

> IS CHRISTIANITY TRUE?_



**23 Essays
Exploring the Truth
of Christianity**

WWW.APOLOGETICS315.COM

FOREWORD

By Chris Reese

<http://greatcloud.wordpress.com>

Christians have always defended their beliefs in the marketplace of ideas. One well-known instance in the life of the apostle Paul—particularly appreciated by apologists—is his speech at the Areopagus in Athens in Acts 17. At this location, where important civil and religious matters were discussed, Paul addressed a diverse and educated audience, including “Epicurean and Stoic philosophers” (v. 18).

Paul was eager to engage the Athenians here because “his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols” (v. 16). In his speech, from which we can glean important lessons concerning apologetics, Paul

sought to establish common ground with his audience by commending the Athenians' religious devotion, quoting two of their poets, and connecting their intuitions about "the unknown god" to the God of Scripture and the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Two thousand years later, those of us who endeavor to commend the Christian gospel and worldview to a skeptical audience are following in Paul's footsteps. One of the most significant provinces of the marketplace of ideas today is the Internet—a modern day Mars Hill. Like Paul, we are struck by the multitude of "gods" that command the devotion of so many today. And we see the destructive effects of false ideas play out in the lives of people around us. But like Paul, we choose to take a stand and winsomely present the Christian faith in the midst of skeptics, critics, seekers, and the curious. In Paul's case, "some mocked" and some went about their business, but some "joined him and believed" (vss. 32-34).

Because the need to articulate and defend the gospel is always present, I'm encouraged by this collection of short

essays defending the Christian faith. Many of us who keep blogs and websites devoted to apologetics are on the frontlines of reaching out to the youngest, brightest, and most articulate skeptics of religion and Christianity. While I admire and respect professional apologists and academics who write and speak on these topics, it takes an army of committed evangelists like you and me to engage one-on-one with the millions of non-believers online who want to ask questions, debate, and sometimes search for answers to honest questions.

So I encourage you to keep up the good work. I see our blogs and websites as islands of truth and light in a vast ocean of confusion and despair. Stay close to Christ and commit your life and work to Him. Devote time to studying theology, apologetics, and philosophy. Engage those who visit your site with wisdom, respect, and love. Remember that you're interacting with flesh and blood people who often have had bad experiences with religion or church. Speak the truth in love. Get to know some fellow apologetics bloggers and stay in touch on a regular basis. Help each other and promote each other's work. I believe we are making a difference out there on a daily basis and

that God will bless our efforts if we devote them to Him and to providing reasons for the hope that is in us.

Chris Reese

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INTRODUCTION

By Brian Auten

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For every weekday in April 2010, Apologetics 315 will feature an essay contributed by a Christian apologetics blogger in response to the question: *Why is Christianity True?* The goal of this project is a simple one: to share the reasons that we have found compelling to believe that Christianity is true. This is not intended to prove the Christian worldview beyond all doubt or to counter every objection of those who zealously reject God. Rather, it is intended as a starting point for those sincerely looking for truth – for those wondering if there are good reasons to believe.

All 23 essays have also been recorded as MP3 audio files to be released along with their respective text version. These audio files can be downloaded through each day's blog

post, or through the “*Is Christianity True?*” [podcast](#). At the end of the month, readers may download an ebook version of the essay collection.

The reasons supporting the truth of Christianity are manifold (history, science, cosmology, morality, scripture, the resurrection of Jesus, personal experience, etc.), but each blogger was given only 1000 words to make their case in a concise manner. Each blogger was given the freedom to take whatever angle they chose in order to present their own reasons for believing that Christianity is objectively true. Three of these essays have been extended in length to form ‘bookends’ to begin and end the series. As the editor, I hope that this concise format will both keep the reader’s (or listener’s) attention focused, and make it more accessible to those with busy schedules.

It has been a pleasure working with some of my fellow apologetics bloggers compiling this project. Their personal backgrounds are diverse: teacher, detective, pastor, scientist, student, among many others. I appreciate their faithfulness and their willingness to contribute these essays aside from their own lives and blogging projects. I encourage those

reading (or listening) to follow their blogs and interact with their work defending the faith.

Enjoy.

DOES GOD EXIST?

By Tawa Anderson

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Is there a God?¹ How can you be *sure* that God exists? Can you *prove* to me that God is real? Does the existence (or lack thereof) of God make any significant difference? Was Nietzsche right in declaring: “God is dead!”? These questions strike at the very heart of human existence, and cry out for our personal attention and deliberation.

Furthermore, these questions must be answered before we can inquire into the truth of Christianity. After all, if there is no God, then Jesus certainly isn’t God in the flesh! If there is no God, there is no Christian faith worth considering. In this brief essay, I will share three persuasive clues (traditionally called arguments or proofs) that point to the existence of God. This is not an apologetic for *Christianity*, but rather for basic *theism* – an argument that

God exists, not an argument that the *Christian* God is real.

The Human Condition: Why God Matters

Before considering arguments for God's existence, however, I want to briefly address the importance of God's existence. To put it bluntly: what are the implications if Freud was right – if God is a delusion, a projection of the human subconscious, an expression of insecurity and wish-fulfillment?²

The Book of Ecclesiastes poetically summarizes the life without God: “Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!” Atheist philosopher Jacques Monod states: “Man at last knows that he is alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe, out of which he emerged only by chance.” What is man, in the absence of God? An insignificant and doomed member of an insignificant and doomed race on an insignificant and doomed planet adrift amongst the infinitely immeasurable universe. What is our ultimate fate? Nothingness. Extinction. Humanity without God is not a pretty picture. The existence of God matters.

So the question becomes: does God exist? Let us look at the clues provided by the unquenchably religious spirit of man, the origins and fine-tuning of the universe, and morality.

Can Man Live Without God? An Existential Argument from Human Religiosity

First, consider the nature and extent of religious desire and religious experience. From the dawn of known history, human beings have been remarkably religious. Every human culture and civilization has had a concept of the divine - gods, goddesses, and spirit beings. People have a relentless desire to understand and touch the divine. St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) said, "Our hearts are restless until they find rest in You [God]." Notice also that our natural desires (e.g. hunger, thirst) are all matched by something which will satisfy them (e.g. food, water). This suggests that our desire to know and touch God is matched by something in reality which will satisfy that desire - namely, God. There is indeed a hole in our hearts that can only be filled by God.³

Human beings also have a hunger for eternal life, to persist

beyond physical death. All human cultures express this desire (e.g. the pyramids of Egypt, the spirit world of native religions, Asian ancestor worship/veneration). This yearning for eternity suggests that we exist for more than just this lifetime. Finally, human beings have always sought answers to the great questions of life—“where did I come from?”, “what is wrong with me (and the world)?”, and “how can we fix it?” We all seek answers, we all want wrongs to be set right, and we all yearn for eternal life. This is a part of the human condition because we have been created in the image of God ([Gen. 1:26-27](#)).⁴

The Heavens Declare the Glory of God: An Evidential Argument from Cosmology⁵

Second, consider the origins of our unimaginably vast and majestic universe. Our four-dimensional⁶ space-time continuum and all physical matter originated in the Big Bang about 13.7 billion years ago. What caused the Big Bang? The cause has to be *transcendent*, that is, outside of the physical universe itself (and therefore outside of time and space as we know it). The cause also has to be *personal* (a “timeless rock” couldn’t cause anything). The God of the Bible is a *transcendent, personal* being who brought the

universe into existence—as [Genesis 1:1](#) says, “In the beginning *God created* the heavens and the earth.”

Someone might ask: “If God made the universe, who [or what] made God?” But God, as the *transcendent personal* cause of the universe, exists independently of time, and as such has no beginning. Therefore, nothing caused God; He has always been.⁷

Furthermore, our universe is *fine-tuned*. It is governed by a number of physical constants and laws (e.g. gravity, relativity) which are set at exactly the right place to support life on earth. This is not random chance or pure luck, as some might argue. Rather, it is evidence of a transcendent Being who created the universe (time, space, and matter) so that we might live and come to know Him.

So, the next time you gaze at the stars, remember that the heavens do indeed declare the glory of God, and the stars declare the work of His hands ([Ps. 19:1](#))—our universe points to the existence of God.⁸

Good & God: A Rational Argument from Morality

Third, consider our awareness of morality—right and wrong. Some people claim that morality is *relative* to the individual (right for me, wrong for you). But deep down everyone knows that morality is *objective*—that some actions are truly wrong and others are truly right, regardless of whether someone agrees or likes it. We recognize our own wrongdoing, and rightly feel guilty about it (see [Rom. 2:1-5](#)). We also know that some things are wrong for all people in all cultures at all times—child abuse, rape, murder. If someone disagrees, pummel them until they admit that it is *really wrong* for you to do so!

Where does our awareness of *objective morality* come from? Perhaps we make it up as individuals or as societies, according to our own tastes. If so, then the Holocaust was not evil, but rather the expression of Nazi Germany’s moral tastes. Perhaps morality is a product of evolution instrumental to human survival. If so, what we call “wrong” today may be “right” tomorrow. Either way, morality is not a prescription for how we *ought to* behave, but rather a description of how we *do* behave. If moral standards are not grounded in something *transcendent* (that is, outside of humanity), it is impossible to say (as we all

do) that anything is always morally wrong (or right).

Simply put, if there is no God, then the evil that men do is not *evil*, it simply *is*.

Objective morality comes from our transcendent God, who has declared what is right and what is wrong (e.g. Ex. 20) based upon His character—His holiness, justice, and love. God is the source of our knowledge of right and wrong—the clue of human morality points to the existence of God.

Come, Let Us Reason Together: An Invitation to Theism¹⁰

I have touched briefly on three persuasive clues that point to the existence of God. I have not had time to lay the arguments out fully, but I have provided suggestions for further reading in each area. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that the arguments are not conclusive proofs. I find them powerful and persuasive, but if you are entirely closed to considering the possibility of God's existence, then no one will convince you. If God is not in your "pool of live options", then you will not be persuaded no matter what evidence and arguments are presented in God's favor. Thus, I wish to conclude with a personal

appeal: I entreat you to not close your mind to the possibility of God. Consider the clues for God with an open mind; consider the following essays (arguing for the truth of Christianity in particular) with a willingness to be persuaded.

1 God here is understood simply as a transcendent or divine being – one outside of space and time.

2 Incidentally, I think the modern denial of God's existence is a different type of wish-fulfillment – one which arises from man's desire to be autonomous, self-sufficient, and secure in his own power.

3 Following C. S. Lewis, the argument looks like this:

a) Humans have undeniable natural desires, longings, or yearnings.

b) Each natural human desire/yearning has a satisfier in nature.

c) Humans have deep-seated religious yearnings which, if it is to be satisfied, can only be satisfied by an infinite God.

d) Therefore, God must exist.

4 For further reading, see Ravi Zecharias, [Can Man Live Without God?](#); William Lane Craig, [Reasonable Faith](#).

5 [Psalm 19:1ff](#).

6 String theory (in most manifestations) suggest there are more than these four dimensions—if you subscribe to string theory, expand the number of dimensions accordingly. The same principle holds.

7 William Lane Craig phrases the argument:

(a) Everything that begins to exist has an external cause.

(b) The universe began to exist.

(c) Therefore, the universe had an external cause (outside of space and time), which we call God.

8 For further reading, see Lee Strobel, [The Case For a Creator](#); Norm Geisler & Frank Turek, [I Don't Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist](#).

9 For further reading, see C. S. Lewis, [Mere Christianity](#); Timothy Keller, [The Reason for God](#).

10 [Isaiah 1:18](#).

THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW IS THE BEST EXPLANATION

By J. Warner Wallace

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As a detective, I have an interesting job. I have to enter the crime scene and assess the evidence in front of me: is this a natural death or a homicide? If it's a homicide, which suspect best explains the evidence at the scene? While there may be a number of potential suspects that account for some or most of the evidence we see, one suspect will usually emerge as the "best" in that he or she most completely (and most reasonably) explains the evidence. This suspect simply makes the most sense of what I am seeing. I then "infer", from the fact that this suspect provides the best explanation (given the evidence) that the suspect is, in fact, the true killer. This process of "inferring to the best explanation" is sometimes called "abduction". I understand the importance of examining a number of

potential solutions (suspects) and carefully assessing which of these solutions best explains the evidence. When I utilize the process of abduction, I end up with an explanation that is simple and coherent and adequately explains the evidence in question. Is it "possible" that I might have the wrong suspect? Sure, especially if I grant that anything and everything is possible. But is it "reasonable" to believe that someone else committed this crime when my final suspect accounts for all the evidence at the crime scene? No. And that's the beauty of utilizing abduction in this manner. I arrive at a place of "evidential sufficiency" and I'm able to make sense of what I am seeing.

