly basic with respect to three epistemic properties. First, a belief can be properly basic with respect to *deontological justification*, which is, roughly, to be responsible or blameless in holding a belief. While knowing the odds are against him, Gambler *irresponsibly* believes that *my next gamble will win*; his belief is not properly basic with respect to deontological justification. Now, suppose it just seems obvious to a theist that God exists, and she has no good reason to reject theism. Plantinga argues that such a person's belief could be properly basic with respect to deontological justification; she would not be blameworthy or irresponsible for believing.³⁶

Second, a belief can be properly basic with respect to *proper function rationality*. Suppose Catherine suffers from capgras syndrome and, as a result of this disorder, believes that her husband is a duplicate imposter. Catherine's belief *might* be deontologically justified; she might not be blameworthy for holding this belief. After all, it's not her fault she has this

³⁵ After making these distinctions, Plantinga said of his early years that he was "someone a little long on chutzpah but a little short on epistemology" (1998, 373).

³⁶ See chapter 3 of WCB for further exploration and defense.

syndrome, and this is how things appear to her. But the belief is not rational; it is the result of a disorder. Plantinga thinks it is implausible that many theists' basic beliefs are the result of a disorder; in fact, their faculties seem to be functioning properly when they form their belief.³⁷

Third, a belief can be properly basic with respect to *warrant*. Plantinga does not mean by 'warrant' what it means in ordinary English; rather 'warrant' is stipulatively defined as whatever it is that makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief. Suppose Gordon believes without argument that God exists. Even if God does exist, could Gordon count as *knowing* God exists? Can his belief have warrant? Now, Plantinga does not argue that theistic belief is warranted *tout court*. Rather, he only argues that it is warranted *if* God exists. In the next section, I present that argument and also explain some of its influence in the religious debunking literature.

3. Plantinga's Argument Reconstructed and Debunking Arguments

According to Plantinga's *proper functionalist* theory of warrant, roughly, S's belief is warranted if and only if 1) it is formed by properly functioning faculties, 2) in an environment appropriate for those faculties, 3) according to a reliable, 4) truth-aimed design plan. For example, my belief that *there is a computer* is warranted if and only if the belief was formed by properly functioning visual faculties, in an environment appropriate for my visual faculties (good lighting conditions), and the design plan of my visual faculties is reliably aimed at forming true beliefs. This is what it takes to *know* that there is a computer. On the other hand, Catherine's belief arising from capgras syndrome is unwarranted because it is the result of dysfunction. And Gambler's belief is unwarranted because the faculties producing it are not reliably aimed at truth.³⁸

After defending his theory of warrant, Plantinga argues that *if* God exists, then belief in God *would* likely meet these conditions for warrant. Here is his argument:

[I]f theistic belief is *true*, then it seems likely that it *does* have warrant. If it is true, then there is, indeed, such a person as God, a person who has created us in his image (so that we resemble him, among other things, in having the capacity for knowledge), who loves us, who desires that we know and love him, and who is such that it is our end and good to know and love him. But if these things are so, then he would of course intend that we be able to be aware of his presence and to know something about him. And if that is so, the natural thing to think is that he created us in such a way that we would come to hold such true beliefs as that there is such a person as God, that he is our creator, that we owe him obedience and worship, that he is worthy of worship, that he loves us, and so on. And if *that* is so, then the natural thing to think is that the cognitive processes that *do* produce belief in God are aimed by their designer at producing that belief. But then the belief in question will be produced by cognitive faculties functioning

³⁷ See chapter 4 of WCB for further exploration and defense. Plantinga also distinguishes between internal and external rationality, which I overlook in this survey.

³⁸ For a book-length defense of this theory, see Plantinga (1993). For more recent discussions, see Boyce & Plantinga (2012) and Boyce & Moon (forthcoming).

properly according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth: it will therefore have warrant (189–190).³⁹

Here is my reconstruction:

- 1) If God exists, then God loves us, desires that we know and love him, and is such that it is our end to know and love him.
- 2) If God loves us, desires that we know and love him, and is such that it is our end to know and love him; then God is probably such that he “would intend that we be able to be aware of his presence and know something about him.”
- 3) If God is probably such that he “would intend that we be able to be aware of his presence and know something about him,” then God probably “created us in such a way that we would come to hold” certain true beliefs about God (e.g., that God exists, is our creator, loves us, etc.).
- 4) If God probably “created us in such a way that we would come to hold” certain true beliefs about God (e.g., that God exists, is our creator, loves us, etc.), then belief in God is probably “produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth: it will therefore have warrant.”
- 5) If God exists, then belief in God is probably warranted.

I will make two clarifications.

First, Plantinga takes seriously potential *defeaters* for theistic belief, reasons to not believe in God. Hence, although Plantinga does not think that an argument *for* theism is required for warrant, an argument *against* theism could preclude warrant. This is why Plantinga spends the last four chapters of WCB responding to potential defeaters for theistic (and Christian) belief, such as the argument from evil. Discussion of these defeaters is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting that a complete argument for the proper basicity of theistic belief would require responding to them. Precision might require stating the above argument only in terms of *prima facie* warrant (warrant in the absence of defeat), but I will leave that assumed.

Second, I will note the dialectical value of the argument. The fact that Plantinga only defends a *conditional* conclusion might disappoint some. “I want to know whether belief in God *is* warranted, not merely that it is warranted *if* God exists!” one might say.⁴⁰ However, the conditional plays a key role in his response to *de jure* objections to theistic belief. For example, consider the Freudian charge that theistic belief is a result of mere wishful thinking. Plantinga responds that *if* God exists, then theistic belief is not the result of mere wishful thinking. It is ultimately produced by truth-aimed, properly functioning, reliable mechanisms designed by

³⁹ Plantinga can be interpreted as giving two distinct arguments for the conditional. The first would be at the bottom of 188 to the top half of 189, and the second would be at the second half of 189 to the top half of 190. The first would appeal to a very long hypothetical syllogism; the second would combine conditional proof and *reductio ad absurdum*. Since I see the two arguments as appealing to the same premises, I only discuss the first one.

⁴⁰ For example, see Richard Swinburne (2001, 206). Cf. Schonecker (2015) and Plantinga’s (2015b) reply.

God.⁴¹ So, Freud's objection is plausible only on the assumption that God does not exist. Hence, many *de jure* objections will fail without a successful *de facto* objection – an argument that God does not exist – which many *de jure* objectors do not have.

Since WCB's publication, Plantinga's strategy has been used to respond to other *de jure* objections. In recent philosophy, they are often not called '*de jure* objections' but are more popularly called 'debunking arguments', which criticize the rationality or warrant of a belief because of how it was formed. So, debunking arguments are a type of *de jure* objection. In response to the claim that evolutionary psychology of religion shows that theistic belief is caused solely by natural processes and not by God, Kelly Clark and Justin Barrett respond,

If God is the first and originating cause of the universe (including all natural laws) and if God were to guide or direct the natural evolutionary processes so that they produced a god-faculty so that people could and would come to form true beliefs about God, then God would be the ultimate cause of our god beliefs... If there is no God, then God could not have been the ultimate cause of the god beliefs... The upshot is that we cannot know whether the evolutionary psychology of religion undermines belief in God unless we already know that there is no God (2011, 21–22).⁴²

Upon considering a similar debunking argument in which an objector claims that the ultimate explanation of theistic belief is not God, Roger White writes,

We would need some reason to suppose that the explanation is correct. How might a theist come rationally to think that the correct ultimate explanation of his belief does not involve God? It would seem that for whatever cause C of theistic belief that science might reveal, a theist should just think that God is responsible for C, that that is just the process that God chose to instill belief in his creatures (2010, p. 583).⁴³

Both dialectics involve two steps. First, the debunker claims that theistic belief lacks positive, epistemic property P. Second, the defender says that *if* God exists, then theistic belief *does* have property P. For Clark and Barrett, the property P is the "proper connection" between God and theistic belief. For White, property P is God's being part of the "correct ultimate explanation" of theistic belief. We can see how both responses follow Plantinga's strategy. This, then, is a legacy of Plantinga's argument that we find in the religious debunking literature.

4. Against Premise 2: The Skeptical Theist Objection

In this section, I address the "skeptical theist objection" to premise 2. To explain it, I will first say some things about premise 1, which states, "If God exists, then God loves us, desires that we know and love him, and is such that it is our end to know and love him." This is ambiguous because the word 'desires' could mean *all-things-considered desires* or merely *has some desire*. I might desire another piece of chocolate cake but not all-things-considered desire it,

⁴¹ For more on this point about wishful thinking, see pp. 194–198, especially p. 197, in WCB.

⁴² Although no reference to Plantinga's argument is made in this quote, its influence is clear from references found on pp. 11 and 18 of their paper.

⁴³ In note 9 of his paper, White notes that Plantinga might have influenced his argument, but he's not sure if he's remembering correctly.

given my stronger desire for a healthy body. I will take the 'desire' in (1) to be understood as *some* desire, not an all-things-considered desire.

Premise 2 states that if God loves us, desires that we know and love him, and is such that it is our end to know and love him; then God is probably such that *he would intend* that we be able to be aware of his presence and know something about him. A general principle supporting (2) is that if one wants X, then it is likely that one would intend to bring about X. The reason for the 'likely' in this principle is to account for cases where the subject has *other* reasons (e.g., other conflicting desires), in addition to the desire for X, which would make it so that she would not intend to bring about X. Could there be such conflicting reasons in the case of God desiring for us to know him?

Yes. To see this, consider one version of the argument from evil:

- A) We cannot think of any good reasons for why God, if he existed, would allow certain evils.
- B) Therefore, there probably aren't good reasons for why God, if he existed, would allow those evils.
- C) If God existed, he wouldn't allow those evils without good reasons.
- D) Therefore, there probably is no God.

Skeptical theists challenge the inference from A to B by appealing to our ignorance of God's total reasons.

However, some say that this acknowledgment of ignorance gives us reason to doubt Plantinga's religious epistemology. Evan Fales writes,

Many theists—Plantinga among them—have expressed skepticism concerning the possibility of an adequate theodicy. What are the chances that we can know what God wants, when he allows Bambi to roast in a forest fire? (360)

Skeptical theists Justin McBrayer and Philip Swenson (2011) concur,

What a sceptical theist is committed to, though, is a general scepticism about our knowledge of what God would do in any particular situation... Plantinga assumes that if God exists it is obvious that our belief-forming faculties are reliable... Given our scepticism, we are not sanguine about [this] inference (God might well have other interests, motives, etc. than the few that we are able to decipher) (145).

The authors' quotes can apply to my argument reconstruction in the following way. A certain response to the problem of evil expresses skepticism about whether God would have *intended* or *all-things considered wanted* to stop certain evils from occurring. This skepticism should cause doubt about whether God would intend for us to know him, and hence, cause doubt about premise 2.

The objection is not making the more contentious claim that skeptical theists must deny *all* knowledge of God's intentions. Skeptical theist Michael Bergmann (2012, 15) has argued that on the basis of my commonsense knowledge that I have existed more than five minutes, I can know that, if God exists, then God did not intend to annihilate me before now. Bergmann argues that no part of skeptical theism precludes such knowledge. The question remains whether we can have the sort of knowledge of God's intentions mentioned in premise 2. This question is worthy of more exploration.⁴⁴

5. On Premise 3: Cognitive Science of Religion and the *Sensus Divinitatis*

Premise 3 states, "if God is probably such that he would intend that we be able to be aware of his presence and know something about him, then God probably created us in such a way that we would come to hold certain true beliefs about God." What is this way that God might have created us? Plantinga endorses the view that "there is a kind of faculty or cognitive mechanism, what Calvin calls a *sensus divinitatis* or sense of divinity, which in a wide variety of circumstances produces in us beliefs about God" (172).⁴⁵ Plantinga says that the *sensus divinitatis* might produce the belief that *God created everything* when one is beholding beauties of nature, the belief that *God is to be thanked* when one is experiencing the joy of a new day, or the belief that *God disapproves of my action* when one acts wrongly (175). Furthermore, these beliefs are *basic*, that is, "not accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs" (176). In this section, I discuss questions that arise about the *sensus divinitatis*; in the next section, I discuss questions that arise about *basicality*.

Suppose we define '*sensus divinitatis*' as a module that has the specialized function of forming true beliefs about God.⁴⁶ Then there are empirical reasons to doubt its existence. Jack Lyons (2009) writes,

It doesn't begin to follow from our having a capacity to form the belief that God exists that we have a God *module*... To figure out whether we do have a God module, we can do far more than make a priori guesses conditional on God's existence or nonexistence (or invoke the authority of Calvin, who was hardly renowned as a cognitive neuroscientist). We can empirically discover (at least in principle) where these beliefs come from... However, there does not seem to be much, if any, empirical support for the claim that we have a system that specializes in producing beliefs about God (160).

Psychologists do identify other cognitive modules: edge detection modules, color vision, face identification modules, and so on. Since there is no empirical evidence of a *sensus divinitatis*, this is evidence that there is none.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ I explore it in Moon (draft).

⁴⁵ Many doubt that what Plantinga means by '*sensus divinitatis*' is what Calvin meant by it. See Moreland & Craig (2003, 168), Clark & Barrett (2010), and especially Jeffreys (1997), Sudduth (2002), and Plasger (2015). Plantinga doesn't seem too worried about this, saying, "Whatever Calvin thinks, it's our model" (2000, 173). See also Plantinga's (2015b) reply to Plasger.

⁴⁶ I follow Lyons (2009, 89) by defining a 'module' as, roughly, an isolable cognitive mechanism that specializes in a task or function, and exhibits a kind of functional unity. However, only functional specialization, and not isolability and functional unity, are directly relevant to our discussion.

⁴⁷ Cf. Fales (2003, p. 361).

Here are three replies. Despite its many developments, cognitive science is still young. Our not having empirically discovered a *sensus divinitatis* yet, therefore, is not good evidence that there is none. Perhaps psychologists need more time to discover it. Second, perhaps Lyons is wrong and that the *sensus divinitatis* isn't the sort of thing that one discovers empirically. Perhaps the only appropriate evidence is *theological*.⁴⁸

Third, J.P. Moreland & William Lane Craig (2003, 167) have noted that Plantinga's argument does not require a *sensus divinitatis*. The consequent of premise 3 states only that God created us in such a way that we would form true beliefs about God. This leaves open exactly what that "way" is, whether this is via a *sensus divinitatis*, or some other means. For example, there *is* empirical evidence that we have cognitive systems which, together in natural environments, result in our forming theistic beliefs. The young and burgeoning field of *cognitive science of religion* ('CSR') explores the various mechanisms that naturally incline us to acquire and retain concepts of and beliefs about supernatural beings. These mechanisms include our *agency detection device* ('ADD', a module designed to detect agents), our *theory of mind* ('ToM', a module designed to ascribe mental properties), a mechanism that attributes teleology or purpose to the world, and more. CSR theorists will differ as to which mechanisms are most central to explaining theistic belief, but there *is* empirical evidence that they play an important role. It seems no more plausible that God would create us to form beliefs about God with a specialized *sensus divinitatis* than with a number of mechanisms working together. For example, we've been designed to form beliefs about food via not only vision, but also via smelling, touching, and tasting. We don't just have one module, a food-module, for forming beliefs about food.⁴⁹

The "way" might also involve testimony. Perhaps God revealed himself to a tribe and its leader (call him 'Shmoses') by causing miracles that triggered the ADD and ToM. This resulted in their gaining both the concept of and beliefs about God, which they spread to others via testimony. The ADD, ToM, teleology module, and other faculties and social factors helped transmit and sustain these beliefs in future generations. Of course, this is a just-so story, but the point is that a number of theories are compatible with premise 3. Furthermore, Plantinga says he is merely offering a model, so he is probably open to altering his model as empirical theories develop (170).⁵⁰ However, which theory is *true* is another matter and is what CSR is currently exploring.⁵¹

⁴⁸ But see Moreland & Craig's (2003, 168) theological reasons for doubting there is a *sensus divinitatis*.

⁴⁹ Above, I defined 'sensus divinitatis' as a single module, but one could define it more liberally, as Clark & Barrett (2010) do, to denote a set of mechanisms working together. Thanks to Justin Barrett for helpful discussion. Of course, people can use the term however they wish, so long as they're clear.

⁵⁰ An alternative model is given on p. 176, according to which the *sensus divinitatis* helps people see the truth of a premise in a theistic argument, by which they infer theistic belief. De Cruz & De Smedt (2014) explore in an empirically rigorous way how modules studied in CSR might be relevant to people's finding intuitive premises in arguments from natural theology. Michael Sudduth (2002) offers a model grounded in reformed theology, according to which only the belief that God exists is basic, and God's properties are inferred. See Plantinga's (2002, 132–135) reply to Sudduth.

⁵¹ For surveys of the CSR literature and some of its epistemological ramifications, see Clark & Barrett (2010) on the relationship between CSR and the *sensus divinitatis*; Clark & Barrett (2011), who use a Reidian perspective; Clark & Rabinowitz (2011), who focus on testimony and safety; Thurow (2013), who focuses on sensitivity and unreliability arguments; and De Cruz & De Smedt (2014), who focus on CSR and natural theology. See also Murray (2009) and Leech & Visala (2011).

6. More on Premise 3: Is Theistic Belief Even Basic?

Plantinga says that the deliverances of the *sensus divinitatis* are *basic beliefs*. But *are* they basic? Fales (2004) notes that even if theistic belief is formed spontaneously, or not on the basis of *conscious inference* from other beliefs, it could still be based on the other beliefs. He says that his belief in the propositions,

(C) It is very probable that most crows are black (377),

(R) What attracts many Republicans to that political ideology is that it makes a virtue of self-interest, and thus provides a convenient rationale for a narrow view of the obligations of generosity and community spirit (378),

(T) Others generally tell the truth (379),

were not consciously inferred from other beliefs. He just finds himself believing them. Yet, they do seem to be held on the basis of other beliefs: beliefs formed in the past on the basis of observations and experiences – about crows, Republicans, and truth-tellers – which seem to be part of the evidential basis for his beliefs in C, R, and T. Similarly, even if theists never consciously inferred their theistic beliefs, Fales notes, it doesn't follow that they are basic. They could also be based on beliefs formed in response to past observations and experiences.⁵²

Here is one of Plantinga's responses to Fales:

My main aim was... to hold that theistic belief in general and Christian belief in particular *can be* accepted with perfect rationality even if the believer doesn't have any good arguments for belief... as far as that central thesis goes, it doesn't really matter whether or not there is a clear, important and precise distinction between basic and nonbasic belief. (2007, 614)

When Plantinga was responding to the original evidentialist objection, the concern was that theistic belief was improper because it was not based on a robust philosophical or scientific argument, something like the cosmological or design argument.⁵³ The theistic belief of Plantinga's grandmother, for example, was in danger of being declared irrational because she had no such argument. Now, suppose we say that a belief is *basic* if it is not based on this type of robust argument. The "way" mentioned in premise 3 might involve people's forming a basic belief in *this* sense, even though the belief might be partly based on background beliefs in the way Fales describes. Plantinga's argument could then be used to show that if theistic belief is

⁵² Koons (2011) similarly argues that all our perceptual beliefs are theory dependent. He then argues that "theistic belief cannot be properly basic, but only because no kind of belief can be properly basic" (843). Interestingly, Plantinga (1993, 100–101) had earlier already discussed the sort of argument that Koons makes, with plausible counterexamples to his universal claim. Cf. Sudduth (2002, 89–90).

⁵³ Or perhaps the requirement for good argument was even stronger: that the belief meets the standards of classical foundationalism. For more, see chapter 3 of WCB.

true, then it can be properly basic with respect to warrant in this sense of 'basic'.⁵⁴ This would bypass Fales' argument.⁵⁵

7. Beyond Plantinga: Applying the Strategy More Broadly

Reformed epistemology is often associated with Plantinga's proper functionalist theory of warrant. However, some philosophers disagree with this theory, and others are interested in epistemic properties Plantinga does not explore. These philosophers need not reject reformed epistemology. In the following, I will briefly explore the views of some philosophers who think you can be a reformed epistemologist without endorsing Plantinga's theories.

Let us take a step back and examine Plantinga's general strategy:

Step 1: Specify a positive epistemic property (or purported conditions for a positive epistemic property).

Step 2: Examine whether basic theistic beliefs might exemplify that epistemic property (or the purported conditions for that property), either on the supposition that God exists or without that supposition.

We can see how Plantinga's normative epistemology (i.e., his theories of various epistemic properties) supports his applied epistemology (i.e., his religious epistemology). This strategy is very natural and is common in ethics, where one's normative ethics (e.g., utilitarianism) drives one's applied ethics (e.g., a position on abortion). Others who are interested in different epistemic properties, or who hold a different theory of warrant, can still follow this strategy and find that their epistemological theory is compatible with reformed epistemology. Indeed, some *have* found this to be so.

Consider *phenomenal conservatism*, which states a sufficient condition for *prima facie* justification:

(PC): If it seems to S as if *p*, then S thereby has at least *prima facie* justification for believing that *p*. (Huemer 2001, 99)

Suppose it seems to me as if there is a cup. According to PC, I thereby have at least *prima facie* justification for believing that there is a cup. The qualifier '*prima facie*' indicates that the justification can be defeated by counterevidence. We have now completed step 1 of Plantinga's strategy.

We may now proceed to Step 2 and examine whether basic, theistic belief can meet PC's conditions. It can. Chris Tucker (2011) has noted how there are a number of theists for

⁵⁴ Bergmann (2015b, 35–37), a reformed epistemologist, develops a view that explicitly allows for background beliefs to play an evidential role in something like the way Fales describes. He uses Robert Audi's (2004, 45–46) distinction between conclusions of reflection and conclusions of inference, the latter being drawn from inference and the former emerging "noninferentially from an awareness of a variety of observations, experiences, and considerations" (2015, 36). Theistic belief, on his view, could be a conclusion of reflection but still be properly basic. Also relevant are Derose (draft a) and Pritchard's (2003, 57–60) foundationalist model, Beilby (2007, 147–151), and Lyons (2009, 162–163).

⁵⁵ See also the definition of warrant basicity that Plantinga (2007, 618) develops in his response to Fales.

whom, at various points in their lives, it seems to them that God is with them or that God is watching over them. These beliefs are not based on any argument; rather, the theist just believes because they seem true.⁵⁶

Consider now *virtue epistemology*. According to John Greco's (2010) version,

S knows that *p* if and only if S believes the truth (with respect to *p*) because S's belief that *p* is produced by intellectual ability (71).

Greco says that an *achievement* is a kind of success because of one's ability. Suppose I am up to bat, I get distracted by an annoying fly, I try to hit the fly, and in the process, I happen to hit a speeding baseball and score a home run. This is success through accident, not success through ability; it is not an *achievement*. A true belief is warranted, on Greco's theory, when one attains a true belief because of one's intellectual ability, when one *achieves* a true belief.

We may proceed to Step 2. Anthony Bolos (2016) says that theistic belief could satisfy the conditions of genuine achievement. He writes,

One strategy, for example, would be to simply demonstrate the parallels between perceptual knowledge and religious knowledge on the reformed account. Both instances of knowledge are the result of one's cognitive faculties which, when successful, demonstrate the cognitive abilities of the agent. In each of the cases, the success in question is appropriately related to the agent's cognitive abilities (186).

If Bolos is correct, then we can see how reformed epistemology is compatible with virtue epistemology.⁵⁷

I have now given two examples of how reformed epistemology might be applied to other epistemological theories. In fact, I find it plausible that there is no non-skeptical theory of an epistemic property *P* that couldn't count many people's theistic belief to be properly basic with respect to *P*.⁵⁸ Showing that there are such theories is where more work should be done.⁵⁹

8. The Great Pumpkin Objection and How to Properly Criticize Reformed Epistemology

⁵⁶ Also, if Tucker is correct, then he would have a good reply to Long's (2010) evidentialist, *de jure* objection to theistic belief.

⁵⁷ For more on the relationship between reformed epistemology and virtue epistemology, see Zagzebski (1993), Pritchard (2003), Axtell (2006), and Bolos (2016). Of note, Pritchard (2003, 60–65) develops an account of how theistic basic belief could result from reflective virtues, and Bolos (2016) argues that theistic basic belief could result from what Pritchard calls a strong achievement, which is characterized by the agent's overcoming an obstacle or demonstrating a significant skill. These accounts might handle earlier criticisms by virtue epistemologists (e.g., Zagzebski, Pritchard, and Axtell) that reformed epistemology does not sufficiently involve the agent.

⁵⁸ Others have applied their normative theories to reformed epistemology. Wolterstorff (1983) applies an epistemic conservative view, Alston (1991) applies his theory of perceptual justification, and Shaw (2016) applies his disjunctivist view.

⁵⁹ According to reliabilism, a belief is justified only if it is produced by a reliable process. Sanford Goldberg (2014) charges that systematic disagreement about religious matters shows that religious belief is not formed by a reliable process; hence, the believer does not meet the reliabilist condition on justification. Furthermore, a believer who is aware of this disagreement has a defeater. Although Goldberg develops both charges in admirable detail, he does not address the responses to this sort of argument by Kwan (2006, 654–657; 2011, 263–283), Murray (2009, 172–173) and Clark & Barrett (2011, 26–29). This is a fascinating topic about which there is insufficient space to discuss in detail here.

Here is a simple formula for criticizing reformed epistemology. First, make clear whether you are criticizing the normative theory (call this a *normative criticism*) or the application of that theory to religious, basic belief (call this an *application criticism*). Then, successfully criticize either the normative theory or its application. An example of an application criticism is the above skeptical theist objection, which gives some theists reason to doubt that theistic belief meets the proper functionalist conditions (even if God exists).

The normative criticism will often require attacking a theory that's already been well defended in the epistemological literature. For example, one might object that since one cannot always know, by reflection, whether one's theistic, basic belief is produced by properly functioning faculties, there is something inadequate about Plantinga's reformed epistemology. However, this is really just a criticism of *proper functionalism*, a normative theory, and also of the many other normative theories that imply that you cannot always know, by reflection, whether the relevant conditions for justification or warrant obtain.⁶⁰ For this criticism, one cannot stay at the level of religious epistemology. One must move up to the normative level and engage in epistemology *tout court*.

It will be useful to see how my formula clarifies two objections to reformed epistemology. They are the *Great Pumpkin Objection* and the related *Son of Great Pumpkin Objection*:

(GPO) If theistic belief can be properly basic, then so can Linus' belief that *there's a Great Pumpkin*.⁶¹

(SGPO) If the theist may claim that her theistic belief can be properly basic, then Linus may claim that his belief that *there's a Great Pumpkin* can be properly basic.⁶²

The objector will then deny the consequent and conclude that the antecedent is false.

Back in the eighties, it was understandable for Plantinga (1983, 74) and Michael Martin (1990, 272) to take seriously GPO or SGPO, when no developed normative theory undergirded reformed epistemology. But suppose a reformed epistemologist – such as Plantinga, Tucker, or Bolos – defends a normative theory, T, for an epistemic property, P, and uses T to undergird the view that theistic belief can be properly basic with respect to P. The GPO and SGPO are now more dubious, since their success depends on whether T, which underwrites theistic belief, also underwrites Linus' belief.

GPO and SGPO must therefore be reformulated:

(GPO*) Theory T, which implies that theistic belief can be properly basic with respect to P, also implies that Linus' belief that *there's a Great Pumpkin* can be properly basic with respect to P.

⁶⁰ Bergmann (2006, ch. 8) argues that virtually all nonskeptical epistemological theories, both externalist and internalist, have this implication. Cf. chapter 4 of Williamson (2000).

⁶¹ This was first introduced in Plantinga (1983, 74–78).

⁶² See Martin (1990, 266–276), Plantinga (2000, 343–352), DeRose (draft b), Bergmann (2006, ch. 8), and Scott (2014). I think Bergmann most clearly gets to the epistemological heart of the issue.

(SGPO*) Theory T, which implies that the theist may claim that her theistic belief can be properly basic with respect to P, also implies that Linus may claim that his belief that *there's a Great Pumpkin* can be properly basic with respect to P.

The objector must then argue both that the implication about Linus' belief in GPO* or SGPO* holds, and also that the implication is false. We can see now that the real charge is that T, a normative theory, is too permissive.⁶³ In other words, these are *normative criticisms*.

For example, suppose the reformed epistemologist is a phenomenal conservative. Then the objector could claim, "This phenomenal conservatism that you endorse also implies that Linus could be *prima facie* justified in believing (or may claim he is *prima facie* justified in believing) that *there's a Great Pumpkin* because of a seeming!" The objector must then argue that this implication follows from PC and also that the implication is false, which will require diving into the epistemological literature on phenomenal conservatism and responding to its defenses.⁶⁴

I conclude by emphasizing how firm the grounds are upon which reformed epistemology stands. Those grounds might have been shaky when Plantinga and others first defended it, but that was when it was not backed by a substantive normative theory. Now, a *number* of diverse, prominent theories in mainstream epistemology undergird reformed epistemology, which makes it very resilient in the face of potential objections.⁶⁵

⁶³ Some literature discusses whether Plantinga's reformed epistemology allows for nonChristian religious beliefs to be properly basic, which, in my framework, is really about whether proper functionalism allows for this. See Plantinga (2000, 349–351), Beilby (2007, 143–147), and the references in footnote 1 of Beilby's paper. He says that some Christians will find this implication of proper functionalism problematic (145). However, if it's a problem for proper functionalism, then it's a problem for most epistemological theories.

⁶⁴ See section 5 of Tucker (2011) for a response to the claim that PC is overly permissive. In chapter 8 of his book, Bergmann (2006) argues that virtually all nonskeptical epistemological theories face a charge of being overly permissive in these ways. See pp. 229–232 for why he thinks the charge fails.

⁶⁵ Thanks to Aaron Arinder, Mark Baker, Max Baker-Hytch, Justin Barrett, Anthony Bolos, Domingos Faria, Tyler McNabb, and Chris Tucker for helpful written comments and discussion. Thanks to Michael Bergmann for helpful discussion. Thanks also to participants in the Spring 2016 Rutgers Cognitive Science of Religion seminar, including Robert and Marilyn Adams, Mark Baker, Laura Callahan, Alvin Goldman, James Jones, Daniel Rubio, Philip Swenson, and Dean Zimmerman.

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A4 - List of Some Fine-Tuned Parameters

From *A Reasonable Little Question* (Barnes 2020)

- Cosmological constant, expressed as a density (ρ_Λ): If $\rho_\Lambda/\rho_{\text{Planck}} \lesssim 10^{-90}$, the universe would recollapse after 1 second; if $\rho_\Lambda/\rho_{\text{Planck}} \gtrsim 10^{-90}$, structure formation would cease after 1 second, resulting in a uniform, rapidly diffusing hydrogen and helium soup (Adams, Alexander, Grohs, & Mersini-Houghton 2017).
- Higgs vev (v): If $v^2/m_{\text{Planck}}^2 \lesssim 6 \times 10^{-35}$, then hydrogen is unstable to electron capture; if $v^2/m_{\text{Planck}}^2 \gtrsim 10^{-33}$ then no nuclei are bound and the periodic table is erased.
 - Vacuum expectation value (vev) of the Higgs boson (v): If $v^2/m_{\text{Planck}}^2 < 6 \times 10^{-35}$, then hydrogen is unstable to electron capture; if $v^2/m_{\text{Planck}}^2 > 6 \times 10^{-33}$ then no nuclei are bound and the periodic table is erased. Given a uniform distribution over v^2 between zero and the Planck mass $[0, m_{\text{Planck}}^2]$, the likelihood of a life-permitting value of the Higgs vev is at most 10^{-33}
- Up-quark, down-quark and electron Yukawa couplings (y_u, y_d, y_e): this three-dimensional subspace and the life-permitting subset is shown in Lewis and Barnes (2016: 256–260), building on Barr and Khan (2007). For stable atoms and stable stars, the region is bounded by: $0 < y_u < 3 \times 10^{-5}, 0.7 \times 10^{-5} < y_d < 7 \times 10^{-5}, 3 \times 10^{-9} < y_e < 4 \times 10^{-5}$.
 - Up-quark, down-quark and electron Yukawa couplings (y_u, y_d, y_e): this three dimensional subspace and the life-permitting subset is shown in Lewis and Barnes (2016, 256–260), building on Barr and Khan (2007). For stable atoms and stable stars, the region is bounded by: $0 < y_u < 3 \times 10^{-5}, 7 \times 10^{-6} < y_d < 7 \times 10^{-5}, 3 \times 10^{-9} < y_e < 4 \times 10^{-5}$
 - For simplicity, set the lower limits to zero. For dimensionless parameters, we expect a distribution that peaks at unity and smoothly decreases away from the peak. Thus, the likelihood of life-permitting up-quark, down-quark and electron Yukawa couplings is at most 10^{-13}
- Strange quark Yukawa couplings: Jaffe, Jenkins, and Kimchi (2009) have suggested that the strange quark may need to be sufficiently heavier than the light quarks (up and down) to avoid composite particles that include the strange quark—including analogues of the proton and neutron and the *hyperon* ($uudds$)—from participating in and possibly destabilising atomic nuclei. However, a firm limit is not derived, and (as a lower limit only) would probably be relatively weak.
- Neutrino Yukawa couplings: if the sum of the neutrino Yukawa couplings is greater than 5×10^{-12} ($\sum m_\nu > 1$ eV), then galaxy formation is significantly suppressed by free-streaming. Further problems await very heavy neutrinos (> 1 MeV): they overclose the universe, result in no hydrogen left over from the big bang, and affect the ability of supernovae to distribute elements into the wider universe.

- Fine-structure and strong force coupling constants: the size and shape of this two-dimensional subspace that is life permitting is shown in Barnes (2012). The relevant one-dimensional limits are as follows. If $\alpha_s < 0.108$ (a 9% decrease; see also Pochet, Pearson, Beaudet, & Reeves 1991), then deuterium is unbound and stars fail to ignite (Adams & Grohs 2017b; Barnes & Lewis 2017); if $\alpha_s > 0.27$, there is little hydrogen left over from the Big Bang for stars and organic molecules. If $\alpha < 7.3 \times 10^{-5}$, stars fail to be stable (though this limit is significantly weakened if the diproton is stable, as shown in Barnes 2015); if $\alpha > v(y_d - y_u)/200 \text{ MeV} \approx 0.018$, the proton is heavier than the neutron, and the universe again has no hydrogen.
- Baryon (ξ_b) and dark matter (ξ_c) to photon ratios, and the scalar fluctuation amplitude (Q): Tegmark et al. (2006) summarize eight anthropic constraints on this subset of parameter space. For illustration purposes: if $Q < 10^{-6}$, matter does not cool sufficiently to collapse into galaxies and stars; if $Q > 10^{-4}$, galaxies may be too dense to permit long-lived planetary systems. These limits are probably too stringent; see Adams, Coppey, and Bloch (2015).
- Dimensionless spatial curvature (κ): if the early universe had been too positively curved and matter/radiation dominated, it would have recollapsed before any galaxies could form. If it had been too negatively curved and matter/radiation dominated, the expansion would have been too fast for galaxies to form.

A5 - Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem

By N.T. Wright, Originally published in *Sewanee Theological Review* 41.2, 1998.

<https://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/christian-origins-and-the-resurrection-of-jesus-the-resurrection-of-jesus-as-a-historical-problem/>

Prologue

The Question of Jesus' resurrection lies at the heart of the Christian faith. There is no form of early Christianity known to us that does not affirm that after Jesus' shameful death God raised him to life again. That affirmation is, in particular, the constant response of earlier Christianity to one of the four key questions about Jesus that must be raised by all serious historians of the first century. I have elsewhere addressed the first three such questions, namely what was Jesus' relation to Judaism? What were his aims? Why did he die?¹ The fourth question is this: Granted the foregoing, why did Christianity arise and take the shape it did? To this question, virtually all early Christians known to us give the same answer, "He was raised from the dead." The historian must therefore investigate what they meant by this and what can be said by way of historical comment.

In this first lecture I shall examine the broad historical issue. I shall do so by sketching out the beliefs about resurrection held within second-Temple Judaism, and then by looking at the shape of early Christianity to examine how the latter movement grew out of the former. In the second lecture we shall close in on some of the detailed evidence by looking at the claims of the early Christian movement as reflected in key texts. In the final lecture I propose to use one particular resurrection narrative, that of Luke, as a springboard for asking the question: What might the message of the resurrection have to say to the world and the church as we face the postmodern challenge in the closing years of the second millennium? The three lectures thus work as follows: In the present lecture I shall sketch a big picture of Christian origins and argue that only the bodily resurrection of Jesus can explain them. In the second I shall examine the detailed texts that speak of this event. In the third I shall move forward from the Emmaus Road in the first century to Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" in the nineteenth and into the twentieth.

My theme for the moment, then, is to present the historical argument that results from looking at first-century Judaism on the one hand and first-century Christianity on the other. We find ourselves, so to speak, contemplating two pillars on either side of a wide river. By studying them both and their relation to each other, we should be able to work out what sort of a bridge might actually join the two together. Christianity emerged from Judaism, but how did this happen? How did we get from the one riverbank to the other?

Resurrection as Understood in Second-Temple Judaism

How did the hope of resurrection function within Judaism's view of the world? And where does resurrection belong within second-temple Jewish beliefs about life after death in general?

Hope for resurrection began in Judaism not as dogma but as a story—the story of Israel's exile and restoration. The first obvious passage in which we find it is Ezekiel 37:1-14, the vision of the valley of the dry bones. There the hope for Israel's restoration is expressed in terms of the vivid, almost surreal, metaphor of dry bones coming back to life, acquiring flesh, sinews, and ultimately breath. The context makes clear that this image denotes return from exile; it also, by means of the previous chapters, sets up a series of connections, such as rescue, cleansing, and (particularly) covenant renewal. The same is true, arguably, of that difficult passage Isaiah 26:16-21. Resurrection begins life, in other words, as a metaphor for return from exile and all that went with Israel's hope for that.

But the story as it was told by second-Temple Jews through Jesus' day and beyond never suggested that the real return had actually taken place. Nobody supposed that the prophecies of Isaiah or Ezekiel had yet been fulfilled. Second-Temple Jews still lived within the narrative world of exile and restoration. Within this narrative, *exile* became focused at certain points in the suffering of the martyrs, and *resurrection* became focused on their vindication. In this context we must set Daniel 12 and, in particular, 2 Maccabees, with its grisly accounts of martyrs who taunt their torturers by assuring them that they, the martyrs, will receive back from Israel's god the physical bodies that are now being torn apart (e.g., 2 Macc 7:1-23).

This is a development of—not a departure from—the metaphorical world of Ezekiel 37. Exile continues, and in the early second century it took the form of brutal oppression by Syrian paganism. The hope then was that Israel's God would restore his people, and that those who died in the struggle, loyal to him and his Torah, would be raised from the dead to share in the eventual restoration. Thus also, after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD had intensified the sense of exile almost unbearably, we find 4 Ezra 7 articulating a similar hope. The same is true, whenever we date them, of 1 Enoch and 2 Baruch. Underlying all of these stories, of course, is the unshakable Jewish belief in the justice of the one true God.

Two important details must be mentioned here. First, we know from Josephus (War 2:163; Ant. 18:14) and the New Testament (Acts 23:7-8) what we might have guessed from the later rabbis, namely, that resurrection was an important feature of Pharisaic theology. But we must remember that in Jesus' day and Paul's day the majority of the Pharisees were on what we could call the revolutionary wing of Judaism, longer for the restoration of Israel.² Resurrection functioned for the Pharisees, not as an abstract doctrine about what happens to God's people (or to anybody) after death, but as a statement about the great turn-around within Israel's fortunes that would shortly take place, and about the fact that when this event happened those who had been loyal to Torah, but had died ahead of time would be raised to share in the blessings of the Age to Come. Pharisaic belief, in other words, is to be seen as a development of the same underlying story that we see in Daniel and 2 Maccabees.

The second detail to be mentioned concerns the book known as the Wisdom of Solomon. It has long been customary among scholars to declare that this book simply teaches the immortality of the soul rather than the resurrection. The opening verses of chapter three are quoted to this effect:

The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. (3:1-3)

However, the passage continues a few verses later:

In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever. (3:7-8)

These righteous Jews who have been martyred at the hands of the pagans are for the present at peace, safe with God, but the immortality of their souls is only the prelude to their rising again and being set in authority over the kingdoms of the earth, within the one kingdom of God. What the passage offers, over and above the other evidence we have briefly considered, is an account of what happens to the righteous dead in the interval between their torture and death and their rising again: their souls are looked after by God.

Resurrection belongs, then, within the revolutionary worldview of second-Temple Judaism. What part does it play within the Jewish hope for life after death? There was within Judaism a considerable spectrum of belief and speculation about what happened to dead people in general, and to dead Jews in particular. At one end were the Sadducees, who seem to have denied any doctrine of post-mortem existence (Mark 12:18; Josephus, War 2:165). At the other were the Pharisees, who affirmed a future embodied existence, and who seem to have at least begun to develop theories about how people continued to exist in the time lag between physical death and physical resurrection. And there are further options. Some writings speak of souls in disembodied bliss, some speculate about souls as angelic or astral beings, and so forth. We cannot, then, simply assert that Greeks believed in immortality and Jews in resurrection. Things were never that simple.

The reason why the Sadducees were opposed not only to resurrection but to any notion of an afterlife is very interesting. First, they insisted that the traditions did not contain this newfangled doctrine and that resurrection was not taught in the Torah itself. But they went further. Resurrection was a revolutionary doctrine, having to do with fiercely held beliefs about the coming climax of Israel's history. It was just the sort of thing, from the Sadducaean point of view, that those troublesome lower-class Pharisees *would* embrace to sustain their revolutionary dreams about the overthrow of the existing order and the establishment of the kingdom of God. The Sadducees' main aim was not to ensure their own personal survival into a future life, but to deny a doctrine that seemed to them (quite rightly) to pose a threat to the survival of their power within the present order and within any coming changes therein.³

I spoke before about the intermediate state between death and resurrection. As we just saw, the Wisdom of Solomon spoke of the souls of the righteous being in the hand of God, against the day when they would rise again and rule over nations and kingdoms. Alternatively, the dead, or at least the righteous dead, were thought to continue to live prior to their resurrection in a state comparable to that of angels or spirits. In this connection, in addition to the various

non-Christian Jewish texts, it is of interest to note a passage in Acts that points precisely in this direction. I mean that wonderfully comic scene in Acts 12, in which the maid Rhoda hears Peter knocking on the door and speaking to her, and instead of opening the door, she runs and tells the assembled company. They say, interestingly, “It must be his angel.” They assume that Peter has been executed in prison, that he has entered into the disembodied state between death and resurrection, and that in this form he has paid them a sort of post-mortem visit that various people in various cultures have experienced when someone close to them had recently died. Such a visit is entirely comprehensible in terms of the person’s “angel.”

My point here is that Jews in this period had reasonably well-developed ideas about an intermediate state—or at least a range of concepts and vocabulary read at hand with which to refer to it. Of course, if someone did not believe in eventual resurrection, believing instead in a continuing disembodied immortality, what a Pharisee would regard as an intermediate state might be thought of as a final state. But if a first-century Jew said that someone had been “raised from the dead,” the one thing they did *not* mean was that such a person had gone to a state of disembodied bliss, there either to rest forever or to wait until the great day of reembodiment.

This can easily be tested by asking whether someone in 150 BC who believed passionately that the Maccabaeans were true and righteous Israelites, or someone in 150 AD who believed that Simeon ben-Kosiba was the true Messiah (if any such existed), would have said that they, or he, had been raised from the dead, intending by that statement to indicate simply that their cause was indeed righteous and that they were alive in a place of honor in the presence of God. The answer is obvious. Someone in the position we have described might well have said that the martyrs, or ben-Kosiba, were alive in the form of either an angel or a spirit, or that their souls were in the hand of God, but they would not have dreamed of saying that they had already been raised from the dead. Resurrection meant embodiment; further, *it implied that the new age had dawned*. Nobody suggested that the martyrs had been reembodied. Nobody suggested that the new age had dawned—except, of course, the Christians, which will be my point in a few minutes.

There was, then, no single universally accepted and commonly articulated second-Temple Jewish hope for the future. It remains likely, however, that the Pharisaic belief, their way of telling the story, was popular with a good many Jews. Be that as it may, however wide the spectrum may have been and however many positions different Jews may have taken upon it, “resurrection” always denotes *one position within* that spectrum. “Resurrection” was not a term for “life after death” in general. It always meant reembodiment.

The Beginnings of Christianity

Having examined very briefly one element of the historical puzzle, the pillar on the Jewish bank of the river, we must now turn our attention to the other bank, the early Christian pillar. Then, in looking at both pillars together, we should be in a position to assess what sort of bridge could conceivably link two structures at once so similar and yet so different.

There are three aspects to this inquiry. Christianity began as a kingdom-of-God movement, as a messianic movement, and as a resurrection movement. In each case, this poses a considerable puzzle for the historian. In considering each of these three aspects, my argument will fall into three steps. First, I shall examine the way in which Christianity began as a movement of the type in question. Second, I shall revisit Judaism to inquire what such movements looked like and what they hoped for. Third, I shall show that the striking differences between the relevant movements in Judaism and the apparently equivalent movement in Christianity are such as to call for a particular sort of explanation.

A Kingdom-of-God Movement

The three steps in this particular case may be summarized as follows. First, early Christianity grew up as a kingdom-of-God movement. Second, kingdom-of-God in Judaism had certain particular meanings. Third, since these certainly had not come to pass, we must inquire why the early Christians said, nonetheless, that the kingdom of God had in fact been brought to earth.

First, then, early Christianity thought of itself as a kingdom-of-God movement (Mark 1:14-15). Already by the time of Paul the phrase “kingdom of God” and its equivalents had become more or less a shorthand for the movement, its way of life, and its *raison d’être* (Rom. 14:17; 1Cor. 4:20, 6:9-10, 15:50; Gal. 5:21; 1 Thess. 2:12). It is already woven into the structure of early Christian thinking. The way Paul uses it shows that it is common coinage within early Christianity and that it belongs within the Jewish world of which I have spoken. The early Christians told the story of the kingdom as their own story. They reordered their lives—in the case of former pagans, quite drastically—around the new symbolic universe in which the Jewish hope that there would be “no king but God” had come true through Jesus the Messiah. They engaged in a praxis that affirmed there was a different way of being human, a way that answered to the claims of this kingdom. This is the first step of this first stage in my argument.

The second step, then, is to consider what “kingdom of God” meant in Judaism (a large topic, of course, which we can here only summarize briefly and inadequately). Within Judaism the coming kingdom of God meant the end of Israel’s exile, the overthrow of a pagan empire and the exaltation of Israel, and the return of YHWH to Zion to judge and save. These are the motifs that emerge from that great kingdom-prophecy, Isaiah 40-55, and from numerous psalms and other parts of the Hebrew scriptures. And, as Josephus makes clear, in Jesus’ day the conviction that their “only Ruler and Master” was God was a particular mark of the revolutionaries (Ant. 18:23).

For a second-Temple Jew, then, the coming of the kingdom was not about a private existentialist or Gnostic experience but about public events. At its narrowest, it was about the liberation of Israel. At its broadest, it was about the coming of God’s justice and liberation for the whole cosmos. Thus, if you had said to a first-century Jew, “The kingdom of God is here,” and had explained yourself by speaking of a new spiritual experience, a new sense of forgiveness, or an exciting reordering of your private religious interiority, he or she might well have said that they were glad you had had this experience, but why did you refer to it as the kingdom of God? This, then, is the second step of this first stage in the argument.

The third step is to put these two together and to notice the contrast. It is clear that, whatever the early Christians said, the kingdom of God had not come in the way that first-century Jews had been imagining. Israel had not been liberated, the Temple was not rebuilt, and—looking wider in the cosmos—evil, injustice, pain, and death were still on the rampage. The question presses, then: Why did the early Christians say that the kingdom of God *had* come?

One answer obviously would be this: The early Christians changed the meaning of the phrase so radically so that it now referred not to a political state of affairs but to an internal or spiritual one. They had taken the apocalyptic meaning current in their world and had demythologized, dejudaized, spiritualized, or Hellenized it. But this is simply untrue to early Christianity. The early Christians acted as if the Jewish-style kingdom of God was really present: they organized their life as if they really were the returned-from-exile people, the people of the new covenant. When they spoke of a new internal or “spiritual” reality, they used the language not of the kingdom of God, but of the new heart, the indwelling of the spirit, and so forth.

The historical question is therefore posed: What on earth (and I mean that on *earth*) would have caused them to act, speak, and think this way? Why, indeed, did they *not* continue the sort of kingdom-revolution they had imagined Jesus was going to lead? How do we explain the fact that early Christianity was neither a nationalist Jewish movement nor a private existential experience? How do we explain the fact that it is asserted, from within the Jewish worldview, that the *eschaton* had arrived, even though it did not look like they had imagined it would? The early Christian answer was, of course, that Jesus had been raised from the dead. That was why they said that the kingdom had come and that the new age had dawned.

This brings us to the second stage in the argument.

A Messianic Movement

I have argued elsewhere that Christianity was from the first a messianic movement.⁴ Let me summarize the case as the first step in this second stage of my argument.

To begin with, the earliest Christian sources that we possess speak of Jesus as Messiah. According to Acts, this assertion was central to the early proclamation that God had made Jesus “both Lord and Christ” (3:36). As for Paul, I have argued elsewhere that Jesus’ messiahship remained central and explicit for him.⁵ But even if you insist that by the time of Paul the word *Christos* had become simply a proper name with a few distant messianic memories attached to it, you cannot evade the conclusion that if the former Pharisee Paul, within thirty years of Jesus’ death, was referring to Jesus as *Christos*—and especially if he was doing so without giving a thought to the Jewish meaning of that word—that only shows how firmly within the earliest tradition the idea of Jesus’ messiahship had taken hold. How do we explain all this? Why did they say that Jesus was Messiah?

Various scholars have long recognized that the resurrection alone cannot explain why the early Christians thought of Jesus as Messiah. If someone other than Jesus had been raised from the dead, there is no reason to suppose that his or her contemporaries would have thought them to be the Messiah. We must, therefore, seek the

reason in Jesus' messianic execution, crucified as he was with the words "king of the Jews" above his head. In *Jesus and the Victory of God*, I have argued that this, in turn, forces us to look further back and to see some of Jesus' key symbolic actions, notably his action in the Temple, and some of his key riddles and parables, as both implicitly and explicitly messianic.⁶ (Let me stress, in case of confusion, that in second-Temple Judaism the word "messiah" carried no connotations of what we would call "divinity.") Again, even if you disagree and want to insist that Jesus came to be thought of as Messiah only at his resurrection, that, if anything, would tighten the screw of my argument still further.

My point is—to move to the second step in this stage of my argument—a first-century Jew, faced with the crucifixion of a would-be messiah, or even of a prophet who had led a significant following, would *not* normally conclude that this person was the Messiah and that the kingdom had com. He or she would normally conclude that he was not and that it had not.

There were, to be sure, several variations on Jewish messianic belief in this period. *None of them envisaged a Messiah who would die at the hands of the pagans.* On the contrary, where Jewish expectations of a Messiah did exist, they regularly possessed a dual focus. In a line of tradition stretching from David to Bar-Kochba, including the Maccabees and Herod, we find that the king would have to defeat the pagans, and that he would have to rebuild (or at least to cleanse) the Temple. The two actions would, of course, go together: as long as the pagans remained undefeated, YHWH had not returned to Zion, presumably because his house was not ready. If a messiah was killed by the pagans, especially if he had not rebuilt the Temple or liberated Israel, that was the surest sign that he was another in the long line of *false* messiahs.

It is surely clear what follows. If the messiah you had been following was killed by the pagans, you were faced with a choice between two courses of action. You could give up on the whole idea of revolution and abandon the dream of liberation. Some went that route, notably, of course, the rabbinic movement as a whole after 135 AD. Or you could find yourself a new messiah, if possible from the same family as the late lamented one. Some went that route: witness the continuing movement that ran from Judas the Galilean in 6 AD to his sons or grandsons in the 50s; to another descendant, Menahem, during the war of 66-70; and to another descendant, Eleazor, who was the leader of the ill-fated Sicarii on Masada in 73.⁷

Once again, let us be clear. If, after the death of Simon bar-Giora in Titus's triumph in Rome, or if, after the death of Simeon ben-Kosiba in 135, you had claimed that Simon, or Simeon, really was the Messiah, you would invite a fairly sharp response from the average first-century Jew. If, by way of explanation, you said that you had had a strong sense of Simon, or Simeon, as still being with you, still supporting and leading you, the kindest response you might expect would be that their angel or spirit was still communicating with you—not that he had been raised from the dead. So far as we know, the followers of the first-century messianic or quasi-messianic movements were fanatically committed to the cause. They, if anybody, might be expected to suffer from cognitive dissonance after the death of their great leader. In no other case, however, right across the century before Jesus and the century after him, do we hear of any Jewish group saying that their executed leader had been raised again from the dead.

So—and here is the third step in the second stage of my argument—granted that Jesus of Nazareth was certainly crucified as a rebel king, it is extremely strange that the early Christians not only insisted that he was actually the Messiah, but they reordered their worldview, their praxis, their stories, symbols, and theology around this belief.

They had, after all, the two normal options open to them. They could simply have gone back to their fishing, glad to have escaped Jerusalem with their lives. They could have switched to a different tack, given up on messianism (as did the post-135 rabbis), and gone in for some form of private religion instead, whether of intensified Torah-observance, private *gnosis*, or something else. They clearly did not do that. Anything less like a private religion than going around the pagan world saying that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel would be hard to imagine.

Equally, and perhaps even more interestingly, they could have found themselves a new messiah from among Jesus' blood relatives. This is not, I think, normally considered. It deserves to be. We know from various sources that Jesus' relatives were important and well-known within the early church. One of the closest, his brother James, though not part of the movement during Jesus' lifetime, actually appears to have become the anchorman in Jerusalem while Peter and Paul went off around the world (Acts 12:17; 15:13, 21:18; Gal. 1:19, 2:9). James was widely regarded in the early church as the person at the center, geographically and theologically. Yet—and this is the vital clue, like Sherlock Holmes's dog that did not bark in the night—*nobody in early Christianity ever dreamed of saying that James was the Messiah*. Nothing would have been more natural, especially on the analogy of the family of Judas the Galilean. Yet James was simply known as "the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19; cf. Mark 6:3).

We must, then, ask once again: Why did Christianity even begin, let alone continue, as a messianic movement, when its Messiah so obviously not only did not do what a Messiah was supposed to do but suffered a fate which ought to have showed conclusively that he could not possibly have been Israel's anointed? Why did this group of first-century Jews, who had cherished messianic hopes and focused them on Jesus of Nazareth, not only continue to believe that he was the Messiah despite his execution, but actively announce him as such in the pagan as well as the Jewish world, cheerfully redrawing the picture of messiahship around him but refusing to abandon it? Their answer, consistently throughout the evidence we possess, was that Jesus, following his execution on a charge of being a would-be Messiah, had been raised from the dead.

Before we can examine what they meant by this, we must look at the third, and clearly the most important, of the three stages within this present argument.

A Resurrection Movement

Christianity began as a resurrection movement. As I have already remarked, there is no evidence for a form of early Christianity in which the resurrection was not a central belief, as it were, bolted on to Christianity at the edge. It was the central driving force, informing the whole movement. In particular, we can see woven into the earliest Christian theology we possess—that of Paul, of course—the belief that the resurrection had in principle occurred and

that the followers of Jesus had to reorder their lives, their narratives, their symbols, and their praxis accordingly (see, classically, Rom. 6:3-11).

I want here to note one interesting phenomenon in particular. This thinking about the resurrection has a remarkable precision and consistency. Unlike the Jewish beliefs we glanced at earlier, from the very beginning Christian re-use of resurrection language is astonishingly free of vague and generalized speculation. It is crisp and clear: resurrection means going through death and out the other side into a new mode of existence. This whole position is comprehensible only within the thought-world of Judaism, but it is much more precise than anything that non-Christian Judaism had at that stage produced.

Christianity, then, began as a resurrection movement. That is the first step of this third stage in my argument.

The second step builds on what I was saying in the first part of this lecture about Jewish expectations of the resurrection. As we saw, “resurrection” in second-Temple Judaism functioned within a controlling narrative about the exile and restoration, and about the suffering and vindication of the martyrs. Let me remind you again: it began life as a metaphor for the return from exile, the renewal of the covenant, and the cleansing of Israel from her sins. “Resurrection” was referred to in various ways, and it took its place within quite a wide range of speculation about the future of humankind in general and Israel in particular after their actual bodily death. The resurrection of the dead was thus both a symbol for the coming of the new ages, and itself, taken literally, one central element in the package: when YHWH restored the fortunes of his people, then of course Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, together with all God’s people down to and including the martyrs who had died in the cause, would be reembodyed, raised to new life in God’s new world. Where second-Temple Jews believed in resurrection then, that belief concerned on the one hand the reembodyment of formerly dead human beings, and on the other the inauguration of the new age, the new covenant, in which all the righteous dead would be raised simultaneously. Resurrection meant both that the dead would be alive again with new or renewed bodies and that the Age to Come had at least been inaugurated.

If therefore at any time in this period you had said to a Jew, “The resurrection has occurred!” you would have received the puzzled (or irritated) response that it obviously had not, since the patriarchs, prophets, and martyrs were not walking around alive again, and since the restoration spoken of in Ezekiel 37 clearly had not occurred either—not to mention the great prophecies of Isaiah and the rest. And if, by way of explanation, you had said that you did not mean all that, that what you meant was that you had had a wonderful new sense of divine healing and forgiveness, or that you believed the former leader of your movement was alive in the presence of God following his shameful torture and death, your interlocutor might have congratulated you on having such an experience, and discussed with you such a belief, but he or she would still have been puzzled as to why you would talk of “the resurrection of the dead” in referring to either of these things. These things imply were not what “the resurrection of the dead” was about.

Nevertheless—and this is the third step in this third stage of the argument—although, as we have stressed, the new age had *not* dawned in the way that first century Jews imagined, and

the resurrection of all God's people had *not* taken place, yet the very earliest church persisted in declaring roundly not only that Jesus was raised from the dead but also that "the resurrection of the dead" had already occurred. What is more, as we have observed, members of the church busily set about redesigning their worldview—their characteristic praxis, their controlling stories, their symbolic universe, and their basic theology—around this new fixed point. They behaved, in other words, as though the new age *had* already arrived. That was the inner logic of the Gentile mission: since God had now done for Israel what he was going to do for Israel the Gentiles would at least share the blessing (Isa. 66:18-23; Zech. 14:16). They did not behave as though they had had a new sort of religious experience or as if their former leader was alive and well in the presence of God, whether as an angel or a spirit or whatever. The only explanation for their behavior, their stories, their symbols, and their theology is that they really believed Jesus had been bodily raised from the dead. This conclusion is so well grounded that, today, even those who would like to insist that the body of Jesus in fact remained decomposing in the tomb agree that the early Christians *believed* him to have been bodily raised, leaving an empty tomb behind him.