Detectives aren't the only people who employ abductive reasoning to make sense of their environment. All of us want to make sense of our world. As a result, each of us holds a view of the world (something we refer to as "worldview") that attempts to explain the situation we find ourselves in. That's fair; all of us observe the world around us and begin to think about potential explanations for what we are seeing. We then find ourselves offering the most reasonable explanation that would, if true, explain the evidence we have in front of us. We are "inferring to the

best explanation"; employing the process of "abduction".

The longer we live, the more we recognize life's "big questions". These questions beg to be answered and have motivated theologians, philosophers and scientists to explore and investigate their world. Every one of us develops a particular worldview in order to explain the reality of our lives and answer life's most important questions. Along the way we make a decision between two potential realities: a world in which only natural forces are at work (an atheistic worldview known as Philosophical Naturalism) or a world in which supernatural forces are at work in addition to natural forces (as represented by Theistic Worldviews). Given these two possibilities, "abductive reasoning" can help us to decide which view best explains the reality in which we live. I hold a theistic worldview because I believe it best explains the world around me, and it does so in a way that simply cannot be equaled by the philosophical naturalism inherent to atheism. In the ten most intriguing and important questions that can be asked by humans, Christian theism continues to offer the best explanation, especially when compared to philosophical naturalism:

- How Did the Universe Come Into Being?
- Why Does There Appear to Be Design (Fine Tuning) in the Universe?
- How Did Life Originate?
- Why Does There Appear to Be Evidence of Intelligence in Biology?
- How Did Human Consciousness Come Into Being?
- Where Does Free Will Come From?
- Why Are Humans So Contradictory in Nature?
- Why Do Transcendent Moral Truths Exist?
- Why Do We Believe Human Life to be Precious?
- Why Does Pain, Evil and Injustice Exist in Our World?

The ten "big questions" of life act as ten pieces of evidence "in the room". As a detective, I look at the evidence, offer possible hypotheses that might explain what I am seeing, then evaluate the hypotheses to see which is the best explanation. The process of "abductive reasoning" requires me to evaluate a given hypothesis to make sure that it is feasible (it possesses "explanatory viability"), that it is simple (it has the most "explanatory power"), that it is exhaustive (it has the most "explanatory scope"), that it is

logical (it has the most "explanatory consistency") and that it is superior (it possesses "explanatory superiority"). When looking at these ten pieces of evidence, I quickly recognize the problem Philosophical Naturalism has explaining them. At the same time, it's clear that Christian Theism offers explanations that are feasible, simple, exhaustive, logical and superior, if we don't simply reject the existence of God before we even begin the examination. After all, we've got to start each investigation by offering the broadest possible solutions, then allow the evidence to tell us which of these "possibilities" is actually the most "reasonable inference".

Finally, it's important for us to recognize that no solution will explain the evidence completely (without leaving some limited number of unanswered questions). I've never worked a homicide case, nor presented a case in front of a jury, that didn't have some unanswered question. But this cannot prevent us from moving toward a decision, and it has never prevented a jury from coming to a verdict. We've got to understand that "certainty" can reasonably emerge from what I call "evidential sufficiency". At some point, the evidence is sufficient to cause us to believe that our hypothesis is the true explanation for the evidence under

consideration. We cannot expect that every question will be answered, but the hypothesis that explains the evidence the most powerfully, the most exhaustively and the most consistently must sufficiently satisfy our need for certainty. This is the case with the Christian Worldview in light of the ten big pieces of evidence "in the room". The Christian Worldview is the best explanation.

COHERENT, CONSISTENT, LIVABLE

By Wes Widner

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Christianity is a worldview, a way of viewing the world we live in. This encompasses metaphysical beliefs such as the origin of the universe, meaning and purpose of life, and what happens to us after we die. It also encompasses things like how we view family, marriage, and careers. It even encompasses mundane decisions such as what we choose to wear, what entertainment we prefer, and how we spend our leisure time.

Most people don't really think about their world-views and, as a consequence, their world-views end up being a hodge-podge collection of beliefs. Very few people take the time to critically think through the beliefs they hold and examine whether their world-view passes three basic tests:

Is it coherent?

The first question of any world-view is whether it offers any explanation of the world around us and how accurate that description is. Not all world-views are concerned with accurately describing the world around us. In Buddhism and Hinduism, for example, reality is seen as a myth so that naturally the descriptions these world-views offer are not intended to provide an accurate description of the world. Naturalism/materialism (held by many atheists) contain descriptions of the world which break down at the point of origin and fail to explain how something can come from nothing.

Christianity is unique in that it not only offers reasonable explanations regarding the origin of the universe, but it also offers a reasonable explanation of well-established historical events such as the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Is it consistent?

The next question we should ask about a world-view is whether it contains contradictory statements. Such statements would pose a logical problem for us as they

would violate one of the foundational laws of logic, namely the law of non-contradiction.

Some worldviews such as Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age, Wicca, Islam and Mormonism embrace paradoxes as part of their standard doctrine and therefore don't hold a pretense of being consistent in regards to their teachings. Rather, the focus in worldviews such as these is more experiential than it is informative. Christianity, however, is concerned with both.

Eastern religions rely heavily on contradictions in order to draw adherents into deeper meditation. Zen Buddhism, for instance, has an entire category of teachings known as Kōan which are expressly designed to combat rational thinking and discourse which is often seen by eastern mystics as a western invention.

Islam embraces contradictions both in the teachings from their holy writings, the Bible, Qur'an and Hadith, and in their ritual practices. Adherents are asked to believe that both the Bible and the Qur'an were given by Allah even though both contain mutually exclusive claims. In more

recent times adherents have also been told that Islam is a religion of peace and is tolerant of opposing world-views which contradicts both history and the words of the founder (Muhammad).

Naturalism/materialism embraces the inherent contradiction of infinite regress when it comes to the origin of the universe as supernatural explanations are categorically rejected out of hand. This also poses a problem of where morals, meaning, and purpose are grounded in a purely naturalistic world view.

Christianity is unique in this area in that it does not pose any inherent contradictions either within the text believed to contain the inspired revelation from God or in the practices prescribed therein. There are certainly difficulties which require some effort and study, and certainly many Christian teachers have managed to introduce foreign philosophies into Christianity making it appear to be logically inconsistent or contradictory. While many followers of Jesus Christ have failed to live consistently, nevertheless the teachings of Christ found in the New Testament are in perfect concert with what we find in the

Old Testament.

The Christian, unlike adherents of competing worldviews, does not need to accept a logical paradox in order to harmonize any teachings found within Christianity with other teachings or with history or scientific findings.

Is it livable?

A worldview may be internally consistent and offer a comprehensive explanation of the world and yet, not be livable. Atheism, for example, offers a succinct view of the world wherein we are merely cosmic accidents: flukes of nature whose existence has no purpose or meaning. Some, like Friedrich Nietzsche, accepted the nihilism that logically accompanies a naturalistic view of the universe.

Unfortunately, Nietzsche ended up going insane attempting to maintain a consistency with his beliefs.

However many choose, instead, to continue believing that life is worth living. That it has meaning and that what we do here on earth matters and echoes in some form into eternity. Such stubborn beliefs are not livable within a naturalistic view of the world and must be borrowed,

instead from somewhere else.

Coherent, consistent, and livable

Christianity is the only worldview that passes each of these tests with flying colors and I highly encourage anyone who is serious in their search for truth to consider Christianity. You might just find that the truth you seek has been expecting you with outstretched arms.

THE FAILURE OF NATURALISM

By Richard Gerhardt

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Though I have come to the same recognition from each of several independent perspectives, today I'll argue that *science* leads me to embrace Christianity. My arguments will address the leading alternative scientific view, scientific naturalism; my primary purpose, then, will not be to affirm Christianity *vis à vis* Islam, Hinduism, or other world religions. The perceptive reader may apply some of these arguments against those other worldviews, but space dictates that I adhere to the primary task of debunking the ideas that (in the words of the late astronomer Carl Sagan) "the Cosmos is all there is, or was, or ever will be" and that modern science has somehow proved this metaphysical claim.

My conclusion as a biologist, historian of science, and philosopher of science, is that Christian theism—which sees the universe and everything in it as the creations of a transcendent, intelligent eternal Being—does a far better job than does scientific naturalism of accounting for the evidence that science provides.

Modern science has discovered and elucidated much about the physical make-up of the universe, its building blocks, and the natural laws that govern its behavior. Science has eliminated diseases, put men on the moon, and made life more comfortable in innumerable ways. But the success of science in describing the way things behave does not justify claims by modern biologists about questions of how things originated. And where philosophical questions concerning the God/no God debate can now be addressed by scientific discoveries, it is the theist whose view is invariably supported.

For centuries, astronomers have progressed in understanding the processes of star, galaxy, and planetary formation, events that proceed (largely, if not entirely) according to natural laws. But only within the last hundred

years did they come to understand what the Judeo-Christian Scriptures have declared for 3500 years—that the universe itself is finite, that space and time and the processes and natural laws that we describe all had a beginning not long ago. Einstein’s discoveries so clearly supported Judeo-Christianity (and undermined naturalist assumptions) that the 20th century was characterized by attempts to find alternative cosmologies to the ‘Big Bang.’ Those attempts served instead to solidify general relativity as the most rigorously tested and verified principle in all of physics. While natural law may be sufficient for explaining the *behavior* of matter, energy, space, and time, the origin of these things and of the natural laws that govern them require for their explanation an Originator.

Cosmology is just one example. All of the big questions for science—and philosophy—are likewise best explained in theistic, not naturalistic, terms. These include the design of the universe (for intelligent life on earth), the origin of life on Earth, the Cambrian explosion (as representative of the fossil record generally, in which every living thing has appeared suddenly, fully formed and adapted for its time on earth and its role in the ecology of its day), the origin of

the information in the universal genetic code, and the origin of human consciousness.

In all of these most important cases, abductive reasoning—arguing to the best explanation from the available evidence—leads to a theistic understanding of the universe and a denial of metaphysical naturalism. This being the case, the naturalist project depends upon the logical fallacies of reductionism and circular reasoning. The only way to keep theistic conclusions out of the debate is to deny their consideration *a priori*—before the evidence. But that, of course, is not objective science but a theological perspective masquerading as science.

This is but one example of the logical problems for modern scientific naturalism. It is a matter of history that it was Christians of the 16th and 17th centuries that birthed modern science. And this was not mere coincidence. Rather, it is the Christian worldview that uniquely provided—and provides—the philosophical assumptions that make science worthwhile. Though some two dozen such assumptions have been identified, I'll mention just two.

The Christian founders of modern science expected order in the universe because they understood the universe to be the product of a rational Creator. Whereas modern scientific naturalists depend upon that order, naturalism cannot account for it, explain why it is characteristic of the universe. Likewise, since they believed humankind to be created in God's image, science's founders expected that our senses and reasoning would be reliable for discerning the order in the universe. Philosopher Alvin Plantinga and others have persuasively argued that naturalistic evolution is self-refuting in this regard—that if the human brain is the product of a random process whose goal was merely survival and reproductive fitness, then there is no reason to trust the conclusions of such a brain.

Agnostic physicist Paul Davies has summed up this problem this way: “So science can proceed only if the scientist adopts an essentially theological worldview.” Plantinga wrote, “Modern science was conceived, and born, and flourished in the matrix of Christian theism. Only liberal doses of self-deception and double-think, I believe, will permit it to flourish in the context of Darwinian

naturalism.”

Much of science deals with elucidating the natural laws that govern ongoing processes; the resulting conclusions are theologically neutral and non-controversial. But by claiming that questions of origin are equally susceptible to natural explanations, scientists betray themselves as philosophically and historically naïve and incapable of keeping up with or understanding the implications of the latest important scientific discoveries.

Christianity makes sense of the facts most in need of explaining—the origin and design of the universe, the origin of life on Earth, of information in DNA, and of human consciousness, to name a few. In addition, Christianity provides the logical assumptions that make science worth doing. Naturalistic science neither accommodates the latest scientific discoveries nor logically grounds its own existence. With C.S. Lewis, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

DEFROCKING THE PRIESTS OF SCIENTISM

By Bob Perry

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The “skeptical” materialist, Michael Shermer recently offered the following as a description of his atheism: “There’s no, like, central set of tenets that we adhere to or believe in, or anything like ... a Christian or a Jew or whatever. We don’t have anything like that, because there is nothing. It’s just simply we just don’t believe.”¹

Shermer’s denial of any adherence to religious belief is instructive in light of the widely heralded claims he and others make about the legitimacy of Christian input to the marketplace of ideas. A “religion,” let us remember, is nothing more than a template by which one understands and responds to the world. Everybody has one. Shermer’s religion is simply informed by a belief that God does not

exist. But that assertion does not allow him to escape the fact that he holds to a systematic view of the world. He has simply tried to construct his understanding of ethics, truth and ultimate reality on the non-existence of God. The question is not about who holds religious views. The question is which of those views correspond best with reality.

Acknowledging this materialist religiosity is not just a clever way to make a trivial point – not when we have been trained to believe that legitimate dialogue starts with the tacit acceptance of naturalistic assumptions in any discussion about what really matters. Any view that questions that mindset is categorically dismissed as a matter of personal opinion that need not be taken seriously. It is within such a paradigm that only scientists may offer us “proof.” Our scientific culture ordains scientists as the source of all wisdom and authority.

If Naturalism is true, this all makes sense. If the physical world is all that is real; if every phenomenon must be understood as a consequence of molecules in motion; if material causes are the only kind we are allowed to invoke,

it stands to reason that science – the study of the natural world – is the only explanatory game in town. If science holds all truth, our *belief* in science – *scientism* – is our greatest hope.

But if science is the only appropriate defender of the Naturalistic worldview, it seems fair to ask how science can analyze things that, under the presuppositions of Naturalism, are not possible *even in principle*? How do the priests of scientism propose to explain away *non-natural* realities?

Take for instance the often-repeated declaration that “science has disproved God.” This is an odd claim to say the least. For one thing, it must simultaneously address the mutually exclusive truths that: 1) science is the study of the physical universe and, 2) no credible theist has ever claimed that God is part of the physical universe. This detail seems to be lost on the priests of scientism – especially on those who espouse their disbelief in the deity with a smug wave of the hand and a demand for “evidence.” They insist that the Christian theist offer acceptable physical evidence for a non-physical entity that the scientific clergy has already

dismissed by mere presupposition. Do they not see the circularity in their reasoning? Without it, the entire scaffolding of *scientism* collapses under the weight of its own criteria for identifying truth.

It is wildly ironic that the priests of scientism seem ignorant of the language of their faith. Science depends on mathematics to make its case. Moreover, this mathematical structure has been described by naturalistic scientists themselves as “an abstract, immutable entity existing outside space and time” that allows for the orderliness and invariant properties we observe in nature. It is “something bordering on the mysterious” that has “an eerily real feel” to it and satisfies “a central criterion of objective existence.”² Stephen Hawking wonders where such characteristics as mathematics, and the laws of physics and chemistry could have originated.³ Even atheist Bertrand Russell once remarked that mathematics holds both “truth and supreme beauty.”

Mathematics is the language of science – the vocabulary of those who deny non-physical reality – yet mathematics itself is the combination of numbers and concepts, *neither*

of which are physical but both of which are undeniably real.

It is through mathematics that scientists engage in the quantum metaphysics by which they try to evade the clear causal inference of Big Bang cosmology. They profess that our universe really required no cause at all and that they know this because the otherwise inexplicable degree of fine-tuning in this universe implies that we must just be living among an infinite number of other ones. As cosmologist Max Tegmark has put it, this “idea ... seems strange and implausible, but it looks as if we will just have to live with it, because it is supported by astronomical observations.”⁴ Of course, the fact that these alternate universes are, by definition, *unobservable* is never addressed by those who demand “evidence” from the theist whose “blind faith” is considered a target for their derision.

Agent causation. Life from non-life. Mind from matter. Non-material objective reality. Each of these actualities is part of our common human experience, yet each is foundationally inconsistent with a naturalistic view of the world.

This is not to say that the scientific enterprise is misguided. Far from it. The point is that, on Christian theism, science is understood in context as the rational method whereby we discover and understand the order and majesty of God's creative work. Seen that way, each of these conundrums vanishes inside the more comprehensive view that nature is *not* a full description of reality. It turns out that Christianity's explanatory power far exceeds the naturalistic alternative.

This does not diminish science. It simply acknowledges that materialism's idolization of science is a futile ritual meant to account for realities the worldview itself denies. "Be patient," we are told, "science may not have explained these things yet, but it will. Just give it time." Though meant to persuade, this pious exhortation serves only to confirm the materialist's religious zeal.

The priests, it seems, also fancy themselves as prophets.

1 Excerpt from the transcript of the December 31, 2009 Hugh Hewitt radio program available at:

<http://www.hughhewitt.com/transcripts.aspx?id=53dc1daa-c9b6-429f-9732-923b01ba19b3>

2 Max Tegmark, "Parallel Universes." (Scientific American. May, 2003), 49.

3 Dean Overman, *A Case Against Accident and Self-Organization* (New York, New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1997), 159.

4 Tegmark, 41.

ORTHOGONAL COMPLEXITY

By Peter Grice

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Something resembling Christianity must be true, in my view, due to a pervasive phenomenon I'd like to call *orthogonal complexity*. It is distinct from two related concepts, *irreducible complexity* and *specified complexity*, as elaborated below.

All three concepts fall under the general category of *teleology*. Telos is a mode of explanation described by Aristotle,¹ where a physical object or system has a purpose that exists in *prior causal relation* to its features of form and function. In other words, its traits serve the interests of a goal.

For example, we understand that a steak knife is *for* cutting

steak. Its own teleological ‘end’ helps to explain both why the knife exists (to function for cutting steak) and why it has particular features (such as its serrated edge and proper balance when held by a human hand). Although a steak knife could be fully measured and described scientifically without invoking its known purpose, this would be a *reduced* rather than *complete* explanation.²

Given the inability of steak knives to intend and manufacture themselves, the clear implication is that they are artefacts of beings with sufficient intelligence and creative power. While this is not disputed for steak knives, it certainly is controversial when it comes to human beings and other biological systems, for obvious reasons.

Yet it seems all too easy to dismiss contemporary discussion about this as “merely an updated form” of William Paley’s argument³ – whatever that might mean in detail. It is precisely the detail that matters, since the design argument is not unsound. Rather, its application is disputed. Our knowledge of biological complexity has come a long way in the past 200 years, making it more applicable than ever to the question of telos in the organic world.

*Irreducible complexity*⁴ is the notion that all constituent parts are necessary for a given biological system to maintain its function relative to the organism.⁵ *Specified complexity*⁶ refers to systems that are both *specified*, as with a single letter of the alphabet, and *complex*, as with a string of letters. If verified, either of these concepts would show that any stepwise, trial-and-error meandering of naturalistic evolution has in fact been transcended by intelligence.

What I mean by *orthogonal complexity*⁷ is the confluence of multiple linear pathways of development, in a coordinated way, resulting in an emergent structure or pattern of different dimensionality. This pattern, such as the impressive fan of “eyes” in a peacock’s train, would be characterised as *epiphenomenal*, *complex*, *specified* and also *digital* in terms of traversing discontinuous structures (as with pixels on a computer screen). The feat must be accomplished via advanced calculations and conceptual mergers far beyond the capacity of undirected, linear processes to procure. While strictly reducible to physical constituent parts, the presence of an effect is real. It dissipates rather than participates in a physical reduction, so

in that sense it is also *irreducible*.

Imagine an exquisite tapestry – its ornate, intricate design the trademark of a particular family of artisans, along with the knowledge of precise over-and-under weavings for its reproduction. Reflect for a moment on the necessity of the craftsman to the process.⁸ One could attempt to explain this away by unraveling the weave, one strand at a time, to show the tapestry composed entirely of linear threads. Yet this is inadequate as a full explanation, since it excludes genuine data – the telos of the arrangement.

Tapestries exhibit *orthogonal complexity* in the way their vertical ‘warp’ threads interlace with horizontal ‘woof’ threads. There is further orthogonality at each point of virtual intersection, with its calculation to reference the superimposed design. The canvas is an assemblage of linear threads and not a continuous flat surface, and therein lies the challenge.

So it is with a peacock’s tail, only here the physical “canvas” comprises myriad linear filaments of different scales, in fractal-like configuration, fixed in precise positions in space

to facilitate the overall arrangement. Just as a pile of threads would seem a poor choice on which to paint a masterpiece, so is the peacock's splay of feathers entirely nonconductive to a two-dimensional picture. Yet it is plain to see one superimposed.⁹

In the case of the rounded "eye" of a single feather, this involves a requisite colour abruptly starting, continuing and stopping along a given barb or barbule – all at precise locations and specified lengths that only make sense within the overall scheme. Adjacent elements of the design are juxtaposed on adjacent digits, with empty space in between.

The mappings involved are analogous to mathematical transformations between lower and higher dimensions. The colours themselves are effects of complex 3D microscopic structures known as photonic crystals,¹⁰ introducing yet another complex transformation. In fact, the whole panoply unfolds from a linear encoding of information inside DNA.

If this boggles the mind of human beings,¹¹ one has to be suspicious that it all ensues straightforwardly once the

humble peahen conspires with nature to simulate a master weaver. We are asked to believe that the mating preferences of peahens largely account for this phenomenally complex feat, despite the disputed nature of any evidence for this.¹² Even the brightest human minds could not produce such a masterpiece without indulging in mimicry.

Multiple interposed levels of orthogonal complexity cry out for adequate explanation. Just as a relatively simple tapestry necessitates a weaver, so it would seem that nature's orthogonality requires transcendent, intelligent, creative causal agency.

I began by implying that this is part of an cumulative case. Personally, I regard the evidence for Christianity to be broad-ranging and convincing, and I encourage readers to explore this through other essays in this series. I trust that my contribution has at least highlighted a major point of departure between rival explanations. Is it legitimate for an anti-supernatural philosophical stance to reject out of hand whole swathes of potential evidence for Christianity? It seems to me that this issue turns on the quality of

complexity we are now discovering, which undermines the claim that telos in biology is illusory.

1 Aristotle assigns telos the role of “Final Cause,” from his doctrine of the Four Causes expounded in his text *Metaphysics*.

2 Hence the pejorative sense of the term reductionism. Within the full range of data present to human understanding, whole categories exist that seem to fall outside the bounds of what science alone is capable of analyzing.

3 Paley’s design argument, from his 1802 work *Natural Theology*, takes this form: if we were to chance upon a wristwatch on some remote ground, we would realise its obvious purpose in measuring time, and infer from this that it had been designed. By analogy, it seems rational to make the same kind of inference from the apparent purposiveness of biological systems, to an intelligent cause.

4 A concept first put forward by Michael Behe in his bestselling *Darwin’s Black Box* (1996).

5 My wording here is significant, since critics have suggested that some parts or substructures of a proposed irreducibly complex system have been co-opted from other contexts, yet this appears to sidestep the claim, which is about the particular system’s function in its present context.

6 Championed by William Dembski in *The Design Inference* (1998).

7 In proposing my own concept I don’t mean to imply that it isn’t subsumed by the work of Behe, Dembski and others, or that it is rigorously formulated elsewhere (I am not a complexity theorist). Nonetheless I trust that my humble observation will provoke the reader to reflect on candidates for orthogonal complexity and their adequate explanation.

8 While afterwards it may be reproduced mechanistically, as with a Jacquard Loom, this wouldn’t have been possible without the initial involvement of an intelligent agent.

9 While there is orthogonality in the diverging and converging growth process, the more interesting and sophisticated orthogonality is in the superimposition of the familiar 2D design on to the underlying structure.