Conclusion: The Questions and the Options

I have argued that Christianity began as a recognizably first-century Jewish movement: it was a kingdom- of-God movement, a messianic movement, and a resurrection movement. The Jewish context for all these movements indicated certain expectations that decidedly had not been fulfilled. Indeed the crucifixion of Jesus was the symbol not merely of hope deferred but of hope crushed and trampled upon. The historian is therefore bound to seek an explanation not only as to why early Christianity began in the first place, but also as to why it took the shape it did. In the final part of this lecture, let me quickly review some of the options that have been canvassed within the debate.

There are, to begin with, some fairly well-known false trails. Some, for example, have suggested that Jesus did not really die on the cross. Against all the proponents of this so-called "swoon" theory, as it has often been called, we must stress that the Romans knew how to kill people. The reappearance of a battered and exhausted Jesus would hardly have suggested that he had gone through death and out the other side, that the kingdom of God had indeed come, that "the resurrection" had occurred, and that he was indeed the Messiah who had defeated God's enemies and would rebuild the Temple.

Equally, there are plenty of people who produce wild and fantastic theories to explain that Jesus did not really rise from the dead at all or leave an empty tomb behind him. I think of a book called *The Tomb of God*, published two years ago, which ends up saying that the bones of Jesus now lie in a sealed tomb in southwestern France.⁸

Among the more serious objections to Jesus' resurrection—and perhaps the most famous in this century—has been that of Rudolf Bultmann. In a much-discussed passage, Bultmann asserts that the resurrection-language of the early church was used to denote not a separate event from the crucifixion but the early disciples' faith that the crucifixion was not a tragic defeat but the divine act of salvation. Easter is thus about the arising, not of Jesus, but of the faith of the early church.⁹

My whole argument thus far tells very heavily against this. If we are to think in first-century Jewish terms, it is impossible to conceive what sort of religious or spiritual experience someone could have that would make them say that the kingdom of God had arrived when it clearly had not, that a crucified leader was the Messiah when he obviously was not, or that the resurrection occurred last month when it obviously did not. However strong the disciples' sense may have been that Jesus had been vindicated, that they had been forgiven, or whatever, they would still not have said he had been raised from the dead. They might, perhaps, have written a new version of 2 Maccabees 7. They might have suggested that Jesus had predicted his own resurrection. They would not have said that it had actually happened yet.

This failure to think in first-century terms also vitiates those who have offered variations on the Bultmannian scheme. Edward Schillebeeckx, for instance, declares that when the disciples went to the tomb their minds were so filled with light that it did not matter whether there was a body there or not. What happened in the Easter appearances was a conversion to Jesus as the Christ, who now came to them as the light of the world, and this was the "illumination" by which the disciples were "justified."¹⁰ Schillebeeckx fits out Bultmann's suggestion with a more precise one; that the disciples, who were overcome by deep feelings of guilt at having run away and let Jesus down, experienced on Easter morning a wonderful sense of the forgiveness of God and the continuing presence of Jesus. This then became the start of the characteristically Christian experience knowing the forgiveness of God and/or knowing the presence of Jesus.¹¹

The trouble with this is that if you had said to a first-century Jew that you had had a wonderful experience of the forgiveness (or the love and grace) of God, she or he would have been delighted for you. But if you had gone on to say that the kingdom had come, that a crucified leader was the Messiah or that the resurrection had occurred, they would have been deeply puzzled if not downright offended. This language is simply not about private experiences, even communicable private experiences, of forgiveness. It is about eschatology, about something happening within history that resulted in a world being now a very different place. Neither Bultmann nor Schillebeeckx can explain from the texts the rise of Christianity as we know it.

A further twist has been given to Bultmann's hypothesis by Gerd Lüdemann.¹² He suggests that Peter was so deeply grieved over Jesus' death that he experienced what, as we noted earlier, people in such a state often report: a sense of the loving presence of the recently deceased person, perhaps even a sense of him speaking and reassuring him. Peter then, so Lüdemann asks us to believe, communicated this experience to the others, who were spontaneously filled with joy at the thought that Jesus was still alive.¹³ Meanwhile Paul underwent the opposite sort of hallucination: having been vehemently opposed to the new movement, he was overcome by guilt and experienced a guilt-induced fantasy which he, too, was able to share with others to remarkably powerful effects.¹⁴

My response to this proposal is (a) that it requires enormous credulity to suppose that, even allowing Peter and Paul to have had such fantasies or hallucinations they would have generated more than a passing comment of sympathy among their colleagues or contemporaries; (b) that psychological theories of this sort—about people two thousand years ago in a different

culture—are at best unprovable and at worst wildly fantastic. But, and most important, (c) the proposal simply does not make sense within the world or first-century Judaism.

As we see from the story of Rhoda in Acts 12, first-century Jews knew about post-mortem visitations from recently deceased friends, and they already had Language systems for speaking of such phenomena. “It must be his angel,” they said, when they thought they were having a visit of just this sort from Peter. They did not say that Peter had been raised from the dead. To put it another way, if we had been members of that group in Acts 12, and if we had been made aware of a recently executed Peter as a ghostly or spiritual presence with us, we would have concluded, certainly, that Peter was now alive with God. But we still also would have thought that we would have to claim his corpse for burial the next day, and we still would have believed that it remained for him actually to be raised, along with the rest of God’s people, at the last day.

You see, it would have been very natural for first-century Jews, especially if they had belonged to a kingdom-of-God movement already, to say of a leader who had paid the ultimate penalty at the hands of the authorities, that his soul was in the band of God, that he was alive to God, that he had been exalted to paradise, and that he was therefore among the righteous who had been unjustly put to death but who would rise again to rule the world in God’s good time. (This is, of course, exactly what Wisdom 3:1-9 *does* say?) And if Jesus’ followers had indeed had a sense that he was alive in a nonphysical way, and even that he was still present with them in some fashion, this is how they would have expressed it. But in so doing they would not have been claiming (to stress the point again) that the *eschaton*, the longed-for kingdom of God, had now arrived; they would *not* have been saying that their crucified leader was the Messiah; and above all they would not have been saying that he had been raised from the dead or that “the resurrection of the dead” had now occurred.

In particular, we have no reason to suppose that after the crucifixion of a would-be messiah anyone would suppose that he had been exalted to a place either of world rulership or divine lordship. Nobody, so far as we know, ever suggested that this was the case after the deaths of Judas the Galilean, Simon bar-Giora, or Simeon ben-Kosiba. Actually, such a suggestion would most likely have been regarded as at best ridiculous and at worst scandalous. The failure of such men to lead a *successful* messianic movement debarred them from further consideration as candidates for such a position. Even if someone had made such a suggestion, however, they would not then have gone on to say that this person had been “raised from the dead.” Belief in exaltation *alone* would not lead, in the world of first-century Judaism, to belief in resurrection. If, by contrast, we suppose that the followers of a crucified would-be messiah *first* came to believe that he had been bodily raised from the dead, then we can trace a clear line by which they subsequently would have come to believe that he must be the Messiah. And if he was the Messiah, then he was also the world ruler promised in Psalm 89 and Daniel 7, and thus he was exalted over the world, and so on. All our texts suggest that this actually was the train of thought that the early Christians followed.

It will be obvious that I have dealt with only a tiny fraction of the theories that have been advanced as to what happened at Easter, but I hope I have said enough to show that the

proponents of any theory that the body of Jesus remained in the tomb while the early Christians said the resurrection had occurred have a formidable task ahead of them, simply in terms of first-century history. What we find, rather, is the universal early Christian claim that Jesus had gone, as it were, through death and out the other side, that he was not just in some intermediate state or wine disembodied existence, but that his body had been transformed in a way for which they, his followers, had been quite unprepared, but with which they had had to come to terms. And they gave this as the reason why they believed his kingdom-announcement had indeed reached its climax, its fulfillment, in his death and resurrection. They gave this as the reason why they continued to regard him as Messiah despite his shameful death. They gave this as the reason for saying that “the resurrection” had in principle already happened. What is more, they wove this belief so firmly into their theology, their praxis, their stories, and their symbols that (unless we are prepared to stop writing history and start writing fantasy instead) we cannot envisage their communal life without it.

I propose, therefore, as the result of this broad-canvas treatment of second- Temple Judaism and early Christianity, that there is in fact no other solution to the historical problem than to conclude that something remarkable had happened to the body of Jesus. No other bridge will carry the historian across the river from one pillar to the other.

But what was it that happened, and how did the first Christians describe it? That is the question that will occupy us in the second lecture, as we look in more detail at the actual rise of Christianity in the light of the key texts from Paul and the gospels.

Endnotes

1 See N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 2: *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

2 See further N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1: *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 189-99.

3 For further information on the Sadducees’ denial of the resurrection, see Wright, *New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 211-212.

4 See Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 309-10.

5 See N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 41-55.

6 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, chapter 11.

7 See Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.*, David Smith, trans. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989 [2nd edition, revised, 1976]) 331-32.

8 Richard Andrews, *The Tomb of God: The Body of Jesus and the Solution to a 2000-Year-Old Mystery* (Boston and London: Little, Brown, 1996).

9 See Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology: The Mythological Element in the Message of the New Testament and the Problem of its Re-interpretation,” in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, Hans Werner Bartsch, ed., Reginald H. Fuller, trans. (London: SPCK, 1953), 38-43.

10 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, Huber Hoskins, trans. (New York: Crossroad, 1979), 384.

11 Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 380-97.

12 Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*, John Bowden, trans. (London: SCM, 1994).

13 Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, 95-100, 176-77.

14 Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, 82-84.

A6 - The Late Twentieth-Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses to Jesus' Resurrection

By Gary Habermas, Originally published in the Trinity Journal / 2001 (TRINJ 22NS (2001) 179-196)
www.garyhabermas.com/articles/southeastern_theological_review/minimal-facts-methodology_08-02-2012.htm

Introduction

The last twenty years or so have witnessed the inevitable march of new theological trends. Gone are scholars like Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr. In their place, less centralized currents have captured the spotlight. Through it all, many publications on the subject of Jesus' resurrection have continued to appear. As the center of Christian theology, this would seem to be inevitable. Yet, to the careful observer, some different tendencies are becoming apparent.

It could be argued that the most captivating theological topic at present, at least in the United States, is the historical Jesus. Scores of publications by major scholars have appeared since the mid-1970s, bringing Jesus and his Palestinian setting to our attention. More recently, the apostle Paul has been the subject of numerous other influential studies. Almost unavoidably, these trends add to the opportunities to discuss the resurrection and its meaning.

Over the last two years, I have tracked more than twelve hundred publications on the subject of the resurrection of Jesus. Each source appeared between 1975 and the present, with the vast majority written by critical scholars. Out of this contemporary milieu, my purpose here will be to outline what appears to be a growing, although still fairly limited, trend. In recent years, some of the old, naturalistic theories that rejected the historicity of Jesus' resurrection have reappeared after a lengthy hiatus.

This essay concerns some of these most recent scholarly trends regarding the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. I will note the emergence of almost a dozen different alternative theses that are variously suggested or favored by more than forty different scholars, some of whom endorse more than one theory. While some of these works are lesser known or more popularly written, others contain suggestions or assertions held by highly influential authors. There is an interdisciplinary flavor here, as well. Most of the critics are theologians or NT scholars, while a number of them are philosophers, along with a few others from diverse fields.

My effort here will attempt to categorize and list these natural hypotheses, including naming two alternative proposals that have so far eluded any generally recognized appellation. Hopefully, even this broad scholarly demarcation will serve the purpose of calling attention to the current skeptical trend, which may become more helpful if the recent trickle becomes a torrent.

I. A Brief Historical Context For Naturalistic Theories

What is a naturalistic theory concerning the resurrection of Jesus? Drawn from a host of philosophical backgrounds, the basic idea is to suggest an alternative explanation in place of divine causation. Thus, a naturalistic theory is an assertion something like this: "Jesus didn't rise from the dead. What really happened is (fill in the blank)."

Notice that my explanation requires that the notion of Jesus' resurrection be replaced with a specific variety of natural substitutes. The seeming supernatural portion of the religious claim is explained in terms of a natural occurrence. Thus, a comment along the lines of a simple denial ("There's no way that events like resurrections ever take place!") does not qualify as a naturalistic theory. Affirmations can be made as easily as denials can. In short, the blank needs to be filled in with an alternative explanation.

Some may assume that these naturalistic hypotheses regarding the resurrection have always been very popular in scholarly circles right up until the present, but this is not the case. While there have been many examples throughout the centuries,¹ besides David Hume's influential argument that natural explanations are always more likely than supernatural ones,² the golden age of such theories came during the reign of nineteenth century German liberalism. Albert Schweitzer lists many examples in his classic volume, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.³

As with the larger question of miracles, the predominant liberal approach was to accept fairly large portions of the gospel accounts as historical, while presenting rationalized alternatives to unwanted portions. Liberal irritation was chiefly provoked by two sorts of biblical data: dogmatic theology and supernatural reports. With the latter, the texts were generally not taken at face value; an alternative sequence of events was supplied.

For example, this approach of accepting a fair amount of gospel content while rejecting the supernatural elements can be seen in Ernest Renan's famous *Vie de Jesus*. Renan generally tended to favor the fourth gospel's account of Jesus, informing his readers more than once of the general accuracy of this gospel's resurrection account.⁴ In the French edition, a footnote by the author also points out that, in the fourth gospel, Mary Magdalene was "le seul témoin primitif de la resurrection"--the only original witness to the resurrection. Having thus identified her, Renan a moment later tells us that it was Mary's love and enthusiasm that caused her to hallucinate, giving the world a resurrected God!⁵ Thus even Renan's favorite gospel is countered when it comes to miracles.

However, other liberals like David Strauss challenged these approaches, favoring a second, more radical strategy. He treated the gospel texts as if they were largely mythical compositions containing very little history. Such a method thereby questioned or rejected "[a] large portion" of the gospel records.⁶ In the process, Strauss created more of a dispute than he had perhaps envisaged. Besides repudiating the historicity of miracles, this minority trend even undermined the predominantly historical emphasis of his colleagues!⁷

One trend in German liberalism was that these scholars criticized the approaches to the gospels taken by their fellow liberals. Additionally, the naturalistic alternatives to Jesus' resurrection favored by some were also frequently rejected by others. For example, David Strauss belittled the swoon theory held by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Heinrich Paulus, and others. Strauss concluded that such a scenario would utterly fail to account for the disciples' passionate belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead as the Lord of life.⁸ Schweitzer noted that these rationalistic approaches suffered the "death-blow at the hands of Strauss."⁹ On the other hand, Schleiermacher, Paulus, and later Theodor Keim took aim at subjective responses like Strauss's hallucination hypothesis.¹⁰

After the demise of German liberalism, usually dated shortly after the termination of World War I, the next few decades of the twentieth century witnessed a decreasing interest in naturalistic alternative theories to Jesus' resurrection. There were several reasons for this, not the least of which was that theological studies had entered what might be called a "No Quest" period. Due to the influence of Schweitzer's major study on the historical Jesus, along with Martin Kähler's *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* in 1896,¹¹ plus the growing influence of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann,¹² historical Jesus studies were severely curtailed.

During this time, it was often the case that any historical emphases, even naturalistic ones, were shunned. It might be said, then, that alternative responses to the resurrection were ruled out by the same tendency that disparaged any significant value being placed on historical studies of Jesus. But it was also well-recognized that there were significant factual problems with these challenges to the resurrection.

In the second half of the twentieth century, theological trends began moving in another direction. Even Bultmann's students argued that at least some historical knowledge was indispensable for the Christian faith. Ernst Käsemann's famous 1954 essay "Das Problem des historischen Jesus"¹³ and James M. Robinson's call for a New Quest¹⁴ marked a very limited interest in historical matters. But as scholars like Wolfhart Pannenberg moved to the forefront of theological discussions, history again regained a place of prominence.¹⁵ Over at least the last twenty years, the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus has dominated the theological landscape.¹⁶

For most of the century, then, critical scholarship has largely rejected the naturalistic approaches to the resurrection. In fact, they have usually done so in a wholesale manner. After noting that "the older criticism took some strange paths," Karl Barth named some of these alternative hypotheses. Then he summed up the matter: "To-day we rightly turn up our nose at this" because of the problems with the thesis. As a result, "these explanations . . . have now gone out of currency."¹⁷ While discussing several naturalistic approaches, Raymond Brown concluded:

The criticism of today does not follow the paths taken by the criticism of the past. No longer respectable are the crude theories.... Occasionally some new mutation of the "plot" approach will briefly capture the public fancy, but serious scholars pay little attention to these fictional reconstructions.¹⁸

This aspect of recent thought is actually quite amazing. Theologians across a very wide conceptual spectrum have agreed in rejecting naturalistic approaches as explanations for the earliest Christians' belief in Jesus' resurrection. Even a sampling of these scholars is impressive.¹⁹

In the last decade or so, several influential theologians and philosophers have continued to concur with these assessments. James D. G. Dunn judges that "alternative interpretations of the data fail to provide a more satisfactory explanation" than the Christian proclamation that God raised Jesus from the dead.²⁰ Steven T. Davis agrees:

All of the alternative hypotheses with which I am familiar are historically weak; some are so weak that they collapse of their own weight once spelled out. . . . the alternative theories that have been proposed are not only weaker but far weaker at explaining the available historical evidence.²¹

Richard Swinburne concludes: "alternative hypotheses have always seemed to me to give far less satisfactory accounts of the historical evidence than does the traditional account."²²

Still, an unusually large number of positive reassessments of naturalistic hypotheses were published in the last ten to twenty years, often put forward by influential scholars. No new evidence favoring these alternative responses has emerged. After a lengthy lapse, it is difficult to account for this trend.

II. The Present Scene

The latest research on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection reveals other very intriguing trends. Perhaps more firmly than ever, the vast majority of contemporary scholars are agreed that the earliest followers of Jesus at least believed that they had experienced their risen Lord. Even radical scholars rarely question this fact. It may well be one of the two or three most widely established particulars about Jesus' life. Therefore, any attempt to explain what happened in natural terms must be able to adequately account for this early conviction.

As Reginald Fuller remarked years ago, Jesus' disciples believing that he was raised from the dead "is one of the indisputable facts of history." That they had experiences that they thought were Jesus' appearances to them "is a fact upon which both believer and unbeliever may agree."²³ Later, Fuller pointed out that these experiences must be adequately explained: it "therefore requires that the historian postulate some other event over and above Good Friday, an event which is not itself the 'rise of the Easter faith' but the cause of the Easter faith."²⁴

James D. G. Dunn speaks similarly: "It is almost impossible to dispute that at the historical roots of Christianity lie some visionary experiences of the first Christians, who understood them as appearances of Jesus, raised by God from the dead."²⁵

And they were not merely speaking about an internal realization or conviction: "they clearly meant that something had happened to Jesus himself. God had raised him, not merely reassured them."²⁶

Even more skeptical scholars often grant the grounds for the appearances. Norman Perrin concluded, "The more we study the tradition with regard to the appearances, the firmer the rock begins to appear upon which they are based."²⁷ Helmut Koester concurs:

We are on much firmer ground with respect to the appearances of the risen Jesus and their effect. . . . that Jesus also appeared to others (Peter, Mary Magdalene, James) cannot very well be questioned.²⁸

How we explain the nature of these early experiences, then, is the chief issue. Peter Carnley sets up the issue rather nicely:

Meanwhile, there is no doubt that the first disciples interpreted the Easter visions or appearances as signs of the heavenly presence of Christ. Why they should be minded to do this with the degree of conviction that is so clearly reflected in the early testimony is what we must seek to explain.²⁹

The different sorts of explanations can perhaps be categorized briefly, at the expense of some oversimplification. The major disagreement, of course, comes from those scholars who hold that natural hypotheses can explain the data better than the thesis that Jesus appeared alive after his death. Of these natural suppositions, some appeal to the earliest Christians' subjective, internal states, while others prefer objective solutions involving external events and conditions. I will call these two perspectives the naturalistic subjective and the naturalistic objective theses, respectively.

Similarly, of those who think that Jesus was really raised from the dead and appeared to his followers, some prefer manifestations that did not involve Jesus' physical body. Others think that Jesus appeared in an external, bodily form.³⁰ But what they both have in common is the conviction that Jesus really appeared to his followers. So I will call these the supernatural subjective and the supernatural objective theses, respectively. We will have much less to say in this essay concerning these supernatural categories, since neither involves natural explanations in order to account for the central phenomena, which are our main concern here.

It is my contention that, while not approaching large proportions in terms of the total number of commentators, we are at present witnessing a noteworthy comeback of scholars who espouse naturalistic hypotheses to account for Jesus' resurrection. Some of us have been predicting this for years, and so we are not really surprised. Although we have seen comparatively little of this activity for perhaps several decades, attitudes do change.

III. Charting Natural Hypotheses

The last couple of decades have produced more than forty suggestions³¹ favoring about a dozen different alternative scenarios to account for the NT report that Jesus was raised from the dead. With few exceptions, these theses are paralleled in the older liberal literature and elsewhere, although they occasionally include new twists. Many of the suggestions are expressed in fairly popular works, while others are published for scholarly consumption. Some are no more than brief mentions, while others are developed in detail. These natural hypotheses are of both the subjective and objective varieties. My purpose here is simply to note some of these trends.

A. Naturalistic Subjective Theories

As with later nineteenth century liberalism, so today some of the most popular alternatives to belief in Jesus' resurrection are that the internal states of the earliest Christians were such that they became convinced that Jesus was alive, even though nothing happened to Jesus himself. Perhaps this approach is largely prompted by the trends that we just noted: the critical community most frequently acknowledges that the disciples at least believed firmly that the risen Jesus had appeared to them. What could give rise to such a conviction? In this general

category, two major answers include hallucinations (often called subjective visions) and what I will call the illumination hypothesis.

After a decades-long hiatus, the subjective vision theory is making a comeback and is again the most popular natural response to Jesus' resurrection. The most influential version is that argued by German theologian Gerd Lüdemann. After a study of the major resurrection texts in the NT, Lüdemann appeals to "stimulus," "religious intoxication," and "enthusiasm" as the states of mind leading to the visions seen by Peter, as well as by others who concluded that Jesus was alive. Lüdemann prefers to speak of these experiences as visions rather than hallucinations, but he is clear that nothing literally happened to Jesus himself.³²

Another influential version is held by Michael Goulder, who employs subjective visions or hallucinations in a more limited fashion than Lüdemann. For Goulder, these psychological states of mind ("conversion visions") particularly explain Peter's experience and Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus and are rather typical of religious conversions even today.³³ Closer to Goulder, Jack Kent employs grief hallucinations and conversion disorder to account for Jesus' appearances.³⁴

Other recent discussions in German circles have touched on a related thesis. Samuel Vollenweider has argued that in the history of religions, group visions are quite rare.³⁵ But Ingo Broer notes a decades-old wartime story involving a reported vision by a group of German soldiers. Yet in the very next sentence, Broer questions the report.³⁶ He concludes his essay while still leaving some question regarding the veridical status of the resurrection appearances.³⁷

Other examples of the subjective vision thesis have also emerged, but without the details provided by Lüdemann, Goulder, and Kent. A few scholars have built on some of the ideas of Carl Jung and his "collective unconsciousness," with visions providing the catalyst for early Christian belief.³⁸ Philosophers Antony Flew³⁹ and John Hick⁴⁰ also prefer the hallucination thesis. Historian Michael Grant thinks that this is a possible explanation of Paul's conversion experience.⁴¹ Jewish scholar Dan Cohn-Sherbok favors such an explanation,⁴² while John Barclay seems at least open to it.⁴³ Somewhat distressingly, even though Carnley supports the occurrence of the resurrection, he considers the subjective vision scenario to be a very difficult one to answer on the grounds of the historical data.⁴⁴

What I have called the illumination thesis argues that, through some nondescript internal process, the disciples became convinced that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Rarely are many details provided. Almost always, the apostle Peter is the key. His insights provided the initial impetus, and his enthusiastic encouragement was the engine that powered and persuaded his friends. As a result, the contagious conviction that Jesus was alive spread to the others. Some idea of autosuggestion or other form of transmittable faith is thereby suggested.

Championed by Willi Marxsen in a day when his treatment was a rare but perennial example that dismissed the historical resurrection, his was the prototypical position that espoused such an inner enlightenment on Peter's part, leading to the belief of the other disciples.⁴⁵ In a later volume, he continued to hold that Peter's faith was the primary motivation for the other disciples'

faith, although Marxsen concluded that he did not know whether this vision(s) of Jesus was subjective or objective.⁴⁶ There is a marked sense here in which the fading influence of Rudolf Bultmann can be seen.⁴⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx expressed similar thoughts, without necessarily denying the resurrection appearances.⁴⁸

Don Cupitt expresses some reluctance to outline precisely the nature of the resurrection appearances. But like Marxsen, he is also much more interested in the disciples' faith than in any event, for (contrary to the vast majority of recent commentators) Cupitt thinks that the former precedes the latter. Through "a shocking flash of recognition everything fell into place and they saw the meaning of this man."⁴⁹

Thomas Sheehan perhaps supplies the most details concerning the new understanding of Jesus arrived at by Peter and the other disciples. In a flash of revelatory "insight," they understood that Jesus had been exalted and glorified by God. So, in some "ecstatic" occurrence that could have been as "ordinary as reflecting," Peter and the others began proclaiming that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Like Marxsen and Cupitt, we do not really know what happened, although Sheehan is quite clear that no resurrection took place. Rather, all we have is the interpretation of what Peter and the other disciples experienced.⁵⁰

John Shelby Spong's writings on the subject have created quite an uproar. Again Peter is the key individual. It was he, not Jesus, who "was resurrected to new life, a new being." Standing "as if in a trance," Peter was "suddenly aglow with life." But there were no visions, hallucinations, or anything to do with the real world. No one else in the room (including Peter) really saw Jesus. He then helped to open the eyes of the other followers of Jesus.⁵¹ In a later work, Spong provides the disclaimer that we really cannot know what happened. He also removes Peter's transformation to about six months after Jesus' death.⁵²

Without resorting to the full ramification of the illumination thesis, Rudolf Pesch's early work is perhaps the major example of a few scholars who thought that Jesus' pre-crucifixion teachings and authority were largely sufficient to help his followers survive the crucifixion and retain their faith.⁵³ Pesch later changed this position, granting that Jesus' appearances could be established by careful research.⁵⁴ However, largely due to the influence exerted by Pesch's earlier position, scholars like Hansjürgen Verweyen continued to emphasize the part that the pre-Easter message of Jesus played in preparing his disciples. Still, Verweyen is more positive towards the importance of the disciples' visionary experiences after Jesus' death.⁵⁵

These two hypotheses--hallucinations (or subjective visions) and what I have called the illumination thesis--are the chief examples of subjective naturalistic theories. There has definitely been an increase in the number of scholars who have held these positions during the last ten to fifteen years.

B. Naturalistic Objective Theories

Recent attempts have also been made to explain away the NT accounts of Jesus' resurrection in terms of external states and conditions. This category involves more options and, not surprisingly, includes a wider range of scenarios.

The swoon theory has reappeared recently in a few places, although seldom among specialists. One of the only exceptions is the brief article by Margaret Lloyd Davies and Trevor A. Lloyd Davies. It develops the hypothesis that Jesus lost consciousness, causing the bystanders to conclude that he was dead. When taken down from the cross, he revived and was treated. Surprisingly, the appearances apparently seem not to be caused by Jesus actually being seen after his recovery, but by some unspecified sort of "perceptions," raising once again the issue of hallucinations.⁵⁶ The medical outcry against the Davies' stance was instructive, with multiple reasons being given to indicate that Jesus really died by crucifixion.⁵⁷

Barbara Thiering has a habit of publishing rather nontraditional items about Jesus. According to her, Jesus married Mary Magdalene, had children, got divorced, and also married Lydia of Philippi. She continues: Jesus was crucified at Qumran, along with Judas Iscariot and Simon Magnus. But none of them died, even though the other two men had their ankles broken. Jesus was drugged, given an antidote later, and traveled all around the Mediterranean with his followers, dying in the 60s A.D.⁵⁸ Perhaps needless to say, scholars have not taken her hypotheses very seriously.⁵⁹

Every once in a while, the swoon theory appears again.⁶⁰ But it has not really been very popular since Strauss's devastating critique in 1835.⁶¹ By the turn of the century, it was declared to be only a curiosity of the past.⁶²

Some commentators have responded to the burial and empty tomb accounts in the gospels by returning to hypotheses reminiscent of nineteenth century efforts. John Dominic Crossan, for example, made headlines by asserting that Jesus' dead body was either simply left on the cross or buried in a shallow grave. Either way, he concludes, "the dogs were waiting."⁶³ Others agree, suggesting that Jesus' body was placed in a common grave and covered. The body decayed rapidly so that nothing was left.⁶⁴

Barnabas Lindars is an example of those who have argued that while the resurrection appearances of Jesus are founded upon strong evidence, the empty "tomb legend" arose as a "late element" extrapolated from the resurrection accounts.⁶⁵ Similarly, Adela Yarbro Collins charged that Mark composed his story of the empty tomb to complement his own belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead and appeared to his disciples.⁶⁶

Certainly the majority of scholars think that Jesus' body was placed in a tomb. But Michael Martin asks why we can rule out the thesis that someone other than the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb.⁶⁷ A. N. Wilson suggests the possibility that the young man at the tomb stole the body and took it elsewhere, but admits that we will never know for sure.⁶⁸

Another rather unconventional criticism has also emerged in recent years, as it did more than a century ago. It has been proposed that a twin brother or another person who looked like Jesus represented him after the crucifixion. A. N. Wilson suggests that this person was James, the brother of Jesus. Their resemblance would explain how James could represent his brother in the post- crucifixion appearances.⁶⁹ Greg Cavin supports a bit more forcefully the twin brother scenario.⁷⁰

In answer to my request that critics be willing to offer naturalistic hypotheses, Frank Miosi offers a similar "likeness" view--what he terms the "John the Baptist Theory." Just as some thought that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead (Mark 6:14-16), Miosi thinks that early believers may have concluded that Jesus was raised when they saw someone else who reminded them of Jesus.⁷¹ Martin also mentions very briefly the possibility of a look-alike individual seen by the followers of Jesus.⁷²

Crossan also offers another provocative thesis. It is not even necessarily a naturalistic account of the resurrection appearances, but seems to function that way in his system. Crossan holds that in Paul's account in 1 Cor 15:1-11, the stories are chiefly concerned with explaining the authority structures in the early church, not in proclaiming supernatural acts. Accordingly, Jesus' appearances are divided into three groups, denoting "three types of recipients" of Jesus' "apparitions or revelations." These three groups are the individual leaders (like Peter, James, and Paul), two leadership groupings (the Twelve and the apostles), and a general community of believers. The accounts are "quite deliberate political dramatizations . . . primarily interested . . . in power and authority."⁷³

As in the nineteenth century, forms of the legend theory also existed at the end of the twentieth century.⁷⁴ To some extent, of course, many alternative hypotheses employ legendary elements that still do not involve full-blown proposals of this sort. For example, we have seen that Lindars and Collins employ such processes regarding the empty tomb narratives.

But others have stretched legendary accretion to cover a much wider scenario.⁷⁵ The best known and most radical of these theses is probably that by G. A. Wells, who has written numerous works on the subject. He asserts either that Jesus never lived at all or that he was an obscure ancient personage who cannot with certainty even be dated to the first century A.D. In the legendary process, Wells notes what he takes to be stages of development regarding the NT books, as well as the evolution of ideas concerning both the historical Jesus and Christology. He thinks that there was very little early interest in the historical Jesus and that by the time of the gospels, we are more or less dealing largely with fabrication. The resurrection appearances are similarly to be explained as the growth of legend.⁷⁶

Michael Martin defends Wells's program on the historicity of Jesus, quoting it widely. But he notes that, since "Wells' thesis is controversial and not widely accepted, I will not rely on it. . . ."⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Martin's recognition of the scholarly response to Wells is still a bold understatement! Concerning the resurrection, Martin also adds the features noted below.

Evan Fales is one of the few recent representatives of the nineteenth century theory popular among the Religionsgeschichte scholars, who traced the origination of NT teachings to the ancient mystery religions. Similarly, Fales thinks the best approach is to study Near Eastern mythical figures like Tammuz, Adonis, Isis, and Osiris.⁷⁸

Robert Price concentrates on historical examples where, in a religious context, legendary growth appeared very quickly. He chides Christian apologists for not doing their homework on these cases. Yet, while he concludes that legend also infests the resurrection accounts, he makes a surprising comment:

One need not assume that there was no resurrection. Indeed it was precisely because of experiences of some kind (such as those intriguingly listed but not described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15) that anyone cared to glorify Jesus.⁷⁹

Thus Price apparently thinks that, while much legend has crept into the NT texts, it does not explain entirely the core of the resurrection tradition.

The last naturalistic hypothesis that we will mention is often treated as a relative to hallucinations because of obvious similarities. Yet, what I will term the illusion theory really needs, upon further reflection, to be cataloged differently. It is an objective alternative response because it is concerned largely with conditions in the external world, although this is seldom noticed.

Perhaps we need briefly to differentiate hallucination from illusion. The former is a seeming perception that is not linked to the real world--"false sensory perception not associated with real external stimuli." Hence, in their very nature, hallucinations are subjective. On the other hand, an illusion is the mistaking of one natural condition for another--the "misperception or misinterpretation of real external sensory stimuli."⁸⁰ Accordingly, and unlike hallucinations, the illusion theory builds on situations where people, singly or in groups, mistake actual phenomena for something other than what they are in reality.

Martin enumerates several illusions (which he also calls mass hysteria) that he thinks are parallels to the early Christian belief in the resurrection appearances of Jesus. His examples certainly include some curious cases--UFOs, cattle mutilations in the western United States that were thought to indicate the activity of satanic cults, as well as reports of witchcraft and related phenomena in colonial America, which Martin especially treats in detail.⁸¹ Wells similarly uses witchcraft trials as an example, although he incorrectly refers to this illusional data as hallucinations.⁸² Goulder also employs some odd illusional incidents as being analogous to the resurrection--like statues of the Virgin Mary that reportedly move, while he concentrates especially on stories of Bigfoot appearances!⁸³

With regard to the resurrection appearances, then, illusion theorists hold that something real was mistakenly thought to be something else--namely, the risen Jesus. As Martin suggests, "a person who looked like Jesus could have triggered a collective delusion."⁸⁴ Presumably, the other believers enthusiastically agreed that they had seen their Lord.

I could give other examples of these naturalistic theories that have appeared in the last decades of the twentieth century. Further, as can be initially noted from this presentation, even the options within the same general species of alternative responses can exhibit many dissimilarities. But hopefully this demarcation will provide a framework for observing that these alternative theses seem to be making a comeback. That alone is worth noting.

Conclusion

Even many scholars seem to be unaware of the current revival of naturalistic theories aimed at the resurrection appearances of Jesus, let alone the history of such alternative theses. This recent trend has not been torrential, and is still not the critics' first option, but the change is

nonetheless quite noteworthy. While some of these critics only briefly mention their response in a sentence or two,⁸⁵ many others are serious, detailed efforts to dismiss the central event and doctrine of orthodox Christianity. Perhaps surprisingly, very few alternative attempts appear in the works of the scholars who are currently the most influential in the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus. Given the exceptional amount of attention to this area of contemporary study, this is surely remarkable.

This study was necessarily sketchy, consisting chiefly of a brief survey of current trends on the subject of naturalistic approaches to Jesus' resurrection. I tried to map a wide range of positions, including differentiating four categories of explanations regarding the resurrection appearances, pro and con.⁸⁶ From the more than forty scholars and almost a dozen alternative theses, I also tried to name and describe two of these positions that are seldom, if ever, differentiated in the literature--the illumination and illusion views.

What responses might be given to the challenge of these naturalistic theses, especially the last two, concerning which there are comparatively few treatments? Detailed rejoinders must be forthcoming.⁸⁷ The more thoroughly naturalistic theories are dismantled, the more solid the data in favor of Jesus' resurrection is displayed.

Endnotes

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[1] For example, the late second century critic Celsus challenged the belief in the resurrection on several grounds: pagan mythology, the disciples stealing the body, and the vivid imagination of Mary Magdalene (cf. Origin, *Against Celsus*, 2:55-58). The English deist Thomas Woolston charged that Jesus' disciples stole his dead body and then lied about the appearances (*Sixth Discourse*, 1729), while deist Peter Annet proposed an early version of the swoon theory (*The Resurrection of Jesus Considered in Answer to the Trial of Witnesses*, 1744).

[2] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 10: "Of Miracles," Part 1 (ed. Tom L. Beauchamp; Oxford Philosophical Texts; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[3] Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (trans. W. Montgomery from the 1906 German version; New York: Macmillan, 1968), 21-22, 43, 47, 53-55, 60, 64, 83, 162-63, 165-67, 170, 179, 187.

[4] Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jesus* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1864), 419-20. On p. 423 Renan states: "Ainsi, dans le récit de la vie d'outre-tomb de Jésus, le quatrième Évangile garde sa supériorité."

[5] *Ibid.*, 356.

[6] David Strauss, *The Old Faith and the New* (trans. Mathilde Blind; New York: Henry Holt, 1872), 59.

[7] Strauss freely (although often gently) criticized other liberals for taking too much for granted in their approaches to the study of the gospels (*The Old Faith*, 42-62).

[8] David Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1879), 1:408-12; cf. *id.*, *The Old Faith*, 43.

[9] See Schweitzer's assessment (*The Quest*, 56-57).

[10] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (trans. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart; 2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 2:420; Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 53-55, 210-14.

- [11] Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (trans. Carl E. Braaten; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964).
- [12] Two dominant works were Karl Barth's volume written in 1918, *The Epistle to the Romans* (trans. Edwyn Hoskyns from the 6th ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1933) and Rudolf Bultmann's 1941 essay, "New Testament and Mythology" in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (ed. Hans Werner Bartsch; rev. ed.; trans. Reginald H. Fuller; New York: Harper & Row, 1961).
- [13] Originally presented as an address in 1953, Käsemann's essay is included in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (trans. W. J. Montague; Naperville: Allenson, 1964), 15-47.
- [14] James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959), esp. part 1.
- [15] Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation as History* (trans. David Granskou; London: Macmillan, 1968).
- [16] Among dozens of prominent works are the projected multi-volumed sets by John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1991, 1994) and N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, 1996).
- [17] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4, part 1 of *Church Dogmatics* (12 vols.; ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 340.
- [18] Raymond Brown, "The Resurrection and Biblical Criticism," *Commonweal* 87 (Nov. 24, 1967): 233. For Brown's similar and much more recent response to these naturalistic theories, see id., *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist, 1997), 163-66.
- [19] Some examples include Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 2: esp. pp. 155-56; Michael C. Perry, *The Easter Enigma* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 120-33; Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey with James M. Robinson; New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 181-85; A. M. Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ* (rev. ed.; London: Collins, 1961), 48-53; Helmut Thielicke, "The Resurrection Kerygma" in *The Easter Message Today* (trans. Salvator Attanasio and Darrell Likens Guder; London: Thomas Nelson, 1964), 87-91, 103-4; Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (trans. James W. Leitch; New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 186, 198-200; Neville Clark, *Interpreting the Resurrection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 99-105; A. M. Hunter, *Bible and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 111-12; Joachim Jeremias, "Easter: The Earliest Tradition and the Earliest Interpretation," in *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (trans. John Bowden; New York: Scribner's, 1971), 302; John A. T. Robinson, *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 123-25; Ulrich Wilckens, *Resurrection: Biblical Testimony to the Resurrection: An Historical Examination and Explanation* (trans. A. M. Stewart; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1977), 117-19; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man* (2d ed.; trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 88-97; Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), 120-26; John Macquarrie, "The Keystone of Christian Faith" in *"If Christ Be Not Risen . . .": Essays in Resurrection and Survival* (ed. John Greenhalgh and Elizabeth Russell; San Francisco: Collins, 1986), 18-22.
- [20] James D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster, 1985), 76. For another recent and influential theologian who speaks similarly, see N. T. Wright, "Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem," *STRev* 41 (1998): 118-22.
- [21] Stephen T. Davis, "Is Belief in the Resurrection Rational?" *Phil* 2 (1999): 57-58.
- [22] Richard Swinburne, "Evidence for the Resurrection," in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 201.
- [23] Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), 142.

[24] Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1980), 169 (emphasis added).

[25] Dunn, *Evidence*, 75.

[26] *Ibid.* (his emphasis).

[27] Norman Perrin, *The Resurrection According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 80.

[28] Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (vol. 2 of *Introduction to the New Testament*; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 84. Koester does not explain the sense in which he thinks that Jesus appeared.

[29] Peter Carnley, *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 246 (emphasis added).

[30] It is no secret that I think that Jesus appeared bodily. For just some of the details, see my publications such as *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin: College Press, 1996), esp. chaps. 4, 11; with J. P. Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidences for Immortality* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), chaps. 5-6, 12; "The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," in *In Defense of Miracles* (ed. Gary Habermas and Doug Geivett; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997); co-authored with Antony Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate* (ed. Terry L. Miethe; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); and *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976).

[31] Again, some of these scholars list or propose more than one naturalistic hypothesis.

[32] Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 106-7, 174-75, 180. An example of the German outcry is the lengthy book review by Andreas Lindemann in *Wege zum Menschen* 46 (November-December 1994): 503-13. A popular version of this volume is Gerd Lüdemann with Alf Ozen, *What Really Happened to Jesus: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection* (trans. John Bowden; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

[33] Michael Goulder, "The Baseless Fabric of a Vision," in *Resurrection Reconsidered* (ed. Gavin D'Costa; Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 48-61. A shorter version is Goulder's "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?" in *Resurrection: Essays in Honour of Leslie Houlden* (ed. Stephen Barton and Graham Stanton; London: SPCK, 1994), esp. 58-62.

[34] Jack Kent, *The Psychological Origins of the Resurrection Myth* (London: Open Gate, 1999), 6-11, 49-61, 85-90.

[35] Samuel Vollenweider, "Ostern--der denkwürdige Ausgang einer Krisenerfahrung," *TZ* 49 (1993): 41-43.

[36] Ingo Broer, "Seid stets bereit, jedem Rede und Antwort zu stehen, der nach der Hoffnung fragt, die euch erfüllt (I Petr 3,15): Das leere Grab und die Erscheinungen Jesu im Lichte der historischen Kritik," in "Der Herr ist wahrhaft auferstanden" (Lk 24, 34): *Biblische und systematische Beiträge zur Entstehung des Osterglaubens* (SBS 134; ed. Ingo Broer and Jürgen Werbeck; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 54-56.

[37] *Ibid.*, 60-61.

[38] Margaret E. Thrall, "Resurrection Traditions and Christian Apologetic," *The Thomist* 43 (1979): 204-5, 209-11; Christopher Knight, "Hysteria and Myth: The Psychology of the Resurrection Appearances," *Modern Churchman* 31 (1989): 38-42; id., "The Resurrection Appearances as Religious Experience," *Modern Believing* 39 (April 1998): 16, 21-22; Robert C. Ware, "The Resurrection of Jesus, I: Theological Orientations," *HeyJ* 16 (January 1975): 24; id., "The Resurrection of Jesus, II: Historical- Critical Studies," *HeyJ* 16 (April 1975): 191-94.

[39] Habermas and Flew, *Did Jesus Rise*, 50-59, 79-91, 98-102, 112-116.

[40] John Hick, *The Center of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 25. It would be fair to note, however, that in a dialogue between Hick, myself, and three other scholars that took place at Louisiana State University, April 26-27, 1987, Hick favored Jesus' actual resurrection, but in a form that did not involve a physical body. This is

probably also the best interpretation of his treatment of the subject in *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 171-81.

[41] Michael Grant, *Paul: The Man* (Glasgow: Collins, 1976), 108.

[42] Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish View," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 197.

[43] John M. G. Barclay, "The Resurrection in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 25-26.

[44] Carnley, *Structure*, 64, 244-45; cf. 69-72, 79, 82.

[45] Willi Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), esp. 88-97. An earlier essay by Marxsen was a forerunner here, although it differed somewhat: "The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical and Theological Problem," in *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ* (ed. C. F. D. Moule; London: SCM, 1968), 5-50.

[46] Willi Marxsen, *Jesus and Easter: Did God Raise the Historical Jesus from the Dead?* (trans. Victor Paul Furnish; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 70-74.

[47] Also reminiscent of Bultmann's emphasis on the centrality of the disciples' faith are the approaches of Karl Lehmann, "Zugang zum Ostergeschehen heute: Am Beispiel der Emmauserzählung," *IKaZ* 11 (January 1982): esp. 45-49; Robert F. Scuka, "Resurrection: Critical Reflections on a Doctrine in Search of a Meaning," *Modern Theology* 6 (October 1989): esp. 79, 85, 90.

[48] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (trans. Hubert Hoskins; New York: Crossroad, 1987), 369, 385-90.

[49] Don Cupitt, *Christ and the Hiddenness of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 143, cf. esp. 164-67. Cf. C. F. D. Moule and Don Cupitt, "The Resurrection: A Disagreement" in Cupitt's, *Explorations in Theology* 6 (London: SCM, 1979); Carnley (*Structure*, 154-82) includes an in-depth critique of both Marxsen and Cupitt.

[50] Thomas Sheehan, *First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity* (New York: Random House, 1986), 103-9, 112-14, 118.

[51] John Shelby Spong, *The Easter Moment* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 196-98.

[52] John Shelby Spong, *Resurrection: Myth or Reality?* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 239-41, 255-57.

[53] Rudolf Pesch, "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu," *TQ* 153 (1973): 219-26; id., "Materialien und Bemerkungen zu Entstehung und Sinn des Osterglaubens" in *Wie kam es zum Osterglauben?* by Anton Vogtle and Rudolf Pesch (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1975), 157-68.

[54] Rudolf Pesch, "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu: Ein neuer Versuch," *FZPhTh* 30 (1983): esp. 87; John Galvin, "The Origin of Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus: Two Recent Perspectives," *TS* 49 (1988): 27-35 contains an excellent summation of the shift in Pesch's thought.

[55] Hansjürgen Verweyen, "Die Ostererscheinungen in fundamentaltheologischer Sicht," *ZKT* 103 (1981): 429. See Galvin's contrast of Pesch and Verweyen ("The Origin of Faith," 35-40). A later contribution to the subject is Verweyen's "Die Sache mit den Ostererscheinungen" in "Der Herr ist wahrhaft Auferstanden" (Lk 24,34), esp. pp. 77-78.

[56] Margaret Lloyd Davies and Trevor A. Lloyd Davies, "Resurrection or Resuscitation?" *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London* 25 (April 1991): 167- 70. It is difficult to know the specifics regarding the brief mention of an "appearance." In fact, the entire article is less than two pages long, plus the endnotes.

[57] "Letters to the Editor," *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London* 25 (July 1991): 268-72.

[58] Among her books explaining these suppositions is Barbara Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1992).

[59] N. T. Wright says, concerning a listing of some of these items, "Once again, it is safe to say that no serious scholar has given this elaborate and fantastic theory any credence whatsoever. . . . The only scholar who takes Thiering's theory with any seriousness is Thiering herself" (see N. T. Wright, *Who was Jesus?* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 22-23). Edwin M. Yamauchi calls her ideas "an Alice-in-Wonderland scenario" (see Edwin Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?" in *Jesus Under Fire* [ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 210.)

[60] Some examples are Gaalah Cornfeld, *The Historical Jesus: A Scholarly View of the Man and His World* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Duncan M. Derrett, *The Anastasis: The Resurrection of Jesus as an Historical Event* (Shipston-on-Stour, England: P. Drinkwater, 1982); Rolland E. Wolfe, *How the Easter Story Grew from Gospel to Gospel* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1989), 92-103; Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2000), 222-24. Derrett's text employs other naturalistic theories as well, further supposing both that the disciples cremated Jesus' body after his later death, and that the disciples experienced visions of the departed Jesus! Two other exceptionally brief mentions of the swoon thesis are B. C. Johnson, *The Atheist Debater's Handbook* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1983), 121-22, and Rupert Gethin, "The Resurrection and Buddhism," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 206. Another example of a popular treatment is Richard Andrews, *The Tomb of God: The Body of Jesus and the Solution to a 2000-Year-Old Mystery* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996).

[61] Schweitzer comments on Strauss's attack (*The Quest*, 56-57), and does not list any nineteenth century proponents of the swoon theory after 1838.

[62] See Eduard Riggienbach, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1907), 48-49; James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (1908; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), 92.

[63] John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 152-58; cf. id., *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 392-94.

[64] Spong, *Resurrection: Myth*, 239-41; Hick, *The Center of Christianity*, 25; Kent, *Psychological Origins*, 88.

[65] Barnabas Lindars, "Jesus Risen: Bodily Resurrection But No Empty Tomb," *Theology* 59 (1986): 90-96. See a subsequent version by Lindars, "The Resurrection and the Empty Tomb," in *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (ed. Paul Avis; London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1993), 128-34.

[66] Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Empty Tomb in the Gospel According to Mark," in *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (ed. Eleanore Stump and Thomas P. Flint; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 128-31. It could be questioned why I am including Lindars and Collins in the naturalistic objective category. For Collins, Mark did not simply invent the empty tomb story (p. 129), but was probably influenced by the "form, content, and style" of Greco-Roman literature, especially by its tales of mythical heroes (pp. 126, 130-31). So she has some similarities to other theses in the legendary category below. But Lindars is a different case, in that he only accepts a natural explanation for the empty tomb, while accepting the historicity of Jesus' appearances.

[67] Michael Martin, *The Case Against Christianity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 95.

[68] A. N. Wilson, *Jesus* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992), 242.

[69] *Ibid.*, 243-44.

[70] Robert Greg Cavin, "Miracles, Probability, and the Resurrection of Jesus: A Philosophical, Mathematical, and Historical Study" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Irvine, 1993), vii, 314-58. Some related thoughts are found in Cavin's, "Is There Sufficient Historical Evidence to Establish the Resurrection of Jesus?" *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (July 1995): 361-79.

[71] Frank Miosi, "The Resurrection Debate," (review of Gary R. Habermas and Antony G. N. Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*), *Free Inquiry* (Spring 1988): 56-57.

[72] Martin, *The Case*, 93.

[73] Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 169-70. Some similar thoughts are found in Evan Fales, "Successful Defense? A Review of *In Defense of Miracles*," *Philosophia Christi* 2d series/3 (2001): esp. 29-34.

[74] Some more popular efforts are those by Bruce Puleo, "Jesus was in Good Company: Other Claimed Resurrections From the Dead," *American Rationalist* 30 (January-February 1986): 80-82; Randall Helms, *Gospel Fictions* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1988), 121-49; Lloyd M. Graham, *Deceptions and Myths in the Bible* (New York: Bell, 1975), 362; Gethin, "The Resurrection," 207.

[75] One version is Hugh Jackson, "The Resurrection Belief of the Earliest Church: A Response to the Failure of Prophecy?" *JR* 55 (October 1975): 415-25. Jackson uses dissonance theory to argue that Jesus' teachings prepared his disciples for his death, leading them to conclude that, contrary to appearances, Jesus was somehow still alive in heaven (pp. 422-23). Unfortunately, Jackson fails to provide many details on how the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection actually evolved.

[76] G. A. Wells develops this thesis in volumes like *Did Jesus Exist?* (2d ed.; London: Pemberton, 1986), esp. chaps. 2-3; *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1988), esp. chaps. 1, 4; *A Resurrection Debate: The New Testament Evidence in Evangelical and Critical Perspective* (London: Rationalist, 1988), esp. chaps. 5, 7-8.

[77] Martin, *The Case*, 67; cf. chap. 2.

[78] Fales, "Successful Defense," 29-34. Robert Funk briefly mentions the mystery religion thesis in *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 35.

[79] Robert M. Price, "Is there a Place for Historical Criticism?" *RelS* 27 (1991): 383 (emphasis added). Cf. id., *Deconstructing Jesus*, 52-61, 214-21, 260-61.

[80] See Jerrold Maxmen and Nicholas Ward, *Essential Psychopathology and Its Treatment* (New York: Norton, 1995), 483-85; Harold I. Kaplan, Benjamin J. Sadock, and Jack A. Grebb, *Synopsis of Psychiatry* (7th ed.; Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1994), 306-7.

[81] Martin, *The Case*, 92-95. Similar delusional data are also cited by Frank J. Tipler, *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 310-12.

[82] Wells, *A Resurrection Debate*, 39-40.

[83] Goulder, "The Baseless Fabric of a Vision," 52-55.

[84] Martin, *The Case*, 93.

[85] Mere suggestions or passing comments, as these sometimes are, can be frequently found ever since the nineteenth century heyday of these hypotheses.

[86] These were the naturalistic subjective and objective theories, and the supernaturalistic subjective and objective approaches.

[87] I have critiqued several versions of these recent naturalistic theories in a number of journal articles. For a detailed response to Evan Fales's rendition of the legend theory, see "On the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," in *Philosophia Christi* 2d series/3 (2001): 76-87. Concerning G. A. Wells's form of the legend theory, see "A Summary Critique: Questioning the Existence of Jesus," *Christian Research Journal* 22 (Spring 2000): 54-56. (For a more detailed critique of both Wells and Michael Martin, see my *The Historical Jesus*, chap. 2.) On the hallucination theory, see "Explaining Away Jesus' Resurrection: The Recent Revival of Hallucination Theories," *Christian Research Journal* 23 (2001): 26-31, 47-49. For a response to a chief proponent of the illumination theory, see "The Early

Christian Belief in the Resurrection of Jesus: A Response to Thomas Sheehan," *Michigan Theological Journal* 3 (Fall 1992): 105-27.

A7 - The Problem of Divine Violence, Case Study: Canaanite Conquest

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Stated: The God of the Bible is positively portrayed in a violent light as a divine-warrior and even authorizes his people, Israel, to perpetrate violence on his behalf. Popular examples include the Flood of Noah (Gen. 6-9), the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14-15), and the conquest of Canaan (Jos. 1-13). Throughout the Psalms, prophets, and writings, God is revered for his violence (e.g. Ps. 7:11-13). This seems to be at odds with our moral sensibilities.

Strategy: Divine violence is a broad canonical question that cannot be answered in one fell swoop; indeed, according to Tremper Longman III, there are only two (2) books in the Hebrew canon that do not portray God as a violent divine warrior. Herein, we will take one case study, the conquest of Canaan, and look at four approaches.⁶⁶

Approach 1: It's Not As Bad As It Seems (NAB)

What *Actually Happened* is NAB

On a face value reading, the text suggests that the Israelites invaded Canaan and annihilated 40 cities in quick succession, slaughtering all the inhabitants with minimal casualties. However, the archaeological record and a genre sensitive reading indicate no such sweeping invasion occurred.

Genre Analysis: Ancient Conquest Accounts

ANE conquest accounts can be difficult for modern readers to decipher. Such accounts contain five major features: (i) repetition, (ii) annihilation language, (iii) hyperbolic language, (iv) common narrative structure, and (v) unique focus on the human military leader.

Language of Annihilation

Joshua 10:20-21,40-42 (NRSV)

"When Joshua and the Israelites had finished inflicting a very great slaughter on them, until they were wiped out, and when the survivors had entered into the fortified towns, all the people returned safe to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah... So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded... Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel.

⁶⁶ Based on Seibert, E. A. (2016). Recent Research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament (with Special Attention to Christian Theological Perspectives). *Currents in Biblical Research*, 15(1), 8-40.

Merneptah Stele (ca. 1208 B.C.), pictured right (Wikimedia)

The princes are prostrate, saying: "Mercy!" // Not one raises his head among the Nine Bows. // Desolation is for Tehenu; Hatti is pacified; // Plundered is the Canaan with every evil; // Carried off is Ashkelon; seized upon is Gezer; // Yanoam is made as that which does not exist; // Israel is laid waste, his seed is not; // All lands together, they are pacified; // Everyone who was restless, he has been bound by the King of Upper and Lower Egypt [i.e. Pharaoh Merneptah].



Papyrus Harris I (ca. 1180 B.C.)

I [Ramesses III] slew the Denyen in their islands, while the Tjeker and the Philistines were made ashes. The Sherden and the Weshesh of the Sea were made nonexistent, captured all together and brought in captivity to Egypt like the sands of the shore. I settled them in strongholds, bound in my name. Their military classes were as numerous as hundred-thousands. I assigned portions for them all with clothing and provisions from the treasuries and granaries every year.

Language of Hyperbole

Josua 10:7-10 (NRSV)

So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the fighting force with him, all the mighty warriors... So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal. And the LORD threw them into a panic before Israel, who inflicted a great slaughter on them at Gibeon, chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah.

Annals of Tiglath-Pileser I (ca. 1110 BC)

With the help of Assur, my lord, I led forth my chariots and warriors and went into the desert. Into the midst of the Ahlami, Arameans, enemies of Assur, my lord, I marched. The country from Suhi [central Iraq] to the city of Carchemish [southern Turkey] in the land of Hatti, I raided in one day. I slew their troops; their spoil, their goods and their possessions in countless numbers, I carried away.

Gilgal to Gibeon to Azekah is over 45 miles as the crow flies with altitude changes in excess of 1 mile. Suhi to Carchemish is over 400 miles. Typical infantry moves about 12 miles per day. These marches simply could not have occurred in one day.

Textual Claims and Archaeological Evidence⁶⁷

⁶⁷ See Ch 2. in *Confronting Old Testament Controversies* by Longman and Ch. 5 in *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* by Kitchen.

Joshua's military campaigns are related via the Ancient Conquest Account genre that includes hyperbole, annihilation language, and many more features that mitigate against a face value reading. Only the three cities of Jericho, Ai, and Hazor are claimed to have been destroyed with fire. The full range of Biblical data on Israelite origins paints a variegated portrait that includes both violent and non-violent entry in the land. The three key sites all have destruction layers, but present a mixed picture with many unanswered questions related to dating, geography, etc. There is not a clear break in material culture between the indigenous Canaanites and the indisputably Israelite time period.

What Was *Supposed to Happen* is NAB

Objection: The Israelites may have *failed* at committing genocide. But they were supposed to because God commanded genocide. Response: Joshua did all as the Lord commanded (Jo. 10:40-2). Joshua did not commit genocide, therefore, God did not command genocide.

Dispossession vs annihilation (Deuteronomy 12:29ff, NRSV)

The LORD your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same."