10 See for instance, <http://www.nnin.org/doc/2007nninREUSmyth.pdf>

11 Little wonder Charles Darwin wrote to a colleague, “Trifling particulars of structure often make me very uncomfortable. The sight of a feather in a peacock’s tail, whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick.”

12 Takahashi et al., Peahens do not prefer peacocks with more elaborate trains; <http://bit.ly/aK3BzL>

CUMULATIVE REASONS FOR CHRISTIANITY

By Chad Gross

<http://truthbomb.blogspot.com>

In this essay, I will share some of the reasons that I follow Jesus Christ.

If God does not exist, each of our thoughts are simply the product of a long series of random, unreasonable accidents. As C.S. Lewis once put it: "...if... thoughts...are merely accidental by-products, why should we believe that one accident should be able to give a correct account of all the other accidents."¹

The fact that we, as finite beings, can ponder such questions as "Does God Exist?" is powerful evidence *for* His existence. For someone to reason about anything, God's existence must be pre-supposed. I see no good basis for

concluding that unreasonable, natural processes can produce reasoning beings. A supremely reasonable mind seems to be the most logical explanation of humanity's reasoning abilities.

Modern day cosmology has discovered that the universe had a beginning. In the finite past, all matter, space, time, and energy exploded into existence out of nothing in what is now known as the "Big Bang." Logically, the cause of this explosion could not have been from within the natural order because nature itself did not exist prior to the Big Bang; therefore, one can conclude that the cause of the Big Bang exists outside of nature i.e. *supernatural*. Further, from the relevant data, one can deduce that this cause is something that is spaceless, timeless, immaterial, supernatural and inconceivably powerful.²

As Arno Penzias, Nobel prize winner for his discovery of the cosmic background radiation that corroborated the Big Bang has said, "The best data we have are exactly what I would have predicted had I nothing to go on but the five books of Moses, the Psalms, and the Bible as a whole"³

Moreover, it has been verified that from the beginning, the initial constants that enable our universe to sustain life were present. Meaning, that from the first moment the universe came into existence, it was programmed, if you will, to form the universe we inhabit. As a result, many have concluded that the Big Bang could not have been a random, chaotic event, but a precise, pre-figured moment of creation.⁴ As a theist, I can conclude that something + nothing = everything; however, the atheist, as admitted by philosopher Quentin Smith, has to believe that the universe came “from nothing, by nothing, and for nothing.”⁵

The Apostle Paul wrote: “And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching *is useless and so is your faith*” ([1 Corinthians 15:14](#)).

Dr. Gary Habermas has compiled a list of more than 2, 200 sources in French, German, and English in which experts have written on the resurrection from 1975 to the present. He has identified minimal facts (12 total) that are strongly evidenced and which are regarded as historical by the large majority of scholars, *including skeptical ones*.

Scholar Mike Licona explains the "minimal facts" approach to the resurrection:

Under this approach, we only consider facts that meet two criteria. First, there must be very strong historical evidence supporting them. And secondly, the evidence must be so strong that the vast majority of today's scholars on the subject- including skeptical ones- accept these as historical facts... Lets face it: there's a greater likelihood that a purported historical fact is true when someone accepts it even though they're not in agreement with your metaphysical beliefs.⁶

This set of facts is based upon viewing the Bible solely as ancient, historical literature.

While all these facts are agreed upon by the large majority of scholars, we will focus on the five that are most evidenced. They are as follows:

Fact #1 - Jesus was killed by Crucifixion

Fact #2 - Jesus' Disciples Believed that He Rose and Appeared to Them

Fact #3 - The Conversion of the Church Persecutor Paul

Fact #4 - The Conversion of the Skeptic James, Jesus' Half-Brother

Fact #5 - Jesus' Tomb was Empty.⁷

The best explanation of these facts is that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead. The skeptic, who rejects this conclusion, must be able to not only provide alternative theories to explain the data, but also present first-century evidence to substantiate their conclusion.⁸

Finally, when someone puts their faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit will confirm that they are saved:

"The Spirit Himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children" ([Romans 8:16a](#), CSB).

This is *experiential evidence* for the believer that Jesus is who He said He was/is.

However, we must address the fact that other world religions claim to possess "tests for truth." The Muslim will tell you to follow Islam because only God could have written the *Qur'an*.⁹ Further, the *Book of Mormon* tells us

that the Holy Spirit will manifest the truth of Mormonism to you when you ask for confirmation through prayer.¹⁰

It's imperative to understand that a believer's experience *must* correlate with the external evidence available through history, archeology, and observable facts.

The test for truth in the *Qur'an* is highly subjective considering that a Christian could claim that Psalm 19 is superior in literally form to the first Sura in the *Qur'an*.

Further, the *Book of Mormon* proves inadequate under critical inquiry due to the virtually non-existent archaeological evidence to substantiate its claims.

What about the skeptic that doesn't believe in Jesus at all?

The resurrection provides an objective test for truth, as Habermas and Licona explain:

"We have the external test that, if Jesus actually rose from the dead, it appears the truth of Christianity is confirmed and all adherents to conflicting beliefs

must reassess whether their assurance came from a spirit other than God's or was the result of self-delusion."¹¹

It was Jesus who said, “If anyone chooses to do God's will, *he will find out* whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own” ([John 7:17 NIV](#); *Emphasis mine*). Is a step of faith required? Yes; however, faith should not be a blind leap into the dark, but a reasonable step into the light based upon sound reason and evidence.¹²

Resources and Notes:

1. C.S. Lewis, [God in the Dock](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 52-53.
2. For a easy to read summary of the evidence for the Big Bang, I recommend agnostic Robert Jastrow's book, [God and the Astronomers](#).
3. Cited by Dinesh D'Souza, [What's So Great about Christianity](#), p.124.
4. For an in-depth look at the precision of the Big Bang and the existence of the cosmological constants from the moment of creation, I recommend William Lane Craig's work [Reasonable Faith](#), 3rd edition.
5. William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith, [Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology](#) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 135.
6. Lee Strobel, [The Case for the Real Jesus](#): Interview with Mike Licona (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2007), p. 112.
7. I have written more about the reasons why the majority of scholars except these facts [here](#).
8. I have addressed some of the common objections to the resurrection [here](#).
9. Sura 2:23-24, The Glorious Qur'an, p.7; Text and Explanatory Translation by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall.
10. Moroni 10:4-5, The Book of Mormon, p. 529 by Joseph Smith, Jun.
11. Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, [The Case for the Resurrection](#), (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel Inc., 2004), p. 28.
12. I have written more on the definition of faith [here](#).

PROPHECY AND RESURRECTION

By Shelby Cade

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A.W. Tozer once stated, “The unattended garden will soon be overrun with weeds; the heart that fails to cultivate truth and root out error will shortly be a theological wilderness.”¹ Tozer recognized the importance of truth, especially theological truth. What evidence can be given to show that Christianity is the religion that has truth as its foundation?

In looking at the Christian truth claims compared to other religions, the divisions are distinguished by way of the evidence. Truth, by its very nature, is exclusive. Truth can be defined as that which corresponds to reality or the way things really are. If something is true, it is irrelevant if an individual believes it or not. All religions can be critiqued – including Christianity – to verify which one corresponds to

the way things really are. What evidence exists for Christianity?

The evidence for Christian truth rests on prophesy and the resurrection. The first bit of evidence comes by way of prophecy. Jesus of Nazareth uniquely fulfilled the prophecies that were spoken of him hundreds of years earlier, even to the point of detailing the type of death he would receive (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53). According to Norm Geisler, the Old Testament records 191 Messianic prophecies.² Peter Stoner has calculated the odds of just eight prophecies being fulfilled as one chance in ten to the 1017th power. An analogy of this is like covering the state of Texas with silver dollars two feet deep and marking one red for an individual to identify, blindfolded, on the first guess.³ The prophetic evidence shows strong support that Jesus was the expected Messiah, but what about the resurrection evidence?

Perhaps the biggest truth claim in context of Christianity is the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Christianity lives or dies based upon the resurrection of Jesus. Paul states in his first book to the Corinthians, "If Christ has not been

raised...we are then found to be false witnesses." ([1 Cor. 15:14-15](#)). Paul claims that the resurrection of Jesus either verifies the truth of Christianity or it does not. If Jesus did rise bodily from the dead, then the best explanation is that Christianity is true. Is there evidence to verify the resurrection?

Being that no one witnessed the resurrection event, the evidence falls to those who claimed to have seen the resurrected Jesus, but how can these accounts be trusted? First, there are multiple attestations to the resurrection, with one of the most important given by the Apostle Paul. Multiple attestations help to show why the individuals who saw Jesus were not hallucinating or seeing a vision. Hallucinations are always individual, not group experiences.⁴ Paul, writing to the Corinthians, states that Jesus appeared to over 500 individuals at one time ([1 Corinthians 15:6](#)). This letter to the Corinthians was written when the people of Paul's day could easily have offered counter explanations, but none were given. Also of note is the almost universal agreement of scholars that 1 Corinthians 15, specifically the first 8 verses, is a credal passage concerning the resurrection that goes back to the

resurrection itself. Jack Kent, a skeptic of bodily resurrection said the I Corinthian 15 passage “could be dated very close to the actual resurrection.”⁵ In other words, the resurrection story is not a later invention.

What other evidence exists to validate the resurrection story? According to the four gospel writers, the first appearances of Jesus were to women. In the first century, the testimony of women was considered invalid, so why would the authors include this point if they were simply trying to invent myth?

Another piece of evidence is the place at which the resurrection occurred, Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the hub of Judaism. The Jews had strongly condemned Jesus for claiming that he was equal to God ([Matthew 26:63-66](#), [John 19:7](#)). If Christianity were forged, we should expect to see this new group start anywhere but Jerusalem. Knowing the kind of persecution that would ensue claiming that Jesus was the resurrected Messiah of Judaism is just one more shred of evidence to point to the truthfulness of Christianity.

The final piece of evidence centers on the disciples themselves. They believed they had physically encountered the resurrected Jesus ([Luke 24:36-43](#), [Galatians 1:11-12](#)). They changed from scared men to individuals who were willing to die for their encounter ([John 20:19](#)). No other stories existed to explain away the appearance of Jesus as the resurrected Messiah during the first century.

In summary, the body of Jesus was missing from the known burial tomb. The Jews claimed the body was stolen, only confirming that the body was gone. Women and a multitude of others saw Jesus alive. The Christian community was birthed in the most hostile environment imaginable, but this did not slow down the followers who had seen the resurrected Jesus. The resurrection story is early and the scale of evidence tips toward the truthfulness of Christianity.

Centuries later, other theories developed to explain the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus, such as the swoon theory, wrong grave theory, legendary story theory, hallucination theory and so forth. The fact is these explanations appeared late and can be discounted as false

for not matching up with reality. Only one story has stood the test of time in aligning with the evidence. The one story that puts the pieces of truth together is that Jesus rose from the dead. Ultimately, Christianity is true based upon the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

1 <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/t/truth.htm>, acquired 14, January 2010

2 Geisler, Norm, [Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics](#), p. 610

3 <http://www.factnet.org/vbforum/archive/index.php/t-1809.html>, acquired 16 January 2010

4 Collins, Gary as quoted by Lee Strobel, [The Case For Christ](#), p. 238

5 Kent, Jack, [The Psychological Origins of the Resurrection Myth](#), p. 16-17

MAKING SENSE OF THE RESURRECTION

By Luke Nix

<http://lukenixblog.blogspot.com>

Every person has a worldview. A person's worldview consists of a web of beliefs, each with its own sub-web of evidences that support it. A worldview's truth can be judged by how closely it reflects reality as we know it. The evidences for each belief should be tested. I believe that the Christian worldview is the one that most accurately reflects reality. I will focus on providing evidences for one of the foundational beliefs of Christianity – that Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead and that the Christian worldview is the only one that can make sense of such an historical event.

First, the fact that Jesus was resurrected needs to be established to be an event that actually happened. Before a

resurrection of anyone from the dead can be concluded, two things must be demonstrated: 1. That they, in fact, died; and 2. That they were seen alive after death.

Several lines of evidence support the fact that Jesus Christ died. First, a large number of both Christian and non-Christian sources record the event.¹ Second, medical studies on the process of crucifixion show that death occurs by asphyxiation. Third, ancient sources record the “final blow” to Jesus that guaranteed his death. Fourth, Jesus’ disciples were astonished to see him alive, because they knew he had died. The vast number of historians who have written on the issue of Jesus’ resurrection agree that these pieces of evidence point to the fact that Jesus had died before his disciples claimed to see Jesus in a “risen” state.²

Second, the fact that the disciples saw Jesus after they knew he died needs to be established. Several lines of evidence support this fact. First, the disciples believed that they had an experience of the risen Jesus. Second, the disciples turned from being cowards (abandoning Jesus just prior to his crucifixion) to being willing to die for their belief. Third, the apostles proclaimed the resurrection extremely

early in the history of the Church (the creed found in [1 Corinthians 15:3](#) has a history that may be traced to only a couple years after the death of Jesus). Fourth, Jesus' brother James was skeptical of Jesus' claims, until he had a post-death experience of Jesus. Fifth, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) was a learned Jewish persecutor of Christians, until he had what he believed to be an experience of Jesus. The evidence provided here for Jesus' appearances is accepted by the majority of critical scholars who have written on the issue.³

Seeing that the evidence for death and appearances afterwards is quite strong, we are left concluding that *something* happened. But can we say that it was a “resurrection,” and if so, can we say that God is responsible? Many theories have been proposed to explain the evidence in a way that did not allow for a resurrection. One such example is that the disciples' experiences were psychological in nature, and had no basis to reflect an actual occurrence. This has been disputed by modern psychological research, showing (among other things) that visions cannot be shared among people.⁴

Another such theory is called the “swoon” theory. This

theory basically posits that Jesus didn't actually die, and the conditions in the tomb were such that he could regain consciousness.⁵ This theory is inadequate for many reasons.⁶ One of them has to do with Jesus' expected physical condition if such a thing actually happened. If Jesus showed up to his disciples in a post-crucifixion state (bloody, disfigured, and weak), then had made the claim that he was their "Risen Lord," the disciples would have, at least, been more concerned about tending to his needs, and at most just told him to "go away", thoroughly convinced that their friend truly was just another fraudulent messiah.

Naturalistic explanations for the evidence, such as the ones provided here, are not adequate to explain all the evidence provided and still remain consistent.⁴ Also, since, naturalistically, things that die do not come back to life, we must accept the fact that Jesus was brought back to life (a resurrection).⁷ But we cannot jump from here to say that God did it. Before this can even be a possibility, it must be established that God exists or has the possibility of existing.

Many arguments have been posed to support the existence of God. Examples are the Kalam cosmological argument,

the teleological argument, the moral argument, the ontological argument, and several others. An explanation and defense of each of these arguments is beyond the scope of this essay, but many sources exist for investigation online. None of these establish a proof for God's existence on its own; however, if taken as a cumulative case, God's existence is the only possibility that can account for *all* the evidence (philosophical, scientific, and experiential) that the arguments provide. Since it is, at least, possible that God exists, then the possibility exists that God is the cause of Jesus' resurrection,⁸ which is the cause for the appearances to the disciples, which is (half of) the cause for their transformation.⁹ The idea that God exists makes sense of all the evidence provided; a non-theistic account cannot do so.

Jesus said that his resurrection would provide proof of the truth of his claims.¹⁰ Since a supernaturalistic account would force the conclusion of approval of Christ's teachings, any religion that denies Christ's claims (he is deity and he is the exclusive way for salvation) will have to account for the evidence for the resurrection with a naturalistic account. Since this is not possible, we must

accept the worldview that accounts consistently for *all* the evidence. That is the Christian worldview.

This short investigation of the resurrection is, by no stretch of the imagination, complete. It is part of a cumulative case for the truth of Christianity and falsity of other worldviews. It provides powerful tools to begin sifting through the available choices.

For more information on this topic, check out [Gary Habermas](#), [William Lane Craig](#), [Michael Licona](#), and [Ben Witherington](#).

1. Habermas, Gary R. [The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for The Life of Christ](#) (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company), pp. 143-242
2. Habermas, Gary R. [The Risen Jesus & Future Hope](#) (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc. 2003), p. 16
3. Ibid., p. 27
4. Ibid., pp. 10-15
5. Habermas, Gary R. [The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for The Life of Christ](#) (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company), pp. 69-72
6. Ibid., pp. 72-75
7. Habermas, Gary R. [The Risen Jesus & Future Hope](#) (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc. 2003), pp. 67-69
8. Ibid., pp. 78-80
9. Ibid., pp. 17-26
10. Ibid., p 108

THE FACTS OF THE RESURRECTION

By Aaron Brake

<http://www.apologeticjunkie.blogspot.com>

“The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It’s outstandingly different in quality and quantity.” — Antony Flew

The truth of Christianity stands or falls on the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Paul himself said, “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”¹ Here the Apostle provides an objective criterion by which to judge the legitimacy of the Christian worldview. Show that Christ has not been raised from the dead and you will have successfully proven Christianity false. Consequently, it is entirely appropriate that a positive case for “Why Christianity is true” focus on the most central truth claim of the Christian faith: the Resurrection.

The Minimal Facts Approach

The approach I will take in this essay is commonly referred to as the “minimal facts approach.” This method “considers only those data that are so strongly attested historically that they are granted by nearly every scholar who studies the subject, even the rather skeptical ones.”² It should be noted this approach does not assume the inerrancy or divine inspiration of any New Testament document. Rather it merely holds these writings to be historical documents penned during the first century AD.³ Though as many as 12 minimal facts surrounding the death and resurrection of Christ may be examined,⁴ the brevity of this essay limits our examination to three: the crucifixion, the empty tomb,⁵ and the post-resurrection appearances. I contend that the best explanation for these minimal facts is that Jesus was raised bodily from the grave.

Fact #1 – The Crucifixion of Jesus

Perhaps no other fact surrounding the life of the historical Jesus is better attested to than His death by crucifixion. Not only is the crucifixion account included in every gospel narrative⁶ but it is also confirmed by several non-Christian

sources. Some of these include the Jewish historian Josephus, the Roman historian Tacitus, the Greek satirist Lucian of Samosata, as well as the Jewish Talmud.⁷ Josephus tells us that “Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us...condemned him to the cross...”⁸ From a perspective of historiography, Jesus’ crucifixion meets the historical criteria of multiple, independent and early eyewitness sources, including enemy attestation. John Dominic Crossan, non-Christian critical scholar and co-founder of the Jesus Seminar, puts it this way: “That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be.”⁹

Fact #2 – The Empty Tomb

Something happened to the body of Jesus. Of this we can be sure. Not only was Jesus publicly executed in Jerusalem but “His post-mortem appearances and empty tomb were first publicly proclaimed there.”¹⁰ This would have been impossible with a decaying corpse still in the tomb. “It would have been wholly un-Jewish,” notes William Lane Craig, “not to say foolish, to believe that a man was raised from the dead when his body was still in the grave.”¹¹ The Jewish authorities had plenty of motivation to produce a body and silence these men who “turned the world upside

down,”¹² effectively ending the Christian religion for good. But no one could. The only early opposing theory recorded by the enemies of Christianity is that the disciples stole the body.¹³ Ironically, this presupposes the empty tomb.

In addition, all four gospel narratives attest to an empty tomb and place women as the primary witnesses.¹⁴ It is hard to imagine this being an invention of the early church considering the low social status of women in both Jewish and Roman cultures and their inability to testify as legal witnesses.¹⁵ As with the crucifixion, the account of the empty tomb meets the historical criteria of multiple, independent and early eyewitness sources, including implicit enemy attestation as well as the principle of embarrassment. Atheist historian Michael Grant concedes that “the historian... cannot justifiably deny the empty tomb” since applied historical criteria shows “the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty.”¹⁶

Fact #3 – The Post-Resurrection Appearances

In [1 Corinthians 15:3-8](#) Paul recounts what biblical scholars recognize as an early Christian creed dating to

within a few years of the crucifixion. Included in this creed are all three of our minimal facts: the death of Jesus, the empty tomb, and the post-resurrection appearances. Atheist New Testament scholar Gerd Lüdemann states, “the elements in the tradition are to be dated to the first two years after the crucifixion of Jesus...not later than three years...*the formation of the appearance traditions mentioned in [1 Cor. 15:3-8](#) falls into the time between 30 and 33 C.E.*”¹⁷ The early date of this creed rules out the possibility of myth or legendary development as a plausible explanation and demonstrates that the disciples began proclaiming Jesus’ death, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances very early.

Furthermore, the disciples *sincerely believed* the resurrection occurred as demonstrated by their transformed lives. Eleven early sources testify to the willingness of the original disciples to suffer and die for their belief in the resurrection.¹⁸ Many people will die for what they believe to be true but no one willingly suffers and dies for what they *know* to be false. *Liars make poor martyrs.* Again Lüdemann acknowledges, “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."¹⁹ Appealing to hallucinations as an explanation simply won't work. Hallucinations are private experiences requiring the proper frame of mind. They cannot explain such facts as the empty tomb, the conversions of skeptics like Paul and James, nor the multiple and varied resurrection appearances.²⁰ As with the crucifixion and empty tomb, the post-resurrection appearances meet the historical criteria of multiple, independent and early eyewitness sources.

Conclusion

How do we know Christianity is true? Because Jesus was resurrected and "God wouldn't have raised a heretic."²¹ Jesus' resurrection fits the context of his life, vindicating His teachings and radical claim to be the unique divine Son of God. Naturalistic explanations such as legendary development, fraud, or hallucinations fail to account for all the relevant data. Conversely, the Resurrection Hypothesis accounts for all of the known facts, has greater explanatory scope and power, is more plausible, and less ad hoc.²² Only if one is guided by a prior commitment to philosophical naturalism will the conclusion "God raised Jesus from the

dead” seem unjustified.

1 [1 Cor. 15:14](#). All Scripture quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

2 Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, [The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus](#) (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 44.

3 For more information on the historical reliability of the New Testament see Craig Blomberg, [The Historical Reliability of the Gospels](#), 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), and F.F. Bruce, [The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?](#), 6th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

4 See Gary Habermas, [The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ](#), Rev. ed. (Joplin: College Press, 1996), 158-167.

5 Habermas and Licona note that “roughly 75 percent of scholars on the subject accept the empty tomb as a historical fact” ([The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus](#), 70).

6 See [Matthew 27:35](#), [Mark 15:24](#), [Luke 23:33](#), and [John 19:18](#).

7 Josephus Jewish Antiquities 18.3.3; Tacitus Annals 15:44; Lucian of Samosata The Death of Peregrine 11-13; Talmud Sanhedrin 43a.

8 Flavius Josephus, [The New Complete Works of Josephus](#), Rev. ed., trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 590.

9 John Dominic Crossan, [Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography](#) (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009), 163.

10 Habermas and Licona, [The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus](#), 70. See also Acts 2 and Tacitus Annals 15:44.

11 William Lane Craig, [Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics](#), 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 361.

12 [Acts 17:6, NKJV](#).

13 See [Matt. 28:12-13](#); Justin Martyr Trypho 108; Tertullian De Spectaculis 30.

14 See [Matt. 28:1](#), [Mark 16:1](#), [Luke 24:10](#), and [John 20:1](#).

15 Craig, Reasonable Faith, 367.

16 Michael Grant, [Jesus: An Historian’s Review of the Gospels](#) (New York: Scribners, 1976), 176.

17 Gerd Lüdemann, The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 38 (His emphasis).

18 Luke, Paul, Josephus, Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Polycarp, Ignatius, Dionysius of Corinth, Tertullian, Origen, and Hegesippus. See Habermas and Licona, [The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus](#), 56-62.

19 Gerd Lüdemann, [What Really Happened to Jesus?: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection](#), trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 80. Lüdemann appeals to hallucinations as an explanation.

20 See [The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus](#), 104-119, and Reasonable Faith, 384-387, for more on the hallucination theory.