K. Lawson Younger, Ancient Conquest Accounts

The *hērem* [i.e. the war command] was not designed by God to eliminate the Canaanite culture per se but to eliminate the Canaanite religious influence. While it may be readily recognized that it is difficult in many instances to separate the two, there is nonetheless a distinction. The Israelite *hērem* commandments had close links to the issues of idolatry and the breaking of the second commandment (Ex. 22:20; Dt. 7:26; 13:16–18). That this is the case in [the first introduction] of Ju. (1:1–2:5) is reinforced by Yahweh's confrontation of the nation in 2:1–5, where it is their failure on the religious front that is of primary concern. In other words, the *hērem* was not concerned with the eradication of Canaanite clothing fashions, pottery styles, music, diet, and other types of particular cultural preferences. But it was deeply concerned with the eradication of the Canaanite religion: its gods/idols, altars, rituals, divinatory practices, uses of magic, etc.

What *Could Have Happened* is NAB

Paul Copan, Did God Command Genocide?

So the Canaanites are not in general portrayed as innocent. They are trespassing on land belonging to Israel and have engaged in practices such as human sacrifice for centuries without repentance. Their numerical and cultural dominance meant Israel could not live in the land alongside them without being absorbed into a culture engaging in abhorrent practices; yet the text suggests that Canaanites who turned from these practices could be spared.

Spared Canaanites

Rahab (Jo. 2:12-14, 5-6), Caleb the Kenizzite (Nu. 14:24), Uriah the Hittite (2 Sa. 23:39), City of Shechem (Jo. 8:33), Unnamed Canaanite (Ju. 1:22-6), Shamgar ben Anat (Ju. 3:31)

Approach 2: God Had Good Reasons / Just Cause

In Short: The commands were justified given God's plan and the moral depravity of the Canaanites including, but not limited to, idolatry, child sacrifice, incest, adultery, and bestiality (Jones 2009).

Genesis 15:12-16 (NRSV)

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.'

Deuteronomy 9:5 (NRSV)

Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Child Sacrifice

Despite the lack of direct unambiguous material evidence of child sacrifice in pre-Israelite Syro-Palestine, significant evidence is present from Carthagian sites (i.e. Phoenician colonies); the practice likely originated in the Canaanite/Phoenician mainland (Dewrell 2017, pg. 68-9, Xella 2013).

Leviticus 20:2-3 (NRSV)

Say further to the people of Israel: Any of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside in Israel, who give any of their offspring to Molech shall be put to death; the people of the land shall stone them to death. I myself will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people, because they have given their offspring to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name.

Philo of Byblos (ca. 100 AD)

Among ancient peoples in critically dangerous situations it was customary for the rulers of a city or nation, rather than lose everyone, to provide the dearest of their children as a propitiatory sacrifice to the avenging deities. The children thus given up were slaughtered according to a secret ritual. Now Kronos, whom the Phoenicians [i.e. Canaanites] call El, who was in their land and who was later divinized after his death as the star of Kronos, had an only son by a local

bride named Anobret, and therefore they called him Ieoud. Even now among the Phoenicians the only son is given this name. When war's gravest dangers gripped the land, Kronos dressed his son in royal attire, prepared an altar and sacrificed him.

Plutarch Moralia 2, De Superstitione 3 (ca. 100 AD)

Again, would it not have been far better for the Carthaginians to have taken Critias or Diagoras to draw up their law-code at the very beginning, and so not to believe in any divine power or god, rather than to offer such sacrifices as they used to offer to Cronos? These were not in the manner that Empedocles describes in his attack on those who sacrifice living creatures:

"Changed in form is the son beloved of his father so pious, Who on the altar lays him and slays him. What folly!" No, but with full knowledge and understanding they themselves offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds; meanwhile the mother stood by without a tear or moan; but should she utter a single moan or let fall a single tear, she had to forfeit the money, and her child was sacrificed nevertheless; and the whole area before the statue was filled with a loud noise of flutes and drums so that the cries of wailing should not reach the ears of the people.

Approach 3: God Accommodates Revelation

In Short: God in choosing to reveal himself to an ancient people had to accommodate where they were.

Are there false depictions of God in the Bible? God is depicted as corporeal (Gen 2), not knowing things (Gen 22), and changing his mind (Jer 18:8). Many classical theists affirm the biblical depictions of God are largely analogical, especially insofar as they run contrary to the classical doctrines of God (e.g. impassibility, immutability, simplicity).

Lois Barrett *The Way God Fights* (1987: 70)

The people of Israel found themselves in a culture in the ancient Near East that accepted holy war as the way to deal with national enemies...God did not tell the people of early Israel to stop going to war any more than God told them to stop speaking Hebrew. Throughout the history of Israel, God took whatever evil practices God found and used them for good. God used warfare to lead people toward love and nonviolence. God was always able to take what was there, use it for good, and then ask people to move beyond it into God's better way of doing things.

Approach 4: Christocentric Critique of the Old Testament

In Short: The Incarnation and resurrection of Jesus turns the entire OT on its head, including the conquest accounts.

C.S. Cowles, *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*

In the New Testament, Jesus is not defined by God; rather, God is defined by Jesus. Jesus is the lens through whom a full, balanced, and undistorted view of God's loving heart and gracious purposes may be seen. The character of God revealed in Jesus enables us to discern the extent to which various Old Testament portrayals of God accurately represent what God is like.

David Janzen, 'The God of the Bible and the Nonviolence of Jesus'

The stories that reflect the God revealed in Jesus Christ will then function as the lens through which we interpret the rest of the biblical material and will be our guide to a truer understanding of the character of God and God's relationship to humanity.

Bringing it all together

The conquest account is a hyperbolic account of a justified expulsion of evil Canaanites from the land. The story is related via unnerving depictions of God as a warrior by an ancient warlike people. With the advent of the Incarnation in Jesus, the violent portraits of God are cast in a different light. The future of the people of God is no longer tied to terrestrial fortunes (John 18:36).

Additional Resources

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

B = Beginner, I = Intermediate, A = Advanced

- Confronting Old Testament Controversies by T. Longman (B)
- God is a Warrior by T. Longman & D. Reid (A)
- Did God Really Command Genocide? by P. Copan & M. Flannagan (I)
- The God I Don't Understand by C.J.H. Wright (B)
- Ancient Conquest Accounts by K. Lawson Younger (A)
- On the Reliability of the Old Testament by K.A. Kitchen (I)
- Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God & Canaanite Genocide, Zondervan Counterpoint Series (B)
- Seibert, E. A. (2016). Recent Research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament (with Special Attention to Christian Theological Perspectives). *Currents in Biblical Research*, 15(1), 8-40.
- Jones, C. (2009). We don't hate sin so we don't understand what happened to the Canaanites: An addendum to "Divine Genocide" arguments. *Philosophia Christi*, 11(1), 53-72.

- Dewrell, H. D. (2017). Child sacrifice in ancient Israel (Vol. 5). Penn State Press.
- Barrett, L. (1987). The Way God Fights: War and Peace in the Old Testament. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Discussion Questions

Based on questions from *Confronting Old Testament Controversy* by T. Longman

1. In addition to the Flood (Gen. 6-9), Reed Sea (Ex. 14-15), and the conquest (Jos. 1-13), where else do you see God acting violently in the Old Testament? What about the New?
2. Who is the object of God's violence in the Old Testament? In the New Testament?
3. Defenders of the NAB approach point out there are elements of the Biblical text that cannot be taken at face value. How do you think this influences our interpretation of the text? Does this undermine a high inerrantist view of scripture?
4. Many scholars compare Biblical literature (e.g. Jos. 1-13) to contemporaneous pagan literature (e.g. Annals of Tiglath-Pileser I). How legitimate is this interpretative method?
5. What do you make of the apparently conflicting Biblical portraits of the conquest?
 - a. **Jos 10:42** Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time // **Jos 11:17ff.** Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. // **Ex 23:29ff.** I will not drive them out from before you in one year...Little by little I will drive them out.
 - b. **Jos 10:40** So Joshua left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed // **Jdg 3:5ff.** So the Israelites lived among the Canaanites // **Ps 106:34ff.** They did not destroy the peoples...but they mingled with the nations.
 - c. **Ezek 16:1ff.** The word of the LORD came to me: Mortal, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites.
6. Defenders of the Just Cause approach often frame the conquest as an "intrusion" or "foretaste" of God's end-time judgment into the period of common grace. What does that mean to you? How do you imagine the second coming of Christ and the final judgment?
7. Can there be justice if evil people are not judged?
8. Defenders of the Accommodation approach make a distinction between how God is depicted in the Bible and the actual God. Do you think that is a helpful distinction? Under what circumstances?
9. Marcion was a 2c. heretic condemned for believing that the Old Testament and violent parts of the New Testament should not be part of the canon for Christians. How fair is it to compare Marcion to those scholars who follow the Christocentric Critique approach?

10. According to Ephesians 6, we are involved in a spiritual battle. In what ways does life seem like a battle to you? How do we fight that battle?

Version 1: Spring 2024

OUTDATED VERSION

Preface

This booklet is designed as a 10 part curriculum teaching the basics of Christian apologetics, with focus on the questions (i) does God exist?, (ii) did Jesus rise from the dead?, and (iii) is evil evidence against God? It was originally written for Redeemer Presbyterian Church in College Station, TX. Consequently, you will find a Reformed flavoring throughout.

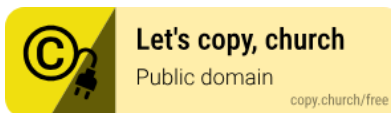
The lessons are written to be dense and self-contained so that someone who misses a week can get all the information by reading through; further, the content can easily fill an hour if you discuss all the points, so, use your best judgment on where to camp out and where to skim.

My appreciation to the students of Ratio Christi at Texas A&M University and the team at Redeemer Presbyterian Church for reviewing and contributing to this booklet. Formatting inconsistencies and other errors that remain are my own. I have tried to cite everything appropriately, but if you notice a missing citation or apparent plagiarism, please let me know so I can fix it.

As stated below, this work is, as far as possible, dedicated to the public domain; you are free to duplicate, remix, edit, adapt, reformat, add, delete, improve, etc. as desired to be most profitable for your use. You can remove all the Reformed theology if you want (although, that will be a downgrade).

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Zachary



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For more information, please visit <https://copy.church/free/> or email me at zacharytlawson@gmail.com

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01 Introduction + Methodology

Intellectual Discipleship - Loving God with All Your Mind

One of them, a lawyer, asked Jesus a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **mind***.” - Matt 22:35-6 (ESV)

In other words, we should love God and follow Jesus with everything that we are. This can be expressed as three areas:

- Discipleship of the Heart - character and showing fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:23-24)
- Discipleship of the Hands - service and meeting material needs (Jas. 2:14-17)
- Discipleship of the Head* - intellect and reason (2 Cor. 10:5, Titus 1:9): This includes a well-rounded knowledge of doctrine, theology, history, exegesis, etc.

When spreading the kingdom of God through evangelism, we will encounter a variety of challenges from those who think that Christianity is not something worth believing. Meeting those challenges is the goal of **apologetics**.

Apologetics - Giving a Defense

Apologetics - from *apologia* (Gk.) meaning to give a reasoned defense for what you believe

“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to **make a defense [apologia]** to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” - 1 Pet 3:13-16 (ESV)

Apologetics should be thought of as one of the fruits or applications of intellectual discipleship.

Discussion - Paul's Apologetic Example in Acts 17:18-34

(i) Who is Paul speaking to? (ii) How does he establish common ground? (iii) What is his goal?

The Effect of Sin - Is Unbelief a Head Issue or a Heart Issue (or Both)?

Sin clouds everything, including our rationality. Reformed theology has held that at least some unbelief is a heart issue, stemming from rebellion to God.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” - Ro. 1:18-20a (ESV)

“Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation.” - Westminster Confession of Faith 1.1

Practical Advice - Treat Everyone As Sincere

While there certainly are some people for whom doubt and unbelief are manifestations of a rebellious heart, Christians agree that this is not *always* the case. Following the instruction in Jude 22 to be “merciful to those who doubt” and 1 Peter 3:15 to answer with “gentleness and respect”, it is best to **treat all questioners as sincere seekers of truth**.

1. Comfort for Curious Christians: The Bible really is confusing and questions can be a sign of a faith growing into intellectual maturity. We should not confuse growing pains with sin.
2. Sympathy for Sincere Seekers: We should not preemptively judge sincerity, for only the Lord knows their heart and we do not know how God has been working in their life.
3. Opportunity for Ornery Objectors. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Prov. 15:1) Responding to an angry objection with sincerity and gentleness can provide opportunity for introspection and de-escalation of the conversation.

Emotional intelligence (discussed in Module III) is critical for doing apologetics correctly. “If I speak with the tongues of men or angels but have not love, I am a clanging cymbal.” - 1 Cor. 13:1

Discussion

Why else is gentleness and respect essential when we talk with non-Christians about what we believe? Have you ever seen a Christian do this without gentleness and respect?

How To Do Apologetics - Three Main Methods⁶⁸

Evidentialism: “The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies show forth his handiwork”. Psalm 19:1

⁶⁸ Based on Beilby, J.K. *Thinking about Christian Apologetics: What it is and why we do it*. InterVarsity Press, 2011.

Emphasizes rational arguments. Three main ideas: (1) Human beings were created as rational beings. (2) There are intellectual objections that require a well-reasoned, well-supported response. (3) Rational and evidential arguments can be highly effective in overcoming objections.

Presuppositionalism: “The fool has said in his heart there is no God”. Psalm 14:1

Emphasizes that the non-Christian’s problem is more about sin manifesting as rebellion against God. This rebellion amounts to a refusal to acknowledge God’s proper place as creator and Lord. Consequently, the authority of Scripture and Lordship of Jesus Christ must be presupposed before sense can be made of arguments for the truthfulness of Christianity.

Experientialism: “Taste and see that the Lord is good!” Psalm 34:8

Emphasizes internal, subjective reasons for non-believers. As summarized by William Alston, “The final test of the Christian scheme comes from trying it out in one’s own life, testing the promises the scheme tells us God has made, following the way enjoined on us by the Church and seeing whether it leads to the new life of the Spirit”.

Our Method - An Integrated Approach (All of the Above)

With the Experientialists, we will acknowledge the direct, experiential sense of God (Latin: *sensus divinitatis*) in the normal way people know God. Yet, as the Presuppositionalists remind us, this awareness of God is often marred by sin. With the Evidentialists, we will formalize God’s general revelation into rational arguments.

We are consciously coming to these questions from a Reformed approach, that is, the theological framework summarized in the Westminster Standards and Three Forms of Unity. Not all the authors referenced herein share this commitment, so citation does not mean endorsement of everything they have to say. For most issues covered, this difference is insignificant, however, questions about the Problem of Evil directly impinge on our doctrine of providence. So, that is where we will be the most cautious.

Our Tool - Formal Arguments

Deductive arguments follow by logical necessity to an airtight conclusion.

- (1) All men are mortal. (Premise)
- (2) Socrates is a man. (Premise)
- (3) Therefore, Socrates is mortal. (Conclusion)

Inductive arguments use probability to infer a likely conclusion.

- (1) Milk went up in price. (Premise)
- (2) Dairy contains milk. (Premise)

(3) All dairy products probably increased in price. (Conclusion)

Abductive arguments attempt to provide the best explanation for a set of data.

- (1) Uranus's orbital pattern consistently deviates from its predicted pattern.
- (2) Other planets have the same orbital discrepancy due to gravity from nearby planets.
- (3) Another planet whose gravity is affecting Uranus's orbit would explain the discrepancy.
- (4) Therefore, there is probably another planet beyond Uranus.

Valid arguments have premises and conclusions that follow the rules of inference. If an argument uses fallacious reasoning, it is invalid, even if all the premises are true.

Sound arguments have premises and conclusions that are all true. If an argument uses false premises, it is unsound, even if it uses valid reasoning.

See: [Appendix A1.1 - Common Rules of Inference](#)

Our Goal - Establish Two Pillars of Christianity

We will evaluate arguments that aim to establish two foundational claims upon which Christianity stands or falls:

- **God Exists** (He that cometh to God must believe that he exists - Heb 11:6)
- **Jesus is Risen** (If Christ is not raised, then your faith is vain - 1 Cor 15:17).

How well did you follow the discussion? (Circle a number)

Over my head **0** **1** **2** **3** Too easy

Additional Resources

B = Beginner (0-1), I = Intermediate (1-2), A = Advanced (2-3)

Numbers in parentheses refer to the number circled above. For example, if you circled a 3, you can probably handle the Advanced resources.

Books discussing apologetics methodology

- *Thinking About Christian Apologetics* by J. K. Beilby (B)
- *Five Views on Apologetics* ed. by S. Cowan (I)

'All-in-one' books from different apologetics perspectives

- *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (B) by Alvin Plantinga, mostly Experiential

- Scholarly version: *Warranted Christian Belief* (I)
- *On Guard* (B) by W.L. Craig, mostly Evidential
 - Scholarly version: *Reasonable Faith* (I)
- *Is There A God?* (B) by Richard Swinburne, Evidential
 - Scholarly version: *The Existence of God* (A)
- *The Defense of the Faith* (I) by C. Van Til, Presuppositional

Thinkers and Apologists in the Reformed Tradition

- Alvin Plantinga
- Greg Welty
- R.C. Sproul (Ligonier Ministries)
- Guillaume Bignon
- Paul Helm
- James N. Anderson
- K. Scott Oliphint

See [Appendix A1.2](#) for extended bibliography

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

Homework for Next Session

“Recent Work in Reformed Epistemology” by Andrew Moon ([Appendix A2.1](#)). Just the introduction is fine, but the article covers several important issues.

02 Knowledge of God

This session is based on the book *Knowledge & Christian Belief* by Alvin Plantinga

Definitions

Epistemology - the study of knowledge

Knowledge - warranted true belief

Warrant - justification for a belief that has some causal connection between its truth and your knowledge of it

Reformed Epistemology in Short

We are warranted (or rational) in accepting beliefs formed by properly functioning cognitive faculties. Not all warranted beliefs are formed on the basis of evidence; non-evidential warranted beliefs are called 'properly basic' beliefs. Examples include beliefs formed by sense perception (e.g. "I see a cow standing over there") and memory (e.g. "I ate blueberry pancakes this morning"). God can also be known in this direct, non-evidential way. Therefore, belief in God can be a properly basic belief, warranted even if there is no evidence for God or if the believer does not know about that evidence. John Calvin called this direct awareness of God the *sensus divinitatis*.

The Evidentialist Objection to Belief in God

Consider the following argument:

- (1) If belief in God is not based on evidence, then it is unwarranted (or irrational)
- (2) Belief in God is not based on evidence
- (3) Therefore, belief in God is unwarranted

Evidence - here, we are using a broad understanding of "evidence" to include tangible information as well as conceptual arguments or reasons

Recall from last week (or [Appendix A1.1](#)) this is a **deductive argument** in the form of *modus tollens*; if we are going to reject the argument, we have to reject one of the premises.

Let's consider (2). Some might argue

- (4) If there is no evidence for God, then belief in God is not based on evidence
- (5) There is no evidence for God
- (6) Therefore, (2) Belief in God is not based on evidence

Is (5) true? Not at all; in the next sessions, we will be discussing sophisticated arguments for the existence of God such as the moral, cosmological, and teleological arguments as well as historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. So, (5) will be rejected, but what about (1)?

The Problem of Grandma

We must recognize that most believers do not form their belief in God on the basis of a dispassionate evaluation of evidence. Consider a sweet old grandma who has no formal education or awareness of technical philosophical arguments, yet fervently believes in God.

(7) Grandma's belief in God is not based on evidence

(8) Therefore, Grandma's belief in God is unwarranted (from 7&1, *modus ponens*)

If we are going to save Grandma, we need to reconsider (1).

Basic Beliefs

Why think that belief in God is warranted only on the basis of evidence? Let's consider a possible justification for (1):

(9) If any belief is not based on evidence, then it is unwarranted

Some beliefs do require evidence to be warranted, for example, if I flip a coin and believe it is heads without looking or there are aliens living on a particular planet without looking at it.

However, can (9) apply to all beliefs without exception? No, because this would entail an infinite regress: I would need evidence for my evidence and evidence for that evidence and so on. We can reason as follows:

(10) If (9) is true, then every belief requires an infinitely long chain of evidence to be warranted

(11) But, there cannot be an infinitely long chain of evidence

(12) Therefore, either (i) there are no warranted beliefs or (ii) there are some warranted beliefs that are non-evidential

(13) At least some beliefs are warranted

(14) Therefore, there are at least some warranted beliefs that are non-evidential

Philosophers refer to these non-evidential beliefs as foundational or **basic** beliefs.

Basic belief - something that is taken to be true upon immediate reflection or awareness; it is not a belief that is argued *to* but a belief that is argued *from*. Put another way, a basic belief is what terminates the incessant "but why?" from five-year-olds (or philosophers, who can be equally annoying as five-year-olds).

Some examples of basic beliefs include:

- I exist
- My hamstrings are sore from my deadlift workout
- The world was not created 5 minutes ago
- Other minds exist outside of my own
- I ate blueberry pancakes for breakfast this morning

None of these beliefs are formed on the basis of argument or evidence - indeed some *cannot* have arguments. Nevertheless, we are warranted in believing them. Why?

Knowledge as Proper Function of Cognitive Faculties

Let's consider the following account of knowledge: We are warranted in some belief provided that when we form that belief our cognitive faculties meet these conditions:

- A. Proper Function
- B. Correct Environment
- C. Aimed at Truth
- D. Reliable

Warranted Cow Belief (Example)

I am at the Dooleys' ranch and see what appears to be a cow 100 yards away; I form the belief "there's a cow over there". I am warranted in this belief formed on the cognitive faculty of **sense perception** (sight) and all the conditions are met.

Suppose that I am suffering from serious macular degeneration. The world appears to me super blurry and at 100 yards, I cannot tell the difference between a cow, tractor, or hay bale. I am not warranted because my faculties are **dysfunctional**; condition (A) is not met.

Suppose that my eyes are fine, but it's 11pm on a cloudy night; no lights are on and I cannot see anything clearly. I am not warranted because the **environment** is not appropriate for me to form beliefs based on visual perception; condition (B) is not met.

Suppose that the cow is extremely sick. I really like this cow and would be sad if she died; so, I form the belief that the cow will recover. I am not warranted in this belief because it was formed by wish fulfillment, a cognitive faculty that is **not aimed at truth**; condition (C) is not met.

Suppose that I try to identify the breed of cow and form the belief it is a Brahman. However, I know basically nothing about cows and most breeds look the same to me. I am not warranted in this belief because I am **unreliable** in identifying cow breeds; condition (D) is not met.

Suppose that a week later, my friend asks if there are any cows on the Dooleys' ranch; I think for a moment, reflect on the cows I saw a week ago, and say "yes, they have cows". I am

warranted in this belief formed on the cognitive faculty of **memory** and all the conditions are met. Further, I show my friend a photo of me standing next to the cows; this photo is **evidence** which gives my friend additional warrant, but even if I didn't have the photo, I would still be warranted in my belief.

This extended example illustrates how knowledge is the result of properly functioning cognitive faculties. Sometimes that knowledge is immediate and non-evidential. Could knowledge of God work in this way?

The Sense of God (*Sensus Divinitatis*) as a Cognitive Faculty

Several thinkers have noted that human beings show a general predisposition to believe in gods of some sort⁶⁹. John Calvin called this the *sensus divinitatis*, a cognitive faculty designed by God to lead to knowledge of Him.

"That there exists in the human mind and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity [*sensus divinitatis*], we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead...this is not a doctrine which is first learned at school, but one as to which every man is, from the womb, his own master; one which nature herself allows no individual to forget." - Calvin, Institutes 1.3.1-3

Various circumstances can activate the *sensus divinitatis*, most commonly, reflections on (i) nature and (ii) morality. Gazing deep into the night sky, one may be awestruck at the incomprehensible size and beauty of the universe, then resonate with the Psalmist who wrote 'the heavens declare the glory of God!'. Following an immoral act, one may be saddled with guilt and awareness of divine disapproval. These immediate beliefs result in a knowledge of God without need of argument or evidence. So, we reject (1) as follows

- (15) If belief in God is based on the *sensus divinitatis*, then it is warranted without evidence

But, if belief in God is warranted without evidence, one may ask what is the use of evidence?

Argument and Evidence as Supplementary Warrant

Beliefs can enjoy dual warrant meaning they can be basic but also have evidential support. For example, suppose you purchased breakfast this morning and have a receipt for the meal. The receipt isn't *necessary*: you would still be warranted on the basis of your memory that you had breakfast, even if the receipt blows away in the wind. But, if you don't trust your memory, the receipt can be an aid to jog your memory. If someone asks you what you had for breakfast, you can show the receipt as a piece of objective evidence (as opposed to your subjective memory).

Belief in God can be much the same way. While you can be warranted on the basis of your sense of God, that warrant does not extend to other people. Moreover, some people do not

⁶⁹ Studies in modern cognitive science of religion have produced some evidence corroborating a natural inclination for humans to form beliefs about gods. See *Born Believers* by J. Barrett and *The Believing Primate* by J. Schloss and M.J. Murray (eds.) for more.

have as strong a sense of God as others. Objective evidence can serve as supplementary support for times when God seems distant or for skeptics who do not trust their sense of God. However, just as a receipt does not capture the experience of a meal, evidence for God will not capture the richness of a personal awareness of Him.

Summary

The Evidentialist objection claims that belief in God is warranted only if there is good evidence or argument. Reformed epistemology contends that belief in God can be warranted on the basis of direct knowledge of God called the *sensus divinitatis*.

How challenging did you find this discussion? (Circle a number)

Over my head 0 1 2 3 Too easy

Additional Resources

B = Beginner (0-1), I = Intermediate (1-2), A = Advanced (2-3)

Numbers in parentheses refer to the number circled above. For example, if you circled a 3, you can probably handle the Advanced resources.

Reformed Epistemology

- “Plantinga Animated Videos” by Center for Philosophy of Religion on YouTube (B)
- *Knowledge and Christian Belief* by Alvin Plantinga (B)
- *Warranted Christian Belief* by Alvin Plantinga (I)
- *Recent work in reformed epistemology* by A. Moon (I), reprinted in [Appendix A2.1](#)
- *Reformed Epistemology and the Problem of Religious Diversity: Proper Function, Epistemic Disagreement, and Christian Exclusivism* by J. Kim (A)

Cognitive Science of Religion

- *Born Believers: The Science of Children’s Religious Belief* by J.L. Barrett (B)
- *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds* by J.L. Barrett (I)
- *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, And Theological Reflections On The Origin Of Religion* by J. Schloss & M.J. Murray (eds.) (I)

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

Homework for Next Session

“Can We Be Good Without God?” by W.L. Craig ([Appendix A3.1](#))

03 God Exists I - Moral Arguments

A First Take: Romans 2:12-16

1. What does Paul say about the nature of God's law?
 2. How is God's law known?
-

This session is based on the book *The Morals of the Story* by David Baggett & Marybeth Baggett

The Moral Argument in Short

Some things are objectively wrong and evil (e.g. torturing for fun). Without God, it seems like morality collapses into arbitrariness and subjective opinion. God is the best explanation for the grounding of morality as a Moral Lawgiver.

Versions of the Moral Argument

Philosophical discussion about the relationship of God and morality has a long history, dating to even pre-Christian times. For simplicity, we will be considering one contemporary version⁷⁰.

David Baggett's Abductive Moral Argument (from *Morals of the Story*)

- (1) There are four moral phenomena that require explanation: (i) value, (ii) obligation, (iii) knowledge, and (iv) transformation.
- (2) Theism provides a better, coherent explanation than naturalistic alternatives.
- (3) Therefore, theism is (probably) true, that is, God (probably) exists.

The Key Moral Phenomena

Moral Values (good and bad) - for example, human beings are intrinsically morally valuable

Moral Obligations (right, wrong, permissible, and required) - Oughts that have authority and for which violators are held accountable.

Moral Knowledge - Rational people of sound mind are able to make moral judgements on a regular basis, indeed, shared moral knowledge is the starting point of the moral argument.

Moral Transformation - People experience guilt as a moral gap between where they are and where they ought to be; in response, they transform to become better people.

⁷⁰Readers are recommended to *The Moral Argument: A History* by Baggett & Walls (2019). For a sample, see the article *A Dozen Moral Arguments* by Dave Baggett, reprinted in [Appendix A3.2](#)

Defending Moral Objectivism⁷¹

Moral arguments start on the assumption of **moral objectivism**, but why think this is so?

Moral Objectivism - moral judgments are ordinarily true or false in an absolute or universal sense, that some of them are true, and that people sometimes are justified in accepting true moral judgments (and rejecting false ones) on the basis of evidence available to any reasonable and well-informed person. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

Common Sense Moral Experience

As we discussed last week, some beliefs are “properly basic”, that is, they are known immediately with no detailed analysis of evidence. For example, you are directly aware that you exist, that the external world is real, etc. Moral beliefs, likewise, can be formed in this way and it is rational to accept them, for example the wisdom of repugnance. This shared moral experience is best explained by moral objectivism. We can summarize this argument as follows:

- (1) If it's *pro tanto* objectively wrong to torture for fun, then there is at least one objective moral truth.
- (2) It is *pro tanto* objectively wrong to torture for fun.
- (3) So, there is at least one objective moral truth.
- (4) If there is at least one objective moral truth, then moral realism is true.
- (5) Therefore, moral realism is true.

Relativism is Unlivable

On a practical level, most people live as if morality is objective; anytime people say “that’s unjust!” or “it’s the right thing to do!” in their daily lives, they show their commitment to objective morality. If you ask further, you’ll find most people have moral issues they are particularly passionate about - especially politically charged issues, such as abortion, immigration, war, etc. The argument is the same as above, but your conversation partner is supplying premise (2), for example, “It is objectively wrong to be intolerant of others”.

No Morality Means No Rationality

Terrance Cuneo⁷² has advanced a “companions in guilt” style of argument for moral realism; this style of argument aims to show that two things are related such that they stand or fall together. Cuneo argues there is such a link between moral facts and epistemic facts (e.g. “one ought to follow the evidence where it leads”). Both moral facts and epistemic facts are (i) prescriptive, (ii) intrinsically motivating, and (iii) give categorical reasons for our cognitive behavior. Cuneo argues,

⁷¹ See “A Positive Case for Objective Morality (Dr. Eric Sampson)” on *The Analytic Christian* YouTube channel for an accessible overview of these arguments. Outline reprinted in Appendix A3.3

⁷² Cuneo, T. (2010). *The normative web: An argument for moral realism*. Clarendon Press.

- (1) If moral facts do not exist, then epistemic facts do not exist.
- (2) But, since we are having an intellectual argument, epistemic facts do exist.
- (3) Therefore, moral facts exist.

Normative Truths Are Indispensable to Deliberation, thus Probably True

David Enoch⁷³ has argued we are justified in believing in the existence of things that are instrumentally indispensable. For example, scientists believe that electrons exist because without them, many chemical phenomena would be inexplicable. Likewise, the deliberative project (i.e., figuring out what is true or what actions we should take) is intrinsically valuable, and indispensable in and of itself. Enoch argues,

- (1) If something is instrumentally indispensable to an intrinsically indispensable project, then we are (epistemically) justified (for that very reason) in believing that that thing exists.
- (2) The deliberative project is intrinsically indispensable.
- (3) Irreducibly normative truths are instrumentally indispensable to the deliberative project.
- (4) Therefore, we are epistemically justified in believing that there are irreducibly normative truths.

Discuss: What are examples of moral claims you've heard from non-Christians? What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments?

How God Explains Morality

God's Nature as the good provides the universal standard by which moral values are assessed. The value of personhood is found in the fact that the metaphysically, ideologically, and explanatorily ultimate Being is personal (Linville, Baggett).

God's Commands, in part, provide the obligation to perform certain actions, for example "love thy neighbor" is obligatory in virtue of God's commanding to do so. The technical term for this is "Divine Command Theory".

God's Creation established a natural law in the cosmos and providentially ordered biological processes to result in minds able to discern scientific and moral truths. Humans are created in the image of God and are rationally capable of discerning reality.

God's Grace provides both the foundation of forgiveness to absolve objective moral guilt and the empowerment of the Spirit to live a godly life (Romans 8:1-8). Note: A strength of this argument is that it dips into Christian theology beyond a generic theism.

⁷³ Enoch, D. (2011). *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* Oxford Academic

A Selection of Naturalistic, Non-Theistic Moral Theories

Below is a brief sketch of non-theistic ethical theories. Many of them have some degree of truth and are compatible with theism; however, by leaving God out of the picture, they miss something important. Please note this is not meant to be an exhaustive rebuttal of these alternatives, rather, this is highlighting their core difficulties.

Strict Naturalism - everything that exists is physical or material in nature, and there are no objective moral values. Reality is a seamless web of physical cause and effect. The goal of strict naturalists is to take beliefs, values, choices that we experience and explain them in terms that are nonconscious, non-mental, and non-psychological. For example, "Ethics is an illusion put in place by natural selection to make us good cooperators." - Michael Ruse⁷⁴

Broad Naturalism - acknowledges the reality of consciousness and moral values and duties, but seeks to explain them within a materialist worldview.

Ethical Egoism - People only have direct duties to themselves. Egoism states that there are reasons to treat people well in order to be treated well himself. But this cannot account for the moral standing of others. There is no direct duty owed to the victim.

Virtue Ethics - places a premium on the virtue of the agent. On virtue ethics, the reason lying is wrong is that it is bad for your character development, not that it violates and harms the victim. Standard virtue ethics does not account for the moral standing of other individuals.

Utilitarianism - something is right or wrong based on whether it benefits society. Rights are not inherent because they can be abrogated when they are no longer advantageous for society. Any and all versions of utilitarianism fail to account for individual moral standing.

Atheistic Moral Platonism⁷⁵ - equates moral laws with logical laws that have independent, necessary existence similar to abstract objects. Both are prescriptive and authoritative. However, moral obligations are authoritative and, if violated, generate guilt, the need for forgiveness, etc. Knowledge of causally effete abstract objects is a perennial challenge as evolutionary pressures select for material reproductive success, not truth tracking.

Euthyphro Dilemma - Theism's Biggest Challenge

Theistic ethics is not without its objections. The primary objection originates from Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro* wherein Socrates and Euthyphro discuss the nature of piety (or goodness). Adapted to our argument, the question is: "Is something good because God commands it or does God command it because it is good?"

On the first horn, we face the problem of **arbitrariness**, that God could command *anything* and it would be good. On the second horn, we face the problem of **vacuity**, that things are good independent of God and He's just identifying them.

⁷⁴ Ruse, M. (2006). *Is Darwinian Metaethics Possible (And If It Is, Is It Well Taken)?*

⁷⁵ Wielenberg, E. J. (2014) *Robust ethics: The metaphysics and epistemology of godless normative realism*. This is perhaps the strongest contemporary challenger to theistic ethics.

The short response is that God's commands flow from His essential, good nature, i.e. God commands things because *He* is good. Thus, God isn't commanding based on some decision-making process so neither horn accurately describes his commands. Instead, the very idea of Good is simply a component of what we speak of when we speak of God, in other words, God = Good.

David Baggett identifies⁷⁶ the following seven distinctions which help us further address the dilemma.

1. **Definition vs Analysis:** We can talk about things without knowing their complete nature. For example, humanity knew what "water" was for thousands of years prior to the discovery of the atom. Upon molecular analysis, we know that water is identical to H₂O. Likewise, we can know what the good is and upon further analysis, it turns out to be identical to God's nature.
2. **Univocation vs Equivocation:** When we speak of God's goodness, we do not mean to say that He is good in exactly the same way people are good (univocation). Nor do we mean that His goodness is utterly unlike human goodness so that our notions of goodness could be flipped on their head (equivocation). Rather, God's goodness is analogical to our goodness such that it is transcendent, perfect, and infinitely greater than ours, yet recognizable as good. God doesn't love as humans love, yet it is recognizable as love.
3. **Conceivability vs Possibility:** The arbitrariness horn of the dilemma says we can conceive of God sinning or issuing an evil command, therefore it's possible. But is this the case? Can we conceive of logical impossibilities? For example, many mathematical theorems are either necessarily true or false; if I conceive of a theorem as false, that doesn't mean it's possibly false. It probably shows I don't understand the theorem.
4. **Good vs Right:** Above, we distinguished between values and obligations, i.e., the good and the right. There are many things that are good to do but not obligatory, e.g., being a doctor. Conversely, there are things that are right but not good, e.g., killing in self-defense. God's commands cannot make things good or bad, but they can make actions right or wrong - even bad actions, such as military invasions into Canaan, which leads to the next distinction.
5. **Difficult vs Impossible:** God must be recognizably good in order for most versions of the moral argument to work, but this may be consistent with God's doing or commanding things that are hard for us to reconcile with our most inviolable moral intuitions. God's being recognizably good, however, would not be consistent with his doing or commanding what's simply impossible to rationally square with our most nonnegotiable moral commitments.
 - a. Baggett & Walls propose the following: when confronted with a candidate for appraisal, some alleged or hypothetical command by God or state of affairs

⁷⁶ *Morals of the Story* pg 93ff. For a more technical treatment, see his *Good God*

allowed by God, we should ask if we can identify a possibly true proposition, consistent with God's moral perfection rationally construed, that would potentially entail such a command or state of affairs. If we can identify such a proposition, then the command or state of affairs in question can be said to be reconcilable with our nonnegotiable moral commitments; if we can't, then it isn't reconcilable. - *Good God*, pg. 136

- b. As Christians, we hold that the God revealed in the Bible is the God whose nature grounds morality. Some of God's actions in scripture challenge our deep moral intuitions - the same intuitions that we earlier attributed to His instilling in us. So, it is critical for us to take head on the challenge of "abhorrent commands" in the Bible. In [Appendix B1.1](#), you can find an example working through the difficulties of Canaanite conquest.
- 6. Knowing vs Being:** Knowledge of a truth is different from the grounds of that truth. Morality may operate "top-down" originating from God, but our knowledge goes "bottom-up", starting with our egoist perspective as toddlers before expanding. Just because our knowledge operates this way doesn't mean morality operates this way. Moreover, belief in God is not a prerequisite to knowledge of the good (as shown above in our First Take).
- 7. Dependence vs Control:** The objection presupposes that if moral truths depend on God, that means He can control them, making evil good and good evil. However, this does not follow; moral truths depend on God's essential, unchanging nature and just as God cannot change his nature or destroy himself, he cannot change the moral truths that flow from that nature.

Summary

	Values	Obligations	Knowledge	Transformation
Theism	God's Nature	God's Commands	God's Creation	God's Grace
Naturalism	Meaningless?	Non-Existent?	Lucky Accident?	Illusory?

How challenging did you find this discussion? (Circle a number)

Over my head 0 1 2 3 Too easy

Additional Resources

Numbers in parentheses refer to the number circled above. For example, if you circled a 3, you can probably handle the Advanced resources.

B = Beginner (0-1), I = Intermediate (1-2), A = Advanced (2-3)

Internet

- *MoralApologetics.com*, website edited by David Baggett
- Evans, C. Stephen and David Baggett, "Moral Arguments for the Existence of God", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = [<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/moral-arguments-god/>](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/moral-arguments-god/).
- "Can We Be Good Without God?" by William Lane Craig, reprinted in [Appendix A3.1](#)
- "A Dozen Moral Arguments" on MoralApologetics.com, reprinted in [Appendix A3.2](#)
- "God and Morality" YouTube playlist by The Analytic Christian

Books

- *The Morals of the Story: Good News About a Good God* by D. Baggett & M. Baggett (B)
- Baggett & Walls Trilogy: *Good God, God & Cosmos, Moral Argument: A History* (I-A)
 - Note: Walls is an ardent anti-Calvinist and many of his works include (in my opinion) unnecessary critiques of Reformed theology, usually in the vein that Calvinism makes God evil. *Good God* includes such a chapter which I think detracts from an otherwise excellent book.
- *God & Moral Obligation* by C.S. Evans (I)
- *Finite & Infinite Goods* by R. Adams (A)
- *The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism* by T. Cuneo (A)

- “*The moral argument*” in *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* by M. Linville (A)

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

Homework for Next Session

“The Kalam Cosmological Argument” by W.L. Craig ([Appendix A4.1](#))

04 God Exists II - Cosmological Arguments

A First Take: Colossians 1:15-20, Romans 4:17

How does Paul describe God's relationship to creation in these two passages? What are the different aspects of God's creative activity that Paul emphasizes?

Definitions

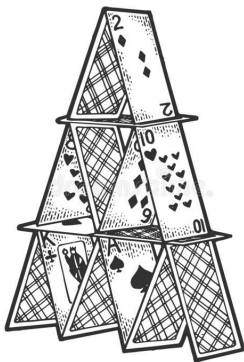
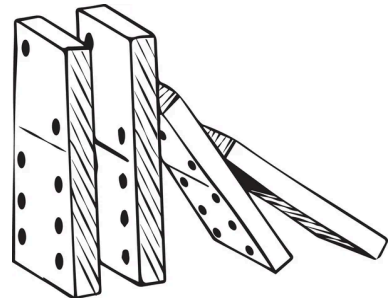
Cosmological argument - a family of arguments that seek to demonstrate the existence of a First Cause or Foundation of the existence of the universe (Gk. *cosmos*). (Craig & Moreland)

Creatio ex nihilo - God's creation of the universe out of nothing at the beginning (Rom 4:17b).

Creatio continua - God's sustaining creative activity (Col 1:15-20)

The Two Main Cosmological Arguments in Short

Consider a row of dominoes getting tipped over one after the other. Working backwards, we can infer that each domino was knocked over by a previous domino. But surely this cannot go on infinitely into the past. So, we may ask what knocked over the first domino? Likewise, we observe a chain of cause-and-effect continuing to today; we can follow this chain back to the beginning and ask what started it. God is the best explanation as a **First Cause**. (Note the connection to *creatio ex nihilo*)



Consider a house of cards. Each card is supported by the row of cards beneath it. Likewise, that row is supported by cards and so on and so forth. But surely this cannot go on infinitely with cards all the way down. So, we may ask what is supporting the whole house of cards? Likewise, we observe that everything that exists depends on something else for its existence; we can follow this chain of dependence (or contingency) to ask what grounds all of existence. God is the best explanation as a **Necessary Being** who depends on nothing for His existence. (Note the connection to *creatio continua*).

For simplicity, we will focus on the First Cause argument. See [Appendix A4.2](#) for the argument to a necessary being from contingency.

The First Cause⁷⁷ Cosmological Argument

Deductive (W.L. Craig, *On Guard*)

⁷⁷ aka the *kalām* cosmological argument, due to the influence of Islamic theologians such as al-Ghazali

- (1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
- (2) The universe began to exist.
- (3) Therefore, the universe has a cause.

(1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause

The causal principle enjoys strong intuitive appeal and it is largely how we govern our everyday lives. Some argue denying the causal principle would lead to chaos (e.g. if things can begin to exist with no cause, how do you know the universe didn't begin to exist 5 minutes ago with all your memories in your head?). While there are some detractors, not many reject this principle.

Discuss: What would you say to someone who says that creation out of nothing is impossible since every thing that begins to exist always comes from a prior something?

(2) The universe began to exist

Two approaches establish that the universe began to exist: philosophical argument and scientific evidence. We will start with the philosophical approach and look at science next.

Philosophical arguments for the beginning of the universe

These arguments aim to show that if the universe is infinite in the past, then impossible scenarios become possible. So, we are arguing for a version of the principle of **finitism**.

Infinite Library Paradox⁷⁸

Consider a library with an infinite number of books. A patron comes in and checks out all of the even-numbered books. How many books are left in the library? The same amount, infinity. So, $\text{infinity} - \text{infinity} = \text{infinity}$. Suppose he returns to the library and checks out all the books numbered greater than 1, again, walking out with an infinite number of books. How many books are left in the library? Just 1. So, $\text{infinity} - \text{infinity} = 1$. Something has gone wrong here as we cannot subtract equal quantities and get different values. Paradox!

Consider the principle of **absolute finitism**: it is impossible for there to be an actually infinite number of anything. If absolute finitism is true, we can argue:

- (4) If the universe did not begin to exist, then the number of actual past events is infinite
- (5) But, it is impossible for there to be an actually infinite number of anything
- (6) Therefore, the universe began to exist

⁷⁸ This is an adapted version of Hilbert's hotel paradox.

Discuss: According to absolute finitism, nothing in our universe can be actually infinite. But what about God? In what sense(s) is God infinite? Why does this matter?

We've argued that an actually infinite number of past events is impossible. What about the future? How is eternity different from an infinite number of moments in time?

Absolute finitism enjoys strong intuitive appeal, but some might push back – especially mathematicians who think it rules out certain mathematical facts. Paradoxes like the infinite library may arise due to *manipulations* of infinity, not infinity itself. Whether these concerns hold or not, we can establish the argument with a slightly weaker principle, illustrated below.

*Flag Paradox*⁷⁹

Consider a flagpole with a lowered flag. A Boy Scout is scheduled to raise the flag at 6:00. A second Boy Scout has been assigned to raise it at 5:30. A third is assigned for 5:15, a fourth for 5:07:30, a fifth at 5:03:45, and so on *ad infinitum*. When the clock strikes 6:00, the flag is flying, but no Scout raised it. Each one arrived to find the flag already up. Paradox!

*Messenger Paradox*⁸⁰

Imagine an infinitely long line of angels. They have been ordered to give you a message by passing a sheet of paper down the line. When each angel receives the paper, the angel must perform one of these actions:

- Action 1: If “Hello World!” is written on the paper, leave as-is and pass to the next angel.
- Action 2: If the paper is blank, write “Hello World!” then pass it to the next angel.

When the last angel hands the paper to you, it says “Hello World!” written on it, but which angel wrote it? For any angel who could write the message, the previous angel would've already done so, and so on *ad infinitum*. Thus, the paper has a message, but no angel wrote it. Paradox!

Consider the principle of **causal finitism**, that is, there is no event whose causal-power history contains an infinitely descending chain. This is weaker than absolute finitism as it grants there can be infinite numbers of some things, just not causes. If causal finitism is true, we can argue:

- (7) Nothing can have an infinite causal history (or causal loops)
- (8) Something has a cause
- (9) Therefore, there is an uncaused first cause

⁷⁹ This is an adapted version of the Grim Reaper Paradox.

⁸⁰ See *Infinity, Causation, and Paradox* by Pruss for more information about these paradoxes.

This uncaused first cause is the same cause of the universe we have in (3).

Scientific confirmation for the beginning of the universe

We will discuss this in more detail next time, but stated succinctly, developments in the 20th century revealed a great deal about the origin and development of our universe. The Standard Hot Big Bang Model developed by Friedmann and Lemaître posits constant expansion of the universe, predicting a singularity in the finite past, and thus, a beginning.

(3) From a First Cause to God?

Arguing from a first cause of the universe to the existence of God is a bit of a difficult task known as the “Gap Problem”. A simple approach is to say that this is **confirmatory evidence** for theism. That is to say, theism predicts that there is a necessary, uncaused ground of reality (God) whereas naturalism does not. Thus, the existence of an uncaused first cause is surprising on naturalism but not surprising on theism. Symbolically, $P(\text{FirstCause} \mid \text{Theism}) \gg P(\text{FirstCause} \mid \text{Naturalism})$.

Alternatively, William Lane Craig argues⁸¹ that through **conceptual analysis** we can derive some features of this first cause. In virtue of (1), (2.4), and (2.6), we can infer the first cause is beginningless and changeless. Since it created the universe, it must transcend the universe, meaning it is immaterial, timeless, and spaceless. Bringing things into being means it is enormously powerful. Finally, it is plausibly a personal cause as “prior” to the beginning of the universe there does not seem to be any scientific law or material causation active. Moreover, a personal, free agency can account for the origin of a first temporal effect from a changeless cause. A beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and an enormously powerful personal Creator of the universe is, as Aquinas would say, what everyone means by “God”.

For additional solutions to the Gap Problem, see the survey by Simón Ocampo, “Strategies for Stage II of Cosmological Arguments” available online at PhilArchive.

How well did you follow the discussion? (Circle a number)

Too complicated 0 1 2 3 Too easy

Additional Resources

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

B = Beginner (0-1), I = Intermediate (1-2), A = Advanced (2-3)

- *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (article) by W.L. Craig, reprinted in Appendix A4.1

⁸¹ “The kalam cosmological argument” in Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology by W.L. Craig & J. Sinclair

- *Infinity, Causation, & Paradox* by Alexander Pruss (A)
- *The Kalam Cosmological Argument (2 Vols.)*, ed. Craig & Copan (A)

Homework for Next Session

Does God Exist? Argument 2: God makes sense of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life by William Lane Craig, reprinted in [Appendix A5.1](#)

05 God Exists III - Design Arguments

A First Take: Psalm 19:1b, Acts 14:16-17

What does physical creation reveal about God? Is it important for Christians to study creation?

Definitions

Teleological (Design) Arguments - a family of arguments that seek to demonstrate the existence of a supernatural designer from the seemingly purposeful features of the observable world.

Anthropic fine-tuning - the laws and values of the constants of physics, and the initial conditions of any universe with the same laws as our universe, must be set in a seemingly very precise way for the universe to support life (Collins, 2012). Importantly, fine-tuning $\neq$ design.

Excursus on Creationism

The age of the earth and evolution are somewhat contentious topics in American evangelical Christian circles. In the context of the Presbyterian Church in America, two major perspectives are represented.

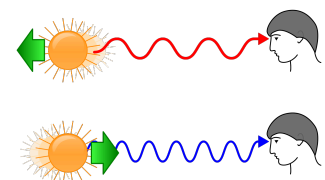
1. "Young-Earth" creationism (YEC) interprets the Bible to teach that the universe/earth was created in six consecutive 24-hour days less than 50,000 years ago.
2. "Old-Earth" creationism (OEC) says that the Bible does not address how old the universe is, so, it is a question for natural science; the best science today indicates the universe began ~13.8 billion years ago and our planet formed ~4.5 billion years ago.

Traditionally, teleological (or "design") arguments have been associated with biological features; some say that Darwinian evolution has explained away those features without need for design. Whether or not that's true, the fine-tuning data discussed herein concern the initial conditions of the big bang without which organic chemistry would not happen and life could not begin, let alone evolve.

The following assumes an OEC perspective that is neutral on the theory of evolution. For more information, consult *PCA Creation Report (1999)*.

The Universe is Expanding

Hubble's Law is the observation that galaxies are moving away from Earth at speeds proportional to their distance, i.e., the farther they are,



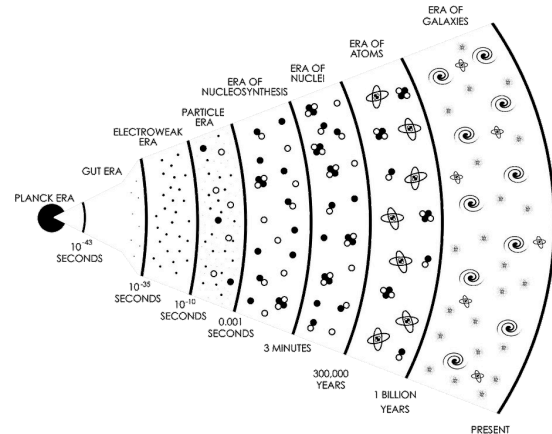
the faster they are moving away from Earth. The velocity of the galaxies has been determined by their redshift, a shift of the light they emit toward the red end of the visible spectrum.

Standard Hot Big Bang Model (Friedmann-Lemaître) posits constant expansion, predicting a singularity (i.e., a region of infinite density and energy) in the finite past.

Hawking-Penrose singularity theorems (1970) show that so long as the universe is governed by general relativity (with a few technical exceptions), our past must include a singularity.

Borde-Guth-Vilken Theorem (2003) proves that classical space-time, under a single, very general condition, cannot be extended to past infinity but must reach a boundary at some time in the finite past.

Recall our First Cause argument from last week. We can now add empirical confirmation that the universe began to exist (and thus, has a cause).



The Universe is Expanding Just Right

When put into mathematical formulation, the laws of nature have certain **constants** and **quantities** that appear in the equations; these are empirically measured free parameters that are not constrained by other laws. For example, Newton's law of gravity utilizes the gravitational constant, G , equal to $6.67408 \times 10^{-11} \text{ m}^3 \text{ kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-2}$ which is the strength of gravity in our universe.

$$F = G \frac{m_1 m_2}{r^2}$$

Newton's law of gravity

Cosmological constant (Λ) - This appears in the Einstein field equation and describes the expansion rate of the universe as governed by the energy density in the vacuum of space.

"Measuring the [cosmological constant], Λ (lambda) was the biggest scientific news of 1998. An unsuspected new force - a cosmic 'antigravity' - controls the expansion of our universe, even though it has no discernable effect on scales less than a billion light-years...Fortunately for us (and very surprisingly to theorists), Λ is very small. Otherwise its effect would have stopped galaxies and stars from forming, and cosmic evolution would have been stifled before it could even begin". Martin Rees, Just Six Numbers (2000), pg. 3

$$\tilde{R}_{ij} - \frac{1}{2} R \tilde{g}_{ij} + \Lambda \tilde{g}_{ij} = \frac{8\pi G}{c^4} \tilde{T}_{ij}$$

Einstein field equation

If $\rho_{\Lambda}/\rho_{\text{Planck}} < -10^{-90}$, the universe would re-collapse after 1 second. If $\rho_{\Lambda}/\rho_{\text{Planck}} > 10^{-90}$, structure formation would cease after 1 second, resulting in a uniform, rapidly diffusing hydrogen and helium soup. Thus, given a uniform distribution over ρ_{Λ} between the Planck limits $[-\rho_{\text{Planck}}, \rho_{\text{Planck}}]$, the likelihood of a life-permitting value of the cosmological constant is at most 10^{-90} (Adams, 2017; Barnes, 2020).

See [Appendix A5.2](#) for additional fine-tuned parameters

The Fine-Tuning Design Argument in Short

The initial conditions of the big bang are incomprehensibly fine-tuned for the possible existence of life. For example, if the cosmological constant Λ was smaller by 1 part in 10^{60} , the universe would have collapsed on itself and cosmic evolution would have never started; that means no chemistry, no planets, nothing. The chances are so incomprehensibly low that design is way more likely. God is the best explanation as a **Cosmic Designer**.

Versions of the Argument

Deductive (W.L. Craig, *On Guard*)

- (1) The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design.
- (2) It is not due to physical necessity.
- (3) It is not due to chance.
- (4) Therefore, it is due to design.

Abductive (Barnes/Collins, *Reasonable Little Question*)

- (1) For two theories T_1 and T_2 , in the context of background information B , if it is true of evidence E that $p(E|T_1 \& B) \gg p(E|T_2 \& B)$ then E strongly favors T_1 over T_2 .
- (2) The likelihood that a life-permitting universe exists on naturalism is vanishingly small,
- (3) The likelihood that a life-permitting universe exists on theism is not vanishingly small.
- (4) Thus, the existence of a life-permitting universe strongly favors theism over naturalism.
 $p(E|\text{Theism} \& B) \gg p(E|\text{Naturalism} \& B)$

The abductive version is a subset of what is called “Bayesian Confirmation Theory” named after mathematician (and Presbyterian minister) Thomas Bayes. To simplify the intuition behind the math, think about it as a measure of how “surprising” something is given a particular story. For example, suppose that there are two suspects in a robbery: Jones and Smith. Smith’s fingerprints are later found on the cracked safe. Finding Smith’s fingerprints on the safe would be extremely surprising if Jones were the robber, but it would not be surprising if Smith were the robber. Therefore, the fingerprints are evidence in favor of the hypothesis “Smith is the robber”. Fine-tuning is surprising if there is no God, but not surprising if the universe is designed.

Explanations for Fine-Tuning

Physical Necessity

In short: the constants and quantities have the values they do because they had to. For example, the ratio of circumference to diameter of a circle *must* have the value of π .

Response 1: We can simulate different universes to quantify the degree of fine-tuning; this seems to push against the necessity of these values.

Response 2: Currently, no proposed mechanism delimits these constants and quantities to single values; string theory, one of the leading options for a theory of everything, can only delimit to 10^{500} possible universes compatible with our laws of nature.

Chance

In short: we got lucky; improbable things happen all the time, why not our universe being fine-tuned?

Response: Such a claim does not fully appreciate the probabilities in play. “Astronomical” is an understatement.

Anthropic Principle

In short: there is a filtering effect as we cannot observe a universe that is not life-permitting, so, we shouldn't be surprised that that's what we observe. By analogy, if our grandpa tells us how he survived a crazy improbable event before meeting our grandma, we shouldn't be surprised because if he didn't survive, we wouldn't exist to hear his story.

Response: While this is partially true, it doesn't explain the phenomenon, only the *observation* of the phenomenon. It only becomes a complete explanation when combined with a generative mechanism.

Multiverse

In short: there is a mechanism that generates multiple universes, each with different parameters. We just happen to find ourselves in the universe that permits life.

Response 1: Such a claim is super cool, I mean who doesn't find the idea of parallel universes awesome?

Response 2: Because the multiverse is, by definition, causally disconnected from ours, it cannot be interrogated by scientific means.

Response 3: The epistemic cost is high because universes like ours, (i.e. large, old, and spacious) are vastly less probable than smaller universes. Moreover, probabilistic reasoning in our universe is undermined because in an infinite universe, all possibilities are realized.

Design

In short: the universe is designed for life by a creator. Such a claim enjoys a theoretical benefit because theism was advocated prior to the discovery of the fine-tuning data.

Objection: “Who designed the designer?” such a complex universe must surely have a complex designer.

Response 1: Good explanations do not necessarily need to be simple; the principle of parsimony (aka Occam’s Razor) is that explanations should not be more complex *than necessary*.

Response 2: It’s not clear that theism is complex for the classical doctrine of God posits that He is a truly simple being, not composed of parts. Complexity of God’s ideas does not translate to complexity of God Himself.

Response 3: We are explaining the complexity of the fine-tuned data here, not all of complexity or all of design. Therefore, appealing to further design or complexity beyond what we’re trying to explain is a moot point. For instance, if we found a city on Mars, then it would have an explanation more complex than the city itself, but that wouldn’t make the explanation any less of an explanation.

How well did you follow the discussion? (Circle a number)

Too complicated 0 1 2 3 Too easy

Additional Resources

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

B = Beginner (0-1), I = Intermediate (1-2), A = Advanced (2-3)

Bible & Science

- Report Of The Creation Study Committee, 27th General Assembly (1999) available at pcahistory.org
- *Reading Genesis Well* by C. John Collins (B)
- *Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory* by Gijsbert van den Brink (I)

Design Argument

- *Where the Conflict Really Lies* by Alvin Plantinga
- *A Fortunate Universe* by L.A. Barnes & G. Lewis (I)
- *Just Six Numbers* by M. Rees (B)
- *God, Design, and Fine-Tuning* (article) by Robin Collins,

- *God and Design* ed. N.A. Manson (I)

Homework for Next Session

“The Resurrection of Jesus” by W.L. Craig ([Appendix A6.1](#))

06 Historicity of the Resurrection I - Sources + Facts

A First Take: 1 Corinthians 15:1-19

How important is the resurrection of Jesus?