21 Habermas and Licona, [The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus](#), 184.

22 Craig, Reasonable Faith, 397-399.

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THE HISTORICAL EVENT OF THE RESURRECTION

By Amy Hall

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When I say that Christianity is true, I am not merely saying that it's meaningful to me personally. I am saying that it accurately represents the truth about reality. And there is nothing more central to Christianity than the idea that Jesus died on the cross, removing the guilt that separated us from our perfect God by taking the punishment we deserved on Himself, and was resurrected, restoring us to a joyful relationship with God who is the very standard of goodness, truth, and beauty.

No resurrection, no Christianity.

Where does this leave the truth seeker? Fortunately, though miracles have a supernatural cause, the evidence of the

effect is available for our scrutiny just as the evidence for any historical event in history is available to us, and so I offer this brief outline of an argument:

1. The disciples and early Christians believed in an actual, physical resurrection, according to the first-century historical evidence.

(Please note that at this point, I'm only arguing for what the disciples *believed*, not for whether or not it's *true*.)

Consider what Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 15:14](#) (his first-century authorship is generally uncontested): "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." The context of this passage along with the Jewish concept of resurrection both support the idea that Paul was referring to a bodily resurrection and not merely a "spiritual" one.

So the Christians considered the resurrection to be an actual, bodily event that was central to their faith. Indeed, as Paul asserts, without that resurrection there is no faith.

2. The resurrection was central to Christian teaching early on and was not a later addition.

There is a pre-biblical creed recorded in [1 Corinthians 15:3-5](#): "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now...."

The technical phrase "for I delivered to you...what I also received," along with the phrases "and that...and that...and that" indicate, according to the conventions of the time, that Paul is reciting a creed and this is not his original writing. This creed places the atonement and the resurrection at the center of the Christian faith and is not Pauline material. In fact, it can be traced back to within a few years of Jesus--probably to the ministry of Peter and James who are mentioned specifically in the creed (James is mentioned in v. 7).

If the crucifixion happened in 30 AD, Paul's conversion happened in approximately 33-35 AD. Three years later (36-38) he went to Jerusalem and met with Peter and James

(see [Galatians 1:18-19](#)), so it's probable that when they discussed the gospel then, this creed was passed on to Paul. (The fact that Peter and James are mentioned specifically in the creed indicates it probably came from their area.) Since the creed was already formulated when it was given to Paul, this means it dates back to earlier than 36-38 AD. And of course, the beliefs that inspired the creed predate even the creed. Again, this time frame is accepted by critics and Christians alike. Some date the creed even earlier.

3. The disciples experienced something.

You must agree that the disciples experienced *something*. Whatever that something was, it changed them from a group of people who deserted Jesus and began to disperse after His death to bold proclaimers of His resurrection.

What happened to change their minds? They claimed it was seeing the resurrected Jesus. Were they trying to perpetrate a hoax? This is extremely unlikely, for nobody would go through torture and death (as most of them did) for something they knew to be a lie. So the disciples were convinced. Were they fooled by someone or something? Or did Jesus actually rise from the dead?

4. Naturalistic explanations fail.

Different naturalistic explanations have been offered to explain the disciples' experience. Those explanations have either been debunked or do not explain the evidence as adequately as does the resurrection. For example:

"Jesus faked His death (or fainted), and did not really die on the cross." This theory is impossible since if a man were to only pretend to be dead on a cross, he would have to discontinue pushing himself up and down in order to breathe. However, as soon as he did that, he would, of course, not be able to breathe and would be dead anyway.

"The disciples [or some other party] stole the body." We are back now to the idea that the disciples sincerely believed the resurrection to be true. So it's highly unlikely they stole the body. Additionally, had anyone else stolen the body (the Jews or the Romans), they (the body-stealers) could have easily produced a body and put an end to the unrest that was resulting from the birth of the church. This church had its start in Jerusalem where critics had a reason to stop it and the means by which to do so if any body still existed.

They did not produce a body, and the church continued to grow.

The other contending naturalistic explanations likewise fail to sufficiently account for the available historical data. Instead, the weight of the evidence lies with the resurrection, and rational people should always side with the weight of the evidence--even if they don't like what they find there. As Sherlock Holmes said, "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth."

(For more information, see the work of [Gary Habermas](#) or [this book](#) by an Orthodox Jewish man who, though he has a different idea about the meaning of the resurrection, is convinced by the evidence it actually occurred in history.)

THE IMPOSSIBLE FAITH

By James Patrick Holding

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No doubt you'll read here a lot of arguments that Christianity is true because Jesus rose from the dead, historically. I agree with those sentiments, and also know many of the standard critical responses (e.g, "the body of Jesus was stolen," "the apostles hallucinated," "aliens hoaxed the Resurrection") and the answers to them.

But here I want to offer my unique perspective on why Christianity is true: I believe that the social world of the first century was, on a large number of counts, ideologically in opposition to Christianity. Response to Christian claims would have been so overwhelmingly negative that the only way anyone outside of an original, dedicated core of Jesus' followers would have become Christians would have been if

they had been able to present sufficient evidence to convince others that the Resurrection actually happened. What kind of evidence? I could discuss that in more words, but since my space is limited, I will only briefly note a few examples: The empty tomb; the miracles wrought by Jesus and the Apostles; the nature miracles at the time of the crucifixion; the testimony of those who guarded the tomb; the unwavering testimony under pressure of those who saw Jesus alive after death.

Our main subject, however: Why would they need this sure witness for people to believe?

The social world of the Bible was a lot different than ours. Values that are virtually unknown or unimportant in America were considered very important in the Biblical world (and also in much of the rest of the world, even today). The foremost of these values was personal honor, or put another way, your reputation with others. One reason why the Christians needed a sure witness to Jesus' Resurrection to convince people is that Jesus was crucified. Today we look at a picture of Jesus on the cross and feel sorry for him, but in the Biblical world, people would have

looked at Jesus in disgust. Being crucified damaged your personal honor in the most complete and brutal way imaginable. Pagan critics of Christianity said that if Jesus were really deity, he would never allow himself to be crucified. So Christians would have needed to convince others that Jesus was resurrected and that the stain of dishonor caused by the crucifixion had been reversed.

Another important value was a person's heritage. People of the Biblical world judged others based on where they were from. In this regard, Jesus had three strikes against him: He was Jewish (and in that time, anti-Semitism was very prevalent); he was from Galilee (which was a place associated with rebellion), and he was from Nazareth (a very small town – and being from a small town meant you had very little personal honor). On this account it would be impossible to convince someone that Jesus had been honored by God by being resurrected, unless you had sufficient evidence that he had.

Yet another factor: The process of resurrection itself. Claiming that Jesus physically rose from the dead would have been contrary to all that was believed about

resurrection. Jews believed that no one would be resurrected until the end of the current age – and then, it would be everyone, not just one person. Pagans didn't believe resurrection was possible at all – and even if it had been, it would have been regarded as undesirable, letting yourself be imprisoned in a miserable body.

There are many more examples I could give: The use of women as witnesses to the empty tomb; the fact that Christianity was a “new” religion; Christian intolerance of other faiths on the one hand, and Christian disdain for the system of classes in their society on the other; the offensive nature of many of Jesus' teachings – there was so much that ancient people would have found offensive about Christianity that anything good about it would be substantially overridden by howls of protest. You can see a more complete outline [here](#).

In closing, I should note that yes, there have been critics of these arguments – one atheist even paid another atheist over five thousand dollars for a rebuttal to them! But yes – I've answered them all. I have also applied the same tests to other faiths – Islam, Mormonism, and the ancient religion

of Mithraism – and none of them pass the test on even a single count.

The case in sum: The fact of the Resurrection is the only suitable historical explanation for why Christianity gained even a single convert beyond Jesus' original circle of disciples.

See also J.P. Holding's book [The Impossible Faith](#).

CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER ANCIENT RELIGIONS

By Stephen Bedard

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Why should Christianity be thought of as true? The challenge is there were other religious movements in the first century Mediterranean that were just as popular. Why should Christianity have a better claim to truth than some of the mystery cults of the Greco-Roman world? Some authors have even suggested that the story of Jesus was based on these mystery cults and that the Gospels simply put a Jewish garb on a universal myth found within the mystery cults. There are many ways to respond to such a Jesus myth hypothesis, but one can look at these religious movements from a historical perspective and conclude that Christianity has a better claim to truth.

Mystery Cults

There were numerous mystery cults within the Greco-Roman world but the ones most often compared with Christianity are the cults of Mithras, Dionysus and Osiris-Isis. It has been argued elsewhere that the supposed parallels with Christianity are either exaggerated or simply false.¹ However, there are other ways to differentiate these cults from Christianity.

Mithraism was a religious movement that some have claimed could have supplanted Christianity as the dominant religion of the Roman Empire. The origins of Mithraism are shrouded in mystery. There seems to be some connection with Hinduism and Persian religion but by the time Mithraism became a popular religion among the Romans it had been transformed into something completely new. The defining event in Mithraism was Mithras' slaying of the bull. However, this was not a datable historical event. The slaying of the bull took place in the primordial past. In fact all of the events of Mithras' life, including his ascension into heaven was not understood as having historical importance but rather ritualistic value.

The Osiris-Isis cycle, which includes the myth of Horus, provided the story for a very popular religious cult. While the actual myth is quite different from the Gospel, there is another difference. The story of Osiris, Isis and Horus takes place in the mythic past. There is no way to place these stories in a historical context. While the myths may have been valued by the ancients, they were not able to describe the events in a historical manner.

The cult of Dionysus is also a movement that is often compared to Christianity. The best account of the myth of Dionysus is found in Euripides' play *The Bacchae*. The story describes Dionysus' anger at being refused worship and the punishment that he inflicts. This play was first presented in 405 BC but it describes events that supposedly take place approximately 2000 BC, according to Herodotus.² Unlike most cults, it is placed in a specific context, although it is still a legendary age where figures are created as founders of important cities.

Christianity

Christianity is different from the contemporary pagan religions and cults in many ways, but one of the most

important is it is a historical religion. By a historical religion I mean that it is a faith movement that is grounded in historical events rather than the mythic past and that the stories were recorded close to the actual events. Luke at the beginning of his Gospel makes it clear that he is recording actual events and that the events that took place had a specific historical context.³ This is important as Christianity is not based simply on philosophy, enjoyable mythology or practical ethics but it is based on historical events.

What is the historical evidence for Christianity? We have exactly what we would expect considering the area of the Roman Empire in which the events took place. The messianic claims of a lower class Jew and the worship of his followers would have held little interest to most citizens of the Empire in the first century.⁴

What about Jewish reports of the ministry of Jesus? Surely if Jesus was preaching and performing miracles, some of the witnesses would record their experiences. There are two issues to take note of. One is that the literacy rate was quite low and most reports would take the form of oral traditions. Secondly, the climate of Galilee and Judea was

too humid for most texts to survive. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls are the exception that prove the rule.

Having said that, there is some Jewish evidence for the life of Jesus. In his *Testamentum Flavianium*, Josephus actually speaks about Jesus. Claims that this passage is a forgery are over ambitious. No doubt there were Christian additions, but scholars have been able to restore the original text.⁵

More important than Josephus is the testimony of the New Testament itself. The Gospels are sometimes discounted as pious fiction and yet this is unwarranted. Second and third century non-canonical Gospels betray influence from Greco-Roman novels but the canonical Gospels are closer to the genre of biography and history.⁶ Although the Gospels were written between thirty and fifty years after the events, this does not take away from their value. They are based on older oral traditions⁷ and compared to our available texts for other ancient figures such as Alexander the Great, the Gospels are relatively close to the events.⁸

Even earlier than the Gospels is the testimony of Paul. Paul wrote as early as twenty years after the events and seems to

cite even earlier traditions. Claims that Paul never speaks of the historical Jesus are exaggerated.⁹ In [1 Corinthians 15:1-6](#), Paul is so confident in the historical reliability of the Gospel that he presents the resurrection as something to be confirmed by eyewitnesses.

Conclusion

Why should Christianity's claim to truth be taken seriously? Unlike other ancient religions and cults, Christianity is firmly planted in history. There is no mythological or legendary age in which the events took place. The Gospel was preached in a time and place where people could confirm the facts. Christianity is not just based on blind faith but is based on historical reliability.

1 Stanley E. Porter and Stephen J. Bedard, *Unmasking the Pagan Christ* (Toronto: Clements, 2006).

2 Herodotus, *Histories* Book II 2.145.

3 [Luke 1:1-5](#).

4 There are some early Roman references such as Suetonius, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger. See Porter and Bedard pp. 129-39.

5 Porter and Bedard, pp. 139-44.

6 Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

7 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). Bauckham even suggests that some of the oral traditions of individual witnesses has made it into the text.

8 Our earliest life of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) is from Plutarch who wrote in the second century AD.

9 Stephen J. Bedard, "Paul and the Historical Jesus: A Case Study in First Corinthians," in *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 7:9-22 (2006).

CHRISTIANITY PROVED BY THE NATURE OF THE JEWISH NATION

by Anthony Horvath

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Much ink has been spilled in defense of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, and I myself have spilled my fair share. Similarly, the stunning explosion of the Christian Church within the Roman Empire has been raised as a phenomenon that requires explanation and a dead man rising from the dead is the best one. These efforts are valid, but their weight cannot be appreciated without first knowing the context behind the arguments. We must understand the Jewish people, their history and religion.

This understanding in turn fuels further arguments for Christianity, one of which was presented by C. S. Lewis, who said,

“[One approach to explaining the rise of Christianity is to say] that His followers exaggerated the story, and so the legend grew up that He had said them. This is difficult because His followers were all Jews; that is, they belonged to that Nation which of all others was most convinced that there was only one God- that there could not possibly be another. It is very odd that this horrible invention about a religious leader should grow up among the one people in the whole earth least likely to make such a mistake. On the contrary, we get the impression that none of His immediate followers or even of the New Testament writers embraced the doctrine at all easily.” “*What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ,*” an essay found in [God in the Dock](#).

We can imagine that a God-Man claim would be natural if it emerged in Hindu territory, where avatars are a dime a dozen. It is something else if the claim emerges among the Jews, a people that were fiercely monotheistic. Yet it is more amazing than that: the claim not only emerged among the Jews, but its first adherents were Jews, and it spread first in Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire and only afterwards turned gentile.

That Jesus' followers didn't embrace the doctrine easily is

an understatement; the fact that they embraced it *at all* is a historical reality that strains credulity.

(Consider the wisdom, if you are God, of incarnating in such a setting if you want people to accept your stated credentials. It is easy to prove your case among friends. Not so much among your enemies. Imagine now that friends and foes alike constitute a hostile audience!)

Given the prevailing skepticism of the New Testament, it is worth noting that all of the salient ingredients to this argument can be generated from documents outside of it. Philo, Josephus, Tacitus, and others all corroborate how fiercely monotheistic the Jewish people were. And when we say, 'fierce,' we really mean it.

It is often argued that Christians tampered with Josephus and other ancient writers. Upon examination of what these documents tell us about first century Judea, we learn that it was filled with red hot nationalism, intense chafing at Roman oppression, roiling anticipation of a Messiah-King, full blooded devotion to religious purity, supreme devotion to the temple, and the eventual destruction of the Jewish

people by the Romans for their insubordination. Can we dispense with any notion that ancient Christians stooped so low as to fabricate even these aspects of the historical record?

If so, let us consider one example from Josephus, the account of Pontius Pilate and the Standards (War 2.169-174, Antiquities 18.55-59). In this event, Pilate, under cover of darkness, had Caesar's effigies placed in Jerusalem. Jews flocked to Caesarea at the horror of having any kind of image present in their city. Pilate rejected their pleas, and when the Jews didn't disperse, he surrounded them and, "he gave a signal to the soldiers to encompass them ... and threatened that their punishment should be no less than immediate death, unless they would leave off disturbing him, and go their ways home. But they threw themselves upon the ground, and laid their necks bare, and said they would take their death very willingly..." Pilate relented in the face of this fanaticism.

Numerous accounts are also given of messiah claimants in Israel during this time. Since 'messiah' refers to an 'anointed one,' or a Jewish King, the Romans were

naturally inclined to squash these individuals quickly. Israel's violent nationalism would eventually lead to open rebellion, prompting a Roman invasion in c. 70 AD that destroyed Jerusalem and decimated the temple.

In the face of the Jewish abhorrence to graven images, idolatry, and blasphemy against God, a man came who claimed to *be* God: the ultimate blasphemy. Jesus was a Jew and all of his disciples, followers, and enemies were Jews. Moreover, among this fiercely nationalistic people, there arose a great mass of women who said, along with their founder, "His kingdom is not of this world."

Few today know the names of any of the dozens, if not hundreds, of other warrior 'messiahs' trying to establish a Jewish Kingdom. The one that is remembered, in defiance to the times, called for a *spiritual* kingdom. He was crucified like other 'messiahs' were, but not forgotten like they were. Perhaps it is because this messiah did not stay dead?

What would happen in Tehran, Cairo, or Riyadh to the man claiming that he was, in fact, Allah? The Mahdi

himself would have to do some pretty remarkable things to convince his fellow Muslims- by the tens of thousands- that he was, in reality, God incarnate! We couldn't help but notice such a thing. First century Palestine presents a similar scenario.

These historical nuts need to be cracked: How is it that the Jewish people of all people gave sudden and rapid birth to a religion such as Christianity? How did this Jewish cult manage to eventually conquer Rome before the barbarians did? These questions arise even if you exclude the New Testament as sources. Integrity and curiosity would seem to demand an explanation that fits all of the facts.

The New Testament *does* provide one explanation. If you do not like it, what is *yours*?

THE EUTHYPHRO DICHOTOMY

By Mariano Grinbank

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Christianity is true because it splits the horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma.

In Plato's *Euthyphro*, Socrates proposes a *dilemma* that calls into question the premise of theistic ethics:

1. Is something good because God proclaims it?
2. Or, does God proclaim it because it is good?

The points of the dilemma are:

1. Is something good *merely* because God proclaims it? In which case, goodness is arbitrary and God could interchange good and evil at a whim.
2. Is there something separate from God to which God adheres; does God have to act according to an ethical standard which is outside of Himself? In which case, God is

not all sufficient and obeys a higher standard.

Let us survey our options and see which concept best provides an absolute and imperative moral premise: an ethos.

Nature:

All claims to naturally evolving ethics can be logically disregarded since—as commonsensical or true as they may be—while there may be actions which help to ensure survival, since nature is not an ethical agent there is no natural ethical imperative. We could feed the poor or eat them.

Semantic Morality:

Ethics can be immediately grounded in human dictates but not ultimately. Humans can make epistemic statements about morality but not provide an ontological premise since—as this view presupposes the above under “Nature”—there is no objective, extrinsic ethical imperative. Thus, humans can, without recourse to God, declare certain actions ethical or unethical, even claiming that these are absolutes, but these are ultimately

ungrounded assertions; they are semantic, intonated morality.

We concoct useful and survival assisting concepts but these do not amount to ethical imperatives. Also, this ethic is impotent, being established by humans who can only deal out justice if the evildoer is caught—its justice is restricted. On this view, ethics are based on majority rule; the fittest as it were. Justice in Nazi Germany differed from the Allied Forces’.

An aside: let us grant that the above (“Nature” and “Semantic Morality”) are valid and let us call these, for the sake of economy of words, “the naturalistic view.” Let us now pose the A-Euthyphro Dilemma:

1. Is something good because a naturalist proclaims it to be good?
2. Or, does a naturalist proclaim something to be good because it is good?

Does a naturalist determine what is good? In that case, what was unethical yesterday, is ethical today and may again be unethical tomorrow and thus, this is arbitrary and robs us of the ability to condemn anything since the

moment we condemn one action and declare another virtuous they may be shifting like so much quicksand.

Or, are naturalists adhering to something outside themselves? They are, and this implies an ethical imperative which implies an ethical law, which implies an ethical law giver, administrator and adjudicator.

Now, to theologies:

Dualism:

Generally, two coeternal gods (two *separate* and *distinct* beings) consisting of a “good” and “evil” god. This is truly arbitrary as the subjective goodness of the one is measured against the subjective evil of the other and *visa versa*.

Strict Monotheism:

Envisaged is one single eternal being, one person, perfectly united, not in the least bit divided. Perhaps such a God lacked companionship/relationship and had to create someone with whom to enjoy that which it lacked.

Being alone in eternity, relationship is not a part of its nature, character or being. Thus, when this God creates

beings it does not seek personal relations with them and thus, does arbitrarily concoct ethics for them. Such a God is capricious as it is not bound by relationship and since ethics is not intrinsic to its nature, ethical actions by this God are not guaranteed.

Pantheons, Polytheism and Henotheism:

These groups of gods are generally conceived of as having been created by one or two previously existing gods.

Whether the many gods are eternal or created by others, they enjoyed relationships with each other. Yet, being distinct beings and persons, they are not famous for conducting ethical relationships with each other but are infamous for quarreling.

In the view of many gods who were created by other gods; the ancient gods somehow established an ethical law which is then external to the subsequent gods and is a law to which these gods are subservient.

Since they could enjoy relationships with other supernatural beings they were not generally interested in relationships with humans. They considered humans to be play things—they manipulate our fates or take human form

to fornicate with us but there is little, if anything, in the way of ethical relationships.

Pantheism, Panentheism:

Essentially, this view postulates that God is the creator and creation. Thus, on this view God's creations are, in reality, extensions of God. Therefore, on pantheism or panentheism ethics amounts to God dictating to God how God should treat God. God is the director, the actor and audience.

Trinitarianism:

In the Bible we are dealing with Trinitarian monotheism, a triune being: one God, one being, and yet, three "persons" (a being who exhibits characteristics of personhood) each is God, each is eternal, each is distinct and yet, each is the one God. One coeternal, coexisting, coequal being consisting of three "persons."

This God is not alone in eternity, is not in relation to separate eternal beings and is in relationship to separate persons. Since each member of the Trinity is eternal, each has enjoyed eternal relationships. This God is not lacking

in relationship. God enjoys a relationship that is both unified in purpose and diverse amongst the persons.

Resolving the Euthyphro Dilemma:

Ethics are based upon the Triune God's nature. God's nature is relational and benevolent, eternal and free from conflict. God enjoys relationships and encourages His creation to enjoy likewise relationships. Life consists of enjoying relationships with humans grounded upon the enjoyment of an eternal relationship with God.

Thus, the Triune God neither adheres to external, nor constructs arbitrary, ethics since they are an aspect of His very nature.

CHRISTIANITY IS OBJECTIVELY TRUE

By Marcus McElhaney

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I believe Christianity is objectively true. What I mean is that Biblical Christianity is true no matter if you or I believe it or not. Three main reasons have brought me to this conclusion:

1. The teleological argument says the observable design in the world suggests that there must be an intelligent designer – God.
2. The Bible has stood the test of time – historically, scientifically, and archaeologically.
3. Jesus really lived, was really crucified, and only his bodily resurrection is the best explanation for the historical data.

These arguments are not new – nor are they the only arguments that support my thesis – but I have found them

compelling. Starting with the teleological argument: it goes far beyond the apparent design seen in all the living things in the environment in which we live. It goes beyond the sheer awesomeness of how the physical world works. It is not just the argument from irreducible complexity. The point I want to make is that we live on a planet that is perfectly placed in our galaxy so we can see, measure, and study the universe. We have developed technology so we can learn a great deal, and we have discovered that we live in a unique time in the history of the universe. Had we arrived several million years from now, much of the evidence for the structure of the universe would be gone as well as evidence for the Big Bang.

But the most compelling for me is that the physical constants have been precisely tuned for us to exist – and we happen to be in the best possible location to see it! It's like an artist/musician has seated us in the chair with the best acoustics and view of the action. This fits with the God described in the Bible putting us all in the best place possible in order to have a relationship with Him (Acts 17). (Lawrence Krauss disagrees with the conclusion that God set up such a universe but he admits that these are the

conditions in which we live.)

As for the Bible, many people have tried to prove it wrong through science, history, and archaeology. But I find that it has stood the test of time. Instead of being proven wrong, I find that it has been confirmed through discoveries in history, science, and archaeology. For example, the Bible describes a nation called the Philistines. If the Philistines never existed and no evidence had ever been found then this would call the scriptures into question. However, archaeological evidence confirms this and countless other historical facts. The Bible passes the test time and again. You can find more evidence everywhere, but you can start with [this link](#).