Thus far, we have discussed three major arguments for the existence of God: Moral, Cosmological, and Design. Together, these make a solid case for a generic creator God, but we need to move to the next step in establishing that this is the God of Christianity. Classically, this has been done by advancing an historical argument for the resurrection of Jesus.

Structure of the Argument

Two steps are involved: (1) establishing the relevant historical facts and (2) explaining those facts. Thus, the argument is **abductive** or an **inference to the best explanation** argument.

William Lane Craig organizes the facts under three main headings, for which he provides several sub-arguments based on an historiographical analysis of the New Testament

1. Jesus's empty tomb
2. Jesus's post-mortem appearances
3. The origin of belief in resurrection

Mike Licona uses the "minimal facts" approach which is similar to Craig's except only uses the historical facts agreed to by the near consensus (> 90%) of relevant scholars. Facts 4 & 5 are "second order" facts that enjoy a majority (> 60%) but not a consensus.

1. Jesus died by crucifixion (consensus)
2. Jesus' disciples believed that he rose and appeared to them (consensus)
3. The persecutor, Paul, suddenly changed (consensus)
4. The skeptic, James, brother of Jesus, suddenly changed
5. Jesus's tomb was empty

N.T. Wright takes a broader scope, attempting to answer how early Christianity originated. He surveys beliefs about life, death, and the afterlife among ancient Hebrews, Second Temple Jews, and Greek pagans. Resurrection belief of the Christians is characterized as a mutation within Second Temple Judaism that is inexplicable as either (i) a natural evolution of Jewish theology nor (ii) influenced by external religious pressure. Wright's approach pairs nicely with Craig's #3. The argument can be summarized as follows.

1. Early Christian doctrine of resurrection exhibits three major mutations when compared to 2TJ: (i) resurrection is a central doctrine, (ii) resurrection is split in two with Jesus as the firstfruits, and (iii) resurrection is connected with messiahship.
2. Christians claimed the reason for these mutations were (i) the empty tomb and (ii) the appearances of Jesus after his death.
3. The empty tomb is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to cause these changes in resurrection belief.
4. The post-death appearances of Jesus is a necessary not a sufficient condition to cause these changes in resurrection belief.
5. The empty tomb + appearances are the necessary and sufficient conditions to cause these changes (2) in resurrection belief.
6. Therefore, it is historically probable that the tomb was empty and Jesus appeared after his death.

Ground Clearing

Before we get into the argument proper, let's use two common objections to clear the way.

Objection 1: Jesus Did Not Exist

Jesus Mythicism is the idea that the Jesus of history was not a real person. There are several different versions, such as he may have been an historicized myth or the gospel story is a psyop from the Roman empire. Frankly, this view is extremely fringe. There are, to date, only two serious scholars in the Western academy that endorse this view: Richard Carrier and Robert M. Price and here are two representative assessments of their view:

"Robert M. Price gets Jesus to the vanishing point [of history] by the simple expedient of denying all the evidence that makes him visible...His writing lacks nothing in clarity or colour. But it does lack the capacity to convince any but those who despair of history altogether." - Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, pg 89

"Where I begin to become irritated by Price's thesis [Jesus at the Vanishing Point of History], as with those of his predecessors, is his ignoring what everyone else in the business regards as primary data and his readiness to offer less plausible hypotheses to explain other data that inconveniences his thesis...In short, if Price's essay is a true expression of the state of health of the Jesus-myth thesis, I can't see much life in it. His essay would be better retitled "The Jesus Myth - a Thesis at Vanishing Point" - James D.G. Dunn, *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, pg 96

Now, "scholars say so" is not an argument. So, the relevant question is why is it that scholars have been widely convinced; the short answer is because **Jesus is abundantly attested in early written sources.**

Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44 (ca. 117 AD)

Therefore, to squelch the rumor, Nero created scapegoats and subjected to the most refined tortures those whom the common people called “Christians”, [a group] hated for their abominable crimes. Their name comes from **Christus, who, during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate**. Suppressed for the moment, the deadly superstition broke out again, not only in Judea, the land which originated this evil, but also in the city of Rome.

Josephus Antiquities 18.63-64 (ca. 95 AD)

*[bracketed text] indicates likely later interpolations not original to Josephus

At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man, *[if indeed one should call him a man]*. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among men of Greek origin. *[He was the Messiah]*. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. *[For he appeared to them on the third day, living again, just as the divine prophets had spoken of these and countless other wondrous things about him]*. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out.

Josephus Antiquities 20.200 (ca. 95 AD)

Having such a character, Ananus thought that with Festus dead and Albinus still on the way he would have the proper opportunity. Convening the judges of the Sanhedrin, he brought before them **the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, whose name was James**, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned.

Documents collected into the New Testament

13 letters attributed to Paul of Tarsus explaining the teaching of the Christian community, 4 biographical accounts of Jesus, 1 early history of the Church immediately after Jesus’s death, and 9 miscellaneous letters.

Objection 2: You Are Using the Bible to Prove the Bible

It’s true as Christians that we believe the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God. However, “the Bible” is not a single book but consists of several independent works by different authors. Moreover, we are treating these documents according to the canons of historical criticism. A work can be divinely inspired and not historically informative (e.g. 1 John); conversely a document can be historically informative and not divinely inspired (e.g. Tacitus’s *Annals*).

A Note on Scholarly Consensus

As stated above, it is not proper to argue that since scholars agree on something, that means that it’s true. However, scholarship can be used as a control to identify controversial positions and presuppositions. The fewer controversial premises we include, the more modest and defensible our argument is, even if those controversial premises are, in fact, true.

Getting a Handle on the Sources

This section is based on Chapter 3 of *The Resurrection of Jesus* by Mike Licona

There are two categories of literature: the extant documents collected in the New Testament and the sources which stand behind those documents.

Extant New Testament Literature: Gospels + Letters

- Four Gospels
 - Mark (probably written 65-70 AD)
 - Matthew (probably written 65-85 AD)
 - Luke-Acts (probably written 65-85 AD)
 - John (probably written 70-90 AD)
- Paul's Letters
 - Undisputed: Galatians (48 AD), 1 Thessalonians (50 AD), 1 & 2 Corinthians (54, 55 AD), Romans (57 AD), Philippians (62 AD), Philemon (62 AD)
 - Questioned: 2 Thess (51 AD), Colossians (60 AD), Ephesians (62 AD)
 - Hotly Debated: 1 & 2 Timothy (64, 65 AD), Titus (66 AD)
- Other Letters (not particularly useful for present purposes)
 - 1,2, & 3 John, James, Jude, Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter, Revelation

Four Gospels

The genre of the gospels has strong affinity to Greco-Roman biography, per Richard Burridge (*What are the Gospels?*, 2004). It is widely believed that Mark was the first gospel written with Matthew and Luke using it as a literary source; the literary relationship between Mt-Mk-Lk is called the Synoptic Problem.

The gospels are formally anonymous, meaning they do not explicitly claim to be written by a particular author. Church tradition holds that Mark was written by John Mark who recorded Peter's witness, Matthew by the tax-collector disciple, Luke by the traveling companion of Paul, and John by one of the disciples of the same name (John the Elder/Presbyter/Beloved/son of Zebedee).

Even though many secular scholars dispute this traditional authorship, nevertheless there is wide agreement that the canonical gospels are the best sources for the life and teaching of Jesus, despite hesitations related to the gospels' evangelistic or miraculous flavoring. However, the Gospels are not the earliest sources, so we will give historical priority to the others.

Paul's Letters

Of the 13 letters attributed to Paul, 7 are universally acknowledged as being authored by Paul, 3 are somewhat questioned with scholars split, and 3 are hotly debated with a slight plurality of scholars thinking that Paul was not the author. These are noted in the list above.

While it may be the case that all the letters are genuinely from Paul, we can sidestep that controversy by appealing only to the 7 undisputed letters.

Sources Behind the New Testament Documents

The authors of the NT used sources and occasionally tell us where they got the information.

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." - Luke 1:1-4

Corinthian Creed (1 Cor. 15:3-11)

Paul recounts the gospel using a creed saying "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received" that Christ died, was buried, was raised, appeared to Cephas [Peter], the Twelve, five hundred brethren, James, all the apostles, and last of all, Paul. This creed is widely regarded to be one of the earliest pieces of Christian literature, likely written within 5 years of Jesus's death and delivered to Paul during his initial trip to Jerusalem following his conversion ca. 36 AD

Pre-Markan Burial Narrative

The gospel of Mark is a rapid fire book with several sentences beginning with "and then", "immediately", etc. Once it reaches Jesus's Passion Week (Mk. 14:32-15:47), the story slows down considerably and the style is much smoother, leading scholars to speculate that the author of Mark was using a written source (Craig, 1989 pg 164). There is great disagreement on which particular verses are from the source and which are the author's editing. Per Marion Soards, only eight of the ninety verses enjoy > 70% consensus (14:46, 15:20-24, 27, 34, 37). Thus, it is largely indeterminate what the exact boundary is between Mark and pre-Mark.

Speeches in Acts

Direct speeches take up over half of Acts with the principal speeches comprising 22% of Acts (Hemer 1990, pg. 415-6). While not direct quotations, these speeches almost certainly contain the *ipissima vox* of the early Christian proclamations from the apostles.

Evidence for the Empty Tomb

There are several sub-arguments for the historicity of the empty tomb, but the principal line of argument that is persuasive to most scholars is the women's testimony to having discovered it

empty. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and a few other women testified to having seen the empty tomb. Multiply & independently attested: Mk. 16:1-8, Lk. 24:1-11, Mt. 28:1-7, Jn. 20:1-8

Women as first witnesses is a story unlikely to have been fabricated because the general cultural expectation of the time was that women were considered unreliable witnesses and not valuable testators. Josephus describes the rules for admissible testimony in court: "Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex" (Antiquities IV.8.15). For the purposes of evangelism and persuading others, telling your audience that women were the principal witnesses was embarrassing. We can see indications of wanting to downplay the women's role in finding the tomb: (i) the Corinthian Creed has Peter as the first witness and doesn't even mention women, and (ii) the pseudepigraphal Gospel of Peter adds in several Roman male witnesses prior to Mary Magdalene going to the tomb.

Evidence for the Appearances

Paul's list of eyewitnesses in 1 Cor 15 is top-shelf given its earliness and proximity with the disciples. Moreover, he is using it in an evidentiary way to bolster the reality of the resurrection.

"...he appeared to Cephas [Peter]": While the appearance to Peter is not narrated in the Gospels, this is on solid ground given Paul's proximity with Peter (Gal 1:18) and corroboration with another ancient tradition in Lk. 24:34, "the Lord has risen indeed and he has appeared to Simon!"

"...then to The Twelve": In addition to the aforementioned earliness and Paul's proximity with The Twelve, these appearances are independently attested in Lk. 24:36-42 and Jn. 20:19-20

"...then to more than 500 brethren": One of the more peculiar passages, it is likely that Paul is saying to his audience that these are witnesses to be questioned regarding the resurrection. There is no independent attestation in the Gospels, so the nature of the appearance is largely speculation.

"...then he appeared to James": It is likely that neither James nor any of Jesus's brothers followed him before the crucifixion (Mk. 3:21.31-35; Jn. 7:1-10). Yet, James becomes a pillar of the early Church, even being martyred. If James was doubtful of Jesus initially, the crucifixion would have only confirmed that Jesus was a false prophet. Such a turnaround demands explanation; a post-mortem appearance of Jesus would certainly provide that explanation and Paul's personal proximity with James (Gal. 1:19, 2:9) is good indication this tradition is reliable.

"...then to all the apostles": Like the the 500, this is murky, but likely a group of close disciples

"...last of all, he appeared to me [Paul]": The crown jewel of the evidence, Paul is a firsthand, eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus and recounts how his Damascus road experience changed him from a persecutor of the Church to one of its greatest Apostles.

How well did you follow the discussion? (Circle a number)

Over my head 0 1 2 3 Too easy

Additional Resources

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

B = Beginner (0-1), I = Intermediate (1-2), A = Advanced (2-3)

- *Did Jesus Exist?* by Bart Ehrman (B), note: Ehrman is an atheist
- *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* ed. J.K. Beilby (I)
- *Studying the Historical Jesus: Sources & Methods* by Darrell Bock (B)
- *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* by M. Licona & G. Habermas (B)
- *The Resurrection of Jesus: a New Historiographical Approach* by M. Licona (A)

Homework for Next Session

“Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem” by N.T. Wright ([Appendix A7.1](#))

07 Historicity of the Resurrection II - Origin of Christian Belief

This session is based on *Surprised by Hope* and *The Resurrection of the Son of God* by N.T. Wright

Resurrection as the Best Explanation of Christian Origins

N.T. Wright's multi-volume series *Christian Origins and the Question of God* aims to answer the question of why Christianity arose and took the shape that it did. He starts by sketching out the broad contours of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity then examines how the latter emerged from the former. Wright contends that there are specific mutations⁸² in belief that are best explained if Jesus actually rose from the dead. His argument can be summarized as follows:

1. Early Christian doctrine of resurrection exhibits three major mutations when compared to 2TJ: (i) resurrection is a central doctrine, (ii) resurrection is split in two with Jesus as the firstfruits, and (iii) resurrection is connected with messiahship.
2. Christians claimed the reason for these mutations were (i) the empty tomb and (ii) the appearances of Jesus after his death.
3. The empty tomb is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to cause these changes in resurrection belief.
4. The post-death appearances of Jesus is a necessary not a sufficient condition to cause these changes in resurrection belief.
5. The empty tomb + appearances are the necessary and sufficient conditions to cause these changes (2) in resurrection belief.
6. Therefore, it is historically probable that the tomb was empty and Jesus appeared after his death.

The Argument in Short

Early Christians were Second Temple Jews who believed Jesus was the messiah because he was resurrected from the dead. The origin of this belief and the community founded around it is best explained by the historical fact that Jesus actually resurrected from the dead.

Overview of Second Temple Judaism

See *Timeline* for more information.

First Temple (Solomon's Temple) was constructed ca. 950 B.C., central place of Israel's worship until destroyed ca. 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar II's Babylonian empire. Jews were carted off

⁸² Wright articulates seven mutations; for the sake of convenience and clarity, I have reduced to three.

into exile until the Persian Empire toppled Babylon with Cyrus the Great issuing an edict for the Jews to return home and rebuild the Temple.

Second Temple was completed ca. 515 B.C. and stood as the central identifier for Judea even after its destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D. during the uprising led by Simon bar Giora; it wasn't until the Bar Kochba revolt (ca. 135 A.D.) that the Jews lost hope of rebuilding their Temple and turned to Torah as their center of devotion. The failure of Simeon bar Kochba signaled the shift from Second Temple Judaism to Rabbinic Judaism. Thus, "Second Temple Judaism" (2TJ) refers to Judaism during approximately 500 BC to 150 AD.

Spiritual Exile: Central question for Jews was had they truly returned from exile and was their god, Yhwh, truly in their midst? Solomon's Temple had a visible manifestation of the glory of God (1 Kg. 6:11-13), but the Second Temple did not. The Jews largely felt abandoned by God, in spiritual exile, under the dominion of foreign empires, and hoping for the Lord's anointed one ("messiah") to lead a military uprising to reclaim the glory of an independent Judea.

Maccabean Revolt: Around 167 B.C. Greek emperor Antiochus IV launched an intense anti-Jewish campaign. He laid siege to Jerusalem, robbed the Temple treasury, and converted it into a shrine for Zeus. As Josephus reports

"For Antiochus the unexpected conquest of Jerusalem, the looting, and the wholesale slaughter were not enough. His psychopathic tendency was exacerbated by resentment at what the siege had cost him, and he tried to force the Jews to violate their traditional codes of practice by leaving their infant sons uncircumcised and sacrificing pigs on the altar. These orders were universally ignored, and Antiochus had the most prominent resisters butchered." — Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Book 1.34–35

In response, Judah Maccabee led a successful military revolt that culminated in an independent Jewish state (the Hasmonean kingdom) that lasted for a century until Rome took over. Significant for three major reasons:

- Success of the revolt celebrated in the holiday of Hanukkah
- Judah Maccabee became the template for messianic expectation
- Period of persecution intensified hope in resurrection (more below)

Jesus's Judea: By 1 A.D. Judea was a client state of Rome under the vassal king Herod. Jews were hoping for a messiah in the vein of Judah Maccabee to overthrow their Roman oppressors, restore the Temple to pure Yhwh worship, and re-establish an independent Jewish empire. Thus, the label of "messiah" was political dynamite and hence the disciples inquiry in Acts 1:6: "Lord, at this time will you restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Mutations from Jewish Doctrine to Christian Doctrine

1) Resurrection as Central Christian Doctrine

Resurrection in Jewish thought: all of the righteous dead will be reconstituted in body and soul on the physical earth to enjoy the blessings of the land God has given to them.

Vague hints at resurrection in the Hebrew Bible (aka Old Testament), e.g. Ezek. 37⁸³ and Dan. 12, doctrine was developed during Greek persecution as a source of hope that the martyrs under Antiochus would be vindicated in the end as illustrated in the story of the Mother of Seven Martyrs:

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king [Antiochus IV], under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. 2 One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, "What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors." ...10 After [the first and second brothers were killed], the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, 11 and said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again." 12 As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing. 13 After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. 14 When he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!" - 2 Maccabees 7:1-2,10-14

However, belief in resurrection was *not* universal. By Jesus's day, two parties dominated the politico-theological scene.

Sadducees were broadly the "establishment" group, in charge of running the Temple operations. Naturally, they were mostly content with the Roman/Herodian government that put them in power. They did not believe in the resurrection, rather, they taught that all the dead descend into the realm of Sheol (Heb. grave) never to return to physical life again.

Pharisees were broadly the "populist" group, observant of Temple, but more concerned with applying Torah to daily living. In general, they hoped for a messiah to overthrow the imperial overlords, restore the kingdom of God in Judea, and taught the doctrine of resurrection.

Jesus aligned closer with the Pharisees in teaching a doctrine of resurrection as illustrated in his debates with the Sadducees (Luke 20:27-40) and his followers' expectation in the general resurrection at the end of days (John 11:21-24).

While the Pharisees and Sadducees argued amongst themselves over this peripheral issue (see: Acts 23:1-10), the early Christians exhibited a unanimous belief in resurrection as the very

⁸³ Valley of Dry Bones was considered a vivid metaphorical picture of Judah's return from exile and not a literal depiction of resurrection. Note that nowhere in the New Testament is Ezek. 37 explicitly referenced.

center and foundation of belief. 1 Cor 15 showcases that resurrection is “of first importance” and without resurrection, a Christian’s faith is “in vain”.

2) Resurrection is Split into Two Events

As 2 Macc 7 and John 11:21ff. highlight, the Jewish (i.e. Pharisaical) understanding of resurrection was a single event in the far future.

In 1 Cor 15:20-28, Paul speaks of Jesus as the “firstfruits” of a future resurrection.

3) Resurrection as the foundation of Jesus’ Messiahship

Two individuals help us understand the curious case of Jesus’s messianic status.

Simon bar Giora: Like Judah Maccabee, launched a revolt against Judea’s imperial overlords. He was a key figure in the First Roman-Jewish War (ca. 66 A.D.) that ended with the destruction of the Temple (70 A.D.) and Simon’s public execution in Rome at the temple of Jupiter. Despite initial military success, his messianic career ended with his death. In contrast, Jesus’s messianic movement continued in his own name even after his death.

James, the brother of Jesus: Political and messianic movements of the era routinely ended with the violent death of the central figure. Survivors of the movement then faced a choice: (i) give up or (ii) find a new messiah, typically a high ranking member or family member of the leader⁸⁴. Had the early Christians wanted to find a new messiah, they had an obvious candidate: James, the Lord’s brother, a great and devout teacher, the central figure in the early Jerusalem church. But, he never took up the messianic mantle nor was heralded as such; as Josephus reports, the brother of the “so-called messiah”. That James was initially skeptical and only endorsed Jesus’s messianic status after the crucifixion is even more peculiar. Something truly unique must have happened.

Empty Tomb + Appearances: Jointly Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Resurrection Belief

Empty Tomb Alone Is Not Enough for Resurrection Belief

If Jesus’s followers only found an empty tomb (and no later appearances), that would be a sad mystery. But, missing bodies on their own do not produce belief in resurrection.

Appearances Alone Are Not Enough for Resurrection Belief

If Jesus’s followers only had appearances of Jesus (and no reason to think something happened to his body), there were many alternative interpretations besides resurrection. Judaism was a visionary culture and visits from the recently deceased were not unheard of. In Acts 12, Peter is about to be executed when he is miraculously delivered from prison. When he goes to visit his friends, the servant girl reports Peter is alive but the others say it is “his angel”.

⁸⁴ Incidentally, this is what happened with the Maccabean revolt; Judah took up the mantle of revolt after his father was executed by Antiochus IV.

Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. - Acts 12:14-16 (ESV)

This is the type of response we would expect from Jesus's disciples had there only been an appearance without an empty tomb. Together, empty tomb + appearances provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for resurrection belief. Next, we look at alternative theories to the resurrection to explain the core facts.

How well did you follow the discussion? (Circle a number)

Too complicated **0** **1** **2** **3** Too easy

Additional Resources

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

B = Beginner (0-1), I = Intermediate (1-2), A = Advanced (2-3)

- *Surprised by Hope* by N.T. Wright (B)
- *Christian Origins and the Question of God* Vol. 1-3 by N.T. Wright (A)
 - Vol.1: The New Testament and the People of God
 - Vol. 2: Jesus and the Victory of God
 - Vol. 3: The Resurrection of the Son of God*

Homework for Next Session

"The Late Twentieth-Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses to Jesus' Resurrection" by Gary Habermas ([Appendix A8.1](#))

Timeline of Key Events in Judah's History

950 BC: First Temple built by Solomon (1 Kings 6)

925 BC: Civil war splits kingdom into Israel and Judah

721 BC: Sennacherib (Assyrian Empire) destroys the Northern Kingdom of Israel (721 BC) but fails to take Jerusalem (701 BC).

Assyrian Empire collapses and is conquered by Babylonian Empire.

586 BC: Nebuchadnezzar II (Babylonian Empire) invades Jerusalem, destroys the Temple, and leads the inhabitants away into exile.

Babylonian Empire collapses and is conquered by the Persian Empire.

539 BC: Cyrus the Great (Persian Empire) issues an edict encouraging the exiles to return to Judah and rebuild their temple, which they do.

Persian Empire collapses and conquered by the Macedonians (i.e. Alexander the Great). Judah/Judaism benefits from a "live and let live" policy of the Macedonians. Hellenization begins. The Old Testament is translated into Greek, aka the Septuagint (LXX).

323 BC: Alexander dies and the Macedonian Empire fractures. Judea is jockeyed between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires before ultimately siding with the Seleucids.

167 BC: Antiochus IV (Seleucid Empire) reverses course on Jewish toleration, leading to the Maccabbean revolt which results in the Hasmonean dynasty's period of independence (138 BC)

Seleucid (Greek) Empire collapses and is conquered by the Roman Empire.

67 BC: Death of Queen Alexandra Salome (Hasmonean dynasty) sparks a succession crisis, Pharisee and Sadducee factions harden.

63 BC: Hasmonean Kingdom slowly loses independence, becomes a Roman client state

37 BC: Herod the Great arises, builds out the Temple to legitimate his claim to the throne.

30 AD: Jesus of Nazareth is crucified.

66 AD: Growing hostilities w/ Romans culminate in the First Jewish-Roman War which results in the Temple being destroyed (70 AD).

135 AD: Bar Kochba revolt results in Romans expelling the Jews from Jerusalem. Bar Kochba was hailed as a messiah, yet the Christians did not participate in the revolt.

08 Historicity of the Resurrection III - Naturalistic Alternatives Considered

This session is based on “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” in *On Guard* by W.L. Craig and *The Resurrection of Jesus* by Michael Licona

Key Facts for the Resurrection

6. **Crucifixion:** Jesus died by crucifixion.
7. **Empty Tomb:** Jesus’s tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers on the Sunday following his crucifixion.
8. **Appearances:** Very shortly after Jesus’ death, groups and individuals had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and had appeared to them (1 Cor. 15:3-8).
 - a. Paul: a former persecutor of the church, turned apostle after seeing Jesus.
 - b. Peter: chief apostle from the beginning.
 - c. The Twelve
 - d. 500 Brethren
 - e. James, brother of Jesus: former skeptic, turned leader of Jerusalem church
 - f. All the apostles
 - g. Mary Magdalene: follower of Jesus from the beginning, likely the first witness
9. **Origin of Christian Belief:** Christians proclaimed Jesus as the resurrected messiah despite strong theological and political predispositions to the contrary. (Recall the three doctrinal mutations from last week).
10. **Martyrdom of Witnesses⁸⁵:** Witnesses of the resurrection were willing to suffer and die for their belief.
 1. Paul: Martyred, most likely beheaded in Rome under Nero (AD 64-67)
 2. Peter: Martyred, most likely crucified in Rome under Nero (AD 64-67)
 3. James, son of Zebedee: Martyred in Jerusalem under Herod Agrippa I.

⁸⁵ Summary results from *The Fate of the Apostles* by Sean McDowell. John, son of Zebedee was not martyred. While church tradition holds all the other apostles were martyred, the evidence is late and uncertain.

4. James, brother of Jesus: Martyred in Jerusalem by stoning in 62 AD.
5. Thomas: Probably martyred in India.
6. Andrew: Plausibly martyred in Greece.

Evaluating Alternative Hypotheses

Recall this is an abductive argument. Having now gathered the facts, we will evaluate alternative explanations to find the best. The following are criteria developed by historian C.B. McCullagh (*Justifying Historical Descriptions*, 1984).

1. **Explanatory Scope:** How *much* does the hypothesis explain? Hypotheses that explain more facts have wider explanatory scope
2. **Explanatory Power:** How *well* does the hypothesis explain? Hypotheses that explain the facts naturally, without vagueness or strain have greater explanatory power.
3. **Plausibility:** How well does the hypothesis fit with *what else we know is true*? Hypotheses that increasingly challenge our background assumptions are less plausible.
4. **Ad hoc:** How much of the hypothesis is *unevidenced*? Hypotheses that include baseless assumptions to make the system work are more ad hoc.
5. **Illumination:** How much does the hypothesis *shed light* in another area of research? Hypotheses that provide understanding elsewhere are illuminating.

Hypotheses Concerning the Fate of Jesus

Conspiracy: The disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb, lied about the appearances.

Apparent Death: Jesus appeared to die on the cross, but survived and resuscitated in the tomb.

Wrong Tomb: Women went to the wrong tomb which is why it was found empty.

Hallucination: Disciples had hallucinatory visions of Jesus after his death.

Resurrection: Jesus bodily rose from the dead, left behind an empty tomb, appeared to many.

Assessing the Hypotheses Concerning the Fate of Jesus

Conspiracy

Scope: Accounts for empty tomb and appearances to the disciples. Does not account for conversion of Paul and James, unless they are added as conspirators.

Power: Does not explain (i) why the disciples would invent the story about the women discovering the tomb, (ii) why Paul and James would be involved in the conspiracy, (iii) why the disciples sincerely believed in the resurrection even unto suffering/martyrdom, i.e. liars make poor martyrs.

Plausibility: Deeply implausible that the disciples would fabricate a resurrection given the typical route for failed Messianic movements was to just find a new Messiah.

Ad hoc: Several unevidenced assumptions regarding the disciples intentions, state of mind, resources, and motivations. Even more ad hoc in response to objections, e.g. how to account for Paul's conversion.

Apparent Death

Scope: Accounts for empty tomb and appearances to the disciples. Does not account for conversion of Paul. Denies that Jesus died.

Power: Does not explain (i) Jesus's escape from the tomb, (ii) origin of belief in resurrection given that Jesus would be half-dead in need of medical attention.

Plausibility: Absurd that a person could survive a crucifixion.

Ad hoc: In the more conspiratorial versions, it becomes ridiculous with secret societies, conspiracies with the Sanhedrin, medical treatment secretly administered, etc.

Illumination: Raises way more questions than it answers including (i) what happened to Jesus when he died "for real"? (ii) why do the disciples only mention a 40 day sojourn with the risen Jesus? (iii) why did the disciples persist in resurrection belief after Jesus died "for real"?

Wrong Tomb

Scope: Accounts for empty tomb; does not account for appearances.

Power: Does not explain origin of resurrection belief; bodies go missing all the time, but that doesn't mean they were resurrected.

Plausibility: Location of Jesus's tomb appears to have been known.

Ad hoc: Selective with the evidence (i) takes the visit to the tomb as historical but not the women noting its location (ii) takes the messenger's words "He is not here" literally, but not the explanation: "he is risen!".

Hallucination

Scope: Does not account for empty tomb; must add Paul and James had hallucinations.

Power: Poorly accounts for belief in resurrection as post-mortem visions of the dead were confirmations of their death, not reversals of it. Appearances in the NT do not fit the mold of hallucinatory experiences nor post-bereavement visions: multiple occurrences over a protracted time period to groups and individuals.

Plausibility: Peter having an individual bereavement vision is plausible; however Paul (especially) and James having such experiences is deeply implausible. Visionary experiences implausible to produce belief in physical resurrection.

Ad hoc: Unevidenced assumptions regarding psychological states of Paul and Peter.

Resurrection

Scope: All facts accounted for.

Power: All facts well explained.

Plausibility: Because the hypothesis is a miracle claim, there is great *a priori* skepticism whether supernatural events like this happen. Many scholars methodologically reject the miraculous from historical investigation.

Ad hoc: Skeptical interlocutor will protest there is an unevidenced assumption that God exists. However, we prefaced this discussion with several arguments (cosmological, design, moral).

Illumination: Answers many of the pressing questions concerning Christian origins such as (i) why did this messianic movement persist after the death of its founder? (ii) why did the early Christians radically modify their praxis and worship to include Jesus?

Summary

There are four major historical facts regarding the fate of Jesus: (i) he was crucified, (ii) his tomb was found empty, (iii) his friends (disciples) + foes (Paul, James) claimed he appeared to them after his death, and (iv) Christian belief and practices emerged centered on his purported resurrection. Naturalistic hypotheses to explain these facts have been largely unsuccessful. Early Christians proclaimed that Jesus had been raised from the dead; this resurrection hypothesis provides the best explanation, but will likely receive pushback because of its miraculous nature. Arguments for the existence of God can raise the prior probability of God's existence and thus reduce resistance to supernatural explanations.

How well did you follow the discussion? (Circle a number)

Over my head 0 1 2 3 Too easy

Additional Resources

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

B = Beginner (0-1), I = Intermediate (1-2), A = Advanced (2-3)

- The Resurrection of Jesus: a New Historiographical Approach by M. Licona (A)
- The Fate of the Apostles by S. McDowell (I)
- Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus by W.L. Craig (A)

- The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy by W.L. Craig (A)
- The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History by Dale Allison (A)
- The Resurrection of God Incarnate by Richard Swinburne (A)

09 Problem of Evil I - Introduction + Defense

This session is based on “What About Suffering?” in *On Guard* by W.L. Craig

A First Take: J.L. Mackie’s Statement of the Problem

“In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all three.”

John L. Mackie

“Evil and Omnipotence,” in *The Philosophy of Religion* ed. Basil Mitchell (London: Oxford University Press, 1971)

Important Distinctions⁸⁶

Moral Evil: intentional malicious actions of agents, e.g. murder, theft, oppression, etc.

Natural Evil: suffering from non-agent causes, e.g. natural disasters, disease, predation, etc.

Emotional Problem (Bedside): concerns a person’s dislike, anger, and frustration expressed towards a God who would permit suffering, especially personal suffering

Intellectual Problem (Clinical): concerns whether it’s plausible to think that God and suffering can coexist.

“Logical” Version: It is *impossible* for God & suffering to coexist

“Evidential” Version: It is *improbable* that God has good reasons for permitting suffering



⁸⁶Most of this nomenclature is misleading at first glance, e.g. the “logical” version uses evidence and the “evidential” version uses logic. However, these are the labels that have stuck in the literature (much to the chagrin of philosophers), so, we will use them.

Defense: a rebuttal that aims to show the argument fails to prove “God & evil” is a contradiction

Theodicy: from *theos* (Gk.) and *dike* (Gk.) meaning “justifying God”, a theodicy aims to refute the argument by providing the actual reasons why God allows suffering

We are focusing on the Intellectual or “Clinical” problem; the following discussion will seem cold and academic to someone in the midst of suffering. Likewise, emotionally sensitive responses will seem sentimental and squishy to someone concerned with the intellectual problem.

The Logical Argument from Evil (Impossibility Claim)

Primer: “inconsistent triad” arguments present three propositions that cannot be held together. The affirmation of any two entails the falsity of the third. Example:

- All men are mortal
- Socrates is a man
- Socrates is immortal

With that in mind, consider Mackie’s triad from the First Take:

- (1) God is all-powerful
- (2) God is wholly good
- (3) Evil exists

Unlike the Socrates example, there is no *explicit* contradiction between these three propositions. Thus, the atheist must posit additional premises to expose the contradiction. Importantly, these premises must be not just true but *necessarily* true (i.e., could not possibly be false). This is an exorbitantly high burden of proof, so most contemporary philosophers focus instead on the “Evidential” version.

Responding to the Logical Argument

Mackie suggests the following propositions:

- (4) There is no limit to what an all-powerful being can do
- (5) A wholly good being would eliminate all evil it could

Discussion

Does (1-5) create an inconsistent quintet?

Are (4) and (5) *necessarily* true?

Why or why not?

Is there no limit to what an all-powerful being can do?

Not even an all-powerful God can create a logical contradiction⁸⁷. So, if we can tell a possible story where the prevention of evil entails a contradiction, we will show that (4) is not *necessarily* true. Arguably, the most influential response of this form in the 20th century is Alvin Plantinga's "free will defense" (FWD) presented in his short book *God, Freedom, & Evil* (1974).

Summarized, the core of Plantinga's FWD is as follows:

- (6) Possibly, freedom of the will is a good God wants to actualize
- (7) God knows for any world he created how free creatures would use their free will
- (8) Possibly, for any world that God wanted to create, there is at least one creature who would use his free will to commit evil acts

*Note: You don't need to accept we actually have free will for the FWD, only that FW is possible.

Would a wholly good being desire to eliminate all evil?

It's possible that outweighing goods come from suffering; there may even be some goods that cannot be achieved *without* suffering (e.g. forgiveness). But if outweighing goods are possible, then (5) is not *necessarily* true. We can add this premise such that (1-3, 9) form a consistent set:

- (9) God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing suffering

In summary, to defend the "logical" problem of evil, the atheist has to show (9) is not just false but *impossible*. Because of the difficulty in establishing such a strong claim, most philosophers of religion consider the "logical" problem a non-starter and focus on the "evidential" problem.

The Evidential Argument from Evil (Improbability Claim)

Philosophers largely agree God's existence is compatible with generic evil, but perhaps not *gratuitous* evil.

Gratuitous Evil: intense suffering that God could have prevented without losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

Here is a version of the argument based on the work of atheist philosopher William Rowe⁸⁸

- (10) If God exists, he has good reasons for permitting evil (i.e. no gratuitous evil)
- (11) If we don't see God's reasons, then there probably aren't any
- (12) We don't see any reason for God to permit evil

⁸⁷ If an omnipotent God could create a contradiction, then the problem evaporates.

⁸⁸ *The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism* by William Rowe (1979)

(13) Therefore, God probably doesn't exist

Responding to the Evidential Argument

We want to exercise modesty in our argumentation, so we will start with the most conciliatory position and move to the more ambitious position.

Counterbalancing Evidence (aka The Moore Switch)

We've already granted (10) is true⁸⁹, but we can actually flip the argument on its head as follows.

(14) If God exists, he has good reasons for permitting evil (i.e. no gratuitous evil)

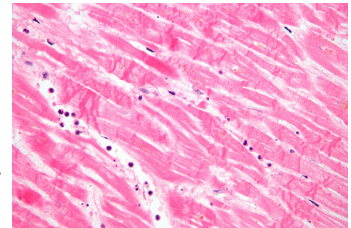
(15) God exists

(16) Therefore, he has good reasons for permitting evil

The argument is valid and (14) is identical to (10). So, why think that (15) is true? Recall that we provided positive evidence for God in the cosmological, moral, and design arguments. Additionally, there are non-evidential ways of knowing God such as the *sensus divinitatis* which may independently justify theistic belief. We can grant the argument, but contend the evidence for gratuitous evil is weaker than the reasons to believe God exists.

Skeptical Theism (aka Inscrutability)

Premise (11) is a *noseeum* inference, i.e., "if it does not seem to be the case that p , then probably not- p " where p is any proposition. But, is a *noseeum* inference always valid?



Example 1: Look at the image to the right. Do you see evidence of necrosis? If not, does that mean there is no necrosis?

Example 2: I'm in Galveston with a 5 gal bucket. I use it to scoop some water from the Atlantic Ocean. I see no whales in my bucket; can I infer that there are no whales in the Atlantic Ocean?

With these considerations in mind, we can formalise a general principle: Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access (CORNEA).

CORNEA (fancy version)⁹⁰: On the basis of cognized situation s , human H is entitled to claim 'It appears that p ' only if it is reasonable for H to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if p were not the case, s would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her.

CORNEA (simple version): We can reason based on appearances only when we are in situations where the differences would appear to us. For example, a bedroom with an elephant

⁸⁹ Some philosophers dispute (11), e.g. Bruce Russell (atheist) & Peter van Inwagen (Christian)

⁹⁰ Wykstra, Stephen, 1984, "The Human Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance,'" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 16: 73–94.

appears different from a bedroom without an elephant. But, a bucket of water from an ocean with whales does not appear different from a bucket of water from a lake without whales.

If God has a reason (or reasons) for permitting suffering, is that the kind of thing we would expect to be able to detect?

Given the massive complexity of the world, we are really not in a position to know the full causal ramifications of any given event; some evils that God permits may have purposes that manifest themselves long after our lifetimes or bring about goods that we cannot know about. However, God is in the epistemic position to know these kinds of things.

Consider an analogy to a parent: Just as we expect a small child to be blind to the reasons her parent has for allowing her to suffer justified pain (e.g. getting a vaccination), so we should expect that we will be blind to the reasons God has for allowing our justified suffering.

Skeptical Theism concludes that due to our cognitive limitations in capacity and frame of reference, we are not in a position to perceive if God has a reason, thus, we cannot infer from “I don’t see a reason” to “there is no reason”.

Theodicy (aka Actually, We Do Know Why God Allows Evil)

Finally, the most ambitious response to the argument from evil is to argue that we actually can know and do know God’s reason(s) for permitting suffering. We will look at this next time.

How well did you follow the discussion? (Circle a number)

Over my head 0 1 2 3 Too easy

Additional Resources

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

B = Beginner (0-1), I = Intermediate (1-2), A = Advanced (2-3)

- “What About Suffering?” in *On Guard* by W.L. Craig (B)
- *The Problem of Pain* by C.S. Lewis (B)
- *God, Freedom, and Evil* by Alvin Plantinga (I)
- *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil* ed. by Alexander and Johnson (I-A)

Homework for Next Session

“Problem of Evil” by G. Welty ([Appendix A9.1](#))

10 Problem of Evil II - Theodicy

This session is based on “The Problem of Evil” by Greg Welty available in Appendix A9.1

A First Take: Psalm 73:1-14, John 9:1-5

What do these passages tell us about the role of sin and evil?

The Evidential Problem of Evil Revisited

Philosophers largely agree God’s existence is compatible with generic evil, but perhaps not *gratuitous* evil. Here is a version of the argument based on William Rowe’s presentation⁹¹.

- (5) If God exists, he has good reasons for permitting evil (i.e. no gratuitous evil)
- (6) If we don’t see God’s reasons, then there probably aren’t any
- (7) We don’t see any reason for God to permit evil
- (8) Therefore, God probably doesn’t exist

Inscrutability or “Skeptical Theism” attacks (2), arguing we can only reason like this when we would expect to detect differences; however, we are not in a good position to know God’s reasons for permitting evil, thus, the lack of appearance is no evidence contrary to God’s existence.

Theodicy attacks (3), arguing that we actually can see at least some of God’s reasons for permitting evil.

Discussion

Are the projects of Inscrutability and Theodicy contradictory?

Positives of Theodicy

- Meditating on suffering can produce insight into the meaning of life
- Finding partial reasons for suffering raises plausibility of there being an ultimate reason
- Demonstrating serious intellectual engagement with the world around us

⁹¹ *The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism* by William Rowe (1979)

Dangers of Theodicy

- Attempting to rationalize the fundamentally irrational
- Trivializing suffering into a math problem
- Existential chaos trying to find out God's reasons instead of calmly trusting him

There is a veritable cornucopia of theodicies on offer in the philosophical literature. As good Reformed folks, we believe God has revealed himself in Scripture; thus, we will put higher premium on theodicies corroborated by the Bible.

God Accomplishes Greater Goods Through Evil⁹²

Scripture combines the ways of Theodicy and Inscrutability, weaving together the following three themes.

- God aims at **great goods** (either for humanity, or for himself, or both).
- God often intends these great goods to come about **by way of various evils**.
- God leaves created persons **in the dark** (in the dark about which goods are indeed his reasons for the evils, or about how the goods depend on the evils).

A Sampling of "Great Goods"

Soul Building: Rather than create human beings with pre-installed virtues, God created us to grow in response to trial. Moreover, some virtues cannot be cultivated without hardship, e.g. there is no courage where there is no danger. (Heb 12:5-11; Rom 5:3-5; 2 Cor 4:17; Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-7; cf. Prov 10:13, 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-24, 29:15; Ps 119:67-71)

Need for Natural Laws: God has created a universe governed by natural laws which are regular, predictable, and understandable. Some suffering is a result of these laws, e.g. the same gravity that governs the heavens will kill you in a high fall. (Gen 8:22; Jer 33:25)

Free Will: God allows for the good of uncoerced moral choice. Creatures who freely choose to commit evil cannot be stopped without overriding their free will. (Dt 30:19; Mt 23:37)

Justice: Suffering is just punishment and/or natural consequence for moral evil committed individually, corporately (e.g. the exile), and covenantally in Adam, i.e. the wages of sin is death. (Gen 3:14-19; Rom 1:24-32, 5:12, 6:23, 8:20-21; Isa 29:5-6; Ez 38:19; Rev 6:12; 11:13; 16:18). Importantly, Scripture emphasizes not all suffering is punishment. This is the core thesis of Job, lamented in Psalm 73, and taught by Jesus in John 9:2-3.

Divine Manifestation: Suffering results in the good of manifesting truths about God and his character. (Exo 14:17-8; Jn 9:1-41) The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to

⁹² Greg Welty, "The Problem of Evil" <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-problem-of-evil/>

the counsel of his will, whereby, *for his own glory*, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. (WSC Q7)

Theodicy of the Cross - Incarnation + Atonement as the Greatest Good

Consider the crucifixion of Jesus through the lens of our threefold Theodicy.

- **Great Goods:** redemption of God's people and glorification of God through the display of his justice, love, grace, mercy, wisdom, and power (Col 1:15-23; Rom 5:6-11; Heb).
- **Ordained Evils:** Jewish plots (Mt 26:3-4, 14-15), Satan's promptings (Jn 13:21-30), Judas's betrayal (Mt 26:47-56; 27:3-10; Lk 22:22), Roman injustice (Matt 26:57-68), Pilate's cowardice (Mt 27:15-26), and the soldiers' brutality (Mt 27:27-44).
- **In The Dark:** Jewish leaders, Satan, Judas, Pilate, and the soldiers are all ignorant of the role they play in fulfilling the divinely prophesied redemptive purpose by the cross of Christ. (Acts 4:25-29; 1 Cor 2:8)

Moreover, there are goods that help us address evil categorically and emotionally.

- **Validation of Evil:** Christian theology confirms our experience of suffering as something truly wrong. Naturalistic accounts struggle in this area (see our previous discussion on the Moral Argument).
- **Sharing in Suffering:** God is not distant, but enters into our suffering and sympathizes with us. (Heb 4:15-17)
- **Defeat of Evil:** God has defeated evil through the cross (1 Cor 15; Col 2:15) and promises a restoration of all things (Rev 21). Rather than a mere intellectual puzzle or experience to be endured, evil is an intruder that God will ultimately remove.

Let's bundle all of this together under the heading of "Incarnation+Atonement" (I+A). This is a truly magnificent good. But just *how* good? Let's consider three possible assessments⁹³.

- **Weak Value:** I+A is so good that, even with all the evil, I+A makes our world, on balance, immensely valuable. Certainly, more valuable than it would be without I+A.
- **Moderate Value:** I+A is so good that it outweighs all of our creaturely goods such that our world with I+A is more valuable than if our world had no sin at all.
- **Strong Value:** I+A is so good that *any* possible world that contains I+A is better than every possible world that lacks I+A.

If the Strong Value Assumption is true, then we have a fairly powerful theodicy: God aims to create a magnificent world and all of the best worlds God could create include Incarnation + Atonement (I+A). However, I+A can only be achieved by a prerequisite Fall into sin, resulting in

⁹³ *Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'* by Alvin Plantinga (2004)

evil and suffering. Paradoxically, the Fall is the necessary pathway to the greatest possible good. Thus we sing,

O felix culpa, quæ talem ac tantum méruit habére Redemptórem!

(O happy Fall, that gained for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer!)

How well did you follow the discussion? (Circle a number)

Over my head **0** **1** **2** **3** Too easy

Additional Resources

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

B = Beginner (0-1), I = Intermediate (1-2), A = Advanced (2-3)

- *Why Is There Evil in the World (and So Much of It?)* by Greg Welty (B)
 - Reformed friendly perspective
- Ch 10 of *Knowledge and Christian Belief* by Alvin Plantinga (B)
- Ch 11 & 14 of *Warranted Christian Belief* by Alvin Plantinga (A)
- *Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'* by Alvin Plantinga (I)
- *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil* ed. by Alexander and Johnson (I-A)
- *The Evidential Argument from Evil* ed. by Howard-Snyder (I-A)

Appendix

A1.1 - Common Rules of Inference (aka Laws of Logic)

Modus Ponens

$p \rightarrow q$	If p is true, then q is true	If Socrates is a man, then he is mortal.
p	p is true	Socrates is a man.
$\therefore q$	Therefore, q is true	Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

Modus Tollens

$p \rightarrow q$	If p is true, then q is true	If it is raining, then it is wet outside.
$\sim q$	q is false	It is not wet outside.
$\therefore \sim p$	Therefore, p is false	Therefore, it is not raining

Elimination

$p \vee q$	Either p is true or q is true	Either Schrödinger is alive or dead.
$\sim p$	p is false	Schrödinger is not alive.
$\therefore q$	Therefore, q is true	Therefore, Schrödinger is dead.

Transitivity

$p \rightarrow q$	If p is true, q is true.	If you can lift more than Jay, you can lift more than Zach.
$q \rightarrow r$	If q is true, r is true.	If you can lift more than Zach, you can lift more than Ada.
$\therefore p \rightarrow r$	Therefore, if p is true, r is true.	Therefore, if you can lift more than Jay, you can lift more than Ada.

Fallacy! Converse Error

$p \rightarrow q$	If Socrates is a man, then he is mortal.
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q Socrates is mortal.

$\therefore p$ Therefore, Socrates is a man.

INVALID! Socrates could be a mortal cat.

Fallacy! Inverse Error

$p \rightarrow q$ If Socrates is a man, then he is mortal.

$\sim p$ Socrates is not a man.

$\therefore \sim q$ Therefore, Socrates is immortal.

INVALID! Socrates could be a mortal cat.

False Premise!

$p \rightarrow q$ If you are reading this, then Earth is round. **UNSOUND!** This premise is false.

p You are reading this.

$\therefore q$ Therefore, Earth is round.

Common Forms of Arguments

Deductive arguments follow by logical necessity to an airtight conclusion.

4. All men are mortal. (Premise)
5. Socrates is a man. (Premise)
6. Therefore, Socrates is mortal. (Conclusion)

Inductive arguments use probability to infer a likely conclusion.

4. Milk went up in price. (Premise)
5. Dairy contains milk. (Premise)
6. All dairy products probably increased in price. (Conclusion)

Abductive arguments attempt to provide the best explanation for a set of data.

5. Uranus's orbital pattern consistently deviates from its predicted pattern.
6. Other planets have the same orbital discrepancy due to gravity from nearby planets.
7. Another planet whose gravity is affecting Uranus's orbit would explain the discrepancy.

8. Therefore, there is probably another planet beyond Uranus.

Conditions of a Good Argument

Valid arguments have premises and conclusions that follow the rules of inference. If an argument uses fallacious reasoning, it is invalid, even if all the premises are true.

Sound arguments have premises and conclusions that are all true. If an argument uses false premises, it is unsound, even if it uses valid reasoning.

A1.2 - Bibliography of Apologetics Resources

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

Starter Pack

Basic introductory books written for beginners

- How Reason Can Lead to God by Joshua Rasmussen
- Knowledge and Christian Belief by Alvin Plantinga
- Surprised by Hope by N.T. Wright
- On Guard by William Lane Craig
- Is There A God? by Richard Swinburne
- Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis (classic)

Intermediate Pack

Scholarly versions of the starter pack books

- Warranted Christian Belief by Alvin Plantinga
- The Resurrection of the Son of God by N.T. Wright
- The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach by Mike Licona
- Reasonable Faith by William Lane Craig
- The Existence of God by Richard Swinburne

Online Resources

- PlantingaVideos.com - Short animated summaries of Alvin Plantinga's key ideas with bibliographies to go deeper
- Ligonier.org - Website for R.C. Sproul's work, great introductory work from a Reformed perspective
- ReasonableFaith.com - Website for William Lane Craig's work, includes articles, videos, audio, etc.
- MoralApologetics.com - Website for David Baggett's work on the moral argument
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy - online peer-reviewed resource from Stanford University

- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy - online peer-reviewed resource from University of Tennessee - Martin
- The Analytic Christian (YouTube channel) - interviews with philosophers, theologians, experts
- Capturing Christianity (YouTube channel) - interviews with philosophers, theologians, experts
- Worldview Design (YouTube channel) - Josh Rasmussen's work, excellent series on cosmological arguments
- Truth Unites (YouTube channel) - Gavin Ortlund's work on apologetics, theology
- Majesty of Reason (YouTube channel) - run by an agnostic philosopher of religion
- RC-TAMU.org - website for Ratio Christi at Texas A&M University

Anthologies

- The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology ed. by Craig & Moreland
- Two Dozen (Or So) Arguments for God ed. by Walls & Dougherty
- A New Theist Response to the New Atheists ed. by Vallier & Rasmussen

Debate Books

The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.
(Proverbs 18:17).

- Knowledge of God - Alvin Plantinga & Michael Tooley
- Is God the Best Explanation of Things? A Dialogue - Joshua Rasmussen & Felipe Leon
- Is There A God? A Debate - Kenny Pearce & Graham Oppy
- Jesus' Resurrection: Fact Or Figment? - William Lane Craig & Gerd Ludemann
- God and Cosmology - William Lane Craig & Sean Carroll
- Is Goodness Without God Good Enough? - William Lane Craig & Paul Kurtz

Reformed Epistemology

- Knowledge and Christian Belief by Alvin Plantinga (B)
- Warranted Christian Belief by Alvin Plantinga (I)
- Recent work in reformed epistemology by A. Moon (I), reprinted in Appendix A2.1

- “Reformed Epistemology,” by Anthony Bolos & Kyle Scott, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Religious Epistemology by T.D. McNabb (I)
- Reformed Epistemology and the Problem of Religious Diversity: Proper Function, Epistemic Disagreement, and Christian Exclusivism by J. Kim (I)

Cognitive Science of Religion

- Born Believers: The Science of Children's Religious Belief by J.L. Barrett (B)
- Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds by J.L. Barrett (I)
- The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, And Theological Reflections On The Origin Of Religion by J. Schloss & M.J. Murray (eds.) (I)

Moral Arguments

Online

- MoralApologetics.com, website edited by David Baggett
- Evans, C. Stephen and David Baggett, "Moral Arguments for the Existence of God", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/moral-arguments-god/>.
- “Can We Be Good Without God?” by William Lane Craig, reprinted in Appendix A3.1
- “A Dozen Moral Arguments” on MoralApologetics.com, reprinted in Appendix A3.2
- “God and Morality” YouTube playlist by The Analytic Christian

Books

- The Morals of the Story: Good News About a Good God by D. Baggett & M. Baggett (B)
- Baggett & Walls Moral Trilogy (I-A)
 - Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality
 - God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning
 - The Moral Argument: A History
- God & Moral Obligation by C.S. Evans (I)
- Finite & Infinite Goods by R. Adams (A)

- The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism by T. Cuneo (A)
- “The moral argument” in Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology by M. Linville (A)
- Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism by D. Enoch (A)
- Justice: Rights and Wrongs by Nicholas Wolterstorff (A)

Cosmological Arguments

Kalam/First Cause

- The Kalam Cosmological Argument (article) by W.L. Craig, reprinted in Appendix A4.1
- “Why Did the Universe Begin?” in On Guard by W.L. Craig (B)
- Escaping the Beginning? by Jeff Zweerink
- Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology by W.L. Craig & Q. Smith (debate)
- The Kalam Cosmological Argument (2 Vols.), ed. Craig & Copan (A)
- “The kalam cosmological argument” in Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology by W.L. Craig & J. Sinclair
- Infinity, Causation, & Paradox by Alexander Pruss (A)

Contingency

- NecessaryBeing.com - quiz built by Alexander Pruss
- How Reason Can Lead to God by Joshua Rasmussen
- “The Leibnizian cosmological argument” in Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology by Alexander Pruss
- The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment by Alexander Pruss
- Necessary Existence by Alexander Pruss & Joshua Rasmussen
- Theism and Ultimate Explanation: The Necessary Shape of Contingency by Timothy O'Connor
- On The Ultimate Origination Of Things by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (classic)
- Is there a God? A Debate by Graham Oppy and Kenneth Pearce (debate)
- Is God the Best Explanation of Things? by Rasmussen and Leon (debate)

Teleological Arguments

- “Why is the Universe Fine-Tuned for Life?” in On Guard by W.L. Craig (B)

- Just Six Numbers by M. Rees (B)
- A Fortunate Universe by L.A. Barnes & G. Lewis (I)
- The Works of His Hands by Sy Garte (B)
- Where the Conflict Really Lies by Alvin Plantinga
- Modern Physics and Ancient Faith by Stephen Barr (B)
- God, the Multiverse, and Everything by Rodney Holder (I)
- God, Design, and Fine-Tuning (article) by Robin Collins, reprinted in Appendix A5.3
- “The teleological argument” in the Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology by Robin Collins (A)
- God and Design ed. N.A. Manson (I)
- The Anthropic Cosmological Principle by Barrow & Tipler (A)

Resurrection of Jesus

- The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus by M. Licona & G. Habermas (B)
- The Resurrection of Jesus: a New Historiographical Approach by M. Licona (A)
- Surprised by Hope by N.T. Wright (B)
- Christian Origins and the Question of God series by N.T. Wright (A), Vol. 3 esp.
 - Vol.1: The New Testament and the People of God
 - Vol. 2: Jesus and the Victory of God
 - Vol. 3: The Resurrection of the Son of God
 - Vol. 4: Paul and the Faithfulness of God
- “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” in On Guard by W.L. Craig (B)
- “Part V: De Christo” in Reasonable Faith by W.L. Craig (I)
- Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus by W.L. Craig (A)
- The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy by W.L. Craig (A)
- The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History by Dale Allison
- The Resurrection of God Incarnate by Richard Swinburne

Other Related Issues

- Did Jesus Exist? by Bart Ehrman (B), note: Ehrman is an atheist
- The Historical Jesus: Five Views ed. J.K. Beilby (I)
- Jesus and the Eyewitnesses (2 ed.) by Richard Bauckham
- The Fate of the Apostles by Sean McDowell

Problem of Evil

- "What About Suffering?" in On Guard by W.L. Craig (B)
- The Problem of Pain by C.S. Lewis (classic)
- A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis (classic)
- God, Freedom, and Evil by Alvin Plantinga (I)
- The Problem of Evil ed. by Adams & Adams (I-A)
- The Evidential Argument from Evil ed. by Howard-Snyder (I-A)
- Calvinism and the Problem of Evil ed. by Alexander & Johnson (I-A)
- The Problem of Animal Pain by Trent Dougherty (I)
- Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God by M.M. Adams (A)
- Excusing Sinners and Blaming God by Guillaume Bignon

Bible Difficulties & Related Issues

- On the Reliability of the Old Testament by K.A. Kitchen
- The Historical Reliability of the New Testament by Craig Blomberg
- Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism ed. By Hays & Ansberry
- Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament by John Walton
- Did God Really Command Genocide? by Copan & Flanagan
- Confronting Old Testament Controversies by Tremper Longman III
- Making Sense of Old Testament Genocide by Christian Hofreiter
- Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory by Gijsbert van den Brink (I)
- Reading Genesis Well by C. John Collins (B-I)

A2.1 - Recent Work in Reformed Epistemology

Andrew Moon (2016) Recent work in reformed epistemology. *Philosophy Compass*, 11: 879–891. doi: 10.1111/phc3.12361. Obtained via <https://philarchive.org/rec/MOORWI-2>; see <https://philpapers.org/help/terms.html> for Terms & Conditions.

Youtube interview on paper: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXVTD52ufDA>

1. Introduction

Reformed epistemology, roughly, is the thesis that religious belief can be rational without argument. Much has been written on this topic, so I will narrow my discussion in two ways. First, I will focus on *theistic* belief, and not on more detailed religious beliefs, such as Christian belief, Islamic belief, and so on.⁹⁴ Second, I will focus on literature that has appeared since Alvin Plantinga's (2000) influential *Warranted Christian Belief* (henceforth, 'WCB'), the most thorough defense of reformed epistemology. Earlier literature has been sufficiently surveyed elsewhere, and I wish to draw attention to less well known literature.⁹⁵

In section 2, I provide some background and two arguments by Plantinga for reformed epistemology. In section 3, I present a third argument by Plantinga for reformed epistemology and how it has influenced recent religious debunking literature. In sections 4–6, I discuss three objections to Plantinga's third argument, which arise from the following three topics: skeptical theism, cognitive science of religion, and basicity. In section 7, I explain how reformed epistemology could be undergirded by other, nonPlantingan epistemological theories. In section 8, I give a formula for how to object to reformed epistemology, using the Great Pumpkin Objection as an example.

2. Some Background and Preliminary Arguments

Reformed epistemology arose in response to what Plantinga calls the *evidentialist objection* to theistic belief.⁹⁶ Roughly, it states,

- 4) It is rational to believe in theism only on the basis of a good argument.
- 5) There is no good argument for theism.
- 6) Therefore, it is not rational to believe in theism.

⁹⁴ Most of the religion-specific literature has been in response to reformed epistemology as applied to Christian belief, discussing issues about sin, the Holy Spirit, and more, which I will not address in this paper. Reformed epistemology has also been applied to Islamic belief (Baldwin (2010) and Baldwin & McNabb (forthcoming)), Advaita Vedanta Hindu belief (Christian (1992) and McNabb (2015)), and to Neo-Confucian belief, (Tien (2004)).

⁹⁵ See Bolos & Scott (2016) for an excellent survey, and Bergmann (2015a) and Beilby (2007) for helpful introductory articles. For discussions of reformed epistemology in the context of religious epistemology more generally, see Smith (2014) and Dougherty & Tweedt (2015). For books on reformed epistemology, see the influential Plantinga & Wolterstorff (1983), the popular-level Plantinga (2015a), and Beilby (2005).

⁹⁶ This should not be confused with the more general view named 'evidentialism' in mainstream epistemology, which states that a belief's justification depends solely on the believer's evidence, where 'evidence' is understood to include more than just arguments. See Tweedt & Dougherty (2015) and Long (2010, 377) for more on the distinction.

The evidentialist objection is an example of what Plantinga calls a *de jure* objection, which concludes that it is not rational to believe in God. This is to be distinguished from what he calls a *de facto* objection, which concludes that there is no God. The former is a claim about believers or their beliefs; the latter is a claim about God. Someone who espouses a *de jure* objection but not a *de facto* objection might say, "Whether or not there is a God, the believer irrationally believes in God when she has no good argument for theism."

A natural reply to the evidentialist objection is to argue, against premise 2, that there *are* good arguments for theism. For example, one could defend one of the traditional arguments for God's existence, such as the cosmological or design arguments. Plantinga proposed another reply. Perhaps, *contra* premise 1, one can rationally believe in God *even if* one has no good argument for it. In other words, perhaps the belief can be *properly basic*. Roughly, a belief is *basic* when it is not held on the basis of an argument. However, not all basic beliefs are *properly basic* (that is, both basic *and* rational). My friend Gambler has no good argument for his belief that his next gamble will win; he believes because of wishful thinking. This belief, though basic, is not properly basic. On the other hand, when I stub my toe and believe that *I feel pain*, this belief is both basic and *properly basic*. It is rational and not held on the basis of an argument.

So far, I have talked loosely as if rationality is the only positive epistemic (or intellectual) property. As Plantinga's epistemology matured, he began to more precisely distinguish between different positive epistemic properties, such as justification, rationality, and warrant (to be described below). Then, instead of talking about a belief's being properly basic *simpliciter*, he would make the qualification that the belief is properly basic *with respect to some positive epistemic property*. For example, a belief can be properly basic with respect to rationality (i.e., be both basic and rational), or it might also be properly basic with respect to warrant (i.e., be both basic and warranted). This led Plantinga to conclude that *de jure* objections may come in different forms, depending on which positive epistemic property that theistic belief is claimed to be lacking.⁹⁷

In WCB, Plantinga argues that theistic belief can be properly basic with respect to three epistemic properties. First, a belief can be properly basic with respect to *deontological justification*, which is, roughly, to be responsible or blameless in holding a belief. While knowing the odds are against him, Gambler *irresponsibly* believes that *my next gamble will win*; his belief is not properly basic with respect to deontological justification. Now, suppose it just seems obvious to a theist that God exists, and she has no good reason to reject theism. Plantinga argues that such a person's belief could be properly basic with respect to deontological justification; she would not be blameworthy or irresponsible for believing.⁹⁸

Second, a belief can be properly basic with respect to *proper function rationality*. Suppose Catherine suffers from capgras syndrome and, as a result of this disorder, believes that her husband is a duplicate imposter. Catherine's belief *might* be deontologically justified; she might not be blameworthy for holding this belief. After all, it's not her fault she has this

⁹⁷ After making these distinctions, Plantinga said of his early years that he was "someone a little long on chutzpah but a little short on epistemology" (1998, 373).

⁹⁸ See chapter 3 of WCB for further exploration and defense.

syndrome, and this is how things appear to her. But the belief is not rational; it is the result of a disorder. Plantinga thinks it is implausible that many theists' basic beliefs are the result of a disorder; in fact, their faculties seem to be functioning properly when they form their belief.⁹⁹

Third, a belief can be properly basic with respect to *warrant*. Plantinga does not mean by 'warrant' what it means in ordinary English; rather 'warrant' is stipulatively defined as whatever it is that makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief. Suppose Gordon believes without argument that God exists. Even if God does exist, could Gordon count as *knowing* God exists? Can his belief have warrant? Now, Plantinga does not argue that theistic belief is warranted *tout court*. Rather, he only argues that it is warranted *if* God exists. In the next section, I present that argument and also explain some of its influence in the religious debunking literature.

3. Plantinga's Argument Reconstructed and Debunking Arguments

According to Plantinga's *proper functionalist* theory of warrant, roughly, S's belief is warranted if and only if 1) it is formed by properly functioning faculties, 2) in an environment appropriate for those faculties, 3) according to a reliable, 4) truth-aimed design plan. For example, my belief that *there is a computer* is warranted if and only if the belief was formed by properly functioning visual faculties, in an environment appropriate for my visual faculties (good lighting conditions), and the design plan of my visual faculties is reliably aimed at forming true beliefs. This is what it takes to *know* that there is a computer. On the other hand, Catherine's belief arising from capgras syndrome is unwarranted because it is the result of dysfunction. And Gambler's belief is unwarranted because the faculties producing it are not reliably aimed at truth.¹⁰⁰

After defending his theory of warrant, Plantinga argues that *if* God exists, then belief in God *would* likely meet these conditions for warrant. Here is his argument:

[I]f theistic belief is *true*, then it seems likely that it *does* have warrant. If it is true, then there is, indeed, such a person as God, a person who has created us in his image (so that we resemble him, among other things, in having the capacity for knowledge), who loves us, who desires that we know and love him, and who is such that it is our end and good to know and love him. But if these things are so, then he would of course intend that we be able to be aware of his presence and to know something about him. And if that is so, the natural thing to think is that he created us in such a way that we would come to hold such true beliefs as that there is such a person as God, that he is our creator, that we owe him obedience and worship, that he is worthy of worship, that he loves us, and so on. And if *that* is so, then the natural thing to think is that the cognitive processes that *do* produce belief in God are aimed by their designer at producing that belief. But then the belief in question will be produced by cognitive faculties functioning

⁹⁹ See chapter 4 of WCB for further exploration and defense. Plantinga also distinguishes between internal and external rationality, which I overlook in this survey.

¹⁰⁰ For a book-length defense of this theory, see Plantinga (1993). For more recent discussions, see Boyce & Plantinga (2012) and Boyce & Moon (forthcoming).

properly according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth: it will therefore have warrant (189–190).¹⁰¹

Here is my reconstruction:

- 6) If God exists, then God loves us, desires that we know and love him, and is such that it is our end to know and love him.
- 7) If God loves us, desires that we know and love him, and is such that it is our end to know and love him; then God is probably such that he “would intend that we be able to be aware of his presence and know something about him.”
- 8) If God is probably such that he “would intend that we be able to be aware of his presence and know something about him,” then God probably “created us in such a way that we would come to hold” certain true beliefs about God (e.g., that God exists, is our creator, loves us, etc.).
- 9) If God probably “created us in such a way that we would come to hold” certain true beliefs about God (e.g., that God exists, is our creator, loves us, etc.), then belief in God is probably “produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth: it will therefore have warrant.”
- 10) If God exists, then belief in God is probably warranted.

I will make two clarifications.

First, Plantinga takes seriously potential *defeaters* for theistic belief, reasons to not believe in God. Hence, although Plantinga does not think that an argument *for* theism is required for warrant, an argument *against* theism could preclude warrant. This is why Plantinga spends the last four chapters of WCB responding to potential defeaters for theistic (and Christian) belief, such as the argument from evil. Discussion of these defeaters is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting that a complete argument for the proper basicity of theistic belief would require responding to them. Precision might require stating the above argument only in terms of *prima facie* warrant (warrant in the absence of defeat), but I will leave that assumed.

Second, I will note the dialectical value of the argument. The fact that Plantinga only defends a *conditional* conclusion might disappoint some. “I want to know whether belief in God *is* warranted, not merely that it is warranted *if* God exists!” one might say.¹⁰² However, the conditional plays a key role in his response to *de jure* objections to theistic belief. For example, consider the Freudian charge that theistic belief is a result of mere wishful thinking. Plantinga responds that *if* God exists, then theistic belief is not the result of mere wishful thinking. It is ultimately produced by truth-aimed, properly functioning, reliable mechanisms designed by

¹⁰¹ Plantinga can be interpreted as giving two distinct arguments for the conditional. The first would be at the bottom of 188 to the top half of 189, and the second would be at the second half of 189 to the top half of 190. The first would appeal to a very long hypothetical syllogism; the second would combine conditional proof and reductio ad absurdum. Since I see the two arguments as appealing to the same premises, I only discuss the first one.

¹⁰² For example, see Richard Swinburne (2001, 206). Cf. Schonecker (2015) and Plantinga’s (2015b) reply.

God.¹⁰³ So, Freud's objection is plausible only on the assumption that God does not exist. Hence, many *de jure* objections will fail without a successful *de facto* objection – an argument that God does not exist – which many *de jure* objectors do not have.

Since WCB's publication, Plantinga's strategy has been used to respond to other *de jure* objections. In recent philosophy, they are often not called '*de jure* objections' but are more popularly called 'debunking arguments', which criticize the rationality or warrant of a belief because of how it was formed. So, debunking arguments are a type of *de jure* objection. In response to the claim that evolutionary psychology of religion shows that theistic belief is caused solely by natural processes and not by God, Kelly Clark and Justin Barrett respond,

If God is the first and originating cause of the universe (including all natural laws) and if God were to guide or direct the natural evolutionary processes so that they produced a god-faculty so that people could and would come to form true beliefs about God, then God would be the ultimate cause of our god beliefs... If there is no God, then God could not have been the ultimate cause of the god beliefs... The upshot is that we cannot know whether the evolutionary psychology of religion undermines belief in God unless we already know that there is no God (2011, 21–22).¹⁰⁴

Upon considering a similar debunking argument in which an objector claims that the ultimate explanation of theistic belief is not God, Roger White writes,

We would need some reason to suppose that the explanation is correct. How might a theist come rationally to think that the correct ultimate explanation of his belief does not involve God? It would seem that for whatever cause C of theistic belief that science might reveal, a theist should just think that God is responsible for C, that that is just the process that God chose to instill belief in his creatures (2010, p. 583).¹⁰⁵

Both dialectics involve two steps. First, the debunker claims that theistic belief lacks positive, epistemic property P. Second, the defender says that *if* God exists, then theistic belief *does* have property P. For Clark and Barrett, the property P is the "proper connection" between God and theistic belief. For White, property P is God's being part of the "correct ultimate explanation" of theistic belief. We can see how both responses follow Plantinga's strategy. This, then, is a legacy of Plantinga's argument that we find in the religious debunking literature.

4. Against Premise 2: The Skeptical Theist Objection

In this section, I address the "skeptical theist objection" to premise 2. To explain it, I will first say some things about premise 1, which states, "If God exists, then God loves us, desires that we know and love him, and is such that it is our end to know and love him." This is ambiguous because the word 'desires' could mean *all-things-considered desires* or merely *has some desire*. I might desire another piece of chocolate cake but not all-things-considered desire it,

¹⁰³ For more on this point about wishful thinking, see pp. 194–198, especially p. 197, in WCB.

¹⁰⁴ Although no reference to Plantinga's argument is made in this quote, its influence is clear from references found on pp. 11 and 18 of their paper.

¹⁰⁵ In note 9 of his paper, White notes that Plantinga might have influenced his argument, but he's not sure if he's remembering correctly.

given my stronger desire for a healthy body. I will take the 'desire' in (1) to be understood as *some* desire, not an all-things-considered desire.

Premise 2 states that if God loves us, desires that we know and love him, and is such that it is our end to know and love him; then God is probably such that *he would intend* that we be able to be aware of his presence and know something about him. A general principle supporting (2) is that if one wants X, then it is likely that one would intend to bring about X. The reason for the 'likely' in this principle is to account for cases where the subject has *other* reasons (e.g., other conflicting desires), in addition to the desire for X, which would make it so that she would not intend to bring about X. Could there be such conflicting reasons in the case of God desiring for us to know him?

Yes. To see this, consider one version of the argument from evil:

- E) We cannot think of any good reasons for why God, if he existed, would allow certain evils.
- F) Therefore, there probably aren't good reasons for why God, if he existed, would allow those evils.
- G) If God existed, he wouldn't allow those evils without good reasons.
- H) Therefore, there probably is no God.

Skeptical theists challenge the inference from A to B by appealing to our ignorance of God's total reasons.

However, some say that this acknowledgment of ignorance gives us reason to doubt Plantinga's religious epistemology. Evan Fales writes,

Many theists—Plantinga among them—have expressed skepticism concerning the possibility of an adequate theodicy. What are the chances that we can know what God wants, when he allows Bambi to roast in a forest fire? (360)

Skeptical theists Justin McBrayer and Philip Swenson (2011) concur,

What a sceptical theist is committed to, though, is a general scepticism about our knowledge of what God would do in any particular situation... Plantinga assumes that if God exists it is obvious that our belief-forming faculties are reliable... Given our scepticism, we are not sanguine about [this] inference (God might well have other interests, motives, etc. than the few that we are able to decipher) (145).

The authors' quotes can apply to my argument reconstruction in the following way. A certain response to the problem of evil expresses skepticism about whether God would have *intended* or *all-things considered wanted* to stop certain evils from occurring. This skepticism should cause doubt about whether God would intend for us to know him, and hence, cause doubt about premise 2.

The objection is not making the more contentious claim that skeptical theists must deny *all* knowledge of God's intentions. Skeptical theist Michael Bergmann (2012, 15) has argued that on the basis of my commonsense knowledge that I have existed more than five minutes, I can know that, if God exists, then God did not intend to annihilate me before now. Bergmann argues that no part of skeptical theism precludes such knowledge. The question remains whether we can have the sort of knowledge of God's intentions mentioned in premise 2. This question is worthy of more exploration.¹⁰⁶

5. On Premise 3: Cognitive Science of Religion and the *Sensus Divinitatis*

Premise 3 states, "if God is probably such that he would intend that we be able to be aware of his presence and know something about him, then God probably created us in such a way that we would come to hold certain true beliefs about God." What is this way that God might have created us? Plantinga endorses the view that "there is a kind of faculty or cognitive mechanism, what Calvin calls a *sensus divinitatis* or sense of divinity, which in a wide variety of circumstances produces in us beliefs about God" (172).¹⁰⁷ Plantinga says that the *sensus divinitatis* might produce the belief that *God created everything* when one is beholding beauties of nature, the belief that *God is to be thanked* when one is experiencing the joy of a new day, or the belief that *God disapproves of my action* when one acts wrongly (175). Furthermore, these beliefs are *basic*, that is, "not accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs" (176). In this section, I discuss questions that arise about the *sensus divinitatis*; in the next section, I discuss questions that arise about *basicality*.

Suppose we define '*sensus divinitatis*' as a module that has the specialized function of forming true beliefs about God.¹⁰⁸ Then there are empirical reasons to doubt its existence. Jack Lyons (2009) writes,

It doesn't begin to follow from our having a capacity to form the belief that God exists that we have a God *module*... To figure out whether we do have a God module, we can do far more than make a priori guesses conditional on God's existence or nonexistence (or invoke the authority of Calvin, who was hardly renowned as a cognitive neuroscientist). We can empirically discover (at least in principle) where these beliefs come from... However, there does not seem to be much, if any, empirical support for the claim that we have a system that specializes in producing beliefs about God (160).

Psychologists do identify other cognitive modules: edge detection modules, color vision, face identification modules, and so on. Since there is no empirical evidence of a *sensus divinitatis*, this is evidence that there is none.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ I explore it in Moon (draft).

¹⁰⁷ Many doubt that what Plantinga means by '*sensus divinitatis*' is what Calvin meant by it. See Moreland & Craig (2003, 168), Clark & Barrett (2010), and especially Jeffreys (1997), Sudduth (2002), and Plasger (2015). Plantinga doesn't seem too worried about this, saying, "Whatever Calvin thinks, it's our model" (2000, 173). See also Plantinga's (2015b) reply to Plasger.

¹⁰⁸ I follow Lyons (2009, 89) by defining a 'module' as, roughly, an isolable cognitive mechanism that specializes in a task or function, and exhibits a kind of functional unity. However, only functional specialization, and not isolability and functional unity, are directly relevant to our discussion.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Fales (2003, p. 361).

Here are three replies. Despite its many developments, cognitive science is still young. Our not having empirically discovered a *sensus divinitatis* yet, therefore, is not good evidence that there is none. Perhaps psychologists need more time to discover it. Second, perhaps Lyons is wrong and that the *sensus divinitatis* isn't the sort of thing that one discovers empirically. Perhaps the only appropriate evidence is *theological*.¹¹⁰

Third, J.P. Moreland & William Lane Craig (2003, 167) have noted that Plantinga's argument does not require a *sensus divinitatis*. The consequent of premise 3 states only that God created us in such a way that we would form true beliefs about God. This leaves open exactly what that "way" is, whether this is via a *sensus divinitatis*, or some other means. For example, there *is* empirical evidence that we have cognitive systems which, together in natural environments, result in our forming theistic beliefs. The young and burgeoning field of *cognitive science of religion* ('CSR') explores the various mechanisms that naturally incline us to acquire and retain concepts of and beliefs about supernatural beings. These mechanisms include our *agency detection device* ('ADD', a module designed to detect agents), our *theory of mind* ('ToM', a module designed to ascribe mental properties), a mechanism that attributes teleology or purpose to the world, and more. CSR theorists will differ as to which mechanisms are most central to explaining theistic belief, but there *is* empirical evidence that they play an important role. It seems no more plausible that God would create us to form beliefs about God with a specialized *sensus divinitatis* than with a number of mechanisms working together. For example, we've been designed to form beliefs about food via not only vision, but also via smelling, touching, and tasting. We don't just have one module, a food-module, for forming beliefs about food.¹¹¹

The "way" might also involve testimony. Perhaps God revealed himself to a tribe and its leader (call him 'Shmoses') by causing miracles that triggered the ADD and ToM. This resulted in their gaining both the concept of and beliefs about God, which they spread to others via testimony. The ADD, ToM, teleology module, and other faculties and social factors helped transmit and sustain these beliefs in future generations. Of course, this is a just-so story, but the point is that a number of theories are compatible with premise 3. Furthermore, Plantinga says he is merely offering a model, so he is probably open to altering his model as empirical theories develop (170).¹¹² However, which theory is *true* is another matter and is what CSR is currently exploring.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ But see Moreland & Craig's (2003, 168) theological reasons for doubting there is a *sensus divinitatis*.

¹¹¹ Above, I defined 'sensus divinitatis' as a single module, but one could define it more liberally, as Clark & Barrett (2010) do, to denote a set of mechanisms working together. Thanks to Justin Barrett for helpful discussion. Of course, people can use the term however they wish, so long as they're clear.

¹¹² An alternative model is given on p. 176, according to which the *sensus divinitatis* helps people see the truth of a premise in a theistic argument, by which they infer theistic belief. De Cruz & De Smedt (2014) explore in an empirically rigorous way how modules studied in CSR might be relevant to people's finding intuitive premises in arguments from natural theology. Michael Sudduth (2002) offers a model grounded in reformed theology, according to which only the belief that God exists is basic, and God's properties are inferred. See Plantinga's (2002, 132–135) reply to Sudduth.

¹¹³ For surveys of the CSR literature and some of its epistemological ramifications, see Clark & Barrett (2010) on the relationship between CSR and the *sensus divinitatis*; Clark & Barrett (2011), who use a Reidian perspective; Clark & Rabinowitz (2011), who focus on testimony and safety; Thurow (2013), who focuses on sensitivity and unreliability arguments; and De Cruz & De Smedt (2014), who focus on CSR and natural theology. See also Murray (2009) and Leech & Visala (2011).

6. More on Premise 3: Is Theistic Belief Even Basic?

Plantinga says that the deliverances of the *sensus divinitatis* are *basic beliefs*. But *are* they basic? Fales (2004) notes that even if theistic belief is formed spontaneously, or not on the basis of *conscious inference* from other beliefs, it could still be based on the other beliefs. He says that his belief in the propositions,

(C) It is very probable that most crows are black (377),

(R) What attracts many Republicans to that political ideology is that it makes a virtue of self-interest, and thus provides a convenient rationale for a narrow view of the obligations of generosity and community spirit (378),

(T) Others generally tell the truth (379),

were not consciously inferred from other beliefs. He just finds himself believing them. Yet, they do seem to be held on the basis of other beliefs: beliefs formed in the past on the basis of observations and experiences – about crows, Republicans, and truth-tellers – which seem to be part of the evidential basis for his beliefs in C, R, and T. Similarly, even if theists never consciously inferred their theistic beliefs, Fales notes, it doesn't follow that they are basic. They could also be based on beliefs formed in response to past observations and experiences.¹¹⁴

Here is one of Plantinga's responses to Fales:

My main aim was... to hold that theistic belief in general and Christian belief in particular *can be* accepted with perfect rationality even if the believer doesn't have any good arguments for belief... as far as that central thesis goes, it doesn't really matter whether or not there is a clear, important and precise distinction between basic and nonbasic belief. (2007, 614)

When Plantinga was responding to the original evidentialist objection, the concern was that theistic belief was improper because it was not based on a robust philosophical or scientific argument, something like the cosmological or design argument.¹¹⁵ The theistic belief of Plantinga's grandmother, for example, was in danger of being declared irrational because she had no such argument. Now, suppose we say that a belief is *basic* if it is not based on this type of robust argument. The "way" mentioned in premise 3 might involve people's forming a basic belief in *this* sense, even though the belief might be partly based on background beliefs in the way Fales describes. Plantinga's argument could then be used to show that if theistic belief is

¹¹⁴ Koons (2011) similarly argues that all our perceptual beliefs are theory dependent. He then argues that "theistic belief cannot be properly basic, but only because no kind of belief can be properly basic" (843). Interestingly, Plantinga (1993, 100–101) had earlier already discussed the sort of argument that Koons makes, with plausible counterexamples to his universal claim. Cf. Sudduth (2002, 89–90).

¹¹⁵ Or perhaps the requirement for good argument was even stronger: that the belief meets the standards of classical foundationalism. For more, see chapter 3 of WCB.

true, then it can be properly basic with respect to warrant in this sense of 'basic'.¹¹⁶ This would bypass Fales' argument.¹¹⁷

7. Beyond Plantinga: Applying the Strategy More Broadly

Reformed epistemology is often associated with Plantinga's proper functionalist theory of warrant. However, some philosophers disagree with this theory, and others are interested in epistemic properties Plantinga does not explore. These philosophers need not reject reformed epistemology. In the following, I will briefly explore the views of some philosophers who think you can be a reformed epistemologist without endorsing Plantinga's theories.

Let us take a step back and examine Plantinga's general strategy:

Step 1: Specify a positive epistemic property (or purported conditions for a positive epistemic property).

Step 2: Examine whether basic theistic beliefs might exemplify that epistemic property (or the purported conditions for that property), either on the supposition that God exists or without that supposition.

We can see how Plantinga's normative epistemology (i.e., his theories of various epistemic properties) supports his applied epistemology (i.e., his religious epistemology). This strategy is very natural and is common in ethics, where one's normative ethics (e.g., utilitarianism) drives one's applied ethics (e.g., a position on abortion). Others who are interested in different epistemic properties, or who hold a different theory of warrant, can still follow this strategy and find that their epistemological theory is compatible with reformed epistemology. Indeed, some *have* found this to be so.

Consider *phenomenal conservatism*, which states a sufficient condition for *prima facie* justification:

(PC): If it seems to S as if *p*, then S thereby has at least *prima facie* justification for believing that *p*. (Huemer 2001, 99)

Suppose it seems to me as if there is a cup. According to PC, I thereby have at least *prima facie* justification for believing that there is a cup. The qualifier '*prima facie*' indicates that the justification can be defeated by counterevidence. We have now completed step 1 of Plantinga's strategy.

We may now proceed to Step 2 and examine whether basic, theistic belief can meet PC's conditions. It can. Chris Tucker (2011) has noted how there are a number of theists for

¹¹⁶ Bergmann (2015b, 35–37), a reformed epistemologist, develops a view that explicitly allows for background beliefs to play an evidential role in something like the way Fales describes. He uses Robert Audi's (2004, 45–46) distinction between conclusions of reflection and conclusions of inference, the latter being drawn from inference and the former emerging "noninferentially from an awareness of a variety of observations, experiences, and considerations" (2015, 36). Theistic belief, on his view, could be a conclusion of reflection but still be properly basic. Also relevant are Derose (draft a) and Pritchard's (2003, 57–60) foundationalist model, Beilby (2007, 147–151), and Lyons (2009, 162–163).

¹¹⁷ See also the definition of warrant basicity that Plantinga (2007, 618) develops in his response to Fales.

whom, at various points in their lives, it seems to them that God is with them or that God is watching over them. These beliefs are not based on any argument; rather, the theist just believes because they seem true.¹¹⁸

Consider now *virtue epistemology*. According to John Greco's (2010) version,

S knows that *p* if and only if S believes the truth (with respect to *p*) because S's belief that *p* is produced by intellectual ability (71).

Greco says that an *achievement* is a kind of success because of one's ability. Suppose I am up to bat, I get distracted by an annoying fly, I try to hit the fly, and in the process, I happen to hit a speeding baseball and score a home run. This is success through accident, not success through ability; it is not an *achievement*. A true belief is warranted, on Greco's theory, when one attains a true belief because of one's intellectual ability, when one *achieves* a true belief.

We may proceed to Step 2. Anthony Bolos (2016) says that theistic belief could satisfy the conditions of genuine achievement. He writes,

One strategy, for example, would be to simply demonstrate the parallels between perceptual knowledge and religious knowledge on the reformed account. Both instances of knowledge are the result of one's cognitive faculties which, when successful, demonstrate the cognitive abilities of the agent. In each of the cases, the success in question is appropriately related to the agent's cognitive abilities (186).

If Bolos is correct, then we can see how reformed epistemology is compatible with virtue epistemology.¹¹⁹

I have now given two examples of how reformed epistemology might be applied to other epistemological theories. In fact, I find it plausible that there is no non-skeptical theory of an epistemic property *P* that couldn't count many people's theistic belief to be properly basic with respect to *P*.¹²⁰ Showing that there are such theories is where more work should be done.¹²¹

8. The Great Pumpkin Objection and How to Properly Criticize Reformed Epistemology

¹¹⁸ Also, if Tucker is correct, then he would have a good reply to Long's (2010) evidentialist, *de jure* objection to theistic belief.

¹¹⁹ For more on the relationship between reformed epistemology and virtue epistemology, see Zagzebski (1993), Pritchard (2003), Axtell (2006), and Bolos (2016). Of note, Pritchard (2003, 60–65) develops an account of how theistic basic belief could result from reflective virtues, and Bolos (2016) argues that theistic basic belief could result from what Pritchard calls a strong achievement, which is characterized by the agent's overcoming an obstacle or demonstrating a significant skill. These accounts might handle earlier criticisms by virtue epistemologists (e.g., Zagzebski, Pritchard, and Axtell) that reformed epistemology does not sufficiently involve the agent.

¹²⁰ Others have applied their normative theories to reformed epistemology. Wolterstorff (1983) applies an epistemic conservative view, Alston (1991) applies his theory of perceptual justification, and Shaw (2016) applies his disjunctivist view.

¹²¹ According to reliabilism, a belief is justified only if it is produced by a reliable process. Sanford Goldberg (2014) charges that systematic disagreement about religious matters shows that religious belief is not formed by a reliable process; hence, the believer does not meet the reliabilist condition on justification. Furthermore, a believer who is aware of this disagreement has a defeater. Although Goldberg develops both charges in admirable detail, he does not address the responses to this sort of argument by Kwan (2006, 654–657; 2011, 263–283), Murray (2009, 172–173) and Clark & Barrett (2011, 26–29). This is a fascinating topic about which there is insufficient space to discuss in detail here.

Here is a simple formula for criticizing reformed epistemology. First, make clear whether you are criticizing the normative theory (call this a *normative criticism*) or the application of that theory to religious, basic belief (call this an *application criticism*). Then, successfully criticize either the normative theory or its application. An example of an application criticism is the above skeptical theist objection, which gives some theists reason to doubt that theistic belief meets the proper functionalist conditions (even if God exists).

The normative criticism will often require attacking a theory that's already been well defended in the epistemological literature. For example, one might object that since one cannot always know, by reflection, whether one's theistic, basic belief is produced by properly functioning faculties, there is something inadequate about Plantinga's reformed epistemology. However, this is really just a criticism of *proper functionalism*, a normative theory, and also of the many other normative theories that imply that you cannot always know, by reflection, whether the relevant conditions for justification or warrant obtain.¹²² For this criticism, one cannot stay at the level of religious epistemology. One must move up to the normative level and engage in epistemology *tout court*.

It will be useful to see how my formula clarifies two objections to reformed epistemology. They are the *Great Pumpkin Objection* and the related *Son of Great Pumpkin Objection*:

(GPO) If theistic belief can be properly basic, then so can Linus' belief that *there's a Great Pumpkin*.¹²³

(SGPO) If the theist may claim that her theistic belief can be properly basic, then Linus may claim that his belief that *there's a Great Pumpkin* can be properly basic.¹²⁴

The objector will then deny the consequent and conclude that the antecedent is false.

Back in the eighties, it was understandable for Plantinga (1983, 74) and Michael Martin (1990, 272) to take seriously GPO or SGPO, when no developed normative theory undergirded reformed epistemology. But suppose a reformed epistemologist – such as Plantinga, Tucker, or Bolos – defends a normative theory, T, for an epistemic property, P, and uses T to undergird the view that theistic belief can be properly basic with respect to P. The GPO and SGPO are now more dubious, since their success depends on whether T, which underwrites theistic belief, also underwrites Linus' belief.

GPO and SGPO must therefore be reformulated:

(GPO*) Theory T, which implies that theistic belief can be properly basic with respect to P, also implies that Linus' belief that *there's a Great Pumpkin* can be properly basic with respect to P.

¹²² Bergmann (2006, ch. 8) argues that virtually all nonskeptical epistemological theories, both externalist and internalist, have this implication. Cf. chapter 4 of Williamson (2000).

¹²³ This was first introduced in Plantinga (1983, 74–78).

¹²⁴ See Martin (1990, 266–276), Plantinga (2000, 343–352), DeRose (draft b), Bergmann (2006, ch. 8), and Scott (2014). I think Bergmann most clearly gets to the epistemological heart of the issue.

(SGPO*) Theory T, which implies that the theist may claim that her theistic belief can be properly basic with respect to P, also implies that Linus may claim that his belief that *there's a Great Pumpkin* can be properly basic with respect to P.

The objector must then argue both that the implication about Linus' belief in GPO* or SGPO* holds, and also that the implication is false. We can see now that the real charge is that T, a normative theory, is too permissive.¹²⁵ In other words, these are *normative criticisms*.

For example, suppose the reformed epistemologist is a phenomenal conservative. Then the objector could claim, "This phenomenal conservatism that you endorse also implies that Linus could be *prima facie* justified in believing (or may claim he is *prima facie* justified in believing) that *there's a Great Pumpkin* because of a seeming!" The objector must then argue that this implication follows from PC and also that the implication is false, which will require diving into the epistemological literature on phenomenal conservatism and responding to its defenses.¹²⁶

I conclude by emphasizing how firm the grounds are upon which reformed epistemology stands. Those grounds might have been shaky when Plantinga and others first defended it, but that was when it was not backed by a substantive normative theory. Now, a *number* of diverse, prominent theories in mainstream epistemology undergird reformed epistemology, which makes it very resilient in the face of potential objections.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Some literature discusses whether Plantinga's reformed epistemology allows for nonChristian religious beliefs to be properly basic, which, in my framework, is really about whether proper functionalism allows for this. See Plantinga (2000, 349–351), Beilby (2007, 143–147), and the references in footnote 1 of Beilby's paper. He says that some Christians will find this implication of proper functionalism problematic (145). However, if it's a problem for proper functionalism, then it's a problem for most epistemological theories.

¹²⁶ See section 5 of Tucker (2011) for a response to the claim that PC is overly permissive. In chapter 8 of his book, Bergmann (2006) argues that virtually all nonskeptical epistemological theories face a charge of being overly permissive in these ways. See pp. 229–232 for why he thinks the charge fails.

¹²⁷ Thanks to Aaron Arinder, Mark Baker, Max Baker-Hytch, Justin Barrett, Anthony Bolos, Domingos Faria, Tyler McNabb, and Chris Tucker for helpful written comments and discussion. Thanks to Michael Bergmann for helpful discussion. Thanks also to participants in the Spring 2016 Rutgers Cognitive Science of Religion seminar, including Robert and Marilyn Adams, Mark Baker, Laura Callahan, Alvin Goldman, James Jones, Daniel Rubio, Philip Swenson, and Dean Zimmerman.

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A3.1 - Can We Be Good Without God?

William Lane Craig

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/can-we-be-good-without-god>, Accessed July 2023

Can we be good without God? At first the answer to this question may seem so obvious that even to pose it arouses indignation. For while those of us who are Christian theists undoubtedly find in God a source of moral strength and resolve which enables us to live lives that are better than those we should live without Him, nevertheless it would seem arrogant and ignorant to claim that those who do not share a belief in God do not often live good moral lives—indeed, embarrassingly, lives that sometimes put our own to shame.

But wait! It would, indeed, be arrogant and ignorant to claim that people cannot be good without belief in God. But that was not the question. The question was: can we be good without God? When we ask that question, we are posing in a provocative way the meta-ethical question of the objectivity of moral values. Are the values we hold dear and guide our lives by mere social conventions akin to driving on the left versus right side of the road or mere expressions of personal preference akin to having a taste for certain foods or not? Or are they valid independently of our apprehension of them, and if so, what is their foundation? Moreover, if morality is just a human convention, then why should we act morally, especially when it conflicts with self-interest? Or are we in some way held accountable for our moral decisions and actions?

Today I want to argue that if God exists, then the objectivity of moral values, moral duties, and moral accountability is secured, but that in the absence of God, that is, if God does not exist, then morality is just a human convention, that is to say, morality is wholly subjective and non-binding. We might act in precisely the same ways that we do in fact act, but in the absence of God, such actions would no longer count as good (or evil), since if God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist. Thus, we cannot truly be good without God. On the other hand, if we do believe that moral values and duties are objective, that provides moral grounds for believing in God.

Consider, then, the hypothesis that God exists. First, if God exists, objective moral values exist. To say that there are objective moral values is to say that something is right or wrong independently of whether anybody believes it to be so. It is to say, for example, that Nazi anti-Semitism was morally wrong, even though the Nazis who carried out the Holocaust thought that it was good; and it would still be wrong even if the Nazis had won World War II and succeeded in exterminating or brainwashing everybody who disagreed with them.

On the theistic view, objective moral values are rooted in God. God's own holy and perfectly good nature supplies the absolute standard against which all actions and decisions are measured. God's moral nature is what Plato called the "Good." He is the locus and source of moral value. He is by nature loving, generous, just, faithful, kind, and so forth.

Moreover, God's moral nature is expressed in relation to us in the form of divine commands which constitute our moral duties or obligations. Far from being arbitrary, these commands flow

necessarily from His moral nature. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the whole moral duty of man can be summed up in the two great commandments: First, you shall love the Lord your God with all your strength and with all your soul and with all your heart and with all your mind, and, second, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On this foundation we can affirm the objective goodness and rightness of love, generosity, self-sacrifice, and equality, and condemn as objectively evil and wrong selfishness, hatred, abuse, discrimination, and oppression.

Finally, on the theistic hypothesis God holds all persons morally accountable for their actions. Evil and wrong will be punished; righteousness will be vindicated. Good ultimately triumphs over evil, and we shall finally see that we do live in a moral universe after all. Despite the inequities of this life, in the end the scales of God's justice will be balanced. Thus, the moral choices we make in this life are infused with an eternal significance. We can with consistency make moral choices which run contrary to our self-interest and even undertake acts of extreme self-sacrifice, knowing that such decisions are not empty and ultimately meaningless gestures. Rather our moral lives have a paramount significance. So I think it is evident that theism provides a sound foundation for morality.

Contrast this with the atheistic hypothesis. First, if atheism is true, objective moral values do not exist. If God does not exist, then what is the foundation for moral values? More particularly, what is the basis for the value of human beings? If God does not exist, then it is difficult to see any reason to think that human beings are special or that their morality is objectively true. Moreover, why think that we have any moral obligations to do anything? Who or what imposes any moral duties upon us? Michael Ruse, a philosopher of science, writes,

The position of the modern evolutionist . . . is that humans have an awareness of morality . . . because such an awareness is of biological worth. Morality is a biological adaptation no less than are hands and feet and teeth Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, ethics is illusory. I appreciate that when somebody says 'Love thy neighbor as thyself,' they think they are referring above and beyond themselves Nevertheless, . . . such reference is truly without foundation. Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction, . . . and any deeper meaning is illusory [1]

As a result of socio-biological pressures, there has evolved among homo sapiens a sort of "herd morality" which functions well in the perpetuation of our species in the struggle for survival. But there does not seem to be anything about homo sapiens that makes this morality objectively true.

Moreover, on the atheistic view there is no divine lawgiver. But then what source is there for moral obligation? Richard Taylor, an eminent ethicist, writes,

The modern age, more or less repudiating the idea of a divine lawgiver, has nevertheless tried to retain the ideas of moral right and wrong, not noticing that, in casting God aside, they have also abolished the conditions of meaningfulness for moral right and wrong as well. Thus, even educated persons sometimes declare that such things as war, or abortion, or the violation of certain human rights, are 'morally wrong,' and they imagine that they have said something true and significant. Educated people do not need to be told, however, that questions such as these have never been answered outside of religion. [2]

He concludes,

Contemporary writers in ethics, who blithely discourse upon moral right and wrong and moral obligation without any reference to religion, are really just weaving intellectual webs from thin air; which amounts to saying that they discourse without meaning. [3]

Now it is important that we remain clear in understanding the issue before us. The question is not: Must we believe in God in order to live moral lives? There is no reason to think that atheists and theists alike may not live what we normally characterize as good and decent lives. Similarly, the question is not: Can we formulate a system of ethics without reference to God? If the non-theist grants that human beings do have objective value, then there is no reason to think that he cannot work out a system of ethics with which the theist would also largely agree. Or again, the question is not: Can we recognize the existence of objective moral values without reference to God? The theist will typically maintain that a person need not believe in God in order to recognize, say, that we should love our children. Rather, as humanist philosopher Paul Kurtz puts it, "The central question about moral and ethical principles concerns this ontological foundation. If they are neither derived from God nor anchored in some transcendent ground, are they purely ephemeral?" [4]

If there is no God, then any ground for regarding the herd morality evolved by homo sapiens as objectively true seems to have been removed. After all, what is so special about human beings? They are just accidental by-products of nature which have evolved relatively recently on an infinitesimal speck of dust lost somewhere in a hostile and mindless universe and which are doomed to perish individually and collectively in a relatively short time. Some action, say, incest, may not be biologically or socially advantageous and so in the course of human evolution has become taboo; but there is on the atheistic view nothing really wrong about committing incest. If, as Kurtz states, "The moral principles that govern our behavior are rooted in habit and custom, feeling and fashion," [5] then the non-conformist who chooses to flout herd morality is doing nothing more serious than acting unfashionably.

The objective worthlessness of human beings on a naturalistic worldview is underscored by two implications of that world view: materialism and determinism. Naturalists are typically materialists or physicalists, who regard man as a purely animal organism. But if man has no immaterial aspect to his being (call it soul or mind or what have you), then he is not qualitatively different from other animal species. For him to regard human morality as objective is to fall into the trap of species-ism. On a materialistic anthropology there is no reason to think that human beings are objectively more valuable than rats. Secondly, if there is no mind distinct from the brain, then everything we think and do is determined by the input of our five senses and our genetic make-up. There is no personal agent who freely decides to do something. But without freedom, none of our choices is morally significant. They are like the jerks of a puppet's limbs, controlled by the strings of sensory input and physical constitution. And what moral value does a puppet or its movements have?

Thus, if naturalism is true, it becomes impossible to condemn war, oppression, or crime as evil. Nor can one praise brotherhood, equality, or love as good. It does not matter what values you choose—for there is no right and wrong; good and evil do not exist. That means that an atrocity

like the Holocaust was really morally indifferent. You may think that it was wrong, but your opinion has no more validity than that of the Nazi war criminal who thought it was good. In his book *Morality after Auschwitz*, Peter Haas asks how an entire society could have willingly participated in a state-sponsored program of mass torture and genocide for over a decade without any serious opposition. He argues that

far from being contemptuous of ethics, the perpetrators acted in strict conformity with an ethic which held that, however difficult and unpleasant the task might have been, mass extermination of the Jews and Gypsies was entirely justified. . . . the Holocaust as a sustained effort was possible only because a new ethic was in place that did not define the arrest and deportation of Jews as wrong and in fact defined it as ethically tolerable and even good. [6]

Moreover, Haas points out, because of its coherence and internal consistency, the Nazi ethic could not be discredited from within. Only from a transcendent vantage point which stands above relativistic, socio-cultural mores could such a critique be launched. But in the absence of God, it is precisely such a vantage point that we lack. One Rabbi who was imprisoned at Auschwitz said that it was as though all the Ten Commandments had been reversed: thou shalt kill, thou shalt lie, thou shalt steal. Mankind has never seen such a hell. And yet, in a real sense, if naturalism is true, our world is Auschwitz. There is no good and evil, no right and wrong. Objective moral values do not exist.

Moreover, if atheism is true, there is no moral accountability for one's actions. Even if there were objective moral values and duties under naturalism, they are irrelevant because there is no moral accountability. If life ends at the grave, it makes no difference whether one lives as a Stalin or as a saint. As the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky rightly said: "If there is no immortality, then all things are permitted." [7]

The state torturers in Soviet prisons understood this all too well. Richard Wurmbrand reports,

The cruelty of atheism is hard to believe when man has no faith in the reward of good or the punishment of evil. There is no reason to be human. There is no restraint from the depths of evil which is in man. The Communist torturers often said, 'There is no God, no hereafter, no punishment for evil. We can do what we wish.' I have heard one torturer even say, 'I thank God, in whom I don't believe, that I have lived to this hour when I can express all the evil in my heart.' He expressed it in unbelievable brutality and torture inflicted on prisoners. [8]

Given the finality of death, it really does not matter how you live. So what do you say to someone who concludes that we may as well just live as we please, out of pure self-interest? This presents a pretty grim picture for an atheistic ethicist like Kai Nielsen of the University of Calgary. He writes,

We have not been able to show that reason requires the moral point of view, or that all really rational persons should not be individual egoists or classical amorality. Reason doesn't decide here. The picture I have painted for you is not a pleasant one. Reflection on it depresses me... Pure practical reason, even with a good knowledge of the facts, will not take you to morality. [9]

Somebody might say that it is in our best self-interest to adopt a moral life-style. But clearly, that is not always true: we all know situations in which self-interest runs smack in the face of

morality. Moreover, if one is sufficiently powerful, like a Ferdinand Marcos or a Papa Doc Duvalier or even a Donald Trump, then one can pretty much ignore the dictates of conscience and safely live in self-indulgence. Historian Stewart C. Easton sums it up well when he writes,

“There is no objective reason why man should be moral, unless morality ‘pays off’ in his social life or makes him ‘feel good.’ There is no objective reason why man should do anything save for the pleasure it affords him.” [10]

Acts of self-sacrifice become particularly inept on a naturalistic world view. Why should you sacrifice your self-interest and especially your life for the sake of someone else? There can be no good reason for adopting such a self-negating course of action on the naturalistic worldview. Considered from the socio-biological point of view, such altruistic behavior is merely the result of evolutionary conditioning which helps to perpetuate the species. A mother rushing into a burning house to rescue her children or a soldier throwing his body over a hand grenade to save his comrades does nothing more significant or praiseworthy, morally speaking, than a fighter ant which sacrifices itself for the sake of the ant hill. Common sense dictates that we should resist, if we can, the socio-biological pressures to such self-destructive activity and choose instead to act in our best self-interest. The philosopher of religion John Hick invites us to imagine an ant suddenly endowed with the insights of socio-biology and the freedom to make personal decisions. He writes:

Suppose him to be called upon to immolate himself for the sake of the ant-hill. He feels the powerful pressure of instinct pushing him towards this self-destruction. But he asks himself why he should voluntarily . . . carry out the suicidal programme to which instinct prompts him? Why should he regard the future existence of a million million other ants as more important to him than his own continued existence? . . . Since all that he is and has or ever can have is his own present existence, surely in so far as he is free from the domination of the blind force of instinct he will opt for life—his own life. [11]

Now why should we choose any differently? Life is too short to jeopardize it by acting out of anything but pure self-interest. Sacrifice for another person is just stupid. Thus the absence of moral accountability from the philosophy of naturalism makes an ethic of compassion and self-sacrifice a hollow abstraction. R. Z. Friedman, a philosopher of the University of Toronto, concludes, “Without religion the coherence of an ethic of compassion cannot be established. The principle of respect for persons and the principle of the survival of the fittest are mutually exclusive.” [12]

We thus come to radically different perspectives on morality depending upon whether or not God exists. If God exists, there is a sound foundation for morality. If God does not exist, then, as Nietzsche saw, we are ultimately landed in nihilism.

But the choice between the two need not be arbitrarily made. On the contrary, the very considerations we have been discussing can constitute moral justification for the existence of God.

For example, if we do think that objective moral values exist, then we shall be led logically to the conclusion that God exists. And could anything be more obvious than that objective moral

values do exist? There is no more reason to deny the objective reality of moral values than the objective reality of the physical world. The reasoning of Ruse is at worst a text-book example of the genetic fallacy and at best only proves that our subjective perception of objective moral values has evolved. But if moral values are gradually discovered, not invented, then such a gradual and fallible apprehension of the moral realm no more undermines the objective reality of that realm than our gradual, fallible perception of the physical world undermines the objectivity of that realm. The fact is that we do apprehend objective values, and we all know it. Actions like rape, torture, child abuse, and brutality are not just socially unacceptable behavior—they are moral abominations. As Ruse himself states, “The man who says that it is morally acceptable to rape little children is just as mistaken as the man who says, $2+2=5$.” [13] By the same token, love, generosity, equality, and self-sacrifice are really good. People who fail to see this are just morally handicapped, and there is no reason to allow their impaired vision to call into question what we see clearly. Thus, the existence of objective moral values serves to demonstrate the existence of God.

Or consider the nature of moral obligation. What makes certain actions right or wrong for us? What or who imposes moral duties upon us? Why is it that we ought to do certain things and ought not to do other things? Where does this ‘ought’ come from? Traditionally, our moral obligations were thought to be laid upon us by God’s moral commands. But if we deny God’s existence, then it is difficult to make sense of moral duty or right and wrong, as Richard Taylor explains,

A duty is something that is owed But something can be owed only to some person or persons. There can be no such thing as duty in isolation The idea of political or legal obligation is clear enough Similarly, the idea of an obligation higher than this, and referred to as moral obligation, is clear enough, provided reference to some lawmaker higher than those of the state is understood. In other words, our moral obligations can . . . be understood as those that are imposed by God. This does give a clear sense to the claim that our moral obligations are more binding upon us than our political obligations But what if this higher-than-human lawgiver is no longer taken into account? Does the concept of a moral obligation . . . still make sense? the concept of moral obligation [is] unintelligible apart from the idea of God. The words remain, but their meaning is gone. [14]

It follows that moral obligations and right and wrong necessitate God’s existence. And certainly we do have such obligations. Speaking recently on a Canadian University campus, I noticed a poster put up by the Sexual Assault & Information Center. It read: “Sexual Assault: No One Has the Right to Abuse a Child, Woman, or Man.” Most of us recognize that that statement is evidently true. But the atheist can make no sense of a person’s right not to be sexually abused by another. The best answer to the question as to the source of moral obligation is that moral rightness or wrongness consists in agreement or disagreement with the will or commands of a holy, loving God.

Finally, take the problem of moral accountability. Here we find a powerful practical argument for believing in God. According to William James, practical arguments can only be used when theoretical arguments are insufficient to decide a question of urgent and pragmatic importance. But it seems obvious that a practical argument could also be used to back up or motivate

acceptance of the conclusion of a sound theoretical argument. To believe, then, that God does not exist and that there is thus no moral accountability would be quite literally de-moralizing, for then we should have to believe that our moral choices are ultimately insignificant, since both our fate and that of the universe will be the same regardless of what we do. By “de-moralization” I mean a deterioration of moral motivation. It is hard to do the right thing when that means sacrificing one’s own self-interest and to resist temptation to do wrong when desire is strong, and the belief that ultimately it does not matter what you choose or do is apt to sap one’s moral strength and so undermine one’s moral life. As Robert Adams observes, “Having to regard it as very likely that the history of the universe will not be good on the whole, no matter what one does, seems apt to induce a cynical sense of futility about the moral life, undermining one’s moral resolve and one’s interest in moral considerations.” [15] By contrast there is nothing so likely to strengthen the moral life as the beliefs that one will be held accountable for one’s actions and that one’s choices do make a difference in bringing about the good. Theism is thus a morally advantageous belief, and this, in the absence of any theoretical argument establishing atheism to be the case, provides practical grounds to believe in God and motivation to accept the conclusions of the two theoretical arguments I just gave above.

In summary, theological meta-ethical foundations do seem to be necessary for morality. If God does not exist, then it is plausible to think that there are no objective moral values, that we have no moral duties, and that there is no moral accountability for how we live and act. The horror of such a morally neutral world is obvious. If, on the other hand, we hold, as it seems rational to do, that objective moral values and duties do exist, then we have good grounds for believing in the existence of God. In addition, we have powerful practical reasons for embracing theism in view of the morally bracing effects which belief in moral accountability produces. We cannot, then, truly be good without God; but if we can in some measure be good, then it follows that God exists.

Footnotes

[1] Michael Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics,” in *The Darwinian Paradigm* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 262, 268-9.

[2] Richard Taylor, *Ethics, Faith, and Reason* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1985), pp. 2-3.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[4] Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1988) p. 65.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[6] Critical notice of Peter Haas, *Morality after Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), by R. L. Rubenstein, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60 (1992): 158.

[7] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. C. Garnett (New York: Signet Classics, 1957), bk. II, chap. 6; bk. V, chap. 4; bk. XI, chap. 8.

- [8] Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967), p. 34.
- [9] Kai Nielsen, "Why Should I Be Moral?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984): 90.
- [10] Stewart C. Easton, *The Western Heritage*, 2d ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1966), p. 878.
- [11] John Hick, *Arguments for the Existence of God* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), p. 63.
- [12] R.Z. Friedman, "Does the 'Death of God' Really Matter?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983):322.
- [13] Michael Ruse, *Darwinism Defended* (London: Addison-Wesley, 1982), p. 275.
- [14] Taylor, *Ethics, Faith, and Reason*, pp. 83-4.
- [15] Robert Merrihew Adams, "Moral Arguments for Theistic Belief," in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. C. F. Delaney (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 127.

A3.2 - A Dozen Moral Arguments

David Baggett, October 25, 2021 <https://www.moralapologetics.com/wordpress/dozen>

The Center for the Foundations of Ethics at Houston Baptist University exists to generate a community of scholars devoted to exploring the rich resources of moral apologetics. Moral apologetics has for its focus the evidential significance of moral realities of various sorts. On occasion such evidence can be put into premise/conclusion format. The following is a nonexhaustive list of moral arguments hammered into discursive format, in an effort to show some of the range of possibilities in two senses:

First, there is diversity when it comes to the *moral phenomena under consideration*. Second, there are several ways in which to *couch the evidential connections*—from natural signs to induction, from deductive to abductive formulations. Obviously, all of these arguments invite critique and critical scrutiny; the purpose of this list is not to settle such matters, but simply to provide some examples of possible arguments. The footnotes have been kept to a relative few, but point to some of the complexities involved in the analysis of such arguments, and a few of the salient sources.

Immanuel Kant: *Arguments from Grace and Providence*

Argument from Grace:

1. Morality requires us to achieve a standard too exacting and demanding to meet on our own without some sort of outside assistance, resulting in a “moral gap.”
2. Exaggerating human capacities, lowering the moral demand, or finding a secular form of assistance are inadequate for the purpose of closing the moral gap.
3. Divine assistance is sufficient to close the gap.
4. Therefore, rationality dictates the postulation of God’s existence.

Argument from Providence:

1. Full rational commitment to morality requires that morality is a rationally stable enterprise.
2. In order for morality to be a rationally stable enterprise, it must feature ultimate correspondence between happiness and virtue.
3. There is no reason to think that such correspondence obtains unless God exists.
4. Therefore, rationality dictates the postulation of God’s existence. [1]

Henry Sidgwick: *An Argument Based on the Dualism of Practical Reason*

1. Morality can be made completely rational only if a complete harmony between the maxim of rational self-love and the maxim of rational benevolence can somehow be demonstrated.
2. If God exists, we may legitimately infer Divine sanctions such that there is a complete harmony between rational self-love (one's interest) and rational benevolence (universal happiness).
3. If we can legitimately infer that there is complete harmony between rational self-love and rational benevolence, morality can be made completely rational.
4. Therefore, if God exists, morality can be made completely rational. [2]

C. S. Lewis: Argument from Book 1 of *Mere Christianity*

1. There is a universal Moral Law.
2. If there is a universal Moral Law, there is a Moral Law-giver.
3. If there is a Moral Law-giver, it must be something beyond the universe.
4. Therefore, there is something beyond the universe.

Austin Farrer: *An Argument Based on Human Worth/Dignity*

1. Human persons have a special kind of intrinsic value that we call dignity.
2. The only (or best) explanation of the fact that humans possess dignity is that they are created by a supremely good God in God's own image.
3. Probably there is a supremely good God. [3]

Alvin Plantinga: *A Moral Obligations Argument*

1. If there are objective moral duties, then God exists.
2. There are objective moral duties.
3. So, God exists. [4]

Richard Swinburne: *An Inductive Epistemic Argument*

1. Humans possess objective moral knowledge.
2. Probably, if God does not exist, humans would not possess objective moral knowledge.
3. Probably, God exists. [5]

C. Stephen Evans: *Natural Signs Approach*

1. Natural signs satisfy the Pascalian constraints of wide accessibility and easy resistibility and dispose us to believe in God.
2. Human value and authoritative moral obligations function as moral natural signs.
3. Therefore, human value and authoritative moral obligations dispose us to believe in God.
[6]

William Lane Craig: *Value and Duties Argument*

1. If God doesn't exist, then objective moral values and duties don't exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

C. Stephen Layman: *Authority of Morality Argument*

1. The overriding (or strongest) reasons always favor doing what is morally required.
("Overriding Reasons Thesis" (ORT))
2. If there is no God and no life after death, then ORT is not true. ("Conditional Thesis")
3. Therefore, either there is a God or there is life after death in which virtue is rewarded.
4. If (3) then God exists.

Mark Linville: *A Deductive Epistemic Argument*

1. If evolutionary naturalism (EN) is true, then human morality is a byproduct of natural selection.
2. If human morality is a byproduct of natural selection, then there is no moral knowledge.
3. There is moral knowledge.
4. So, EN is false. [7]

Baggett/Walls: *A Four-Fold Abductive Cumulative Argument*

1. Moral facts [8], moral knowledge, moral transformation, and moral rationality require robust explanation.[9]
2. The best explanation of these phenomena is God.
3. Therefore, God (probably) exists.[10]

Footnotes

[1] See John Hare's *Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* for these formulations.

[2] This formulation has obvious limitations. Even if we affirm that morality can be made completely rational, it doesn't logically follow that God exists. It is probably best interpreted either inductively or abductively.

[3] This formulation is not directly from Farrer, but Farrer focused heavily on the value we should recognize in our neighbor for being made in God's image.

[4] See my article on this argument in Walls and Dougherty's *Two Dozen (Or So) Arguments for God*.

[5] Find Swinburne's discussion in his *Existence of God*. He thinks of the argument as a P-inductive argument, increasing the likelihood of theism somewhat, without making it more likely true than not (though the argument might be part of a cumulative case that does do the latter). Angus Ritchie gives an epistemic moral argument in his *From Morality to Metaphysics: The Theistic Implication of Our Ethical Commitments*.

[6] Find Evans' argument in his *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God*.

[7] Find Linville's argument online here:

<https://appearedtoblogly.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/linville-mark-22the-moral-argument22.pdf>

That article also features critiques of the standard substantive ethical theories of egoism, utilitarianism, and virtue theory with respect to intrinsic human worth.

[8] Among relevant moral facts we discuss are moral goodness per se (objective values), human moral worth, binding moral duties, moral freedom, moral regrets, etc.

[9] Moral transformation and moral rationality correspond to the two Kantian arguments above, and to the two aspects of Kantian moral faith: (a) that morality is possible (and we emphasize three existential moral needs, namely, to be forgiven, changed, and perfected) and (b) that morality is a fully rational enterprise.

[10] See *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* for a fuller explication of this approach. For a slightly more accessible discussion, see *The Morals of the Story: Good News about a Good God*. For a much more comprehensive history of moral apologetics, see *The Moral Argument: A History*.

A3.3 - Outline of Arguments for Moral Realism

Interview with Eric Sampson on Arguments for Moral Realism

Courtesy *The Analytic Christian* (YouTube), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KICGOHpz7A>

What is moral realism and why should we care whether it's true?

- I. **Cognitivism:** moral judgments express beliefs that aim to represent moral reality
- II. **Stance-independence:** the truth or falsity of our moral judgments doesn't depend on any (hypothetical) agent's beliefs or desires
- III. **Non-nihilism:** Some of our moral judgments are true.

And most add...

- IV. **Non-skepticism:** Some of us know at least some moral truths

In other words: Moral truths are, in important ways, like physical truths, chemical truths, astronomical truths, economic truths, etc.

Why care?

- If realism is true, you have obligations, maybe even extensive obligations to others
- If realism is true, it means that reality is weirder than many people think
- If realism is true, we immediately face metaphysical and epistemological challenges. And we can deal with them fairly easily by endorsing theism

What arguments are there for moral realism?

- The Modal Ontological Argument (Christian Coons, Michael Huemer)
- The Moorean Argument (Common Sense)
- The Companions in Guilt Argument (Terence Cuneo)
- The Argument from Deliberative Indispensability (David Enoch)

General remarks

- I. All of these arguments are recent. The oldest is from 2007.
 - II. All 4 arguments appear elsewhere in philosophy and are applied to morality
 - III. All of them are resistible, but they each come with big costs for resisting
-

The Modal Ontological Argument

What is the Modal Ontological Argument for moral realism?

The idea: The modal ontological argument for God's existence has some things going for it. But it's got some problems. Oh look! When we try it for moral truths, we get all the good features and none of the bad. So let's try it for moral truths.

The Modal Ontological Argument (Christian Coons, Michael Huemer)

1. Some putative objective moral truths are such that, if they're true, they're necessarily true.
2. It is possible that at least one of these putative objective moral truths is true.
3. So, at least one of these putative objective moral truths is *necessarily* true.
4. If at least one of these putative objective moral truths is *necessarily* true, then at least one of these putative objective moral truths is *actually* true.
5. Therefore, at least one of these putative objective moral truths is *actually* true—that is, moral realism is true.

What are some of the main objections to this argument?

- Parity arguments: Greatest conceivable island (reductio against the argument)
- Possibility premise: For any putative moral truth, it's possibly false (rejects Premise 2)
- Deny S5 (the inference rule that gets you from possibly necessarily *p* to necessarily *p*)

What are some of the responses to these objections?

- Everyone agrees that, if there are objective moral truths, they're necessarily true (Supervenience)
- No one is appealing to "the greatest conceivable" anything, so not clear how the parity would work.
- There's nothing about existence in the mind vs. existence in reality
- No one is illicitly building in necessary existence into the nature of the thing to be proved
- None of the usual reasons for thinking God is impossible apply here (e.g., incoherence of his attributes, problem of evil, divine hiddenness)
- None of the standard arguments against realism are intended to show that realism is *impossible*, only improbable.

- Queerness (metaphysical and epistemological), Disagreement, Evolutionary debunking, Moral objections
 - If you're rejecting an otherwise well-motivated and widely accepted rule of inference because you don't like the conclusion of an argument that employs that rule of inference, then...maybe think things over
-

The Moorean Argument

What is a Moorean argument for moral realism?

The idea: We already use these to combat highly revisionary views: nihilism about consciousness, time, motion, linguistic meaning, composite objects, and various types of skepticism (e.g., external world skepticism, other minds skepticism).

We'll just use one to non-realism.

The Moorean Argument (Common Sense)

6. If it's pro tanto objectively wrong to punch a helpless child, then there is at least one objective moral truth.
7. It is pro tanto objectively wrong to punch a helpless child. (Moorean premise)
8. So, there is at least one objective moral truth.
9. If there is at least one objective moral truth, then moral realism is true.
10. Therefore, moral realism is true.

What are some of the main objections to this argument?

- Begs the question: the argument is dialectically useless
- Evolutionary debunking: explains why Moorean premise merely *seems* credible
- Can't believe the error theory. Explains why Moorean premise merely *seems* more credible than the error theory.
- Reject Moorean arguments in general

What are some of the responses to these objections?

- Each debunking argument employs highly controversial premises. *Far* fewer people disagree about the Moorean premise. Thus, the Moorean premise enjoys much more credibility than the debunking premise.

- Unbelievability of error theory doesn't explain why the Moorean premise seems exceedingly credible to us rather than merely mildly credible, or not very credible but still *more* credible than error theory.
- Debunking arguments are dead.
 - If you're a theist, you have an easy answer to debunking arguments.
 - Even atheist moral realists can pose the following dilemma.
 - Either we *can* assume that we know some moral truths and then tell the story about how we self-correct to have reliable moral beliefs.
 - Or, we *can't* assume that we know some moral truths, but also can't come to get evidence that we're mistaken about them.
- Realists can debunk too: Here's why you accept error theory.
 - Morality is onerous and it's more pleasant to think that we don't have extensive obligations
 - Some philosophers have an abnormal fear of being duped
 - It's fun to wear the "black hat" in philosophy
 - Such views are (in virtue of their novelty) rewarded by the profession
 - Some enjoy the sense of cleverness associated with debunking cherished views
 - Some have an exaggerated allegiance to science due to the appearance of "rationality" associated with that allegiance
- If you reject all Moorean arguments, explain why you reject revisionary views

The Companions in Guilt Argument

What is the Companions in Guilt argument for moral realism?

The idea: You're committed to something important. If you give up on morality you're gonna have to give up on that other thing you like. Pick your poison.

The Companions in Guilt Argument (Cuneo)

11. If there are objective epistemic facts, then there are objective moral facts.
12. There are objective epistemic facts.
13. Therefore, there are objective moral facts—that is, moral realism is true.

What are some of the main objections to this argument?

- Epistemic instrumentalism: You ought to believe iff it promotes ur goals (Rejects 12)
- Epistemic error theory: Rejects 12, bites bullet

What are some of the responses to these objections?

- If you endorse instrumentalism then you should love Pascal's Wager *both* for God's existence and the existence of moral truths
 - If you endorse instrumentalism you shouldn't blame me for believing in moral realism if it comforts me
 - If you endorse error theory, there are no epistemic properties either: knowledge, justification, understanding, open-mindedness, curiosity, healthy-skepticism, irrationality, foolishness
 - If you're a hyper-consistent error theorist, there's nothing more to say
-

The Argument from Deliberative Indispensability

What is David Enoch's argument for moral realism?

The Idea: Explanatory indispensability is used by the sciences to ground ontological commitment and rational belief. Deliberative indispensability is just as respectable and grounds commitment to realistic normative truths.

The Argument from Deliberative Indispensability (Enoch)

14. If something is instrumentally indispensable to an intrinsically indispensable project, then we are (epistemically) justified (for that very reason) in believing that that thing exists.
15. The deliberative project is intrinsically indispensable.
16. Irreducibly normative truths are instrumentally indispensable to the deliberative project.
17. Therefore, we are epistemically justified in believing that there are irreducibly normative truths.

Instrumentally indispensable: if you don't do this thing, you'll undermine the project

- Fork is not instrumentally indispensable for eating
- Opening your mouth is instrumentally indispensable for eating
- Relying on perception, memory, induction, IBE to do science

- Positing electrons, numbers, a black hole at the center of the Milky Way

Intrinsically indispensable project: one that is both *descriptively* non-optional and *rationally* non-optional

- The explanatory project

What are some of the main objections to this argument?

- This argument may show that we have *practical* reasons to believe realism, but not *epistemic* reasons
- The only reason to think something exists is that it explains something.
- Try to find a disanalogy between explanatory indispensability and deliberative indispensability

What are some of the responses to these objections?

- Practical considerations can justify belief
- If you reject indispensability as a way to justify belief, then tell me why we're justified in
 - Using perception, memory, induction, IBE, and so on.
 - Oh and make sure you don't presuppose that any of them are reliable.
 - Positing elections, numbers, black holes, dark matter, dark energy, etc.
- Normative truths don't explain anything. So if you think something exists only if it explains something, then you're an error theorist.

A4.1 - The *Kalām* Cosmological Argument

William Lane Craig

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/the-kalam-cosmological-argument>, Accessed July 2023

As a boy I wondered at the existence of the universe. I wondered where it came from. Did it have a beginning? I remember lying in bed at night trying to think of a beginningless universe. Every event would be preceded by another event, back and back into the past, with no stopping point—or, more accurately, no starting point! An infinite past, with no beginning! My mind reeled at the prospect. It just seemed inconceivable to me. There must have been a beginning at some point, I thought, in order for everything to get started.

Little did I suspect that for centuries—millennia, really—men had grappled with the idea of an infinite past and the question of whether there was a beginning of the universe. Ancient Greek philosophers believed that matter was necessary and uncreated and therefore eternal. God may be responsible for introducing order into the cosmos, but He did not create the universe itself.

This Greek view was in contrast to even more ancient Jewish thought about the subject. Hebrew writers held that the universe has not always existed but was created by God at some point in the past. As the first verse of the Hebrew holy scriptures states: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

Eventually these two competing traditions began to interact. There arose within Western philosophy an ongoing debate that lasted for well over a thousand years about whether or not the universe had a beginning. This debate played itself out among Jews and Muslims as well as Christians, both Catholic and Protestant. It finally sputtered to something of an inconclusive end in the thought of the great eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant. He held, ironically, that there are rationally compelling arguments for *both* sides, thereby exposing the bankruptcy of reason itself!

I first became aware of this debate only *after* graduating from university. Wanting to come to terms with this question, I decided upon completion of my Master’s degree work in philosophy to find someone who would be willing to supervise a doctoral thesis on this question. The person who stood out above all others was Prof. John Hick at the University of Birmingham. We did come to Birmingham, and I did write on the cosmological argument under Prof. Hick’s direction, and eventually three books flowed out of that doctoral thesis. I was able to explore the historical roots of the argument, as well as deepen and advance the analysis of the argument. I also discovered quite amazing connections to contemporary astronomy and cosmology.

Because of its historic roots in medieval Islamic theology, I christened the argument “the *kalam* cosmological argument” (“*kalam*” is the Arabic word for medieval theology). Today this argument, largely forgotten since the time of Kant, is once again back at center stage. The *Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (2007) reports, “A count of the articles in the philosophy journals shows that more articles have been published about . . . the Kalam argument than have

been published about any other . . . contemporary formulation of an argument for God's existence. . . . theists and atheists alike 'cannot leave [the] Kalam argument alone'" (p. 183).

What is the argument which has stirred such interest? Let's allow one of the greatest medieval protagonists in this debate to speak for himself. Al-Ghazali was a twelfth century Muslim theologian from Persia, or modern day Iran. He was concerned that Muslim philosophers of his day were being influenced by ancient Greek philosophy to deny God's creation of the universe. After thoroughly studying the teachings of these philosophers, Ghazali wrote a withering critique of their views entitled *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. In this fascinating book, he argues that the idea of a beginningless universe is absurd. The universe must have a beginning, and since nothing begins to exist without a cause, there must be a transcendent Creator of the universe.

Ghazali formulates his argument very simply: "Every being which begins has a cause for its beginning; now the world is a being which begins; therefore, it possesses a cause for its beginning." [1]

Ghazali's reasoning involves three simple steps:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause of its beginning.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause of its beginning.

Let's look at each step of this argument.

Premise 1

Notice that Ghazali does not need a premise so strong as (1) in order for his argument to succeed. The first premise can be more modestly stated.

- 1'. If the universe began to exist, then the universe has a cause of its beginning.

This more modest version of the first premise will enable us to avoid distractions about whether subatomic particles which are the result of quantum decay processes come into being without a cause. This alleged exception to (1) is irrelevant to (1'). For the universe comprises all contiguous spacetime reality. Therefore, for the whole universe to come into being without a cause is to come into being from nothing, which is absurd. In quantum decay events, the particles do not come into being from nothing. As Christopher Isham, Britain's premier quantum cosmologist, cautions,

Care is needed when using the word 'creation' in a physical context. One familiar example is the creation of elementary particles in an accelerator. However, what occurs in this situation is the conversion of one type of matter into another, with the total amount of energy being preserved in the process. [2]

Thus, this alleged exception to (1) is not an exception to (1').

Let me give three reasons in support of premise (1'):

1. *Something cannot come from nothing.* To claim that something can come into being from nothing is worse than magic. When a magician pulls a rabbit out of a hat, at least you've got the magician, not to mention the hat! But if you deny premise (1'), you've got to think that the whole universe just appeared at some point in the past for no reason whatsoever. But nobody *sincerely* believes that things, say, a horse or an Eskimo village, can just pop into being without a cause.

2. *If something can come into being from nothing, then it becomes inexplicable why just anything or everything doesn't come into being from nothing.* Think about it: why don't bicycles and Beethoven and root beer just pop into being from nothing? Why is it only universes that can come into being from nothing? What makes nothingness so discriminatory? There can't be anything about nothingness that favors universes, for nothingness doesn't have any properties. Nor can anything constrain nothingness, for there isn't anything to be constrained!

3. *Common experience and scientific evidence confirm the truth of premise 1'.* The science of cosmogony is based on the assumption that there are causal conditions for the origin of the universe. So it's hard to understand how anyone committed to modern science could deny that (1') is more plausibly true than false.

So I think that the first premise of the *kalam* cosmological argument is surely true.

Premise 2

The more controversial premise in the argument is premise 2, that *the universe began to exist*. This is by no means obvious. Let's examine both philosophical arguments and scientific evidence in support of premise 2.

First Philosophical Argument

Ghazali argued that if the universe never began to exist, then there has been an infinite number of past events prior to today. But, he argued, an infinite number of things cannot exist. Ghazali recognized that a *potentially* infinite number of things could exist, but he denied that an *actually* infinite number of things could exist.

When we say that something is *potentially* infinite, infinity serves merely as an ideal limit which is never reached. For example, you could divide any finite distance in half, and then into fourths, and then into eighths, and then into sixteenths, and so on to infinity. The number of divisions is potentially infinite, in the sense that you could go on dividing endlessly. But you would never arrive at an "infinitieth" division. You would never have an actually infinite number of parts or divisions.

Now Ghazali has no problem with the existence of merely potential infinities, for these are just ideal limits. But he argued that if an actually infinite number of things could exist, then various absurdities would result. If we're to avoid these absurdities, then we must deny that an actually

infinite number of things exist. That implies that the number of past events cannot be actually infinite. Therefore, the universe cannot be beginningless; rather the universe began to exist.

It's very frequently alleged that this kind of argument has been invalidated by developments in modern mathematics. In modern set theory the use of actually infinite sets is commonplace. For example, the set of the natural numbers $\{0, 1, 2, \dots\}$ has an actually infinite number of members in it. The number of members in this set is not merely potentially infinite, according to modern set theory; rather the number of members is actually infinite. Many people have inferred that these developments undermine Ghazali's argument.

But is that really the case? Modern set theory shows that if you adopt certain axioms and rules, then you can *talk* about actually infinite collections in a consistent way, without contradicting yourself. All this accomplishes is showing how to set up a certain *universe of discourse* for talking consistently about actual infinities. But it does absolutely nothing to show that such mathematical entities really exist or that an actually infinite number of things can really exist. If Ghazali is right, then this universe of discourse may be regarded as just a fictional realm, like the world of Sherlock Holmes, or something that exists only in your mind.

The way in which Ghazali brings out the real impossibility of an actually infinite number of things is by imagining what it would be like if such a collection could exist and then drawing out the absurd consequences. Let me share one of my favorite illustrations called "Hilbert's Hotel," the brainchild of the great German mathematician David Hilbert.

Hilbert first invites us to imagine an ordinary hotel with a finite number of rooms. Suppose, furthermore, that all the rooms are full. If a new guest shows up at the desk asking for a room, the manager says, "Sorry, all the rooms are full," and that's the end of the story.

But now, says Hilbert, let's imagine a hotel with an infinite number of rooms, and let's suppose once again that *all the rooms are full*. This fact must be clearly appreciated. There is not a single vacancy throughout the entire infinite hotel; every room already has a flesh-and-blood person in it. Now suppose a new guest shows up at the front desk, asking for a room. "No problem," says the manager. He moves the person who was staying in room #1 into room #2, the person who was staying in room #2 into room #3, the person who was staying in room #3 into room #4, and so on to infinity. As a result of these room changes, room #1 now becomes vacant, and the new guest gratefully checks in. But before he arrived, all the rooms were already full!

It gets worse! Let's now suppose, Hilbert says, that an *infinity* of new guests shows up at the front desk, asking for rooms. "No problem, no problem!" says the manager. He moves the person who was staying in room #1 into room #2, the person who was staying in room #2 into room #4, the person who was staying in room #3 into room #6, each time moving the person into the room number twice his own. Since any number multiplied by two is an even number, all the guests wind up in even-numbered rooms. As a result, all the odd-numbered rooms become vacant, and the infinity of new guests is easily accommodated. In fact, the manager could do this *an infinite number of times* and always accommodate infinitely more guests. And yet, before they arrived, all the rooms were already full!

As a student once remarked to me, Hilbert's Hotel, if it could exist, would have to have a sign posted outside: "No Vacancy (Guests Welcome)." Can such a hotel exist in reality?

Hilbert's Hotel is absurd. Since nothing hangs on the illustration's involving a hotel, the argument can be generalized to show that the existence of an actually infinite number of things is absurd.

Sometimes people react to Hilbert's Hotel by saying that these absurdities result because the concept of infinity is beyond us and we can't understand it. But this reaction is mistaken and naïve. As I said, infinite set theory is a highly developed and well-understood branch of modern mathematics. The absurdities result because we *do* understand the nature of the actual infinite. Hilbert was a smart guy, and he knew well how to illustrate the bizarre consequences of the existence of an actually infinite number of things.

Really, the only thing the critic can do at this point is to just bite the bullet and say that a Hilbert's Hotel is not absurd. Sometimes critics will try to justify this move by saying that if an actual infinite could exist, then such situations are exactly what we should expect. But this response is inadequate. Hilbert would, of course, agree that *if* an actual infinite could exist, the situation with his imaginary hotel is what we would expect. Otherwise, it wouldn't be a good illustration! But the question is whether such a hotel is really possible.

So I think Ghazali's first argument is a good one. It shows that the number of past events must be finite. Therefore, the universe must have had a beginning. We can summarize Ghazali's argument as follows:

1. An actual infinite cannot exist.
2. An infinite temporal regress of events is an actual infinite.
3. Therefore an infinite temporal regress of events cannot exist.

Second Philosophical Argument

Ghazali has a second, independent argument for the beginning of the universe. The series of past events, Ghazali observes, has been formed by adding one event after another. The series of past events is like a sequence of dominoes falling one after another until the last domino, today, is reached. But, he argues, no series which is formed by adding one member after another can be actually infinite. For you cannot pass through an infinite number of elements one at a time.

This is easy to see in the case of trying to count to infinity. No matter how high you count, there is always an infinity of numbers left to count.

But if you can't count *to* infinity, how could you count down *from* infinity? This would be like someone's claiming to have counted down all the negative numbers, ending at zero: . . ., -3, -2, -1, 0. This seems crazy. For before he could count 0, he would have to count -1, and before he could count -1, he would have to count -2, and so on, back to infinity. Before any number could

be counted an infinity of numbers will have to have been counted first. You just get driven back and back into the past, so that no number could ever be counted.

But then the final domino could never fall if an infinite number of dominoes had to fall first. So today could never be reached. But obviously here we are! This shows that the series of past events must be finite and have a beginning.

Ghazali sought to heighten the impossibility of forming an infinite past by giving illustrations of the absurdities that would result if it could be done. For example, suppose that for every one orbit that Saturn completes around the sun Jupiter completes two. The longer they orbit, the further Saturn falls behind. If they continue to orbit forever, they will approach a limit at which Saturn is infinitely far behind Jupiter. Of course, they will never actually arrive at this limit.

But now turn the story around: suppose Jupiter and Saturn have been orbiting the sun from eternity past. Which will have completed the most orbits? The answer is that the number of their orbits is exactly the same: infinity! (We can't slip out of this argument by saying that infinity is not a number. In modern mathematics it *is* a number, the number of elements in the set $\{0, 1, 2, 3, \dots\}$.) But that seems absurd, for the longer they orbit, the greater the disparity grows. So how does the number of orbits magically become equal by making them orbit from eternity past?

Another illustration: suppose we meet someone who claims to have been counting down from eternity past and is now finishing: . . . -3, -2, -1, 0! Whew! Why, we may ask, is he just finishing his countdown today? Why didn't he finish yesterday or the day before? After all, by then an infinite amount of time had already elapsed. So if the man were counting at a rate of one number per second, he's already had an infinite number of seconds to finish his countdown. He should already be done! In fact, at *any* point in the past, he has already had infinite time and so should already have finished. But then at no point in the past can we find the man finishing his countdown, which contradicts the hypothesis that he has been counting from eternity.

Alexander Pruss and Robert Koons have recently defended an engaging contemporary version of Ghazali's argument called the Grim Reaper Paradox. There are infinitely many Grim Reapers (whom we may identify as gods, so as to forestall any physical objections). You are alive at midnight. Grim Reaper 1 will strike you dead at 1:00 a.m. if you are still alive at that time. Grim Reaper 2 will strike you dead at 12:30 a.m. if you are still alive then. Grim Reaper 3 will strike you dead at 12:15 a.m., and so on. Such a situation seems clearly conceivable—given the possibility of an actually infinite number of things—but leads to an impossibility: you cannot survive past midnight, and yet you cannot be killed by any Grim Reaper at any time. Pruss and Koons show how to re-formulate the paradox so that the Grim Reapers are spread out over infinite time rather than over a single hour, for example, by having each Grim Reaper swing his scythe on January 1 of each past year if you have managed to live that long.

These illustrations only strengthen Ghazali's claim that no series which is formed by adding one member after another can be actually infinite. Since the series of past events has been formed by adding one event after another, it can't be actually infinite. It must have had a beginning. So we have a second good argument for premise 2, that *the universe began to exist*. We can summarize this argument as follows:

1. A collection formed by successive addition cannot be an actual infinite.
2. The temporal series of events is a collection formed by successive addition.
3. Therefore, the temporal series of events cannot be an actual infinite.

First Scientific Confirmation

One of the most astonishing developments of modern astronomy, which Ghazali would never have anticipated, is that we now have strong scientific evidence for the beginning of the universe. The first scientific confirmation of the universe's beginning comes from the expansion of the universe.

All throughout history men have assumed that the universe as a whole was unchanging. Of course, things *in* the universe were moving about and changing, but the universe itself was just there, so to speak. This was also Albert Einstein's assumption when he first began to apply his new theory of gravity, called the General Theory of Relativity, to the universe in 1917.

But Einstein found there was something terribly amiss. His equations described a universe which was either blowing up like a balloon or else collapsing in upon itself. During the 1920s the Russian mathematician Alexander Friedman and the Belgian astronomer Georges LeMaître decided to take Einstein's equations at face value, and as a result they came up independently with models of an expanding universe. In 1929 the American astronomer Edwin Hubble, through tireless observations at Mt. Wilson Observatory, made a startling discovery which verified Friedman and LeMaître's theory. He found that the light from distant galaxies appeared to be redder than expected. This "red shift" in the light was most plausibly due to the stretching of the light waves as the galaxies are moving away from us. Wherever Hubble trained his telescope in the night sky, he observed this same red-shift in the light from the galaxies. It appeared that we are at the center of a cosmic explosion, and all of the other galaxies are flying away from us at fantastic speeds!

Now according to the Friedman-LeMaître model, we are not *really* at the center of the universe. Rather an observer in *any* galaxy will look out and see the other galaxies moving away from him. This is because, according to the theory, it is really space itself which is expanding. The galaxies are actually at rest in space, but they recede from one another as space itself expands.

The Friedman-LeMaître model eventually came to be known as the Big Bang theory. But that name can be misleading. Thinking of the expansion of the universe as a sort of explosion could mislead us into thinking that the galaxies are moving out into a pre-existing, empty space from a central point. That would be a complete misunderstanding of the model. The theory is much more radical than that.

As you trace the expansion of the universe back in time, everything gets closer and closer together. Eventually the distance between any two points in space becomes zero. You can't get any closer than that! So at that point you've reached the boundary of space and time. Space

and time cannot be extended any further back than that. It is literally the beginning of space and time.

To get a picture of this we can portray our three-dimensional space as a two-dimensional disk which shrinks as you go back in time (Fig. 2).

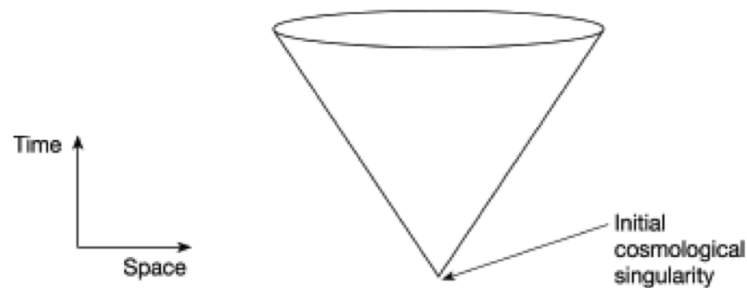


Fig. 2. Geometrical representation of space-time. The two-dimensional disc represents our three-dimensional space. The vertical dimension represents time. As one goes back in time, space shrinks until the distance between any two points is zero. Space-time thus has the geometry of a cone. The point of the cone is the boundary of space and time.

Eventually, the distance between any two points in space becomes zero. So space-time can be represented geometrically as a cone. What's significant about this is that while a cone can be extended indefinitely in one direction, it has a boundary point in the other direction. Because this direction represents time and the boundary point lies in the past, the model implies that past time is finite and had a beginning.

Because space-time is the arena in which all matter and energy exist, the beginning of space-time is also the beginning of all matter and energy. It's the beginning of the universe.

Notice that there's simply nothing prior to the initial boundary of space-time. Let's not be misled by words. When cosmologists say, "There is nothing prior to the initial boundary," they do *not* mean that there is some state of affairs prior to it, and that is a state of nothingness. That would be to treat nothing as though it were something! Rather they mean that at the boundary point, it is false that "There is something prior to this point."

The standard Big Bang model thus predicts an absolute beginning of the universe. If this model is correct, then we have amazing scientific confirmation of the second premise of the *kalam* cosmological argument.

So is the model correct, or, more importantly, is it correct in predicting a beginning of the universe? Despite its empirical confirmation, the standard Big Bang model will need to be modified in various ways. The model is based, as we've seen, on Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. But Einstein's theory breaks down when space is shrunk down to sub-atomic proportions. We'll need to introduce subatomic physics at that point, and no one is sure how this is to be done. Moreover, the expansion of the universe is probably not constant, as in the

standard model. It's probably accelerating and may have had a brief moment of super-rapid expansion in the past.

But none of these adjustments need affect the fundamental prediction of the absolute beginning of the universe. Indeed, physicists have proposed scores of alternative models over the decades since Friedman and LeMaître's work, and those that do not have an absolute beginning have been repeatedly shown to be unworkable. Put more positively, the only viable non-standard models have been those that involve an absolute beginning to the universe. That beginning may or may not involve a beginning *point*. But on theories (such as Stephen Hawking's "no boundary" proposal) that do not have a point-like beginning, the past is still finite, not infinite. The universe has not existed forever according to such theories but came into existence, even if it didn't do so at a sharply defined point.

In a sense, the history of twentieth century cosmology can be seen as a series of one failed attempt after another to avoid the absolute beginning predicted by the standard Big Bang model. That prediction has now stood for nearly 100 years, during a period of enormous advances in observational astronomy and creative theoretical work in astrophysics.

Meanwhile, a series of remarkable singularity theorems has increasingly tightened the loop around empirically tenable models by showing that under more and more generalized conditions, a beginning is inevitable. In 2003 Arvind Borde, Alan Guth, and Alexander Vilenkin were able to show that any universe which is, on average, in a state of cosmic expansion throughout each history cannot be infinite in the past but must have a beginning. That goes for multiverse scenarios, too. In 2012 Vilenkin showed that models which do not meet this one condition still fail for other reasons to avert the beginning of the universe. Vilenkin concluded, "None of these scenarios can actually be past eternal." [3] "All the evidence we have says that the universe had a beginning." [4]

The Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem proves that classical space-time, under a single, very general condition, cannot be extended to past infinity but must reach a boundary at some time in the finite past. Now either there was something on the other side of that boundary or not. If not, then that boundary just is the beginning of the universe. If there was something on the other side, then it would be a region described by the yet-to-be discovered theory of quantum gravity. In that case, Vilenkin says, *it* will be the beginning of the universe. Either way, the universe began to exist.

Of course, scientific results are always provisional. We can fully expect that new theories will be proposed, attempting to avoid the universe's beginning. Such proposals are to be welcomed and tested. Nevertheless, it's pretty clear which way the evidence points. Today the proponent of Ghazali's cosmological argument stands comfortably within the scientific mainstream in holding that the universe began to exist.

Second Scientific Argument

As if this weren't enough, there is actually a second scientific confirmation of the beginning of the universe, this one from the Second Law of Thermodynamics. According to the Second Law, unless energy is being fed into a system, that system will become increasingly disorderly.

Now already in the nineteenth century scientists realized that the Second Law implied a grim prediction for the future of the universe. Given enough time, all the energy in the universe will spread itself out evenly throughout the universe. The universe will become a featureless soup in which no life is possible. Once the universe reaches such a state, no significant further change is possible. It is a state of *equilibrium*. Scientists called this the "heat death" of the universe.

But this unwelcome prediction raised a further puzzle: if, given enough time, the universe *will* inevitably stagnate in a state of heat death, then why, if it has existed forever, is it not *now* in a state of heat death? If in a finite amount of time, the universe *will* reach equilibrium, then, given infinite past time, it should by now *already be* in a state of equilibrium. But it's not. We're in a state of *disequilibrium*, where energy is still available to be used and the universe has an orderly structure.

The nineteenth century German physicist Ludwig Boltzmann proposed a daring solution to this problem. Boltzmann suggested that perhaps the universe *is*, in fact, in a state of overall equilibrium. Nevertheless, by chance alone, there will arise more orderly pockets of disequilibrium here and there. Boltzmann refers to these isolated regions of disequilibrium as "worlds." Our universe just happens to be one of these worlds. Eventually, in accord with the Second Law, it will revert to the overall state of equilibrium.

Contemporary physicists have universally rejected Boltzmann's daring Many Worlds Hypothesis as an explanation of the observed disequilibrium of the universe. Its fatal flaw is that if our world is just a chance fluctuation from a state of overall equilibrium, then we ought to be observing a much smaller patch of order. Why? Because a small fluctuation from equilibrium is vastly more probable than the huge, sustained fluctuation necessary to create the universe we see, and yet a small fluctuation would be sufficient for our existence. For example, a fluctuation that formed a world no bigger than our solar system would be enough for us to be alive and would be incomprehensibly more likely to occur than a fluctuation that formed the whole universe we see!

In fact, Boltzmann's hypothesis, if consistently carried out, would lead to a strange sort of illusionism: in all probability we really *do* inhabit a smaller world, and the stars and the planets we observe are just illusions, mere images on the heavens. For that sort of world is much more probable than a universe which has, in defiance of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, moved away from equilibrium for billions of years to form the universe we observe.

The discovery of the expansion of the universe in the 1920s modified the sort of heat death predicted on the basis of the Second Law, but it didn't alter the fundamental question. Recent discoveries indicate that the cosmic expansion is actually speeding up. Because the volume of space is increasing so rapidly, the universe actually becomes farther and farther from an equilibrium state in which matter and energy are evenly distributed. But the acceleration of the universe's expansion only hastens its demise. For now the different regions of the universe

become increasingly isolated from one another in space, and each marooned region becomes dark, cold, dilute, and dead. So again, why isn't our region in such a state if the universe has already existed for infinite time?

The obvious implication of all this is that the question is based on a false assumption, namely, that the universe has existed for infinite time. Today most physicists would say that matter and energy were simply put into the universe as an initial condition, and the universe has been following the path plotted by the Second Law ever since its beginning a finite time ago.

Of course, attempts have been made to avoid the beginning of the universe predicted on the basis of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. But none of them has been successful. Skeptics might hold out hope that quantum gravity will serve to avert the implications of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. But in 2013, the cosmologist Aron Wall of the University of California was able to formulate a new singularity theorem which seems to close the door on that possibility. Wall shows that, given the validity of the generalized Second Law of Thermodynamics in quantum gravity, the universe must have begun to exist, unless one postulates *a reversal of the arrow of time* (time runs backwards!) at some point in the past, which, he rightly observes, involves a thermodynamic beginning in time which "would seem to raise the same sorts of philosophical questions that any other sort of beginning in time would." [5] Wall reports that his results require the validity of only certain basic concepts, so that "it is reasonable to believe that the results will hold in a complete theory of quantum gravity."

So once again the scientific evidence confirms the truth of the second premise of Ghazali's cosmological argument.

Conclusion

On the basis, therefore, of both philosophical and scientific evidence, we have good grounds for believing that the universe began to exist. It therefore follows that the universe has a cause of its beginning.

What properties must this cause of the universe possess? This cause must be itself uncaused because we've seen that an infinite series of causes is impossible. It is therefore the Uncaused First Cause. It must transcend space and time, since it created space and time. Therefore, it must be immaterial and non-physical. It must be unimaginably powerful, since it created all matter and energy.

Finally, Ghazali argued that this Uncaused First Cause must also be a personal being. It's the only way to explain how an eternal cause can produce an effect with a beginning like the universe.

Here's the problem: If a cause is sufficient to produce its effect, then if the cause is there, the effect must be there, too. For example, the cause of water's freezing is the temperature's being below 0 degrees Celsius. If the temperature has been below 0 degrees from eternity, then any water around would be frozen from eternity. It would be impossible for the water to *begin* to freeze just a finite time ago. Now the cause of the universe is permanently there, since it is

timeless. So why isn't the universe permanently there as well? Why did the universe come into being only 14 billion years ago? Why isn't it as permanent as its cause?

Ghazali maintained that the answer to this problem is that the First Cause must be a personal being endowed with freedom of the will. His creating the universe is a free act which is independent of any prior determining conditions. So his act of creating can be something spontaneous and new. Freedom of the will enables one to get an effect with a beginning from a permanent, timeless cause. Thus, we are brought not merely to a transcendent cause of the universe but to its Personal Creator.

This is admittedly hard for us to imagine. But one way to think about it is to envision God existing alone without the universe as changeless and timeless. His free act of creation is a temporal event simultaneous with the universe's coming into being. Therefore, God enters into time when He creates the universe. God is thus timeless without the universe and in time with the universe.

Ghazali's cosmological argument thus gives us powerful grounds for believing in the existence of a beginningless, uncaused, timeless, spaceless, changeless, immaterial, enormously powerful, Personal Creator of the universe.

Footnotes

[1] Al-Gha-zali-, *Kitab al-Iqtisad fi'l-l'tiqad*, cited in S. de Beaurecueil, "Gazzali et S. Thomas d'Aquin: Essai sur la preuve de l'existence de Dieu proposée dans l'Iqtisad et sa comparaison avec les 'voies' Thomiste," *Bulletin de l'Institut Francais d'Archaeologie Orientale* 46 (1947): 203.

[2] Christopher Isham, "Creation of the Universe as a Quantum Process," p. 378.

[3] Audrey Mithani and Alexander Vilenkin, "Did the universe have a beginning?" arXiv:1204.4658v1 [hep-th] 20 Apr 2012, p. 5. For an accessible video, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXCQelhKJ7A> (accessed February 23, 2014), where Vilenkin concludes, "there are no models at this time that provide a satisfactory model for a universe without a beginning."

[4] A.Vilenkin, cited in "Why physicists can't avoid a creation event," by Lisa Grossman, *New Scientist* (January 11, 2012).

[5] Aron C. Wall, "The Generalized Second Law implies a Quantum Singularity Theorem," arXiv: 1010.5513v3 [gr-qc] 24 (Jan 2013), p. 38.

A4.2 - Cosmological Argument From Contingency

Courtesy of Ratio Christi Texas A&M, public domain

1. Anything that exists has a sufficient explanation in either its own nature or an external thing
2. **Causal History** has a sufficient explanation in an external thing
3. Every sufficient explanation of Causal History invokes God
4. Therefore, God exists

Anything that exists has a sufficient explanation in either itself or an external thing

This principle is what Leibniz referred to as the **Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR)**, sometimes called the Strong PSR¹²⁸. Why think this is true?

- Background Knowledge: Everything we've ever experienced has had an explanation, even if we couldn't point to what exactly it was.
- Best Scientific Practice: When doing science, we assume there is an explanation for every observation, even if we don't know what it is yet. What if Isaac Newton thought apples fall for no reason and they just do that sometimes?

Causal History has a sufficient explanation in an external thing

Some facts are *necessary* and have a sufficient explanation in themselves. Others are *contingent* and could have been otherwise. Nothing external, it seems, explains why water is H₂O, it is wholly explained by water's own nature. Consider here one argument for this *Causal History* being *necessary*, and one for it being *contingent*.

- Necessity: Imagine that each cause is derived from a prior cause, and that, stretching back eternally, each link of the chain is explained by the prior link. Thus, each individual link is explained, so no additional explanation is required for the chain as a whole.
- Contingency: Imagine, someone were to ask why the moon shines, you could appeal to another moon that illuminates our moon, and another moon that illuminates that moon, and so on... However, this would get you no closer to explaining illumination, as illumination is not an intrinsic characteristic of any moon in the series. You must eventually arrive at the Sun (of God).

The *necessity* argument has been lampooned since the days of Aristotle, but the concrete example in the *contingency* argument is a decisive rebuttal. Hence, this argument will still work even if one affirms the possibility of an infinite regress.

Grounding

¹²⁸ An advanced apologist may instead wish to defend a more modest principle, but for ease of access, we will use the Strong version.

What, then, can explain causality without appealing to causality? After all, the sufficient explanation of causality must be *both* external *and* non-causal. The answer lies in a more fundamental concept.

- **Grounding** is the relation where more fundamental things give rise to less fundamental things.
- Imagine a ball of play-doh. Mold it into a cross. We might say that the cross is nothing over and above the play-doh, nor is it separate from the play-doh, but it is distinct from the play-doh. We can destroy the cross by rolling it back into a ball, but the play-doh will remain unscathed. Thus, we can see the cross is *grounded* in the play-doh.

Every sufficient explanation of Causal History invokes God

The defense is two-pronged: (1) Naturalists cannot sufficiently explain *Causal History* and (2) Christians can.

- Inadequacy of Naturalist explanations: A naturalist *grounding* of the universe will make our world the only way *Causal History* could ever be. There is no variety of choices for the naturalist foundation to choose from, since it does not have the agency to choose. However, according to Atheist Philosopher Graham Oppy, a worldview where could ever possibly have been different “is the worst possible view you can have” (Oppy 13). Worse still, any Naturalist foundation for reality will be fundamentally arbitrarily limited, so we always ask “why could it only make the world like this and not differently?” and thus cries out for an external explanation, making it no explanation at all.
- Success of Divine explanations: God’s free creative choice *grounds Causal History*, but not like a stack of dominos where one falls and then the rest follow and the fallen pieces may be removed. Instead, like the play-doh, there is nothing about *Causal History* over and beyond God’s free creative choice. It’s distinct, but it’s *grounded* fully in God’s free decision to create. If God ceased thinking about his creation, then it would not subsist on its own, but would cease altogether. Thus, God’s sustaining creative choice is more akin to the floor all of the falling dominoes are on. And, by making a free choice among options, God non-arbitrarily ensures that there were other ways the universe could have been which he did not freely elect, thus also fulfilling the condition of being non-necessitating.

Formulations of Leibnizian-style Contingency Arguments throughout history

Leibniz's Original Version (from *Monadology*)

1. PSR: “There can be found no fact which is true and evident, or any proposition, without there being a sufficient reason for there being so and not otherwise” (*Monadology*, 32)
2. Therefore, there is an infinite chain of explanations or a self-explained being
3. An infinite chain of causes is not a sufficient explanation for the universe

- a. "... a sufficient reason for existence cannot be found merely in any one individual thing or even in the whole aggregate and series of things." (*Radical Origination*, 486)
 - i. Not things by themselves because their "analysis into particular reasons could proceed into unlimited detail" which "includes other earlier or more detailed contingent factors" so "on makes no progress" (*Monadology*, 36-37)
 - ii. Not aggregates for "we will never discover in them a full reason why there should be a world at all, and why it should be such as it is" (*Radical Origination*, 486)
- 4. Therefore, a self-explained being exists

Samuel Clarke's Version (from *The Demonstration*, Sec. 1 and 2)

- 1. PSR: "Whatever exists, has a cause, a reason, a ground of its existence (a foundation, on which its existence relies, a ground or reason why it doth exist rather than not exist"
- 2. Therefore, either there is an infinite chain of contingent causes or there is a self-grounded being
- 3. An infinite chain of causes won't provide a sufficient reason for the universe
 - a. An infinite chain cannot be a foundation or ground "To suppose an infinite series of changeable and dependent beings produced one from another in an endless progression, without any original cause at all, is only pushing out of sight the question about the ground or reason for the existence of things"
 - b. An infinite chain cannot provide a reason for why it exists as opposed to nothing
- 4. Therefore, there is a self-grounded being

Alexander Pruss's rendition of Leibniz's version (*Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*)

- 1. Every contingent fact has an explanation.
- 2. There is a contingent fact that includes all other contingent facts.
- 3. Therefore, there is an explanation of this fact.
- 4. This explanation cannot itself be a contingent fact.
- 5. So, the explanation of all contingent facts is necessary.

Joshua Rasmussen's Version (see his interviews on YouTube)

- 1. The universe can possibly [consistent with reason] have an external explanation (Principle of Possible Explanation)

2. The universe cannot possibly [consistent with reason] be externally explained solely in terms of non-maximally-great things
3. If (1) and (2) are true, then the universe can be explained in terms of God (a maximally great being)
4. So, it is possible [consistent with reason] that God can exist
5. It is not possible [consistent with reason] that God can exist unless God actually exists
6. Therefore, God exists

How well did you follow the discussion? (Circle a number)

Too complicated **0** **1** **2** **3** Too easy

Additional Resources

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

B = Beginner (0-1), I = Intermediate (1-2), A = Advanced (2-3)

- *ON THE ULTIMATE ORIGINATION OF THINGS* By Leibniz (B)
- *How Reason Can Lead to God* by Joshua Rasmussen (B)
- *Is there a God? A Debate* by Graham Oppy and Kenneth Pearce (I)
- *Necessary Existence* by Alexander Pruss and Joshua Rasmussen (A)
- *Is God the Best Explanation of Things?* by Rasmussen and Leon (A)

A5.1 - God makes sense of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life

William Lane Craig, excerpted from "Does God Exist?", available at

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/does-god-exist#anchor-two>

During the last 40 years or so, scientists have discovered that the existence of intelligent life depends upon a complex and delicate balance of initial conditions given in the Big Bang itself. Scientists once believed that whatever the initial conditions of the universe, eventually intelligent life might evolve. But we now know that our existence is balanced on a knife's edge. The existence of intelligent life depends upon a conspiracy of initial conditions which must be fine-tuned to a degree that is literally incomprehensible and incalculable.

This fine-tuning is of two sorts.

First, when the laws of nature are expressed as mathematical equations, you find appearing in them certain constants, like the gravitational constant. These constants are not determined by the laws of nature. The laws of nature are consistent with a wide range of values for these constants.

Second, in addition to these constants there are certain arbitrary quantities which are just put in as initial conditions on which the laws of nature operate, for example, the amount of entropy or the balance between matter and anti-matter in the universe. Now all of these constants and quantities fall into an extraordinarily narrow range of life-permitting values. Were these constants or quantities to be altered by a hair's breadth, the life-permitting balance would be destroyed and life would not exist.

For example, the physicist P. C. W. Davies has calculated that a change in the strength of gravity or of the atomic weak force by only one part in 10^{100} would have prevented a life-permitting universe. The cosmological constant which drives the inflation of the universe and is responsible for the recently discovered acceleration of the universe's expansion is inexplicably fine-tuned to around one part in 10^{120} .

Roger Penrose of Oxford University has calculated that the odds of the Big Bang's low entropy condition existing by chance are on the order of one out of $10^{10^{123}}$. Penrose comments, "I cannot even recall seeing anything else in physics whose accuracy is known to approach, even remotely, a figure like one part in $10^{10^{123}}$." [5] And it's not just each constant or quantity which must be exquisitely finely-tuned; their ratios to one another must be also finely-tuned. So improbability is multiplied by improbability by improbability until our minds are reeling in incomprehensible numbers.

Now there are three possibilities for explaining the presence of this remarkable fine-tuning of the universe: physical necessity, chance, or design.

The first alternative holds that there is some unknown Theory of Everything (T.O.E.) which would explain the way the universe is. It had to be that way, and there was really no chance or little chance of the universe's not being life-permitting.

By contrast, the second alternative states that the fine-tuning is due entirely to chance. It's just an accident that the universe is life-permitting, and we're the lucky beneficiaries. The third alternative rejects both of these accounts in favor of an intelligent Mind behind the cosmos, who designed the universe to permit life.

Which of these alternatives is the most plausible?

The first alternative seems extraordinarily implausible. There is just no physical reason why these constants and quantities should have the values they do. As P. C. W. Davies states,

Even if the laws of physics were unique, it doesn't follow that the physical universe itself is unique. . . . the laws of physics must be augmented by cosmic initial conditions. . . . There is nothing in present ideas about 'laws of initial conditions' remotely to suggest that their consistency with the laws of physics would imply uniqueness. Far from it. . . . it seems, then, that the physical universe does not have to be the way it is: it could have been otherwise. [6]

For example, the most promising candidate for a T.O.E. to date, super-string theory or M-Theory, fails to uniquely predict our universe.

In fact, string theory allows a "cosmic landscape" of around 10⁵⁰⁰ different universes governed by the present laws of nature, so that it does nothing to render the observed values of the constants and quantities physically necessary.

So what about the second alternative, that the fine-tuning of the universe is due to chance?

The problem with this alternative is that the odds against the universe's being life-permitting are so incomprehensibly great that they cannot be reasonably faced. Even though there will be a huge number of life-permitting universes lying within the cosmic landscape, nevertheless the number of life-permitting worlds will be unfathomably tiny compared to the entire landscape, so that the existence of a life-permitting universe is fantastically improbable.

Students or laymen who blithely assert, "It could have happened by chance!" simply have no conception of the fantastic precision of the fine-tuning requisite for life. They would never embrace such a hypothesis in any other area of their lives—for example, in order to explain how there came to be overnight a car in one's driveway.

Some people have tried to escape this problem by claiming that we really shouldn't be surprised at the finely-tuned conditions of the universe, for if the universe were not fine-tuned, then we wouldn't be here to be surprised about it!

Given that we are here, we should expect the universe to be fine-tuned. But such reasoning is logically fallacious. We can show this by means of a parallel illustration.

Imagine you're traveling abroad and are arrested on trumped-up drug charges and dragged in front of a firing squad of 100 trained marksmen, all with rifles aimed at your heart, to be executed. You hear the command given: "Ready! Aim! Fire!" and you hear the deafening roar of the guns. And then you observe that you are still alive, that all of the 100 trained marksmen missed!

Now what would you conclude?

"Well, I guess I really shouldn't be surprised that they all missed. After all, if they hadn't all missed, then I wouldn't be here to be surprised about it! Given that I am here, I should expect them all to miss."

Of course not!

You would immediately suspect that they all missed on purpose, that the whole thing was a set-up, engineered for some reason by someone. While you wouldn't be surprised that you don't observe that you are dead, you'd be very surprised, indeed, that you do observe that you are alive. In the same way, given the incredible improbability of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life, it is reasonable to conclude that this is not due to chance, but to design.

In order to rescue the alternative of chance, its proponents have therefore been forced to adopt the hypothesis that there exists an infinite number of randomly ordered universes composing a sort of World Ensemble or multiverse of which our universe is but a part. Somewhere in this infinite World Ensemble finely-tuned universes will appear by chance alone, and we happen to be one such world.

There are, however, at least two major failings of the World Ensemble hypothesis:

First, there's no evidence that such a World Ensemble exists. No one knows if there are other worlds. Moreover, recall that Borde, Guth, and Vilenkin proved that any universe in a state of continuous cosmic expansion cannot be infinite in the past. Their theorem applies to the multiverse, too. Therefore, since the past is finite, only a finite number of other worlds can have been generated by now, so that there's no guarantee that a finely-tuned world will have appeared in the ensemble.

Second, if our universe is just a random member of an infinite World Ensemble, then it is overwhelmingly more probable that we should be observing a much different universe than what we in fact observe.

Roger Penrose has calculated that it is inconceivably more probable that our solar system should suddenly form by the random collision of particles than that a finely-tuned universe should exist. (Penrose calls it "utter chicken feed" by comparison. [7]) So if our universe were just a random member of a World Ensemble, it is inconceivably more probable that we should be observing a universe no larger than our solar system.

Or again, if our universe were just a random member of a World Ensemble, then we ought to be observing highly extraordinary events, like horses' popping into and out of existence by random

collisions, or perpetual motion machines, since such things are vastly more probable than all of nature's constants and quantities' falling by chance into the virtually infinitesimal life-permitting range.

Observable universes like those are much more plentiful in the World Ensemble than worlds like ours and, therefore, ought to be observed by us. Since we do not have such observations, that fact strongly disconfirms the multiverse hypothesis. On atheism, at least, it is therefore highly probable that there is no World Ensemble.

So once again, the view that Christian theists have always held, that there is an intelligent designer of the universe, seems to make much more sense than the atheistic view that the universe just happens to be by chance fine-tuned to an incomprehensible precision for the existence of intelligent life.

We can summarize this second argument as follows:

1. The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design.
2. It is not due to physical necessity or chance.
3. Therefore, it is due to design.

References

[5] Roger Penrose, "Time-Asymmetry and Quantum Gravity," in *Quantum Gravity 2*, ed. C. J. Isham, R. Penrose, and D. W. Sciama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 249.

[6] Paul Davies, *The Mind of God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p. 169.

[7] See Roger Penrose, *The Road to Reality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), pp. 762-5.

A5.2 - Additional Fine-Tuned Parameters

From *A Reasonable Little Question* (Barnes 2020)

- Cosmological constant, expressed as a density (ρ_Λ): If $\rho_\Lambda/\rho_{\text{Planck}} \leq 10^{-90}$, the universe would recollapse after 1 second; if $\rho_\Lambda/\rho_{\text{Planck}} \geq 10^{-90}$, structure formation would cease after 1 second, resulting in a uniform, rapidly diffusing hydrogen and helium soup (Adams, Alexander, Grohs, & Mersini-Houghton 2017).
- Higgs vev (v): If $v^2/m_{\text{Planck}}^2 \leq 6 \times 10^{-35}$, then hydrogen is unstable to electron capture; if $v^2/m_{\text{Planck}}^2 \geq 10^{-33}$ then no nuclei are bound and the periodic table is erased.
 - Vacuum expectation value (vev) of the Higgs boson (v): If $v^2/m_{\text{Planck}}^2 < 6 \times 10^{-35}$, then hydrogen is unstable to electron capture; if $v^2/m_{\text{Planck}}^2 > 6 \times 10^{-33}$ then no nuclei are bound and the periodic table is erased. Given a uniform distribution over v^2 between zero and the Planck mass $[0, m_{\text{Planck}}^2]$, the likelihood of a life-permitting value of the Higgs vev is at most 10^{-33}
- Up-quark, down-quark and electron Yukawa couplings (y_u, y_d, y_e): this three-dimensional subspace and the life-permitting subset is shown in Lewis and Barnes (2016: 256–260), building on Barr and Khan (2007). For stable atoms and stable stars, the region is bounded by: $0 < y_u < 3 \times 10^{-5}$, $0.7 \times 10^{-5} < y_d < 7 \times 10^{-5}$, $3 \times 10^{-9} < y_e < 4 \times 10^{-5}$.
 - Up-quark, down-quark and electron Yukawa couplings (y_u, y_d, y_e): this three dimensional subspace and the life-permitting subset is shown in Lewis and Barnes (2016, 256–260), building on Barr and Khan (2007). For stable atoms and stable stars, the region is bounded by: $0 < y_u < 3 \times 10^{-5}$, $7 \times 10^{-6} < y_d < 7 \times 10^{-5}$, $3 \times 10^{-9} < y_e < 4 \times 10^{-5}$
 - For simplicity, set the lower limits to zero. For dimensionless parameters, we expect a distribution that peaks at unity and smoothly decreases away from the peak. Thus, the likelihood of life-permitting up-quark, down-quark and electron Yukawa couplings is at most 10^{-13}
- Strange quark Yukawa couplings: Jaffe, Jenkins, and Kimchi (2009) have suggested that the strange quark may need to be sufficiently heavier than the light quarks (up and down) to avoid composite particles that include the strange quark—including analogues of the proton and neutron and the *hyperon* ($uudds$)—from participating in and possibly destabilising atomic nuclei. However, a firm limit is not derived, and (as a lower limit only) would probably be relatively weak.
- Neutrino Yukawa couplings: if the sum of the neutrino Yukawa couplings is greater than 5×10^{-12} ($\sum m_\nu > 1$ eV), then galaxy formation is significantly suppressed by free-streaming. Further problems await very heavy neutrinos (> 1 MeV): they overclose the universe, result in no hydrogen left over from the big bang, and affect the ability of supernovae to distribute elements into the wider universe.

- Fine-structure and strong force coupling constants: the size and shape of this two-dimensional subspace that is life permitting is shown in Barnes (2012). The relevant one-dimensional limits are as follows. If $\alpha_s < 0.108$ (a 9% decrease; see also Pochet, Pearson, Beaudet, & Reeves 1991), then deuterium is unbound and stars fail to ignite (Adams & Grohs 2017b; Barnes & Lewis 2017); if $\alpha_s > 0.27$, there is little hydrogen left over from the Big Bang for stars and organic molecules. If $\alpha < 7.3 \times 10^{-5}$, stars fail to be stable (though this limit is significantly weakened if the diproton is stable, as shown in Barnes 2015); if $\alpha > v(y_d - y_u)/200 \text{ MeV} \approx 0.018$, the proton is heavier than the neutron, and the universe again has no hydrogen.
- Baryon (ξ_b) and dark matter (ξ_c) to photon ratios, and the scalar fluctuation amplitude (Q): Tegmark et al. (2006) summarize eight anthropic constraints on this subset of parameter space. For illustration purposes: if $Q < 10^{-6}$, matter does not cool sufficiently to collapse into galaxies and stars; if $Q > 10^{-4}$, galaxies may be too dense to permit long-lived planetary systems. These limits are probably too stringent; see Adams, Coppey, and Bloch (2015).
- Dimensionless spatial curvature (κ): if the early universe had been too positively curved and matter/radiation dominated, it would have recollapsed before any galaxies could form. If it had been too negatively curved and matter/radiation dominated, the expansion would have been too fast for galaxies to form.

A6.1 - The Resurrection of Jesus

By William Lane Craig

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/jesus-of-nazareth/the-resurrection-of-jesus>

I spoke recently at a major Canadian university on the existence of God. After my talk, one slightly irate co-ed wrote on her comment card, “I was with you until you got to the stuff about Jesus. God is not the Christian God!”

This attitude is all too typical today. Most people are happy to agree that God exists; but in our pluralistic society it has become politically incorrect to claim that God has revealed Himself decisively in Jesus. What justification can Christians offer, in contrast to Hindus, Jews, and Muslims, for thinking that the Christian God is real?

The answer of the New Testament is: the resurrection of Jesus. “God will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17.31). The resurrection is God’s vindication of Jesus’ radical personal claims to divine authority.

So how do we know that Jesus is risen from the dead? The Easter hymnwriter says, “You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart!” This answer is perfectly appropriate on an individual level. But when Christians engage unbelievers in the public square—such as in “Letters to the Editor” of a local newspaper, on call-in programs on talk-radio, at PTA meetings, or even just in conversation with co-workers—, then it’s crucial that we be able to present objective evidence in support of our beliefs. Otherwise our claims hold no more water than the assertions of anyone else claiming to have a private experience of God.

Fortunately, Christianity, as a religion rooted in history, makes claims that can in important measure be investigated historically. Suppose, then, that we approach the New Testament writings, not as inspired Scripture, but merely as a collection of Greek documents coming down to us out of the first century, without any assumption as to their reliability other than the way we normally regard other sources of ancient history. We may be surprised to learn that the majority of New Testament critics investigating the gospels in this way accept the central facts undergirding the resurrection of Jesus. I want to emphasize that I am not talking about evangelical or conservative scholars only, but about the broad spectrum of New Testament critics who teach at secular universities and non-evangelical seminaries. Amazing as it may seem, most of them have come to regard as historical the basic facts which support the resurrection of Jesus. These facts are as follows:

FACT #1: After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea. This fact is highly significant because it means, contrary to radical critics like John Dominic Crossan of the Jesus Seminar, that the location of Jesus’ burial site was known to Jew and Christian alike. In that case, the disciples could never have proclaimed his resurrection in Jerusalem if the tomb

had not been empty. New Testament researchers have established this first fact on the basis of evidence such as the following:

1. Jesus' burial is attested in the very old tradition quoted by Paul in I Cor. 15.3-5:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:

. . . that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

and that he was buried,

and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.

Paul not only uses the typical rabbinical terms "received" and "delivered" with regard to the information he is passing on to the Corinthians, but vv. 3-5 are a highly stylized four-line formula filled with non-Pauline characteristics. This has convinced all scholars that Paul is, as he says, quoting from an old tradition which he himself received after becoming a Christian. This tradition probably goes back at least to Paul's fact-finding visit to Jerusalem around AD 36, when he spent two weeks with Cephas and James (Gal. 1.18). It thus dates to within five years after Jesus' death. So short a time span and such personal contact make it idle to talk of legend in this case.

2. The burial story is part of very old source material used by Mark in writing his gospel. The gospels tend to consist of brief snapshots of Jesus' life which are loosely connected and not always chronologically arranged. But when we come to the passion story we do have one, smooth, continuously-running narrative. This suggests that the passion story was one of Mark's sources of information in writing his gospel. Now most scholars think Mark is already the earliest gospel, and Mark's source for Jesus' passion is, of course, even older. Comparison of the narratives of the four gospels shows that their accounts do not diverge from one another until after the burial. This implies that the burial account was part of the passion story. Again, its great age militates against its being legendary.

3. As a member of the Jewish court that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention. There was strong resentment against the Jewish leadership for their role in the condemnation of Jesus (I Thess. 2.15). It is therefore highly improbable that Christians would invent a member of the court that condemned Jesus who honors Jesus by giving him a proper burial instead of allowing him to be dispatched as a common criminal.

4. No other competing burial story exists. If the burial by Joseph were fictitious, then we would expect to find either some historical trace of what actually happened to Jesus' corpse or at least some competing legends. But all our sources are unanimous on Jesus' honorable interment by Joseph.

For these and other reasons, the majority of New Testament critics concur that Jesus was buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea. According to the late John A. T. Robinson of

Cambridge University, the burial of Jesus in the tomb is “one of the earliest and best-attested facts about Jesus. [1]

FACT #2: On the Sunday following the crucifixion, Jesus’ tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers. Among the reasons which have led most scholars to this conclusion are the following:

1. The empty tomb story is also part of the old passion source used by Mark. The passion source used by Mark did not end in death and defeat, but with the empty tomb story, which is grammatically of one piece with the burial story.
2. The old tradition cited by Paul in I Cor. 15.3-5 implies the fact of the empty tomb. For any first century Jew, to say that of a dead man “that he was buried and that he was raised” is to imply that a vacant grave was left behind. Moreover, the expression “on the third day” probably derives from the women’s visit to the tomb on the third day, in Jewish reckoning, after the crucifixion. The four-line tradition cited by Paul summarizes both the gospel accounts and the early apostolic preaching (Acts 13. 28-31); significantly, the third line of the tradition corresponds to the empty tomb story.
3. The story is simple and lacks signs of legendary embellishment. All one has to do to appreciate this point is to compare Mark’s account with the wild legendary stories found in the second-century apocryphal gospels, in which Jesus is seen coming out of the tomb with his head reaching up above the clouds and followed by a talking cross!
4. The fact that women’s testimony was discounted in first century Palestine stands in favor of the women’s role in discovering the empty tomb. According to Josephus, the testimony of women was regarded as so worthless that it could not even be admitted into a Jewish court of law. Any later legendary story would certainly have made male disciples discover the empty tomb.
5. The earliest Jewish allegation that the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body (Matt. 28.15) shows that the body was in fact missing from the tomb. The earliest Jewish response to the disciples’ proclamation, “He is risen from the dead!” was not to point to his occupied tomb and to laugh them off as fanatics, but to claim that they had taken away Jesus’ body. Thus, we have evidence of the empty tomb from the very opponents of the early Christians.

One could go on, but I think that enough has been said to indicate why, in the words of Jacob Kremer, an Austrian specialist in the resurrection, “By far most exegetes hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements concerning the empty tomb.” [2]

FACT #3: On multiple occasions and under various circumstances, different individuals and groups of people experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead.

This is a fact which is almost universally acknowledged among New Testament scholars, for the following reasons:

1. The list of eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection appearances which is quoted by Paul in I Cor. 15: 5-7 guarantees that such appearances occurred. These included appearances to Peter (Cephas), the Twelve, the 500 brethren, and James.

2. The appearance traditions in the gospels provide multiple, independent attestation of these appearances. This is one of the most important marks of historicity. The appearance to Peter is independently attested by Luke, and the appearance to the Twelve by Luke and John. We also have independent witness to Galilean appearances in Mark, Matthew, and John, as well as to the women in Matthew and John.

3. Certain appearances have earmarks of historicity. For example, we have good evidence from the gospels that neither James nor any of Jesus' younger brothers believed in him during his lifetime. There is no reason to think that the early church would generate fictitious stories concerning the unbelief of Jesus' family had they been faithful followers all along. But it is indisputable that James and his brothers did become active Christian believers following Jesus' death. James was considered an apostle and eventually rose to the position of leadership of the Jerusalem church. According to the first century Jewish historian Josephus, James was martyred for his faith in Christ in the late AD 60s. Now most of us have brothers. What would it take to convince you that your brother is the Lord, such that you would be ready to die for that belief? Can there be any doubt that this remarkable transformation in Jesus' younger brother took place because, in Paul's words, "then he appeared to James"?

Even Gerd Lüdemann, the leading German critic of the resurrection, himself admits, "It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ." [3]

FACT #4: The original disciples believed that Jesus was risen from the dead despite their having every predisposition to the contrary. Think of the situation the disciples faced after Jesus' crucifixion:

1. Their leader was dead. And Jews had no belief in a dying, much less rising, Messiah. The Messiah was supposed to throw off Israel's enemies (= Rome) and re-establish a Davidic reign—not suffer the ignominious death of a criminal.

2. According to Jewish law, Jesus' execution as a criminal showed him out to be a heretic, a man literally under the curse of God (Deut. 21.23). The catastrophe of the crucifixion for the disciples was not simply that their Master was gone, but that the crucifixion showed, in effect, that the Pharisees had been right all along, that for three years they had been following a heretic, a man accursed by God!

3. Jewish beliefs about the afterlife precluded anyone's rising from the dead to glory and immortality before the general resurrection at the end of the world. All the disciples could do was to preserve their Master's tomb as a shrine where his bones could reside until that day when all of Israel's righteous dead would be raised by God to glory.

Despite all this, the original disciples believed in and were willing to go to their deaths for the fact of Jesus' resurrection. Luke Johnson, a New Testament scholar from Emory University,

muses, “some sort of powerful, transformative experience is required to generate the sort of movement earliest Christianity was” [4] N. T. Wright, an eminent British scholar, concludes, “that is why, as a historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind him.” [5]

In summary, there are four facts agreed upon by the majority of scholars who have written on these subjects which any adequate historical hypothesis must account for: Jesus’ entombment by Joseph of Arimathea, the discovery of his empty tomb, his post-mortem appearances, and the origin of the disciples’ belief in his resurrection.

Now the question is: what is the best explanation of these four facts? Most scholars probably remain agnostic about this question. But the Christian can maintain that the hypothesis that best explains these facts is “God raised Jesus from the dead.”

In his book *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, historian C. B. McCullagh lists six tests which historians use in determining what is the best explanation for given historical facts. [6] The hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead” passes all these tests:

1. It has great explanatory scope: it explains why the tomb was found empty, why the disciples saw post-mortem appearances of Jesus, and why the Christian faith came into being.
2. It has great explanatory power: it explains why the body of Jesus was gone, why people repeatedly saw Jesus alive despite his earlier public execution, and so forth.
3. It is plausible: given the historical context of Jesus’ own unparalleled life and claims, the resurrection serves as divine confirmation of those radical claims.
4. It is not ad hoc or contrived: it requires only one additional hypothesis: that God exists. And even that needn’t be an additional hypothesis if one already believes that God exists.
5. It is in accord with accepted beliefs. The hypothesis: “God raised Jesus from the dead” doesn’t in any way conflict with the accepted belief that people don’t rise naturally from the dead. The Christian accepts that belief as wholeheartedly as he accepts the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead.
6. It far outstrips any of its rival hypotheses in meeting conditions (1)-(5). Down through history various alternative explanations of the facts have been offered, for example, the conspiracy hypothesis, the apparent death hypothesis, the hallucination hypothesis, and so forth. Such hypotheses have been almost universally rejected by contemporary scholarship. None of these naturalistic hypotheses succeeds in meeting the conditions as well as the resurrection hypothesis.

Now this puts the sceptical critic in a rather desperate situation. A few years ago I participated in a debate on the resurrection of Jesus with a professor at the University of California, Irvine. He had written his doctoral dissertation on the resurrection, and he was thoroughly familiar with the evidence. He could not deny the facts of Jesus’ honorable burial, empty tomb, post-mortem appearances, and the origin of the disciples’ belief in the resurrection. So his only recourse was

to come up with some alternate explanation of those facts. And so he argued that Jesus of Nazareth had an unknown, identical twin brother, who was separated from him as an infant and grew up independently, but who came back to Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion, stole Jesus' body out of the tomb, and presented himself to the disciples, who mistakenly inferred that Jesus was risen from the dead! Now I won't bother to go into how I went about refuting this theory. But I think the example is illustrative of the desperate lengths to which scepticism must go in order to refute the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, the evidence is so powerful that one of the world's leading Jewish theologians, the late Pinchas Lapide, who taught at Hebrew University in Israel, declared himself convinced on the basis of the evidence that the God of Israel raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead! [7]

The significance of the resurrection of Jesus lies in the fact that it is not just any old Joe Blow who has been raised from the dead, but Jesus of Nazareth, whose crucifixion was instigated by the Jewish leadership because of his blasphemous claims to divine authority. If this man has been raised from the dead, then the God whom he allegedly blasphemed has clearly vindicated his claims. Thus, in an age of religious relativism and pluralism, the resurrection of Jesus constitutes a solid rock on which Christians can take their stand for God's decisive self-revelation in Jesus.

Endnotes

[1] John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), p. 131.

[2] Jacob Kremer, *Die Osterevangelien—Geschichten um Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), pp. 49-50.

[3] Gerd Lüdemann, *What Really Happened to Jesus?*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville, Kent.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 80.

[4] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), p. 136.

[5] N. T. Wright, "The New Unimproved Jesus," *Christianity Today* (September 13, 1993), p. 26.

[6] C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 19.

[7] Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (London: SPCK, 1983).

A7.1 - Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem

By N.T. Wright, Originally published in *Sewanee Theological Review* 41.2, 1998.

<https://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/christian-origins-and-the-resurrection-of-jesus-the-resurrection-of-jesus-as-a-historical-problem/>

Prologue

The Question of Jesus' resurrection lies at the heart of the Christian faith. There is no form of early Christianity known to us that does not affirm that after Jesus' shameful death God raised him to life again. That affirmation is, in particular, the constant response of earlier Christianity to one of the four key questions about Jesus that must be raised by all serious historians of the first century. I have elsewhere addressed the first three such questions, namely what was Jesus' relation to Judaism? What were his aims? Why did he die?¹ The fourth question is this: Granted the foregoing, why did Christianity arise and take the shape it did? To this question, virtually all early Christians known to us give the same answer, "He was raised from the dead." The historian must therefore investigate what they meant by this and what can be said by way of historical comment.

In this first lecture I shall examine the broad historical issue. I shall do so by sketching out the beliefs about resurrection held within second-Temple Judaism, and then by looking at the shape of early Christianity to examine how the latter movement grew out of the former. In the second lecture we shall close in on some of the detailed evidence by looking at the claims of the early Christian movement as reflected in key texts. In the final lecture I propose to use one particular resurrection narrative, that of Luke, as a springboard for asking the question: What might the message of the resurrection have to say to the world and the church as we face the postmodern challenge in the closing years of the second millennium? The three lectures thus work as follows: In the present lecture I shall sketch a big picture of Christian origins and argue that only the bodily resurrection of Jesus can explain them. In the second I shall examine the detailed texts that speak of this event. In the third I shall move forward from the Emmaus Road in the first century to Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" in the nineteenth and into the twentieth.

My theme for the moment, then, is to present the historical argument that results from looking at first-century Judaism on the one hand and first-century Christianity on the other. We find ourselves, so to speak, contemplating two pillars on either side of a wide river. By studying them both and their relation to each other, we should be able to work out what sort of a bridge might actually join the two together. Christianity emerged from Judaism, but how did this happen? How did we get from the one riverbank to the other?

Resurrection as Understood in Second-Temple Judaism

How did the hope of resurrection function within Judaism's view of the world? And where does resurrection belong within second-temple Jewish beliefs about life after death in general?

Hope for resurrection began in Judaism not as dogma but as a story—the story of Israel's exile and restoration. The first obvious passage in which we find it is Ezekiel 37:1-14, the vision of the valley of the dry bones. There the hope for Israel's restoration is expressed in terms of the vivid, almost surreal, metaphor of dry bones coming back to life, acquiring flesh, sinews, and ultimately breath. The context makes clear that this image denotes return from exile; it also, by means of the previous chapters, sets up a series of connections, such as rescue, cleansing, and (particularly) covenant renewal. The same is true, arguably, of that difficult passage Isaiah 26:16-21. Resurrection begins life, in other words, as a metaphor for return from exile and all that went with Israel's hope for that.

But the story as it was told by second-Temple Jews through Jesus' day and beyond never suggested that the real return had actually taken place. Nobody supposed that the prophecies of Isaiah or Ezekiel had yet been fulfilled. Second-Temple Jews still lived within the narrative world of exile and restoration. Within this narrative, *exile* became focused at certain points in the suffering of the martyrs, and *resurrection* became focused on their vindication. In this context we must set Daniel 12 and, in particular, 2 Maccabees, with its grisly accounts of martyrs who taunt their torturers by assuring them that they, the martyrs, will receive back from Israel's god the physical bodies that are now being torn apart (e.g., 2 Macc 7:1-23).

This is a development of—not a departure from—the metaphorical world of Ezekiel 37. Exile continues, and in the early second century it took the form of brutal oppression by Syrian paganism. The hope then was that Israel's God would restore his people, and that those who died in the struggle, loyal to him and his Torah, would be raised from the dead to share in the eventual restoration. Thus also, after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD had intensified the sense of exile almost unbearably, we find 4 Ezra 7 articulating a similar hope. The same is true, whenever we date them, of 1 Enoch and 2 Baruch. Underlying all of these stories, of course, is the unshakable Jewish belief in the justice of the one true God.

Two important details must be mentioned here. First, we know from Josephus (War 2:163; Ant. 18:14) and the New Testament (Acts 23:7-8) what we might have guessed from the later rabbis, namely, that resurrection was an important feature of Pharisaic theology. But we must remember that in Jesus' day and Paul's day the majority of the Pharisees were on what we could call the revolutionary wing of Judaism, longer for the restoration of Israel.² Resurrection functioned for the Pharisees, not as an abstract doctrine about what happens to God's people (or to anybody) after death, but as a statement about the great turn-around within Israel's fortunes that would shortly take place, and about the fact that when this event happened those who had been loyal to Torah, but had died ahead of time would be raised to share in the blessings of the Age to Come. Pharisaic belief, in other words, is to be seen as a development of the same underlying story that we see in Daniel and 2 Maccabees.

The second detail to be mentioned concerns the book known as the Wisdom of Solomon. It has long been customary among scholars to declare that this book simply teaches the immortality of the soul rather than the resurrection. The opening verses of chapter three are quoted to this effect:

The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. (3:1-3)

However, the passage continues a few verses later:

In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever. (3:7-8)

These righteous Jews who have been martyred at the hands of the pagans are for the present at peace, safe with God, but the immortality of their souls is only the prelude to their rising again and being set in authority over the kingdoms of the earth, within the one kingdom of God. What the passage offers, over and above the other evidence we have briefly considered, is an account of what happens to the righteous dead in the interval between their torture and death and their rising again: their souls are looked after by God.

Resurrection belongs, then, within the revolutionary worldview of second-Temple Judaism. What part does it play within the Jewish hope for life after death? There was within Judaism a considerable spectrum of belief and speculation about what happened to dead people in general, and to dead Jews in particular. At one end were the Sadducees, who seem to have denied any doctrine of post-mortem existence (Mark 12:18; Josephus, War 2:165). At the other were the Pharisees, who affirmed a future embodied existence, and who seem to have at least begun to develop theories about how people continued to exist in the time lag between physical death and physical resurrection. And there are further options. Some writings speak of souls in disembodied bliss, some speculate about souls as angelic or astral beings, and so forth. We cannot, then, simply assert that Greeks believed in immortality and Jews in resurrection. Things were never that simple.

The reason why the Sadducees were opposed not only to resurrection but to any notion of an afterlife is very interesting. First, they insisted that the traditions did not contain this newfangled doctrine and that resurrection was not taught in the Torah itself. But they went further. Resurrection was a revolutionary doctrine, having to do with fiercely held beliefs about the coming climax of Israel's history. It was just the sort of thing, from the Sadducaean point of view, that those troublesome lower-class Pharisees *would* embrace to sustain their revolutionary dreams about the overthrow of the existing order and the establishment of the kingdom of God. The Sadducees' main aim was not to ensure their own personal survival into a future life, but to deny a doctrine that seemed to them (quite rightly) to pose a threat to the survival of their power within the present order and within any coming changes therein.³

I spoke before about the intermediate state between death and resurrection. As we just saw, the Wisdom of Solomon spoke of the souls of the righteous being in the hand of God, against the day when they would rise again and rule over nations and kingdoms. Alternatively, the dead, or at least the righteous dead, were thought to continue to live prior to their resurrection in a state comparable to that of angels or spirits. In this connection, in addition to the various

non-Christian Jewish texts, it is of interest to note a passage in Acts that points precisely in this direction. I mean that wonderfully comic scene in Acts 12, in which the maid Rhoda hears Peter knocking on the door and speaking to her, and instead of opening the door, she runs and tells the assembled company. They say, interestingly, “It must be his angel.” They assume that Peter has been executed in prison, that he has entered into the disembodied state between death and resurrection, and that in this form he has paid them a sort of post-mortem visit that various people in various cultures have experienced when someone close to them had recently died. Such a visit is entirely comprehensible in terms of the person’s “angel.”

My point here is that Jews in this period had reasonably well-developed ideas about an intermediate state—or at least a range of concepts and vocabulary read at hand with which to refer to it. Of course, if someone did not believe in eventual resurrection, believing instead in a continuing disembodied immortality, what a Pharisee would regard as an intermediate state might be thought of as a final state. But if a first-century Jew said that someone had been “raised from the dead,” the one thing they did *not* mean was that such a person had gone to a state of disembodied bliss, there either to rest forever or to wait until the great day of reembodiment.

This can easily be tested by asking whether someone in 150 BC who believed passionately that the Maccabaeans were true and righteous Israelites, or someone in 150 AD who believed that Simeon ben-Kosiba was the true Messiah (if any such existed), would have said that they, or he, had been raised from the dead, intending by that statement to indicate simply that their cause was indeed righteous and that they were alive in a place of honor in the presence of God. The answer is obvious. Someone in the position we have described might well have said that the martyrs, or ben-Kosiba, were alive in the form of either an angel or a spirit, or that their souls were in the hand of God, but they would not have dreamed of saying that they had already been raised from the dead. Resurrection meant embodiment; further, *it implied that the new age had dawned*. Nobody suggested that the martyrs had been reembodied. Nobody suggested that the new age had dawned—except, of course, the Christians, which will be my point in a few minutes.

There was, then, no single universally accepted and commonly articulated second-Temple Jewish hope for the future. It remains likely, however, that the Pharisaic belief, their way of telling the story, was popular with a good many Jews. Be that as it may, however wide the spectrum may have been and however many positions different Jews may have taken upon it, “resurrection” always denotes *one position within* that spectrum. “Resurrection” was not a term for “life after death” in general. It always meant reembodiment.

The Beginnings of Christianity

Having examined very briefly one element of the historical puzzle, the pillar on the Jewish bank of the river, we must now turn our attention to the other bank, the early Christian pillar. Then, in looking at both pillars together, we should be in a position to assess what sort of bridge could conceivably link two structures at once so similar and yet so different.

There are three aspects to this inquiry. Christianity began as a kingdom-of-God movement, as a messianic movement, and as a resurrection movement. In each case, this poses a considerable puzzle for the historian. In considering each of these three aspects, my argument will fall into three steps. First, I shall examine the way in which Christianity began as a movement of the type in question. Second, I shall revisit Judaism to inquire what such movements looked like and what they hoped for. Third, I shall show that the striking differences between the relevant movements in Judaism and the apparently equivalent movement in Christianity are such as to call for a particular sort of explanation.

A Kingdom-of-God Movement

The three steps in this particular case may be summarized as follows. First, early Christianity grew up as a kingdom-of-God movement. Second, kingdom-of-God in Judaism had certain particular meanings. Third, since these certainly had not come to pass, we must inquire why the early Christians said, nonetheless, that the kingdom of God had in fact been brought to earth.

First, then, early Christianity thought of itself as a kingdom-of-God movement (Mark 1:14-15). Already by the time of Paul the phrase “kingdom of God” and its equivalents had become more or less a shorthand for the movement, its way of life, and its *raison d’être* (Rom. 14:17; 1Cor. 4:20, 6:9-10, 15:50; Gal. 5:21; 1 Thess. 2:12). It is already woven into the structure of early Christian thinking. The way Paul uses it shows that it is common coinage within early Christianity and that it belongs within the Jewish world of which I have spoken. The early Christians told the story of the kingdom as their own story. They reordered their lives—in the case of former pagans, quite drastically—around the new symbolic universe in which the Jewish hope that there would be “no king but God” had come true through Jesus the Messiah. They engaged in a praxis that affirmed there was a different way of being human, a way that answered to the claims of this kingdom. This is the first step of this first stage in my argument.

The second step, then, is to consider what “kingdom of God” meant in Judaism (a large topic, of course, which we can here only summarize briefly and inadequately). Within Judaism the coming kingdom of God meant the end of Israel’s exile, the overthrow of a pagan empire and the exaltation of Israel, and the return of YHWH to Zion to judge and save. These are the motifs that emerge from that great kingdom-prophecy, Isaiah 40-55, and from numerous psalms and other parts of the Hebrew scriptures. And, as Josephus makes clear, in Jesus’ day the conviction that their “only Ruler and Master” was God was a particular mark of the revolutionaries (Ant. 18:23).

For a second-Temple Jew, then, the coming of the kingdom was not about a private existentialist or Gnostic experience but about public events. At its narrowest, it was about the liberation of Israel. At its broadest, it was about the coming of God’s justice and liberation for the whole cosmos. Thus, if you had said to a first-century Jew, “The kingdom of God is here,” and had explained yourself by speaking of a new spiritual experience, a new sense of forgiveness, or an exciting reordering of your private religious interiority, he or she might well have said that they were glad you had had this experience, but why did you refer to it as the kingdom of God? This, then, is the second step of this first stage in the argument.

The third step is to put these two together and to notice the contrast. It is clear that, whatever the early Christians said, the kingdom of God had not come in the way that first-century Jews had been imagining. Israel had not been liberated, the Temple was not rebuilt, and—looking wider in the cosmos—evil, injustice, pain, and death were still on the rampage. The question presses, then: Why did the early Christians say that the kingdom of God *had* come?

One answer obviously would be this: The early Christians changed the meaning of the phrase so radically so that it now referred not to a political state of affairs but to an internal or spiritual one. They had taken the apocalyptic meaning current in their world and had demythologized, dejudaized, spiritualized, or Hellenized it. But this is simply untrue to early Christianity. The early Christians acted as if the Jewish-style kingdom of God was really present: they organized their life as if they really were the returned-from-exile people, the people of the new covenant. When they spoke of a new internal or “spiritual” reality, they used the language not of the kingdom of God, but of the new heart, the indwelling of the spirit, and so forth.

The historical question is therefore posed: What on earth (and I mean that on *earth*) would have caused them to act, speak, and think this way? Why, indeed, did they *not* continue the sort of kingdom-revolution they had imagined Jesus was going to lead? How do we explain the fact that early Christianity was neither a nationalist Jewish movement nor a private existential experience? How do we explain the fact that it is asserted, from within the Jewish worldview, that the *eschaton* had arrived, even though it did not look like they had imagined it would? The early Christian answer was, of course, that Jesus had been raised from the dead. That was why they said that the kingdom had come and that the new age had dawned.

This brings us to the second stage in the argument.

A Messianic Movement

I have argued elsewhere that Christianity was from the first a messianic movement.⁴ Let me summarize the case as the first step in this second stage of my argument.

To begin with, the earliest Christian sources that we possess speak of Jesus as Messiah. According to Acts, this assertion was central to the early proclamation that God had made Jesus “both Lord and Christ” (3:36). As for Paul, I have argued elsewhere that Jesus’ messiahship remained central and explicit for him.⁵ But even if you insist that by the time of Paul the word *Christos* had become simply a proper name with a few distant messianic memories attached to it, you cannot evade the conclusion that if the former Pharisee Paul, within thirty years of Jesus’ death, was referring to Jesus as *Christos*—and especially if he was doing so without giving a thought to the Jewish meaning of that word—that only shows how firmly within the earliest tradition the idea of Jesus’ messiahship had taken hold. How do we explain all this? Why did they say that Jesus was Messiah?

Various scholars have long recognized that the resurrection alone cannot explain why the early Christians thought of Jesus as Messiah. If someone other than Jesus had been raised from the dead, there is no reason to suppose that his or her contemporaries would have thought them to be the Messiah. We must, therefore, seek the

reason in Jesus' messianic execution, crucified as he was with the words "king of the Jews" above his head. In *Jesus and the Victory of God*, I have argued that this, in turn, forces us to look further back and to see some of Jesus' key symbolic actions, notably his action in the Temple, and some of his key riddles and parables, as both implicitly and explicitly messianic.⁶ (Let me stress, in case of confusion, that in second-Temple Judaism the word "messiah" carried no connotations of what we would call "divinity.") Again, even if you disagree and want to insist that Jesus came to be thought of as Messiah only at his resurrection, that, if anything, would tighten the screw of my argument still further.

My point is—to move to the second step in this stage of my argument—a first-century Jew, faced with the crucifixion of a would-be messiah, or even of a prophet who had led a significant following, would *not* normally conclude that this person was the Messiah and that the kingdom had com. He or she would normally conclude that he was not and that it had not.

There were, to be sure, several variations on Jewish messianic belief in this period. *None of them envisaged a Messiah who would die at the hands of the pagans.* On the contrary, where Jewish expectations of a Messiah did exist, they regularly possessed a dual focus. In a line of tradition stretching from David to Bar-Kochba, including the Maccabees and Herod, we find that the king would have to defeat the pagans, and that he would have to rebuild (or at least to cleanse) the Temple. The two actions would, of course, go together: as long as the pagans remained undefeated, YHWH had not returned to Zion, presumably because his house was not ready. If a messiah was killed by the pagans, especially if he had not rebuilt the Temple or liberated Israel, that was the surest sign that he was another in the long line of *false* messiahs.

It is surely clear what follows. If the messiah you had been following was killed by the pagans, you were faced with a choice between two courses of action. You could give up on the whole idea of revolution and abandon the dream of liberation. Some went that route, notably, of course, the rabbinic movement as a whole after 135 AD. Or you could find yourself a new messiah, if possible from the same family as the late lamented one. Some went that route: witness the continuing movement that ran from Judas the Galilean in 6 AD to his sons or grandsons in the 50s; to another descendant, Menahem, during the war of 66-70; and to another descendant, Eleazor, who was the leader of the ill-fated Sicarii on Masada in 73.⁷

Once again, let us be clear. If, after the death of Simon bar-Giora in Titus's triumph in Rome, or if, after the death of Simeon ben-Kosiba in 135, you had claimed that Simon, or Simeon, really was the Messiah, you would invite a fairly sharp response from the average first-century Jew. If, by way of explanation, you said that you had had a strong sense of Simon, or Simeon, as still being with you, still supporting and leading you, the kindest response you might expect would be that their angel or spirit was still communicating with you—not that he had been raised from the dead. So far as we know, the followers of the first-century messianic or quasi-messianic movements were fanatically committed to the cause. They, if anybody, might be expected to suffer from cognitive dissonance after the death of their great leader. In no other case, however, right across the century before Jesus and the century after him, do we hear of any Jewish group saying that their executed leader had been raised again from the dead.

So—and here is the third step in the second stage of my argument—granted that Jesus of Nazareth was certainly crucified as a rebel king, it is extremely strange that the early Christians not only insisted that he was actually the Messiah, but they reordered their worldview, their praxis, their stories, symbols, and theology around this belief.

They had, after all, the two normal options open to them. They could simply have gone back to their fishing, glad to have escaped Jerusalem with their lives. They could have switched to a different tack, given up on messianism (as did the post-135 rabbis), and gone in for some form of private religion instead, whether of intensified Torah-observance, private *gnosis*, or something else. They clearly did not do that. Anything less like a private religion than going around the pagan world saying that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel would be hard to imagine.

Equally, and perhaps even more interestingly, they could have found themselves a new messiah from among Jesus' blood relatives. This is not, I think, normally considered. It deserves to be. We know from various sources that Jesus' relatives were important and well-known within the early church. One of the closest, his brother James, though not part of the movement during Jesus' lifetime, actually appears to have become the anchorman in Jerusalem while Peter and Paul went off around the world (Acts 12:17; 15:13, 21:18; Gal. 1:19, 2:9). James was widely regarded in the early church as the person at the center, geographically and theologically. Yet—and this is the vital clue, like Sherlock Holmes's dog that did not bark in the night—*nobody in early Christianity ever dreamed of saying that James was the Messiah*. Nothing would have been more natural, especially on the analogy of the family of Judas the Galilean. Yet James was simply known as "the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19; cf. Mark 6:3).

We must, then, ask once again: Why did Christianity even begin, let alone continue, as a messianic movement, when its Messiah so obviously not only did not do what a Messiah was supposed to do but suffered a fate which ought to have showed conclusively that he could not possibly have been Israel's anointed? Why did this group of first-century Jews, who had cherished messianic hopes and focused them on Jesus of Nazareth, not only continue to believe that he was the Messiah despite his execution, but actively announce him as such in the pagan as well as the Jewish world, cheerfully redrawing the picture of messiahship around him but refusing to abandon it? Their answer, consistently throughout the evidence we possess, was that Jesus, following his execution on a charge of being a would-be Messiah, had been raised from the dead.

Before we can examine what they meant by this, we must look at the third, and clearly the most important, of the three stages within this present argument.

A Resurrection Movement

Christianity began as a resurrection movement. As I have already remarked, there is no evidence for a form of early Christianity in which the resurrection was not a central belief, as it were, bolted on to Christianity at the edge. It was the central driving force, informing the whole movement. In particular, we can see woven into the earliest Christian theology we possess—that of Paul, of course—the belief that the resurrection had in principle occurred and

that the followers of Jesus had to reorder their lives, their narratives, their symbols, and their praxis accordingly (see, classically, Rom. 6:3-11).

I want here to note one interesting phenomenon in particular. This thinking about the resurrection has a remarkable precision and consistency. Unlike the Jewish beliefs we glanced at earlier, from the very beginning Christian re-use of resurrection language is astonishingly free of vague and generalized speculation. It is crisp and clear: resurrection means going through death and out the other side into a new mode of existence. This whole position is comprehensible only within the thought-world of Judaism, but it is much more precise than anything that non-Christian Judaism had at that stage produced.

Christianity, then, began as a resurrection movement. That is the first step of this third stage in my argument.

The second step builds on what I was saying in the first part of this lecture about Jewish expectations of the resurrection. As we saw, “resurrection” in second-Temple Judaism functioned within a controlling narrative about the exile and restoration, and about the suffering and vindication of the martyrs. Let me remind you again: it began life as a metaphor for the return from exile, the renewal of the covenant, and the cleansing of Israel from her sins. “Resurrection” was referred to in various ways, and it took its place within quite a wide range of speculation about the future of humankind in general and Israel in particular after their actual bodily death. The resurrection of the dead was thus both a symbol for the coming of the new ages, and itself, taken literally, one central element in the package: when YHWH restored the fortunes of his people, then of course Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, together with all God’s people down to and including the martyrs who had died in the cause, would be reembodyed, raised to new life in God’s new world. Where second-Temple Jews believed in resurrection then, that belief concerned on the one hand the reembodyment of formerly dead human beings, and on the other the inauguration of the new age, the new covenant, in which all the righteous dead would be raised simultaneously. Resurrection meant both that the dead would be alive again with new or renewed bodies and that the Age to Come had at least been inaugurated.

If therefore at any time in this period you had said to a Jew, “The resurrection has occurred!” you would have received the puzzled (or irritated) response that it obviously had not, since the patriarchs, prophets, and martyrs were not walking around alive again, and since the restoration spoken of in Ezekiel 37 clearly had not occurred either—not to mention the great prophecies of Isaiah and the rest. And if, by way of explanation, you had said that you did not mean all that, that what you meant was that you had had a wonderful new sense of divine healing and forgiveness, or that you believed the former leader of your movement was alive in the presence of God following his shameful torture and death, your interlocutor might have congratulated you on having such an experience, and discussed with you such a belief, but he or she would still have been puzzled as to why you would talk of “the resurrection of the dead” in referring to either of these things. These things imply were not what “the resurrection of the dead” was about.

Nevertheless—and this is the third step in this third stage of the argument—although, as we have stressed, the new age had *not* dawned in the way that first century Jews imagined, and

the resurrection of all God's people had *not* taken place, yet the very earliest church persisted in declaring roundly not only that Jesus was raised from the dead but also that "the resurrection of the dead" had already occurred. What is more, as we have observed, members of the church busily set about redesigning their worldview—their characteristic praxis, their controlling stories, their symbolic universe, and their basic theology—around this new fixed point. They behaved, in other words, as though the new age *had* already arrived. That was the inner logic of the Gentile mission: since God had now done for Israel what he was going to do for Israel the Gentiles would at least share the blessing (Isa. 66:18-23; Zech. 14:16). They did not behave as though they had had a new sort of religious experience or as if their former leader was alive and well in the presence of God, whether as an angel or a spirit or whatever. The only explanation for their behavior, their stories, their symbols, and their theology is that they really believed Jesus had been bodily raised from the dead. This conclusion is so well grounded that, today, even those who would like to insist that the body of Jesus in fact remained decomposing in the tomb agree that the early Christians *believed* him to have been bodily raised, leaving an empty tomb behind him.

Conclusion: The Questions and the Options

I have argued that Christianity began as a recognizably first-century Jewish movement: it was a kingdom- of-God movement, a messianic movement, and a resurrection movement. The Jewish context for all these movements indicated certain expectations that decidedly had not been fulfilled. Indeed the crucifixion of Jesus was the symbol not merely of hope deferred but of hope crushed and trampled upon. The historian is therefore bound to seek an explanation not only as to why early Christianity began in the first place, but also as to why it took the shape it did. In the final part of this lecture, let me quickly review some of the options that have been canvassed within the debate.

There are, to begin with, some fairly well-known false trails. Some, for example, have suggested that Jesus did not really die on the cross. Against all the proponents of this so-called "swoon" theory, as it has often been called, we must stress that the Romans knew how to kill people. The reappearance of a battered and exhausted Jesus would hardly have suggested that he had gone through death and out the other side, that the kingdom of God had indeed come, that "the resurrection" had occurred, and that he was indeed the Messiah who had defeated God's enemies and would rebuild the Temple.

Equally, there are plenty of people who produce wild and fantastic theories to explain that Jesus did not really rise from the dead at all or leave an empty tomb behind him. I think of a book called *The Tomb of God*, published two years ago, which ends up saying that the bones of Jesus now lie in a sealed tomb in southwestern France.⁸

Among the more serious objections to Jesus' resurrection—and perhaps the most famous in this century—has been that of Rudolf Bultmann. In a much-discussed passage, Bultmann asserts that the resurrection-language of the early church was used to denote not a separate event from the crucifixion but the early disciples' faith that the crucifixion was not a tragic defeat but the divine act of salvation. Easter is thus about the arising, not of Jesus, but of the faith of the early church.⁹

My whole argument thus far tells very heavily against this. If we are to think in first-century Jewish terms, it is impossible to conceive what sort of religious or spiritual experience someone could have that would make them say that the kingdom of God had arrived when it clearly had not, that a crucified leader was the Messiah when he obviously was not, or that the resurrection occurred last month when it obviously did not. However strong the disciples' sense may have been that Jesus had been vindicated, that they had been forgiven, or whatever, they would still not have said he had been raised from the dead. They might, perhaps, have written a new version of 2 Maccabees 7. They might have suggested that Jesus had predicted his own resurrection. They would not have said that it had actually happened yet.

This failure to think in first-century terms also vitiates those who have offered variations on the Bultmannian scheme. Edward Schillebeeckx, for instance, declares that when the disciples went to the tomb their minds were so filled with light that it did not matter whether there was a body there or not. What happened in the Easter appearances was a conversion to Jesus as the Christ, who now came to them as the light of the world, and this was the "illumination" by which the disciples were "justified."¹⁰ Schillebeeckx fits out Bultmann's suggestion with a more precise one; that the disciples, who were overcome by deep feelings of guilt at having run away and let Jesus down, experienced on Easter morning a wonderful sense of the forgiveness of God and the continuing presence of Jesus. This then became the start of the characteristically Christian experience knowing the forgiveness of God and/or knowing the presence of Jesus.¹¹

The trouble with this is that if you had said to a first-century Jew that you had had a wonderful experience of the forgiveness (or the love and grace) of God, she or he would have been delighted for you. But if you had gone on to say that the kingdom had come, that a crucified leader was the Messiah or that the resurrection had occurred, they would have been deeply puzzled if not downright offended. This language is simply not about private experiences, even communicable private experiences, of forgiveness. It is about eschatology, about something happening within history that resulted in a world being now a very different place. Neither Bultmann nor Schillebeeckx can explain from the texts the rise of Christianity as we know it.

A further twist has been given to Bultmann's hypothesis by Gerd Lüdemann.¹² He suggests that Peter was so deeply grieved over Jesus' death that he experienced what, as we noted earlier, people in such a state often report: a sense of the loving presence of the recently deceased person, perhaps even a sense of him speaking and reassuring him. Peter then, so Lüdemann asks us to believe, communicated this experience to the others, who were spontaneously filled with joy at the thought that Jesus was still alive.¹³ Meanwhile Paul underwent the opposite sort of hallucination: having been vehemently opposed to the new movement, he was overcome by guilt and experienced a guilt-induced fantasy which he, too, was able to share with others to remarkably powerful effects.¹⁴

My response to this proposal is (a) that it requires enormous credulity to suppose that, even allowing Peter and Paul to have had such fantasies or hallucinations they would have generated more than a passing comment of sympathy among their colleagues or contemporaries; (b) that psychological theories of this sort—about people two thousand years ago in a different

culture—are at best unprovable and at worst wildly fantastic. But, and most important, (c) the proposal simply does not make sense within the world or first-century Judaism.

As we see from the story of Rhoda in Acts 12, first-century Jews knew about post-mortem visitations from recently deceased friends, and they already had Language systems for speaking of such phenomena. “It must be his angel,” they said, when they thought they were having a visit of just this sort from Peter. They did not say that Peter had been raised from the dead. To put it another way, if we had been members of that group in Acts 12, and if we had been made aware of a recently executed Peter as a ghostly or spiritual presence with us, we would have concluded, certainly, that Peter was now alive with God. But we still also would have thought that we would have to claim his corpse for burial the next day, and we still would have believed that it remained for him actually to be raised, along with the rest of God’s people, at the last day.

You see, it would have been very natural for first-century Jews, especially if they had belonged to a kingdom-of-God movement already, to say of a leader who had paid the ultimate penalty at the hands of the authorities, that his soul was in the band of God, that he was alive to God, that he had been exalted to paradise, and that he was therefore among the righteous who had been unjustly put to death but who would rise again to rule the world in God’s good time. (This is, of course, exactly what Wisdom 3:1-9 *does* say?) And if Jesus’ followers had indeed had a sense that he was alive in a nonphysical way, and even that he was still present with them in some fashion, this is how they would have expressed it. But in so doing they would not have been claiming (to stress the point again) that the *eschaton*, the longed-for kingdom of God, had now arrived; they would *not* have been saying that their crucified leader was the Messiah; and above all they would not have been saying that he had been raised from the dead or that “the resurrection of the dead” had now occurred.

In particular, we have no reason to suppose that after the crucifixion of a would-be messiah anyone would suppose that he had been exalted to a place either of world rulership or divine lordship. Nobody, so far as we know, ever suggested that this was the case after the deaths of Judas the Galilean, Simon bar-Giora, or Simeon ben-Kosiba. Actually, such a suggestion would most likely have been regarded as at best ridiculous and at worst scandalous. The failure of such men to lead a *successful* messianic movement debarred them from further consideration as candidates for such a position. Even if someone had made such a suggestion, however, they would not then have gone on to say that this person had been “raised from the dead.” Belief in exaltation *alone* would not lead, in the world of first-century Judaism, to belief in resurrection. If, by contrast, we suppose that the followers of a crucified would-be messiah *first* came to believe that he had been bodily raised from the dead, then we can trace a clear line by which they subsequently would have come to believe that he must be the Messiah. And if he was the Messiah, then he was also the world ruler promised in Psalm 89 and Daniel 7, and thus he was exalted over the world, and so on. All our texts suggest that this actually was the train of thought that the early Christians followed.

It will be obvious that I have dealt with only a tiny fraction of the theories that have been advanced as to what happened at Easter, but I hope I have said enough to show that the

proponents of any theory that the body of Jesus remained in the tomb while the early Christians said the resurrection had occurred have a formidable task ahead of them, simply in terms of first-century history. What we find, rather, is the universal early Christian claim that Jesus had gone, as it were, through death and out the other side, that he was not just in some intermediate state or wine disembodied existence, but that his body had been transformed in a way for which they, his followers, had been quite unprepared, but with which they had had to come to terms. And they gave this as the reason why they believed his kingdom-announcement had indeed reached its climax, its fulfillment, in his death and resurrection. They gave this as the reason why they continued to regard him as Messiah despite his shameful death. They gave this as the reason for saying that “the resurrection” had in principle already happened. What is more, they wove this belief so firmly into their theology, their praxis, their stories, and their symbols that (unless we are prepared to stop writing history and start writing fantasy instead) we cannot envisage their communal life without it.

I propose, therefore, as the result of this broad-canvas treatment of second- Temple Judaism and early Christianity, that there is in fact no other solution to the historical problem than to conclude that something remarkable had happened to the body of Jesus. No other bridge will carry the historian across the river from one pillar to the other.

But what was it that happened, and how did the first Christians describe it? That is the question that will occupy us in the second lecture, as we look in more detail at the actual rise of Christianity in the light of the key texts from Paul and the gospels.

Endnotes

1 See N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 2: *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

2 See further N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1: *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 189-99.

3 For further information on the Sadducees’ denial of the resurrection, see Wright, *New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 211-212.

4 See Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 309-10.

5 See N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 41-55.

6 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, chapter 11.

7 See Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.*, David Smith, trans. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989 [2nd edition, revised, 1976]) 331-32.

8 Richard Andrews, *The Tomb of God: The Body of Jesus and the Solution to a 2000-Year-Old Mystery* (Boston and London: Little, Brown, 1996).

9 See Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology: The Mythological Element in the Message of the New Testament and the Problem of its Re-interpretation,” in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, Hans Werner Bartsch, ed., Reginald H. Fuller, trans. (London: SPCK, 1953), 38-43.

10 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, Huber Hoskins, trans. (New York: Crossroad, 1979), 384.

11 Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 380-97.

12 Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*, John Bowden, trans. (London: SCM, 1994).

13 Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, 95-100, 176-77.

14 Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, 82-84.

A8.1 - The Late Twentieth-Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses to Jesus' Resurrection

By Gary Habermas, Originally published in the Trinity Journal / 2001 (TRINJ 22NS (2001) 179-196)

www.garyhabermas.com/articles/southeastern_theological_review/minimal-facts-methodology_08-02-2012.htm

Introduction

The last twenty years or so have witnessed the inevitable march of new theological trends. Gone are scholars like Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr. In their place, less centralized currents have captured the spotlight. Through it all, many publications on the subject of Jesus' resurrection have continued to appear. As the center of Christian theology, this would seem to be inevitable. Yet, to the careful observer, some different tendencies are becoming apparent.

It could be argued that the most captivating theological topic at present, at least in the United States, is the historical Jesus. Scores of publications by major scholars have appeared since the mid-1970s, bringing Jesus and his Palestinian setting to our attention. More recently, the apostle Paul has been the subject of numerous other influential studies. Almost unavoidably, these trends add to the opportunities to discuss the resurrection and its meaning.

Over the last two years, I have tracked more than twelve hundred publications on the subject of the resurrection of Jesus. Each source appeared between 1975 and the present, with the vast majority written by critical scholars. Out of this contemporary milieu, my purpose here will be to outline what appears to be a growing, although still fairly limited, trend. In recent years, some of the old, naturalistic theories that rejected the historicity of Jesus' resurrection have reappeared after a lengthy hiatus.

This essay concerns some of these most recent scholarly trends regarding the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. I will note the emergence of almost a dozen different alternative theses that are variously suggested or favored by more than forty different scholars, some of whom endorse more than one theory. While some of these works are lesser known or more popularly written, others contain suggestions or assertions held by highly influential authors. There is an interdisciplinary flavor here, as well. Most of the critics are theologians or NT scholars, while a number of them are philosophers, along with a few others from diverse fields.

My effort here will attempt to categorize and list these natural hypotheses, including naming two alternative proposals that have so far eluded any generally recognized appellation. Hopefully, even this broad scholarly demarcation will serve the purpose of calling attention to the current skeptical trend, which may become more helpful if the recent trickle becomes a torrent.

I. A Brief Historical Context For Naturalistic Theories

What is a naturalistic theory concerning the resurrection of Jesus? Drawn from a host of philosophical backgrounds, the basic idea is to suggest an alternative explanation in place of divine causation. Thus, a naturalistic theory is an assertion something like this: "Jesus didn't rise from the dead. What really happened is (fill in the blank)."

Notice that my explanation requires that the notion of Jesus' resurrection be replaced with a specific variety of natural substitutes. The seeming supernatural portion of the religious claim is explained in terms of a natural occurrence. Thus, a comment along the lines of a simple denial ("There's no way that events like resurrections ever take place!") does not qualify as a naturalistic theory. Affirmations can be made as easily as denials can. In short, the blank needs to be filled in with an alternative explanation.

Some may assume that these naturalistic hypotheses regarding the resurrection have always been very popular in scholarly circles right up until the present, but this is not the case. While there have been many examples throughout the centuries,¹ besides David Hume's influential argument that natural explanations are always more likely than supernatural ones,² the golden age of such theories came during the reign of nineteenth century German liberalism. Albert Schweitzer lists many examples in his classic volume, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.³

As with the larger question of miracles, the predominant liberal approach was to accept fairly large portions of the gospel accounts as historical, while presenting rationalized alternatives to unwanted portions. Liberal irritation was chiefly provoked by two sorts of biblical data: dogmatic theology and supernatural reports. With the latter, the texts were generally not taken at face value; an alternative sequence of events was supplied.

For example, this approach of accepting a fair amount of gospel content while rejecting the supernatural elements can be seen in Ernest Renan's famous *Vie de Jesus*. Renan generally tended to favor the fourth gospel's account of Jesus, informing his readers more than once of the general accuracy of this gospel's resurrection account.⁴ In the French edition, a footnote by the author also points out that, in the fourth gospel, Mary Magdalene was "le seul témoin primitif de la resurrection"--the only original witness to the resurrection. Having thus identified her, Renan a moment later tells us that it was Mary's love and enthusiasm that caused her to hallucinate, giving the world a resurrected God!⁵ Thus even Renan's favorite gospel is countered when it comes to miracles.

However, other liberals like David Strauss challenged these approaches, favoring a second, more radical strategy. He treated the gospel texts as if they were largely mythical compositions containing very little history. Such a method thereby questioned or rejected "[a] large portion" of the gospel records.⁶ In the process, Strauss created more of a dispute than he had perhaps envisaged. Besides repudiating the historicity of miracles, this minority trend even undermined the predominantly historical emphasis of his colleagues!⁷

One trend in German liberalism was that these scholars criticized the approaches to the gospels taken by their fellow liberals. Additionally, the naturalistic alternatives to Jesus' resurrection favored by some were also frequently rejected by others. For example, David Strauss belittled the swoon theory held by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Heinrich Paulus, and others. Strauss concluded that such a scenario would utterly fail to account for the disciples' passionate belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead as the Lord of life.⁸ Schweitzer noted that these rationalistic approaches suffered the "death-blow at the hands of Strauss."⁹ On the other hand, Schleiermacher, Paulus, and later Theodor Keim took aim at subjective responses like Strauss's hallucination hypothesis.¹⁰

After the demise of German liberalism, usually dated shortly after the termination of World War I, the next few decades of the twentieth century witnessed a decreasing interest in naturalistic alternative theories to Jesus' resurrection. There were several reasons for this, not the least of which was that theological studies had entered what might be called a "No Quest" period. Due to the influence of Schweitzer's major study on the historical Jesus, along with Martin Kähler's *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* in 1896,¹¹ plus the growing influence of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann,¹² historical Jesus studies were severely curtailed.

During this time, it was often the case that any historical emphases, even naturalistic ones, were shunned. It might be said, then, that alternative responses to the resurrection were ruled out by the same tendency that disparaged any significant value being placed on historical studies of Jesus. But it was also well-recognized that there were significant factual problems with these challenges to the resurrection.

In the second half of the twentieth century, theological trends began moving in another direction. Even Bultmann's students argued that at least some historical knowledge was indispensable for the Christian faith. Ernst Käsemann's famous 1954 essay "Das Problem des historischen Jesus"¹³ and James M. Robinson's call for a New Quest¹⁴ marked a very limited interest in historical matters. But as scholars like Wolfhart Pannenberg moved to the forefront of theological discussions, history again regained a place of prominence.¹⁵ Over at least the last twenty years, the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus has dominated the theological landscape.¹⁶

For most of the century, then, critical scholarship has largely rejected the naturalistic approaches to the resurrection. In fact, they have usually done so in a wholesale manner. After noting that "the older criticism took some strange paths," Karl Barth named some of these alternative hypotheses. Then he summed up the matter: "To-day we rightly turn up our nose at this" because of the problems with the thesis. As a result, "these explanations . . . have now gone out of currency."¹⁷ While discussing several naturalistic approaches, Raymond Brown concluded:

The criticism of today does not follow the paths taken by the criticism of the past. No longer respectable are the crude theories.... Occasionally some new mutation of the "plot" approach will briefly capture the public fancy, but serious scholars pay little attention to these fictional reconstructions.¹⁸

This aspect of recent thought is actually quite amazing. Theologians across a very wide conceptual spectrum have agreed in rejecting naturalistic approaches as explanations for the earliest Christians' belief in Jesus' resurrection. Even a sampling of these scholars is impressive.¹⁹

In the last decade or so, several influential theologians and philosophers have continued to concur with these assessments. James D. G. Dunn judges that "alternative interpretations of the data fail to provide a more satisfactory explanation" than the Christian proclamation that God raised Jesus from the dead.²⁰ Steven T. Davis agrees:

All of the alternative hypotheses with which I am familiar are historically weak; some are so weak that they collapse of their own weight once spelled out. . . . the alternative theories that have been proposed are not only weaker but far weaker at explaining the available historical evidence.²¹

Richard Swinburne concludes: "alternative hypotheses have always seemed to me to give far less satisfactory accounts of the historical evidence than does the traditional account."²²

Still, an unusually large number of positive reassessments of naturalistic hypotheses were published in the last ten to twenty years, often put forward by influential scholars. No new evidence favoring these alternative responses has emerged. After a lengthy lapse, it is difficult to account for this trend.

II. The Present Scene

The latest research on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection reveals other very intriguing trends. Perhaps more firmly than ever, the vast majority of contemporary scholars are agreed that the earliest followers of Jesus at least believed that they had experienced their risen Lord. Even radical scholars rarely question this fact. It may well be one of the two or three most widely established particulars about Jesus' life. Therefore, any attempt to explain what happened in natural terms must be able to adequately account for this early conviction.

As Reginald Fuller remarked years ago, Jesus' disciples believing that he was raised from the dead "is one of the indisputable facts of history." That they had experiences that they thought were Jesus' appearances to them "is a fact upon which both believer and unbeliever may agree."²³ Later, Fuller pointed out that these experiences must be adequately explained: it "therefore requires that the historian postulate some other event over and above Good Friday, an event which is not itself the 'rise of the Easter faith' but the cause of the Easter faith."²⁴

James D. G. Dunn speaks similarly: "It is almost impossible to dispute that at the historical roots of Christianity lie some visionary experiences of the first Christians, who understood them as appearances of Jesus, raised by God from the dead."²⁵

And they were not merely speaking about an internal realization or conviction: "they clearly meant that something had happened to Jesus himself. God had raised him, not merely reassured them."²⁶

Even more skeptical scholars often grant the grounds for the appearances. Norman Perrin concluded, "The more we study the tradition with regard to the appearances, the firmer the rock begins to appear upon which they are based."²⁷ Helmut Koester concurs:

We are on much firmer ground with respect to the appearances of the risen Jesus and their effect. . . . that Jesus also appeared to others (Peter, Mary Magdalene, James) cannot very well be questioned.²⁸

How we explain the nature of these early experiences, then, is the chief issue. Peter Carnley sets up the issue rather nicely:

Meanwhile, there is no doubt that the first disciples interpreted the Easter visions or appearances as signs of the heavenly presence of Christ. Why they should be minded to do this with the degree of conviction that is so clearly reflected in the early testimony is what we must seek to explain.²⁹

The different sorts of explanations can perhaps be categorized briefly, at the expense of some oversimplification. The major disagreement, of course, comes from those scholars who hold that natural hypotheses can explain the data better than the thesis that Jesus appeared alive after his death. Of these natural suppositions, some appeal to the earliest Christians' subjective, internal states, while others prefer objective solutions involving external events and conditions. I will call these two perspectives the naturalistic subjective and the naturalistic objective theses, respectively.

Similarly, of those who think that Jesus was really raised from the dead and appeared to his followers, some prefer manifestations that did not involve Jesus' physical body. Others think that Jesus appeared in an external, bodily form.³⁰ But what they both have in common is the conviction that Jesus really appeared to his followers. So I will call these the supernatural subjective and the supernatural objective theses, respectively. We will have much less to say in this essay concerning these supernatural categories, since neither involves natural explanations in order to account for the central phenomena, which are our main concern here.

It is my contention that, while not approaching large proportions in terms of the total number of commentators, we are at present witnessing a noteworthy comeback of scholars who espouse naturalistic hypotheses to account for Jesus' resurrection. Some of us have been predicting this for years, and so we are not really surprised. Although we have seen comparatively little of this activity for perhaps several decades, attitudes do change.

III. Charting Natural Hypotheses

The last couple of decades have produced more than forty suggestions³¹ favoring about a dozen different alternative scenarios to account for the NT report that Jesus was raised from the dead. With few exceptions, these theses are paralleled in the older liberal literature and elsewhere, although they occasionally include new twists. Many of the suggestions are expressed in fairly popular works, while others are published for scholarly consumption. Some are no more than brief mentions, while others are developed in detail. These natural hypotheses are of both the subjective and objective varieties. My purpose here is simply to note some of these trends.

A. Naturalistic Subjective Theories

As with later nineteenth century liberalism, so today some of the most popular alternatives to belief in Jesus' resurrection are that the internal states of the earliest Christians were such that they became convinced that Jesus was alive, even though nothing happened to Jesus himself. Perhaps this approach is largely prompted by the trends that we just noted: the critical community most frequently acknowledges that the disciples at least believed firmly that the risen Jesus had appeared to them. What could give rise to such a conviction? In this general

category, two major answers include hallucinations (often called subjective visions) and what I will call the illumination hypothesis.

After a decades-long hiatus, the subjective vision theory is making a comeback and is again the most popular natural response to Jesus' resurrection. The most influential version is that argued by German theologian Gerd Lüdemann. After a study of the major resurrection texts in the NT, Lüdemann appeals to "stimulus," "religious intoxication," and "enthusiasm" as the states of mind leading to the visions seen by Peter, as well as by others who concluded that Jesus was alive. Lüdemann prefers to speak of these experiences as visions rather than hallucinations, but he is clear that nothing literally happened to Jesus himself.³²

Another influential version is held by Michael Goulder, who employs subjective visions or hallucinations in a more limited fashion than Lüdemann. For Goulder, these psychological states of mind ("conversion visions") particularly explain Peter's experience and Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus and are rather typical of religious conversions even today.³³ Closer to Goulder, Jack Kent employs grief hallucinations and conversion disorder to account for Jesus' appearances.³⁴

Other recent discussions in German circles have touched on a related thesis. Samuel Vollenweider has argued that in the history of religions, group visions are quite rare.³⁵ But Ingo Broer notes a decades-old wartime story involving a reported vision by a group of German soldiers. Yet in the very next sentence, Broer questions the report.³⁶ He concludes his essay while still leaving some question regarding the veridical status of the resurrection appearances.³⁷

Other examples of the subjective vision thesis have also emerged, but without the details provided by Lüdemann, Goulder, and Kent. A few scholars have built on some of the ideas of Carl Jung and his "collective unconsciousness," with visions providing the catalyst for early Christian belief.³⁸ Philosophers Antony Flew³⁹ and John Hick⁴⁰ also prefer the hallucination thesis. Historian Michael Grant thinks that this is a possible explanation of Paul's conversion experience.⁴¹ Jewish scholar Dan Cohn-Sherbok favors such an explanation,⁴² while John Barclay seems at least open to it.⁴³ Somewhat distressingly, even though Carnley supports the occurrence of the resurrection, he considers the subjective vision scenario to be a very difficult one to answer on the grounds of the historical data.⁴⁴

What I have called the illumination thesis argues that, through some nondescript internal process, the disciples became convinced that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Rarely are many details provided. Almost always, the apostle Peter is the key. His insights provided the initial impetus, and his enthusiastic encouragement was the engine that powered and persuaded his friends. As a result, the contagious conviction that Jesus was alive spread to the others. Some idea of autosuggestion or other form of transmittable faith is thereby suggested.

Championed by Willi Marxsen in a day when his treatment was a rare but perennial example that dismissed the historical resurrection, his was the prototypical position that espoused such an inner enlightenment on Peter's part, leading to the belief of the other disciples.⁴⁵ In a later volume, he continued to hold that Peter's faith was the primary motivation for the other disciples'

faith, although Marxsen concluded that he did not know whether this vision(s) of Jesus was subjective or objective.⁴⁶ There is a marked sense here in which the fading influence of Rudolf Bultmann can be seen.⁴⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx expressed similar thoughts, without necessarily denying the resurrection appearances.⁴⁸

Don Cupitt expresses some reluctance to outline precisely the nature of the resurrection appearances. But like Marxsen, he is also much more interested in the disciples' faith than in any event, for (contrary to the vast majority of recent commentators) Cupitt thinks that the former precedes the latter. Through "a shocking flash of recognition everything fell into place and they saw the meaning of this man."⁴⁹

Thomas Sheehan perhaps supplies the most details concerning the new understanding of Jesus arrived at by Peter and the other disciples. In a flash of revelatory "insight," they understood that Jesus had been exalted and glorified by God. So, in some "ecstatic" occurrence that could have been as "ordinary as reflecting," Peter and the others began proclaiming that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Like Marxsen and Cupitt, we do not really know what happened, although Sheehan is quite clear that no resurrection took place. Rather, all we have is the interpretation of what Peter and the other disciples experienced.⁵⁰

John Shelby Spong's writings on the subject have created quite an uproar. Again Peter is the key individual. It was he, not Jesus, who "was resurrected to new life, a new being." Standing "as if in a trance," Peter was "suddenly aglow with life." But there were no visions, hallucinations, or anything to do with the real world. No one else in the room (including Peter) really saw Jesus. He then helped to open the eyes of the other followers of Jesus.⁵¹ In a later work, Spong provides the disclaimer that we really cannot know what happened. He also removes Peter's transformation to about six months after Jesus' death.⁵²

Without resorting to the full ramification of the illumination thesis, Rudolf Pesch's early work is perhaps the major example of a few scholars who thought that Jesus' pre-crucifixion teachings and authority were largely sufficient to help his followers survive the crucifixion and retain their faith.⁵³ Pesch later changed this position, granting that Jesus' appearances could be established by careful research.⁵⁴ However, largely due to the influence exerted by Pesch's earlier position, scholars like Hansjürgen Verweyen continued to emphasize the part that the pre-Easter message of Jesus played in preparing his disciples. Still, Verweyen is more positive towards the importance of the disciples' visionary experiences after Jesus' death.⁵⁵

These two hypotheses--hallucinations (or subjective visions) and what I have called the illumination thesis--are the chief examples of subjective naturalistic theories. There has definitely been an increase in the number of scholars who have held these positions during the last ten to fifteen years.

B. Naturalistic Objective Theories

Recent attempts have also been made to explain away the NT accounts of Jesus' resurrection in terms of external states and conditions. This category involves more options and, not surprisingly, includes a wider range of scenarios.

The swoon theory has reappeared recently in a few places, although seldom among specialists. One of the only exceptions is the brief article by Margaret Lloyd Davies and Trevor A. Lloyd Davies. It develops the hypothesis that Jesus lost consciousness, causing the bystanders to conclude that he was dead. When taken down from the cross, he revived and was treated. Surprisingly, the appearances apparently seem not to be caused by Jesus actually being seen after his recovery, but by some unspecified sort of "perceptions," raising once again the issue of hallucinations.⁵⁶ The medical outcry against the Davies' stance was instructive, with multiple reasons being given to indicate that Jesus really died by crucifixion.⁵⁷

Barbara Thiering has a habit of publishing rather nontraditional items about Jesus. According to her, Jesus married Mary Magdalene, had children, got divorced, and also married Lydia of Philippi. She continues: Jesus was crucified at Qumran, along with Judas Iscariot and Simon Magnus. But none of them died, even though the other two men had their ankles broken. Jesus was drugged, given an antidote later, and traveled all around the Mediterranean with his followers, dying in the 60s A.D.⁵⁸ Perhaps needless to say, scholars have not taken her hypotheses very seriously.⁵⁹

Every once in a while, the swoon theory appears again.⁶⁰ But it has not really been very popular since Strauss's devastating critique in 1835.⁶¹ By the turn of the century, it was declared to be only a curiosity of the past.⁶²

Some commentators have responded to the burial and empty tomb accounts in the gospels by returning to hypotheses reminiscent of nineteenth century efforts. John Dominic Crossan, for example, made headlines by asserting that Jesus' dead body was either simply left on the cross or buried in a shallow grave. Either way, he concludes, "the dogs were waiting."⁶³ Others agree, suggesting that Jesus' body was placed in a common grave and covered. The body decayed rapidly so that nothing was left.⁶⁴

Barnabas Lindars is an example of those who have argued that while the resurrection appearances of Jesus are founded upon strong evidence, the empty "tomb legend" arose as a "late element" extrapolated from the resurrection accounts.⁶⁵ Similarly, Adela Yarbro Collins charged that Mark composed his story of the empty tomb to complement his own belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead and appeared to his disciples.⁶⁶

Certainly the majority of scholars think that Jesus' body was placed in a tomb. But Michael Martin asks why we can rule out the thesis that someone other than the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb.⁶⁷ A. N. Wilson suggests the possibility that the young man at the tomb stole the body and took it elsewhere, but admits that we will never know for sure.⁶⁸

Another rather unconventional criticism has also emerged in recent years, as it did more than a century ago. It has been proposed that a twin brother or another person who looked like Jesus represented him after the crucifixion. A. N. Wilson suggests that this person was James, the brother of Jesus. Their resemblance would explain how James could represent his brother in the post- crucifixion appearances.⁶⁹ Greg Cavin supports a bit more forcefully the twin brother scenario.⁷⁰

In answer to my request that critics be willing to offer naturalistic hypotheses, Frank Miosi offers a similar "likeness" view--what he terms the "John the Baptist Theory." Just as some thought that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead (Mark 6:14-16), Miosi thinks that early believers may have concluded that Jesus was raised when they saw someone else who reminded them of Jesus.⁷¹ Martin also mentions very briefly the possibility of a look-alike individual seen by the followers of Jesus.⁷²

Crossan also offers another provocative thesis. It is not even necessarily a naturalistic account of the resurrection appearances, but seems to function that way in his system. Crossan holds that in Paul's account in 1 Cor 15:1-11, the stories are chiefly concerned with explaining the authority structures in the early church, not in proclaiming supernatural acts. Accordingly, Jesus' appearances are divided into three groups, denoting "three types of recipients" of Jesus' "apparitions or revelations." These three groups are the individual leaders (like Peter, James, and Paul), two leadership groupings (the Twelve and the apostles), and a general community of believers. The accounts are "quite deliberate political dramatizations . . . primarily interested . . . in power and authority."⁷³

As in the nineteenth century, forms of the legend theory also existed at the end of the twentieth century.⁷⁴ To some extent, of course, many alternative hypotheses employ legendary elements that still do not involve full-blown proposals of this sort. For example, we have seen that Lindars and Collins employ such processes regarding the empty tomb narratives.

But others have stretched legendary accretion to cover a much wider scenario.⁷⁵ The best known and most radical of these theses is probably that by G. A. Wells, who has written numerous works on the subject. He asserts either that Jesus never lived at all or that he was an obscure ancient personage who cannot with certainty even be dated to the first century A.D. In the legendary process, Wells notes what he takes to be stages of development regarding the NT books, as well as the evolution of ideas concerning both the historical Jesus and Christology. He thinks that there was very little early interest in the historical Jesus and that by the time of the gospels, we are more or less dealing largely with fabrication. The resurrection appearances are similarly to be explained as the growth of legend.⁷⁶

Michael Martin defends Wells's program on the historicity of Jesus, quoting it widely. But he notes that, since "Wells' thesis is controversial and not widely accepted, I will not rely on it. . . ."⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Martin's recognition of the scholarly response to Wells is still a bold understatement! Concerning the resurrection, Martin also adds the features noted below.

Evan Fales is one of the few recent representatives of the nineteenth century theory popular among the Religionsgeschichte scholars, who traced the origination of NT teachings to the ancient mystery religions. Similarly, Fales thinks the best approach is to study Near Eastern mythical figures like Tammuz, Adonis, Isis, and Osiris.⁷⁸

Robert Price concentrates on historical examples where, in a religious context, legendary growth appeared very quickly. He chides Christian apologists for not doing their homework on these cases. Yet, while he concludes that legend also infests the resurrection accounts, he makes a surprising comment:

One need not assume that there was no resurrection. Indeed it was precisely because of experiences of some kind (such as those intriguingly listed but not described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15) that anyone cared to glorify Jesus.⁷⁹

Thus Price apparently thinks that, while much legend has crept into the NT texts, it does not explain entirely the core of the resurrection tradition.

The last naturalistic hypothesis that we will mention is often treated as a relative to hallucinations because of obvious similarities. Yet, what I will term the illusion theory really needs, upon further reflection, to be cataloged differently. It is an objective alternative response because it is concerned largely with conditions in the external world, although this is seldom noticed.

Perhaps we need briefly to differentiate hallucination from illusion. The former is a seeming perception that is not linked to the real world--"false sensory perception not associated with real external stimuli." Hence, in their very nature, hallucinations are subjective. On the other hand, an illusion is the mistaking of one natural condition for another--the "misperception or misinterpretation of real external sensory stimuli."⁸⁰ Accordingly, and unlike hallucinations, the illusion theory builds on situations where people, singly or in groups, mistake actual phenomena for something other than what they are in reality.

Martin enumerates several illusions (which he also calls mass hysteria) that he thinks are parallels to the early Christian belief in the resurrection appearances of Jesus. His examples certainly include some curious cases--UFOs, cattle mutilations in the western United States that were thought to indicate the activity of satanic cults, as well as reports of witchcraft and related phenomena in colonial America, which Martin especially treats in detail.⁸¹ Wells similarly uses witchcraft trials as an example, although he incorrectly refers to this illusional data as hallucinations.⁸² Goulder also employs some odd illusional incidents as being analogous to the resurrection--like statues of the Virgin Mary that reportedly move, while he concentrates especially on stories of Bigfoot appearances!⁸³

With regard to the resurrection appearances, then, illusion theorists hold that something real was mistakenly thought to be something else--namely, the risen Jesus. As Martin suggests, "a person who looked like Jesus could have triggered a collective delusion."⁸⁴ Presumably, the other believers enthusiastically agreed that they had seen their Lord.

I could give other examples of these naturalistic theories that have appeared in the last decades of the twentieth century. Further, as can be initially noted from this presentation, even the options within the same general species of alternative responses can exhibit many dissimilarities. But hopefully this demarcation will provide a framework for observing that these alternative theses seem to be making a comeback. That alone is worth noting.

Conclusion

Even many scholars seem to be unaware of the current revival of naturalistic theories aimed at the resurrection appearances of Jesus, let alone the history of such alternative theses. This recent trend has not been torrential, and is still not the critics' first option, but the change is

nonetheless quite noteworthy. While some of these critics only briefly mention their response in a sentence or two,⁸⁵ many others are serious, detailed efforts to dismiss the central event and doctrine of orthodox Christianity. Perhaps surprisingly, very few alternative attempts appear in the works of the scholars who are currently the most influential in the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus. Given the exceptional amount of attention to this area of contemporary study, this is surely remarkable.

This study was necessarily sketchy, consisting chiefly of a brief survey of current trends on the subject of naturalistic approaches to Jesus' resurrection. I tried to map a wide range of positions, including differentiating four categories of explanations regarding the resurrection appearances, pro and con.⁸⁶ From the more than forty scholars and almost a dozen alternative theses, I also tried to name and describe two of these positions that are seldom, if ever, differentiated in the literature--the illumination and illusion views.

What responses might be given to the challenge of these naturalistic theses, especially the last two, concerning which there are comparatively few treatments? Detailed rejoinders must be forthcoming.⁸⁷ The more thoroughly naturalistic theories are dismantled, the more solid the data in favor of Jesus' resurrection is displayed.

Endnotes

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[1] For example, the late second century critic Celsus challenged the belief in the resurrection on several grounds: pagan mythology, the disciples stealing the body, and the vivid imagination of Mary Magdalene (cf. Origin, *Against Celsus*, 2:55-58). The English deist Thomas Woolston charged that Jesus' disciples stole his dead body and then lied about the appearances (*Sixth Discourse*, 1729), while deist Peter Annet proposed an early version of the swoon theory (*The Resurrection of Jesus Considered in Answer to the Trial of Witnesses*, 1744).

[2] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 10: "Of Miracles," Part 1 (ed. Tom L. Beauchamp; Oxford Philosophical Texts; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[3] Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (trans. W. Montgomery from the 1906 German version; New York: Macmillan, 1968), 21-22, 43, 47, 53-55, 60, 64, 83, 162-63, 165-67, 170, 179, 187.

[4] Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jesus* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1864), 419-20. On p. 423 Renan states: "Ainsi, dans le récit de la vie d'outre-tomb de Jésus, le quatrième Évangile garde sa supériorité."

[5] *Ibid.*, 356.

[6] David Strauss, *The Old Faith and the New* (trans. Mathilde Blind; New York: Henry Holt, 1872), 59.

[7] Strauss freely (although often gently) criticized other liberals for taking too much for granted in their approaches to the study of the gospels (*The Old Faith*, 42-62).

[8] David Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1879), 1:408-12; cf. *id.*, *The Old Faith*, 43.

[9] See Schweitzer's assessment (*The Quest*, 56-57).

[10] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (trans. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart; 2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 2:420; Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 53-55, 210-14.

- [11] Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (trans. Carl E. Braaten; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964).
- [12] Two dominant works were Karl Barth's volume written in 1918, *The Epistle to the Romans* (trans. Edwyn Hoskyns from the 6th ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1933) and Rudolf Bultmann's 1941 essay, "New Testament and Mythology" in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (ed. Hans Werner Bartsch; rev. ed.; trans. Reginald H. Fuller; New York: Harper & Row, 1961).
- [13] Originally presented as an address in 1953, Käsemann's essay is included in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (trans. W. J. Montague; Naperville: Allenson, 1964), 15-47.
- [14] James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959), esp. part 1.
- [15] Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation as History* (trans. David Granskou; London: Macmillan, 1968).
- [16] Among dozens of prominent works are the projected multi-volumed sets by John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1991, 1994) and N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, 1996).
- [17] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4, part 1 of *Church Dogmatics* (12 vols.; ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 340.
- [18] Raymond Brown, "The Resurrection and Biblical Criticism," *Commonweal* 87 (Nov. 24, 1967): 233. For Brown's similar and much more recent response to these naturalistic theories, see id., *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist, 1997), 163-66.
- [19] Some examples include Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 2: esp. pp. 155-56; Michael C. Perry, *The Easter Enigma* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 120-33; Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey with James M. Robinson; New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 181-85; A. M. Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ* (rev. ed.; London: Collins, 1961), 48-53; Helmut Thielicke, "The Resurrection Kerygma" in *The Easter Message Today* (trans. Salvator Attanasio and Darrell Likens Guder; London: Thomas Nelson, 1964), 87-91, 103-4; Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (trans. James W. Leitch; New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 186, 198-200; Neville Clark, *Interpreting the Resurrection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 99-105; A. M. Hunter, *Bible and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 111-12; Joachim Jeremias, "Easter: The Earliest Tradition and the Earliest Interpretation," in *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (trans. John Bowden; New York: Scribner's, 1971), 302; John A. T. Robinson, *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 123-25; Ulrich Wilckens, *Resurrection: Biblical Testimony to the Resurrection: An Historical Examination and Explanation* (trans. A. M. Stewart; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1977), 117-19; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man* (2d ed.; trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 88-97; Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), 120-26; John Macquarrie, "The Keystone of Christian Faith" in *"If Christ Be Not Risen . . .": Essays in Resurrection and Survival* (ed. John Greenhalgh and Elizabeth Russell; San Francisco: Collins, 1986), 18-22.
- [20] James D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster, 1985), 76. For another recent and influential theologian who speaks similarly, see N. T. Wright, "Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem," *STRev* 41 (1998): 118-22.
- [21] Stephen T. Davis, "Is Belief in the Resurrection Rational?" *Phil* 2 (1999): 57-58.
- [22] Richard Swinburne, "Evidence for the Resurrection," in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 201.
- [23] Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), 142.

[24] Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1980), 169 (emphasis added).

[25] Dunn, *Evidence*, 75.

[26] *Ibid.* (his emphasis).

[27] Norman Perrin, *The Resurrection According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 80.

[28] Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (vol. 2 of *Introduction to the New Testament*; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 84. Koester does not explain the sense in which he thinks that Jesus appeared.

[29] Peter Carnley, *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 246 (emphasis added).

[30] It is no secret that I think that Jesus appeared bodily. For just some of the details, see my publications such as *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin: College Press, 1996), esp. chaps. 4, 11; with J. P. Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidences for Immortality* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), chaps. 5-6, 12; "The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," in *In Defense of Miracles* (ed. Gary Habermas and Doug Geivett; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997); co-authored with Antony Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate* (ed. Terry L. Miethe; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); and *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1976).

[31] Again, some of these scholars list or propose more than one naturalistic hypothesis.

[32] Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 106-7, 174-75, 180. An example of the German outcry is the lengthy book review by Andreas Lindemann in *Wege zum Menschen* 46 (November-December 1994): 503-13. A popular version of this volume is Gerd Lüdemann with Alf Ozen, *What Really Happened to Jesus: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection* (trans. John Bowden; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

[33] Michael Goulder, "The Baseless Fabric of a Vision," in *Resurrection Reconsidered* (ed. Gavin D'Costa; Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 48-61. A shorter version is Goulder's "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?" in *Resurrection: Essays in Honour of Leslie Houlden* (ed. Stephen Barton and Graham Stanton; London: SPCK, 1994), esp. 58-62.

[34] Jack Kent, *The Psychological Origins of the Resurrection Myth* (London: Open Gate, 1999), 6-11, 49-61, 85-90.

[35] Samuel Vollenweider, "Ostern--der denkwürdige Ausgang einer Krisenerfahrung," *TZ* 49 (1993): 41-43.

[36] Ingo Broer, "Seid stets bereit, jedem Rede und Antwort zu stehen, der nach der Hoffnung fragt, die euch erfüllt (I Petr 3,15): Das leere Grab und die Erscheinungen Jesu im Lichte der historischen Kritik," in "Der Herr ist wahrhaft auferstanden" (Lk 24, 34): *Biblische und systematische Beiträge zur Entstehung des Osterglaubens* (SBS 134; ed. Ingo Broer and Jürgen Werbeck; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 54-56.

[37] *Ibid.*, 60-61.

[38] Margaret E. Thrall, "Resurrection Traditions and Christian Apologetic," *The Thomist* 43 (1979): 204-5, 209-11; Christopher Knight, "Hysteria and Myth: The Psychology of the Resurrection Appearances," *Modern Churchman* 31 (1989): 38-42; id., "The Resurrection Appearances as Religious Experience," *Modern Believing* 39 (April 1998): 16, 21-22; Robert C. Ware, "The Resurrection of Jesus, I: Theological Orientations," *HeyJ* 16 (January 1975): 24; id., "The Resurrection of Jesus, II: Historical- Critical Studies," *HeyJ* 16 (April 1975): 191-94.

[39] Habermas and Flew, *Did Jesus Rise*, 50-59, 79-91, 98-102, 112-116.

[40] John Hick, *The Center of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 25. It would be fair to note, however, that in a dialogue between Hick, myself, and three other scholars that took place at Louisiana State University, April 26-27, 1987, Hick favored Jesus' actual resurrection, but in a form that did not involve a physical body. This is

probably also the best interpretation of his treatment of the subject in *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 171-81.

[41] Michael Grant, *Paul: The Man* (Glasgow: Collins, 1976), 108.

[42] Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish View," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 197.

[43] John M. G. Barclay, "The Resurrection in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 25-26.

[44] Carnley, *Structure*, 64, 244-45; cf. 69-72, 79, 82.

[45] Willi Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), esp. 88-97. An earlier essay by Marxsen was a forerunner here, although it differed somewhat: "The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical and Theological Problem," in *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ* (ed. C. F. D. Moule; London: SCM, 1968), 5-50.

[46] Willi Marxsen, *Jesus and Easter: Did God Raise the Historical Jesus from the Dead?* (trans. Victor Paul Furnish; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 70-74.

[47] Also reminiscent of Bultmann's emphasis on the centrality of the disciples' faith are the approaches of Karl Lehmann, "Zugang zum Ostergeschehen heute: Am Beispiel der Emmauserzählung," *IKaZ* 11 (January 1982): esp. 45-49; Robert F. Scuka, "Resurrection: Critical Reflections on a Doctrine in Search of a Meaning," *Modern Theology* 6 (October 1989): esp. 79, 85, 90.

[48] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (trans. Hubert Hoskins; New York: Crossroad, 1987), 369, 385-90.

[49] Don Cupitt, *Christ and the Hiddenness of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 143, cf. esp. 164-67. Cf. C. F. D. Moule and Don Cupitt, "The Resurrection: A Disagreement" in Cupitt's, *Explorations in Theology* 6 (London: SCM, 1979); Carnley (*Structure*, 154-82) includes an in-depth critique of both Marxsen and Cupitt.

[50] Thomas Sheehan, *First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity* (New York: Random House, 1986), 103-9, 112-14, 118.

[51] John Shelby Spong, *The Easter Moment* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 196-98.

[52] John Shelby Spong, *Resurrection: Myth or Reality?* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 239-41, 255-57.

[53] Rudolf Pesch, "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu," *TQ* 153 (1973): 219-26; id., "Materialien und Bemerkungen zu Entstehung und Sinn des Osterglaubens" in *Wie kam es zum Osterglauben?* by Anton Vogtle and Rudolf Pesch (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1975), 157-68.

[54] Rudolf Pesch, "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu: Ein neuer Versuch," *FZPhTh* 30 (1983): esp. 87; John Galvin, "The Origin of Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus: Two Recent Perspectives," *TS* 49 (1988): 27-35 contains an excellent summation of the shift in Pesch's thought.

[55] Hansjürgen Verweyen, "Die Ostererscheinungen in fundamentaltheologischer Sicht," *ZKT* 103 (1981): 429. See Galvin's contrast of Pesch and Verweyen ("The Origin of Faith," 35-40). A later contribution to the subject is Verweyen's "Die Sache mit den Ostererscheinungen" in "Der Herr ist wahrhaft Auferstanden" (Lk 24,34), esp. pp. 77-78.

[56] Margaret Lloyd Davies and Trevor A. Lloyd Davies, "Resurrection or Resuscitation?" *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London* 25 (April 1991): 167- 70. It is difficult to know the specifics regarding the brief mention of an "appearance." In fact, the entire article is less than two pages long, plus the endnotes.

[57] "Letters to the Editor," *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London* 25 (July 1991): 268-72.

[58] Among her books explaining these suppositions is Barbara Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1992).

[59] N. T. Wright says, concerning a listing of some of these items, "Once again, it is safe to say that no serious scholar has given this elaborate and fantastic theory any credence whatsoever. . . . The only scholar who takes Thiering's theory with any seriousness is Thiering herself" (see N. T. Wright, *Who was Jesus?* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 22-23). Edwin M. Yamauchi calls her ideas "an Alice-in-Wonderland scenario" (see Edwin Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?" in *Jesus Under Fire* [ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 210.)

[60] Some examples are Gaalah Cornfeld, *The Historical Jesus: A Scholarly View of the Man and His World* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Duncan M. Derrett, *The Anastasis: The Resurrection of Jesus as an Historical Event* (Shipston-on-Stour, England: P. Drinkwater, 1982); Rolland E. Wolfe, *How the Easter Story Grew from Gospel to Gospel* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1989), 92-103; Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2000), 222-24. Derrett's text employs other naturalistic theories as well, further supposing both that the disciples cremated Jesus' body after his later death, and that the disciples experienced visions of the departed Jesus! Two other exceptionally brief mentions of the swoon thesis are B. C. Johnson, *The Atheist Debater's Handbook* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1983), 121-22, and Rupert Gethin, "The Resurrection and Buddhism," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 206. Another example of a popular treatment is Richard Andrews, *The Tomb of God: The Body of Jesus and the Solution to a 2000-Year-Old Mystery* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996).

[61] Schweitzer comments on Strauss's attack (*The Quest*, 56-57), and does not list any nineteenth century proponents of the swoon theory after 1838.

[62] See Eduard Riggensbach, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1907), 48-49; James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (1908; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), 92.

[63] John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 152-58; cf. id., *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 392-94.

[64] Spong, *Resurrection: Myth*, 239-41; Hick, *The Center of Christianity*, 25; Kent, *Psychological Origins*, 88.

[65] Barnabas Lindars, "Jesus Risen: Bodily Resurrection But No Empty Tomb," *Theology* 59 (1986): 90-96. See a subsequent version by Lindars, "The Resurrection and the Empty Tomb," in *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (ed. Paul Avis; London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1993), 128-34.

[66] Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Empty Tomb in the Gospel According to Mark," in *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (ed. Eleanore Stump and Thomas P. Flint; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 128-31. It could be questioned why I am including Lindars and Collins in the naturalistic objective category. For Collins, Mark did not simply invent the empty tomb story (p. 129), but was probably influenced by the "form, content, and style" of Greco-Roman literature, especially by its tales of mythical heroes (pp. 126, 130-31). So she has some similarities to other theses in the legendary category below. But Lindars is a different case, in that he only accepts a natural explanation for the empty tomb, while accepting the historicity of Jesus' appearances.

[67] Michael Martin, *The Case Against Christianity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 95.

[68] A. N. Wilson, *Jesus* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992), 242.

[69] *Ibid.*, 243-44.

[70] Robert Greg Cavin, "Miracles, Probability, and the Resurrection of Jesus: A Philosophical, Mathematical, and Historical Study" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Irvine, 1993), vii, 314-58. Some related thoughts are found in Cavin's, "Is There Sufficient Historical Evidence to Establish the Resurrection of Jesus?" *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (July 1995): 361-79.

[71] Frank Miosi, "The Resurrection Debate," (review of Gary R. Habermas and Antony G. N. Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*), *Free Inquiry* (Spring 1988): 56-57.

[72] Martin, *The Case*, 93.

[73] Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 169-70. Some similar thoughts are found in Evan Fales, "Successful Defense? A Review of *In Defense of Miracles*," *Philosophia Christi* 2d series/3 (2001): esp. 29-34.

[74] Some more popular efforts are those by Bruce Puleo, "Jesus was in Good Company: Other Claimed Resurrections From the Dead," *American Rationalist* 30 (January-February 1986): 80-82; Randall Helms, *Gospel Fictions* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1988), 121-49; Lloyd M. Graham, *Deceptions and Myths in the Bible* (New York: Bell, 1975), 362; Gethin, "The Resurrection," 207.

[75] One version is Hugh Jackson, "The Resurrection Belief of the Earliest Church: A Response to the Failure of Prophecy?" *JR* 55 (October 1975): 415-25. Jackson uses dissonance theory to argue that Jesus' teachings prepared his disciples for his death, leading them to conclude that, contrary to appearances, Jesus was somehow still alive in heaven (pp. 422-23). Unfortunately, Jackson fails to provide many details on how the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection actually evolved.

[76] G. A. Wells develops this thesis in volumes like *Did Jesus Exist?* (2d ed.; London: Pemberton, 1986), esp. chaps. 2-3; *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1988), esp. chaps. 1, 4; *A Resurrection Debate: The New Testament Evidence in Evangelical and Critical Perspective* (London: Rationalist, 1988), esp. chaps. 5, 7-8.

[77] Martin, *The Case*, 67; cf. chap. 2.

[78] Fales, "Successful Defense," 29-34. Robert Funk briefly mentions the mystery religion thesis in *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 35.

[79] Robert M. Price, "Is there a Place for Historical Criticism?" *RelS* 27 (1991): 383 (emphasis added). Cf. id., *Deconstructing Jesus*, 52-61, 214-21, 260-61.

[80] See Jerrold Maxmen and Nicholas Ward, *Essential Psychopathology and Its Treatment* (New York: Norton, 1995), 483-85; Harold I. Kaplan, Benjamin J. Sadock, and Jack A. Grebb, *Synopsis of Psychiatry* (7th ed.; Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1994), 306-7.

[81] Martin, *The Case*, 92-95. Similar delusional data are also cited by Frank J. Tipler, *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 310-12.

[82] Wells, *A Resurrection Debate*, 39-40.

[83] Goulder, "The Baseless Fabric of a Vision," 52-55.

[84] Martin, *The Case*, 93.

[85] Mere suggestions or passing comments, as these sometimes are, can be frequently found ever since the nineteenth century heyday of these hypotheses.

[86] These were the naturalistic subjective and objective theories, and the supernaturalistic subjective and objective approaches.

[87] I have critiqued several versions of these recent naturalistic theories in a number of journal articles. For a detailed response to Evan Fales's rendition of the legend theory, see "On the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," in *Philosophia Christi* 2d series/3 (2001): 76-87. Concerning G. A. Wells's form of the legend theory, see "A Summary Critique: Questioning the Existence of Jesus," *Christian Research Journal* 22 (Spring 2000): 54-56. (For a more detailed critique of both Wells and Michael Martin, see my *The Historical Jesus*, chap. 2.) On the hallucination theory, see "Explaining Away Jesus' Resurrection: The Recent Revival of Hallucination Theories," *Christian Research Journal* 23 (2001): 26-31, 47-49. For a response to a chief proponent of the illumination theory, see "The Early

Christian Belief in the Resurrection of Jesus: A Response to Thomas Sheehan," *Michigan Theological Journal* 3 (Fall 1992): 105-27.

A9.1 - The Problem of Evil

Greg Welty, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-problem-of-evil/>, Accessed July 2023

DEFINITION

“The problem of evil” is one of the most discussed objections to the existence of God and is a top reason many unbelievers give for their unbelief. These objectors argue that since there are so many cases of significant pain and suffering in the world that God could easily prevent, the fact that all this evil was *not* prevented means it is very unlikely (if not impossible) that God exists.

SUMMARY

“The problem of evil” appeals to the phenomenon of evil (significant cases of pain and suffering) as evidence against the existence of God. For many, this evidence appears decisive, because if God existed, he would be *powerful* enough to prevent such evil, and *good* enough to want to prevent such evil. Since there *is* evil, no such powerful and good being exists. For the past two millennia Christians have typically urged two points in reply: theodicy and inscrutability. First, God may very well have a *good reason* for allowing the evil he does allow – a reason compatible with his holy and good character – and the way of theodicy goes on to list a number of these reasons. Second, the fact that unbelievers may not be able to *discern or correctly guess at* God’s justifying reason for allowing evil is no good reason to think he doesn’t *have* a reason. Given the infinity of God’s omniscience, the complexity of his providence, the depth of the goods he aims at, and our own substantial cognitive limitations, we shouldn’t *expect* to guess God’s reasons.

What Is the Problem of Evil?

The so-called “problem of evil” is an argument against the existence of God that reasons along these lines:

1. A perfectly powerful being *can* prevent any evil.
2. A perfectly good being *will* prevent evil as far as he can.
3. God is perfectly powerful and good.
4. So, if a perfectly powerful and good God exists, there will be no evil.
5. There is evil.
6. Therefore, God doesn’t exist.

“Evil,” here is understood as any significant case of pain and suffering in the world, whether “moral” (evil willfully caused by human beings such as murder, adultery, theft, rape, etc.) or “natural” evil (harm caused by impersonal forces of nature such as earthquakes, tornadoes, plague, etc.).

Responding to the Problem of Evil

Nonstarters

A Christian must be truthful and face the question honestly. It will not do to deny that evil exists (#5 above), for evil is the very presumption of the gospel. Nor can we deny that God could prevent evil (#1 above) or that he is perfect in power and goodness (#3). However, we can (and should) question the second premise above – that a perfectly good God must prevent all evil – for it doesn't necessarily follow from God's perfect goodness that he will prevent every evil he can prevent. Perhaps God has a *good reason* for permitting evil rather than preventing it; if so, then his permission of evil is justified and doesn't militate against his goodness.

The Ways of Theodicy and Inscrutability

Our response to the problem of evil, then, may take either of two approaches. We may argue that the second premise above is *false* and seek to demonstrate that it is false by showing God's reasons for permitting evil – the way of "theodicy." Or we could argue that the second premise is *unproven* because unbelievers *can't rule out* God's having a good reason for permitting evil – the way of "inscrutability."

The way of *theodicy* (from the Greek *theos*, "God," and *dikaios*, "just"; hence, a justification of the ways of God in his dealings with men) seeks to demonstrate God's reasons for permitting evil. The idea is that by allowing evil God attains greater good than possible apart from evil. The way of theodicy shows that premise (2) is false, arguing that God *wouldn't* prevent every evil he could prevent.

The way of *inscrutability* argues, more modestly, that *no one knows that premise (2) is true* because no one can know enough to conclude that God *doesn't* have good reason for permitting evil. We just cannot grasp God's knowledge, the complexity of his plans, or the deep nature of the good he aims at in providence. And there is no proof that God does *not* have good reasons for allowing evil, but because he is good we can only assume that he does. Here we don't have to come up with 'theodicies' to defend God against the problem of evil. Rather, the way of inscrutability shows that it is entirely to be expected that creatures like us *can't* come up with God's reasons, given who God is and who we are.

The Way of Theodicy

Two popular theodicies that have no biblical basis.

Some theodicies that have been offered lack solid biblical grounding. *The free will theodicy*, for example, argues that moral evil is due to human abuse of free will. The value of free will is a great good: the possibility of morally good choice and of human beings imaging God by way of these choices. But free will has the unfortunate consequence of allowing for the possibility of moral evil. In response to this we might ask, if free will of this sort is so valuable then why doesn't God have it, and why won't we have it in heaven?

The natural law theodicy argues that natural evil is due to the laws of nature. The value of laws of nature is a great good: a stable environment needed for making rational choices of any sort. But laws of nature have the unfortunate consequence of allowing for the possibility of natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.). In response to this we might ask, if a stable environment *requires* the possibility of natural evil by requiring laws of nature then why isn't there any natural evil in the pre-fall Garden of Eden or in the new heavens and the new earth?

Four popular theodicies have some biblical basis

By contrast, at least four theodicies have been offered that have some biblical basis. *The punishment theodicy* argues that suffering is a result of God's just punishment of evildoers (Gen 3:14-19; Rom 1:24-32, 5:12, 6:23, 8:20-21; Isa 29:5-6; Ezek 38:19; Rev 6:12; 11:13; 16:18). In punishment God aims at the good of displaying his judgment against sin. *The soul-building theodicy* argues that suffering leads us from self-centeredness to other-centeredness (Heb 12:5-11; Rom 5:3-5; 2Cor 4:17; Jas 1:2-4; 1Pet 1:6-7; cf. Prov 10:13, 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-24, 29:15). In painful providences God aims at the good of displaying his goodness in shaping our character for good. *The pain as God's megaphone theodicy* argues that pain is God's way of getting the attention of unbelievers in a noncoercive way so that they might forget the vanities of earth, consider spiritual things instead, and perhaps even repent of sin (Luke 13:1-5). In pain God aims at the good of displaying his mercy that through such warnings we might be delivered from the wrath to come. *The higher-order goods theodicy* says that some goods can't exist apart from the evils to which they are a response. There is no courage without danger, no sympathy without suffering, no forgiveness without sin, no atonement without suffering, no compassion without need, no patience without adversity. God must often allow lots of evils to make *these* goods a part of his world, given how these goods are defined (Eph 1:3-10; 1Pet 1:18-20).

These theodicies fall under the umbrella of the "greater good theodicy."

A "greater good theodicy" (GGT) argues that the pain and suffering in God's world play a necessary role in bringing about greater goods that could not be brought about otherwise. The question that remains, then, is just this: does the Bible really teach that God aims at great goods by way of various evils?

Constructing the "Greater Good Theodicy": a Three-Fold Argument for Three Biblical Themes

Our argument here is that *Scripture combines the ways of theodicy and inscrutability*. The biblical accounts of Job, Joseph, and Jesus reveal the goodness of God in the midst of evil, weaving together these three themes:

1. God aims at *great goods* (either for mankind, or for himself, or both).
2. God often intends these great goods to come about *by way of various evils*.
3. God leaves created persons *in the dark* (in the dark about *which* goods are indeed his reasons for the evils, or about *how* the goods depend on the evils).

Thus, the Bible seems to strongly suggest that the GGT (God's aiming at great goods by way of various evils) is in fact his *modus operandi* in providence, his "way of working." But this GGT is tempered by a good dose of divine inscrutability.

The Case of Job

In the case of Job *God aims at a great good*: his own vindication – in particular, the vindication of his worthiness to be served for who he is rather than for the earthly goods he supplies (Job 1:11; 2:5). God intends the great good of the vindication of his own name to come to pass *by way of various evils*. These are a combination of moral evil and natural evil (Job 1:15, 16, 17, 19, 21-22; 2:7, 10; 42:11). *God also leaves Job in the dark about what God is doing*, for Job has no access to the story's prologue in chapter 1. And when God speaks to him "out of the whirlwind" he never reveals to Job *why* he suffered. Instead, Job's ignorance of the whole spectrum of created reality is exposed (Job 38:4-39:30; 40:6-41:34), and Job confesses his ignorance of both creation and providence (Job 40:3-5; 42:1-6).

The Case of Joseph

In the case of Joseph we find the same. *God aims at great goods*: saving the broader Mediterranean world from a famine, preserving his people amid such danger, and (ultimately) bringing a Redeemer into the world descended from such Israelites (Matt 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). God intends the great good of the preservation of his people from famine to come to pass *by way of various evils* (Gen 45:5, 7; Psa 105:16-17), including Joseph's betrayal, being sold into slavery, and suffering unjust accusation and imprisonment (Gen 37, 39). Joseph sees these evils as the means of God's sovereign providence (Gen 50:20). But God leaves Joseph's brothers, the Midianite traders, Potiphar's wife, and the cupbearer *in the dark*. None of these people knew the role their blameworthy actions would play in preserving God's people in a time of danger. They had no clue *which* goods depended on which evils, or that the evils would even work toward *any* goods at all.

The Case of Jesus

And in the case of Jesus we see the same again. *God aims at great goods*: the redemption of his people by the atonement of Christ and the glorification of God in the display of his justice, love, grace, mercy, wisdom, and power. God intends the great good of atonement to come to pass *by way of various evils*: Jewish plots (Matt 26:3-4, 14-15), Satan's promptings (John 13:21-30), Judas's betrayal (Matt 26:47-56; 27:3-10; Luke 22:22), Roman injustice (Matt 26:57-68), Pilate's cowardice (Matt 27:15-26), and the soldiers' brutality (Matt 27:27-44). But God leaves various created agents (human and demonic) *in the dark*, for it is clear that the Jewish leaders, Satan, Judas, Pilate, and the soldiers are all ignorant of the role they play in fulfilling the divinely prophesied redemptive purpose by the cross of Christ (Acts 2:23, 3:18, 4:25-29; John 13:18, 17:12, 19:23-24).

Licensing and Limiting the GGT

In each narrative, the first two themes highlight *the way of theodicy* (God aiming at great goods by way of evils), while the third theme highlights *the way of inscrutability* (left to ourselves, we

cannot discern what God's reasons are for any case of evil). By way of the first two themes Scripture repeatedly encourages the view that God *has* a justifying reason for permitting the evils of the world. That is what's right with the way of theodicy. But Scripture, by way of the third theme, repeatedly discourages the view that we can ever *know* what that reason is in any particular case of evil. That is what's right with the way of inscrutability. In contemporary philosophy, these are usually presented as two different ways to solve the problem of evil (theodicy and inscrutability). However, the Bible seems to combine these two ways when it speaks of God's relation to the evils in the world. That is, it licenses the greater good theodicy as an overall perspective on evil, but wisely limits that perspective in a way that is instructive for both Christians and non-Christians.

Licensing the GGT: God's Sovereignty over *All* Evil

God's Sovereignty over Natural Evil

It is one thing to acknowledge God's sovereign and purposeful providence over the moral and natural evils mentioned in the Job, Joseph, and Jesus narratives. It is quite another to claim that God is sovereign over *all* moral and natural evils. But this is what the Bible repeatedly teaches. This takes us a considerable way towards licensing the GGT as a *general* approach to the problem of evil. The Bible presents multitudes of examples of God intentionally bringing about natural evils – famine, drought, rampaging wild animals, disease, birth defects such as blindness and deafness, and even death itself – rather than being someone who merely permits nature to 'do its thing' on its own. Here are some samples:

- Famine (Deut 32:23-24; 2Kgs 8:1; Psa 105:16; Isa 3:1; Ezek 4:16, 5:16-17, 14:13, 14:21; Hos 2:9; Amos 4:6, 9; Hag 2:17)
- Drought (Deut 28:22; 1Kgs 8:35; Isa 3:1; Hos 2:3; Amos 4:6-8; Hag 1:11)
- Rampaging wild animals (Lev 26:22; Num 21:6; Deut 32:23-24; 2Kgs 17:25; Jer 8:17; Ezek 5:17, 14:15, 14:21, 33:27)
- Disease (Lev 26:16, 25; Num 14:12; Deut 28:21-22, 28:27; 2Kgs 15:5; 2Chron 21:14, 26:19-20)
- Birth defects such as blindness and deafness (Exod 4:11; John 9:1-3)
- Death itself (Deut 32:39; 1Sam 2:6-7)
- Ten Egyptian plagues (Exod 7:14-24, 8:1-15, 8:16-19, 8:20-32, 9:1-7, 9:8-12, 9:13-35, 10:1-20, 10:21-29, 11:4-10, 12:12-13, 12:27-30)
- 'Impersonal' forces and objects (Psa 65:9-11, 77:18, 83:13-15, 97:4, 104:4, 104:10-24, 107:25, 29, 135:6-7, 147:8, 147:16-18, 148:7-8, Jonah 1:4, Nah 1:3-4, Zech 7:14, Matt 5:45, Acts 14:17)

God's Sovereignty over Moral Evil

In addition, and perhaps surprisingly, the Bible presents God as having such meticulous control over the course of human history that a wide range of moral evils – murder, adultery, disobedience to parents, rejecting wise counsel, even human hatred – can be regarded as “of the Lord.” Without erasing or suppressing the intentionality of creatures – and this includes their deliberations, their reasoning, their choosing between alternatives they consider and reflect upon – God’s own intentionality stands above and behind the responsible choices of his creatures. Again, some samples:

- Eli’s sons’ disobedience (1Sam 2:23-25)
- Samson’s desire for a foreign wife (Jdg 14:1-4)
- Absalom, Rehoboam, and Amaziah rejecting wise counsel (2Sam 17:14; 1Kgs 12:15; 2Chron 25:20)
- Assassination (2Chron 22:7, 9, 32:21-22)
- Adultery (2Sam 12:11-12, 16:22)
- Human hatred (Psa 105:23-25; Exod 4:21; Deut 2:30, 32; Josh 11:20; 1Kgs 11:23, 25; 2Chron 21:16-17)

God’s Sovereignty over All Evil

So the Job, Joseph, and Jesus passages are not anomalies, but part and parcel of a more general view the Bible takes on the subject, with respect to both natural and moral evil. Indeed, in addition to this large swath of ‘particular’ texts about individual cases of evil, there are quite a few “universal” texts which seem to trace all calamities, all human decision-making, all events whatsoever, back to the will of God.

- God’s sovereignty over all calamity (Ecc 7:13-14; Isa 45:7; Lam 3:37-38; Amos 3:6)
- God’s sovereignty over all human decision-making (Prov 16:9, 19:21, 20:24, 21:1; Jer 10:23)
- God’s sovereignty over all events whatsoever (Psa 115:3; Prov 16:33; Isa 46:9-10; Rom 8:28, 11:36; Eph 1:11)

Limiting the GGT: The Inscrutability of God’s Purposes

Establishing the Burden of Proof

Of course, each specific theodicy mentioned earlier has significant limitations. For instance, the Bible frequently discourages the idea that the punishment theodicy can explain *all* evils in the world (Job 1:1, 1:8, 2:3, 42:7-8; John 9:1-3; Acts 28:1-6). More generally, Christians can never know enough about a person’s situation, or about God’s purposes, to *rule in* a specific theodicy as being God’s reason for permitting evil in a particular case. In fact, it would be entirely presumptuous to do so. But if he who affirms must prove, then the question in the problem of evil is not whether *Christians* know enough to “rule in” the applicability of a theodicy on any

particular occasion, but whether *critics* know enough to “rule out” the applicability of any theodicy. But how could a critic reasonably claim to know that *there is no reason* that would justify God in permitting suffering? How could he know that premise (2) of the original argument is true? For why think that God’s reasons for permitting particular cases of evil are the kinds of things that we would discern by our cognitive capacities, if such reasons were there?

Analogies for our Cognitive Limitations

It is widely recognized that we have cognitive limitations with respect to discerning goods and connections, at least in territories where we lack the relevant expertise, experience, or vantage point. Some examples:

- It doesn’t *seem* to me that there is a perfectly spherical rock on the dark side of the moon right now, but that’s no reason to conclude that such a rock *isn’t* there.
- It didn’t *seem* to any medievals that the theories of special relativity or quantum mechanics were true, but that was no reason to think they *weren’t* true.
- It didn’t *seem* to humans in earlier eras that fundamental human rights of one sort or another were in fact *fundamental* human rights, but that was no reason to think there *weren’t* any such rights.
- It wouldn’t *seem* to a non-Greek-speaker that spoken Greek sentences have any meaning, but that is no reason to think they *don’t* have a meaning.
- It wouldn’t *seem* to the musically uninitiated that Beethoven projected the ‘sonata form’ onto the symphony as a whole, giving the entire musical work a fundamental unity it would not otherwise have had. But it wouldn’t follow from their ignorance that Beethoven *didn’t* have such a purpose, much less that he was unsuccessful in executing it.
- It might not *seem* to my one-month-old son that I have a good reason for him to receive a painful series of shots at the doctor’s office. But it wouldn’t follow from his ignorance that there *isn’t* a good reason.

God is omniscient, which means he not only knows everything that we are likely to guess at, but every truth whatsoever. This means that God knows things that we cannot even fathom. As the above analogies suggest, this is easily demonstrated for a huge range of cases. If the complexities of an infinite God’s divine plan for the unfolding of the universe *does* involve God’s recognizing either deep goods, or necessary connections between various evils and the realization of those goods, or both of these things, would our inability to discern these goods or connections give us a reason for thinking they aren’t there? What would be the basis of such confidence? But without such confidence, we have little reason to accept premise (2) of the problem of evil. So we have little reason to accept its conclusion.

Biblical Argument for Divine Inscrutability

The theme of divine inscrutability is not only exceedingly defensible common sense. It also looms large in the Bible, having both pastoral and apologetic implications. It closes the mouths

of Christians who would insensitively offer “God’s reasons” to those who suffer (when they don’t know such reasons). And it closes the mouths of critics who would irrationally preclude divine reasons for the suffering. Imagine we were on the scene in the cases of Job (as his friend), Joseph (as his brother), and Jesus (as his tormentor). Would we have been able to guess at God’s purpose for the suffering? Would we not instead have been wholly unaware of any such purpose? Does not a large part of the literary power of the Bible’s narrative, and the spiritual encouragement it offers, rest upon this interplay between the ignorance of the human actors and the wisdom of divine providence?

One of the most extended reflections in the New Testament on the problem of evil – in this case, the evil of Jewish apostasy – is Romans 9-11. Paul’s concluding doxology blends together these twin themes of divine sovereignty over evil and divine inscrutability in the midst of evil:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Rom 11:33–36).

To the extent that God has not spoken about a particular event in history, his judgments *are* unsearchable, and his paths *are* beyond tracing out. But that does not mean there is not a greater good which justifies God’s purposing of that event

FURTHER READING

1. William P. Alston, ‘The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition’, reprinted in Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument From Evil* (Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 97–125.
2. Alistair Begg, *The Hand of God: Finding His Care in All Circumstances* (Moody, 2001).
3. Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God* (NavPress, 1988).
4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, chapters 16–18.
5. D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?* (2nd edn.) (Baker, 2006).
6. John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* (P&R, 2015), Ch. 7–8.
7. Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (IVP, 1994), chapters 7–8.
8. Daniel Howard-Snyder, ‘God, Evil, and Suffering’, chapter 4 of Michael J. Murray (ed.), *Reason for the Hope Within* (Eerdmans, 1999).
9. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Macmillan, 1962).
10. John Piper & Justin Taylor (eds), *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Crossway, 2006).
11. Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000), chapter 14.
12. Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press, 1998).
13. Greg Welty, *Why Is There Evil in the World (and So Much of it)?* (Christian Focus, 2018).

B1.1 Bonus Topic - The Problem of Divine Violence, Case Study: Canaanite Conquest

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Stated: The God of the Bible is positively portrayed in a violent light as a divine-warrior and even authorizes his people, Israel, to perpetrate violence on his behalf. Popular examples include the Flood of Noah (Gen. 6-9), the crossing of the Reed Sea (Ex. 14-15), and the conquest of Canaan (Jos. 1-13). Throughout the Psalms, prophets, and writings, God is revered for his violence (e.g. Ps. 7:11-13). This seems to be at odds with our moral sensibilities.

Strategy: Divine violence is a broad canonical question that cannot be answered in one fell swoop; indeed, according to Tremper Longman III, there are only two (2) books in the Hebrew canon that do not portray God as a violent divine warrior. Herein, we will take one case study, the conquest of Canaan, and look at four approaches.¹²⁹

Approach 1: It's Not As Bad As It Seems (NAB)

What *Actually Happened* is NAB

On a face value reading, the text suggests that the Israelites invaded Canaan and annihilated 40 cities in quick succession, slaughtering all the inhabitants with minimal casualties. However, the archaeological record and a genre sensitive reading indicate no such sweeping invasion occurred.

Genre Analysis: Ancient Conquest Accounts

ANE conquest accounts can be difficult for modern readers to decipher. Such accounts contain five major features: (i) repetition, (ii) annihilation language, (iii) hyperbolic language, (iv) common narrative structure, and (v) unique focus on the human military leader.

Language of Annihilation

Joshua 10:20-21, 40-42 (NRSV)

"When Joshua and the Israelites had finished inflicting a very great slaughter on them, until they were wiped out, and when the survivors had entered into the fortified towns, all the people returned safe to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah... So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded... Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel.

¹²⁹ Based on Seibert, E. A. (2016). Recent Research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament (with Special Attention to Christian Theological Perspectives). *Currents in Biblical Research*, 15(1), 8-40.

Merneptah Stele (ca. 1208 B.C.), pictured right (Wikimedia)

The princes are prostrate, saying: "Mercy!" // Not one raises his head among the Nine Bows. // Desolation is for Tehenu; Hatti is pacified; // Plundered is the Canaan with every evil; // Carried off is Ashkelon; seized upon is Gezer; // Yanoam is made as that which does not exist; // Israel is laid waste, his seed is not; // All lands together, they are pacified; // Everyone who was restless, he has been bound by the King of Upper and Lower Egypt [i.e. Pharaoh Merneptah].



Papyrus Harris I (ca. 1180 B.C.)

I [Ramesses III] slew the Denyen in their islands, while the Tjeker and the Philistines were made ashes. The Sherden and the Weshesh of the Sea were made nonexistent, captured all together and brought in captivity to Egypt like the sands of the shore. I settled them in strongholds, bound in my name. Their military classes were as numerous as hundred-thousands. I assigned portions for them all with clothing and provisions from the treasuries and granaries every year.

Language of Hyperbole

Josua 10:7-10 (NRSV)

So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the fighting force with him, all the mighty warriors... So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal. And the LORD threw them into a panic before Israel, who inflicted a great slaughter on them at Gibeon, chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah.

Annals of Tiglath-Pileser I (ca. 1110 BC)

With the help of Assur, my lord, I led forth my chariots and warriors and went into the desert. Into the midst of the Ahlami, Arameans, enemies of Assur, my lord, I marched. The country from Suhi [central Iraq] to the city of Carchemish [southern Turkey] in the land of Hatti, I raided in one day. I slew their troops; their spoil, their goods and their possessions in countless numbers, I carried away.

Gilgal to Gibeon to Azekah is over 45 miles as the crow flies with altitude changes in excess of 1 mile. Suhi to Carchemish is over 400 miles. Typical infantry moves about 12 miles per day. These marches simply could not have occurred in one day.

Textual Claims and Archaeological Evidence¹³⁰

¹³⁰ See Ch 2. in *Confronting Old Testament Controversies* by Longman and Ch. 5 in *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* by Kitchen.

Joshua's military campaigns are related via the Ancient Conquest Account genre that includes hyperbole, annihilation language, and many more features that mitigate against a face value reading. Only the three cities of Jericho, Ai, and Hazor are claimed to have been destroyed with fire. The full range of Biblical data on Israelite origins paints a variegated portrait that includes both violent and non-violent entry in the land. The three key sites all have destruction layers, but present a mixed picture with many unanswered questions related to dating, geography, etc. There is not a clear break in material culture between the indigenous Canaanites and the indisputably Israelite time period.

What Was Supposed to Happen is NAB

Objection: The Israelites may have *failed* at committing genocide. But they were supposed to because God commanded genocide. Response: Joshua did all as the Lord commanded (Jo. 10:40-2). Joshua did not commit genocide, therefore, God did not command genocide.

Dispossession vs annihilation (Deuteronomy 12:29ff, NRSV)

The LORD your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same."

K. Lawson Younger, Ancient Conquest Accounts

The hērem [i.e. the war command] was not designed by God to eliminate the Canaanite culture per se but to eliminate the Canaanite religious influence. While it may be readily recognized that it is difficult in many instances to separate the two, there is nonetheless a distinction. The Israelite hērem commandments had close links to the issues of idolatry and the breaking of the second commandment (Ex. 22:20; Dt. 7:26; 13:16–18). That this is the case in [the first introduction] of Ju. (1:1–2:5) is reinforced by Yahweh's confrontation of the nation in 2:1–5, where it is their failure on the religious front that is of primary concern. In other words, the hērem was not concerned with the eradication of Canaanite clothing fashions, pottery styles, music, diet, and other types of particular cultural preferences. But it was deeply concerned with the eradication of the Canaanite religion: its gods/idols, altars, rituals, divinatory practices, uses of magic, etc.

What Could Have Happened is NAB

Paul Copan, Did God Command Genocide?

So the Canaanites are not in general portrayed as innocent. They are trespassing on land belonging to Israel and have engaged in practices such as human sacrifice for centuries without repentance. Their numerical and cultural dominance meant Israel could not live in the land alongside them without being absorbed into a culture engaging in abhorrent practices; yet the text suggests that Canaanites who turned from these practices could be spared.

Spared Canaanites

Rahab (Jo. 2:12-14, 5-6), Caleb the Kenizzite (Nu. 14:24), Uriah the Hittite (2 Sa. 23:39), City of Shechem (Jo. 8:33), Unnamed Canaanite (Ju. 1:22-6), Shamgar ben Anat (Ju. 3:31)

Approach 2: God Had Good Reasons / Just Cause

In Short: The commands were justified given God's plan and the moral depravity of the Canaanites including, but not limited to, idolatry, child sacrifice, incest, adultery, and bestiality (Jones 2009).

Genesis 15:12-16 (NRSV)

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.'

Deuteronomy 9:5 (NRSV)

Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Child Sacrifice

Despite the lack of direct unambiguous material evidence of child sacrifice in pre-Israelite Syro-Palestine, significant evidence is present from Carthagian sites (i.e. Phoenician colonies); the practice likely originated in the Canaanite/Phoenician mainland (Dewrell 2017, pg. 68-9, Xella 2013).

Leviticus 20:2-3 (NRSV)

Say further to the people of Israel: Any of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside in Israel, who give any of their offspring to Molech shall be put to death; the people of the land shall stone them to death. I myself will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people, because they have given their offspring to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name.

Philo of Byblos (ca. 100 AD)

Among ancient peoples in critically dangerous situations it was customary for the rulers of a city or nation, rather than lose everyone, to provide the dearest of their children as a propitiatory sacrifice to the avenging deities. The children thus given up were slaughtered according to a

secret ritual. Now Kronos, whom the Phoenicians [i.e. Canaanites] call El, who was in their land and who was later divinized after his death as the star of Kronos, had an only son by a local bride named Anobret, and therefore they called him Ieoud. Even now among the Phoenicians the only son is given this name. When war's gravest dangers gripped the land, Kronos dressed his son in royal attire, prepared an altar and sacrificed him.

Plutarch Moralia 2, De Superstitione 3 (ca. 100 AD)

Again, would it not have been far better for the Carthaginians to have taken Critias or Diagoras to draw up their law-code at the very beginning, and so not to believe in any divine power or god, rather than to offer such sacrifices as they used to offer to Cronos? These were not in the manner that Empedocles describes in his attack on those who sacrifice living creatures: "Changed in form is the son beloved of his father so pious, Who on the altar lays him and slays him. What folly!" No, but with full knowledge and understanding they themselves offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds; meanwhile the mother stood by without a tear or moan; but should she utter a single moan or let fall a single tear, she had to forfeit the money, and her child was sacrificed nevertheless; and the whole area before the statue was filled with a loud noise of flutes and drums so that the cries of wailing should not reach the ears of the people.

Approach 3: God Accommodates Revelation

In Short: God in choosing to reveal himself to an ancient people had to accommodate where they were.

Are there false depictions of God in the Bible? God is depicted as corporeal (Gen 2), not knowing things (Gen 22), and changing his mind (Jer 18:8). Many classical theists affirm the biblical depictions of God are largely analogical, especially insofar as they run contrary to the classical doctrines of God (e.g. impassibility, immutability, simplicity).

Lois Barrett *The Way God Fights* (1987: 70)

The people of Israel found themselves in a culture in the ancient Near East that accepted holy war as the way to deal with national enemies...God did not tell the people of early Israel to stop going to war any more than God told them to stop speaking Hebrew. Throughout the history of Israel, God took whatever evil practices God found and used them for good. God used warfare to lead people toward love and nonviolence. God was always able to take what was there, use it for good, and then ask people to move beyond it into God's better way of doing things.

Approach 4: Christocentric Critique of the Old Testament

In Short: The Incarnation and resurrection of Jesus turns the entire OT on its head, including the conquest accounts.

C.S. Cowles, Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide

In the New Testament, Jesus is not defined by God; rather, God is defined by Jesus. Jesus is the lens through whom a full, balanced, and undistorted view of God's loving heart and gracious purposes may be seen. The character of God revealed in Jesus enables us to discern the extent to which various Old Testament portrayals of God accurately represent what God is like.

David Janzen, 'The God of the Bible and the Nonviolence of Jesus'

The stories that reflect the God revealed in Jesus Christ will then function as the lens through which we interpret the rest of the biblical material and will be our guide to a truer understanding of the character of God and God's relationship to humanity.

Bringing it all together

The conquest account is a hyperbolic account of a justified expulsion of evil Canaanites from the land. The story is related via unnerving depictions of God as a warrior by an ancient warlike people. With the advent of the Incarnation in Jesus, the violent portraits of God are cast in a different light. The future of the people of God is no longer tied to terrestrial fortunes (John 18:36).

Additional Resources

*Note: Use of sources does not mean endorsement of everything in these books. These writers come from various perspectives and theological commitments. Remember to test all things and hold to what is true.

B = Beginner, I = Intermediate, A = Advanced

- Confronting Old Testament Controversies by T. Longman (B)
- God is a Warrior by T. Longman & D. Reid (A)
- Did God Really Command Genocide? by P. Copan & M. Flannagan (I)
- The God I Don't Understand by C.J.H. Wright (B)
- Ancient Conquest Accounts by K. Lawson Younger (A)
- On the Reliability of the Old Testament by K.A. Kitchen (I)
- Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God & Canaanite Genocide, Zondervan Counterpoint Series (B)
- Seibert, E. A. (2016). Recent Research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament (with Special Attention to Christian Theological Perspectives). Currents in Biblical Research, 15(1), 8-40.

- Jones, C. (2009). We don't hate sin so we don't understand what happened to the Canaanites: An addendum to "Divine Genocide" arguments. *Philosophia Christi*, 11(1), 53-72.
- Dewrell, H. D. (2017). *Child sacrifice in ancient Israel* (Vol. 5). Penn State Press.
- Barrett, L. (1987). *The Way God Fights: War and Peace in the Old Testament*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Discussion Questions

Based on questions from *Confronting Old Testament Controversy* by T. Longman

11. In addition to the Flood (Gen. 6-9), Reed Sea (Ex. 14-15), and the conquest (Jos. 1-13), where else do you see God acting violently in the Old Testament? What about the New?
12. Who is the object of God's violence in the Old Testament? In the New Testament?
13. Defenders of the NAB approach point out there are elements of the Biblical text that cannot be taken at face value. How do you think this influences our interpretation of the text? Does this undermine a high inerrantist view of scripture?
14. Many scholars compare Biblical literature (e.g. Jos. 1-13) to contemporaneous pagan literature (e.g. Annals of Tiglath-Pileser I). How legitimate is this interpretative method?
15. What do you make of the apparently conflicting Biblical portraits of the conquest?
 - a. **Jos 10:42** Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time // **Jos 11:17ff.** Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. // **Ex 23:29ff.** I will not drive them out from before you in one year...Little by little I will drive them out.
 - b. **Jos 10:40** So Joshua left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed // **Jdg 3:5ff.** So the Israelites lived among the Canaanites // **Ps 106:34ff.** They did not destroy the peoples...but they mingled with the nations.
 - c. **Ezek 16:1ff.** The word of the LORD came to me: Mortal, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites.
16. Defenders of the Just Cause approach often frame the conquest as an "intrusion" or "foretaste" of God's end-time judgment into the period of common grace. What does that mean to you? How do you imagine the second coming of Christ and the final judgment?
17. Can there be justice if evil people are not judged?
18. Defenders of the Accommodation approach make a distinction between how God is depicted in the Bible and the actual God. Do you think that is a helpful distinction? Under what circumstances?

19. Marcion was a 2c. heretic condemned for believing that the Old Testament and violent parts of the New Testament should not be part of the canon for Christians. How fair is it to compare Marcion to those scholars who follow the Christocentric Critique approach?
20. According to Ephesians 6, we are involved in a spiritual battle. In what ways does life seem like a battle to you? How do we fight that battle?