We have over 200 extrabiblical citations of Jesus Christ – we know that there was a man named Jesus from Nazareth who preached throughout Palestine during the early 1st Century AD. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and three days after his death his tomb was empty. His followers proclaimed that Jesus was alive and raised from the dead. This changed the whole world forever. Even the most liberal scholars will agree with these core truths.

Objections from real scholars to the Resurrection never center on Jesus' *existence* but on whether or not He performed miracles or really rose from the dead.

As I study the alternative theories to the resurrection, none of them seem to fit or answer all the data. The disciples were willing to go to their deaths rather than deny they saw and interacted the risen Christ – a fact they were in the position to know firsthand. Some scholars like Bart Ehrman favor the idea that Peter and the other 10 disciples who were with Jesus throughout his ministry had a shared hallucination or really believed they saw Jesus because they wanted to see him and didn't want to let the movement Jesus started die. The problem is that two or more people cannot share the same hallucination! They can hallucinate simultaneously but they cannot experience the same hallucination. Also this does not explain Jesus' brother James, nor Saul – who became Paul the Apostle. Neither believed in Jesus or had a motive to become his follows. They were hostile until something happened to them.

Also, if Jesus' tomb was not empty, why didn't the Jewish leaders shut down Peter and the rest by producing the

body? If the apostles had stolen the body, how did they get past the sealed tomb and the guards? I think the answer is simple. God raised Jesus up again just like He said. Why is this the clincher for me? The Apostles recognized it 2000 years ago. Christianity rises or falls on one thing – The Resurrection of Christ. It's the linchpin. Without it Christianity is useless. This was their core belief and the center of the Gospel. Look at [2 Peter 1: 3-11](#) and [1 Corinthians 15: 1-11](#). Use [this link](#) to explore more about Jesus' Resurrection.

THE GOSPELS TELL ME SO

By [Vocab Malone](#) & [Paul D. Adams](#)

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Why believe Christianity is true? Because the Gospels tell me so. Although this may sound trite or dismissive, it is a reasonable response if the biblical content preserves the events as they really happened. And if Christianity is based in certain empirically verifiable events, then Christianity is true. This essay will speak to the general reliability of the New Testament Gospels.

Preliminary questions regarding ancient literature purporting to record accurate historical events include: “What is the author’s intent?” “Did the Gospel authors intend to capture a genuine portrayal of the life and works of Jesus of Nazareth?” If not, then at least it is psychologically naïve and at most historically irresponsible

to rely upon the Gospel accounts as accurate sources. If it can be demonstrated the Gospel authors intended to write biographies and accurately record the words and works of Jesus, then it becomes a small distance to travel in believing Christianity is true.

Should we give the benefit of the doubt to the Gospels or should we just assume they're inaccurate? Dr. Greg Boyd cautions against taking the latter stance:

Historians generally assume that an author's intent is to write history if it *appears* he or she is trying to write history. ... [W]e in general trust the account unless we have reasons not to do so. The burden of proof, in short, is always assumed to rest on historians to demonstrate that a work is untrustworthy; it does not rest on documents to in every instance prove the opposite. ... Unless such a commonsensical assumption were made, it is difficult to see how the discipline of writing ancient history could ever get far off the ground.¹

Professor Luke Timothy Johnson highlights the desperate result of applying skeptical methodology to historical documentation:

Each writer follows the predictable path of rationalist reduction. Historical difficulties in the texts as we have them are construed as hopeless obstacles, which must lead inevitably to skepticism. The void of skepticism is then filled with inventive speculation. The speculation is not a reasonable alternative reading based on the available evidence, but a complete reshuffling of the pieces, yielding a picture more satisfying to the aesthetic or religious sensibilities of the authors.²

If we wish to avoid the agnostic pitfalls of skepticism, we should grant the courtesy Boyd notes above and apply it to the New Testament Gospels.

While modern biographers typically cover the entire life span of their subjects, ancient biographers were more selective and focused on the end of the person's life. *The Trial of Socrates* by Plato is a good example. This selectivity may explain why there is little of Jesus's life before he began his public ministry.

Eyewitness testimony was considered essential for a reliable Greco-Roman biography. Luke's prologue is clear that he

interviewed eyewitnesses before assembling an accurate account of Jesus's life ([Luke 1:1-4](#)). Moreover, it is possible that Mark's Gospel has an *inclusio** in which he begins and ends with Peter, traditionally understood to be Mark's main source. Martin Hengel has noted that [Mark 1:17](#) and [16:7](#) work to show that Peter was a legitimate eyewitness per the qualifications in [Luke 1:2](#), [John 15:27](#) and [Acts 1:22](#).³

Paul D. Adams (the co-author of this essay) makes some important points about first century oral culture. He writes:

Though the author's right to summarize rather than cite every word was recognized, there was an intense concern for accuracy in what counted as history, both in the Greco-Roman tradition and the Jewish tradition. ... The primary issue is between summary versus citation. But, as [Darrell] Bock reminds us, "it is possible to have historical truth without always resorting to explicit citation."⁴

If the Gospels are historically accurate, then the events in them must be aligned with real people and places. Archaeology can be immensely helpful to confirm historical record. Consider the discovery of the Caiaphas Ossuary

(bone box) outside of Jerusalem in 1990; this artifact holds the bones of "Yehosef bar Kayafa," translated as "Joseph, son of Caiaphas"⁵

Excavations verify the pools of Bethesda ([John 5:1-15](#)) and Siloam ([John 9:1-11](#)).⁶ Bethesda is especially relevant since critics long doubted John's accuracy, only later to find his description matches down to the detail. Similarly, in 1961, a team of Italian archaeologists working on a theater in Caesarea Maritima found what is now known as the "Pilate Stone". It mentions Tiberius and includes an inscription describing Pilate as the Prefect of Judea.⁷ At last count, there are nearly twenty different people mentioned in the Gospels, either confirmed by archaeology or cited by non-Christian writers.⁸ Craig Blomberg estimates nearly sixty confirmed historical details in John's Gospel.⁹ Obviously, these findings speak to the veracity of the Gospels.

In summary, the authors of the Gospels intended to record an accurate account of Jesus' earthly ministry and we can verify they are accurate. Archaeology and non-Christian historians give confirmation to the Gospels, offering evidence that when we read about the actions and message

of Jesus in the Gospels, we are reading what really happened. In short, Christianity is true because “the Bible tells me so.”

**An inclusio is a literary device that brackets or frames a section by purposefully repeating the same word or phrase at the beginning and the end of the section. Also called an “envelope”.*

NOTES

1 Gregory A. Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God? Recovering the Real Jesus in an Age of Revisionist Replies* (Wheaton, Ill: BridgePoint, 1995), 220-221.

2 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 32.

3 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans), 124-126.

4 See <http://tmch.net/mystery.htm> and references there.

5 see <http://www.formerthings.com/caiaphas.htm>, cf. [Matthew 26:3; 57](#); [Luke 3:2](#).

6 Hershel Shanks “Where Jesus Cured the Blind Man” *Biblical Archaeology Review* vol 31 no 5 Sep/Oct 2005, 16-23

7 see <http://www.formerthings.com/pontius.htm>

8 See Table 10.1 in Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 270.

9 Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2001), 70-280.

CHRISTIANITY EXPLAINS LOGIC

By Glenn Hendrickson

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There have been many attempts to prove God's existence, the validity of Christianity, the resurrection or deity of Christ, etcetera. All of these fall under the broad heading of Christian Apologetics. Various methods and data have been employed in this enterprise, all aiming at justifying part of, or the entire, Christian worldview. I hope to demonstrate in my brief essay that the Christian worldview is justified over and against an atheistic worldview on the basis of humanity's everyday use of logic.

The argument might be presented as follows:

1. All we experience is grounded in the laws of logic.

2. The Christian worldview alone adequately explains and accounts for the laws of logic.
3. Therefore, all we experience cannot be explained or accounted for outside of the Christian worldview.

Point 1 is hardly controversial. Whether consciously or unconsciously, all humans use logic. We avoid contradictions, lies, making poorly informed choices, etc because (among other things) these are not logical. People strive for consistency in thinking and living, looking for patterns, making decisions based on the past, altering behavior which yielded undesirable results. When people budget money to avoid overspending they use logic. When planning classes, meetings, parties, etc they use logic. Although much of the logic of which I write is not immediately recognized as logic, it is an undeniable experience shared by all.

Point 2 is a bold assertion which perhaps needs the most justification. Sure, humans of all stripes use logic of some kind to get through the day. But how is this possible? If humans everywhere can recognize patterns, count, communicate (even at basic levels), acquire knowledge, and

so on, then how do we explain this? Perhaps if logic was only discernible in societies with schools and better education systems we could say it is learned. But this is clearly not the case. Primitive people groups have been observed telling and re-telling stories, performing religious ceremonies, passing beliefs and knowledge down from generation to generation. Their way of life is notably different than many of the people who will access this article online, yet they exhibit logic in their everyday life nonetheless.

The contention that the Christian worldview alone adequately explains and accounts for the laws of logic is a statement which needs to be unpacked. The Christian worldview is the outlook and interpretation of life, God, man, the world, etc that is presented in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the Bible. This worldview is in opposition to all other competing worldviews, whether they are religious or secular in nature. The Bible paints a picture of man being created in the image (or likeness) of God ([Gen. 1:26-27](#); [James 3:9](#)). The triune God thus created us with the capacity to reason logically, reflecting the way in which he thinks and reasons. Logical behavior in

humanity is reflective of the logic inherent in the person of God.

An evolutionary worldview, for instance, might put forth the idea that humanity has evolved from lower life forms in a purely naturalistic process. If we suppose for the sake of argument that this is the case I would press the question of how logic is to be found in all people? We see the same basic process at work in civilizations and cultures so completely different and removed from one another that it is difficult to accept the assertion that the process of evolution could yield logical, reasoning people across the board.

Contrary to an atheistic worldview which is forced to assume some sort of evolutionary process to explain the existence of intelligent, rational beings, the Christian worldview cogently explains that all of mankind makes use of logic because God created us to do so. The presence of everyday logic is easily explained by the Christian worldview, it fits hand in glove with its explanation of the nature of God (as a logical being) and of man (that is, of *all* men and women as creatures made in the image of God).

From points 1 and 2 it follows in point 3 that all we experience cannot be explained or accounted for outside of the Christian worldview, as it alone can adequately explain the universality of the laws of logic. The atheist is at a disadvantage without a satisfactory account for the existence of logic in man. The biblical worldview makes sense of logic, reasoning, and so forth – but the atheist has no good explanation for the phenomenon of logic or for their use of logic (if we grant atheistic presuppositions). It is almost humorous that in order for an atheist to present an argument against God's existence, they must first reach into the Christian worldview to borrow their tools - logic, reasoning, ethics, morality, etc.

This argument for Christianity is best understood, not as a reasoning starting from the ground up (that is, moving autonomously from neutral premises to a definite or probable conclusion), but as a recognition that Christianity must be assumed true at a presupposition level in order to use logic at all. Much the same could be said for ethics, beauty, knowledge, reasoning, the concept of absolute truth, value judgments, moral indignation in the presence

of evil, recognition of evil, love, honor, etc. On atheistic premises, man is the highest court of appeal. These and many more become relative and meaningless without the biblical God in the picture. In short, the fact that there is a picture to begin with proves the biblical worldview.

ATHEISM: A FALSIFIED HYPOTHESIS

By Brian Colón

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Several Atheists like to complain that Theism, unlike Atheism is unfalsifiable. If this is true, then it means that Atheism can be proven false, Theism cannot. Many Atheists consider this to be a strong point for Atheism and a weak point for Theism. The problem is, since Atheism CAN be proven false, then IF it IS proven false, then Theism (its negation) would necessarily be proven true. When there are only two possible answers for a proposition, and one of them is proven false, then the other is necessarily true. Consider the question "Does God Exist?" There are only two possible answers, "yes" and "no". If the answer "no" was proven false, then the only alternative answer remaining is "yes".

The way I choose to show Atheism false is by showing the self contradictions contained within the Atheistic worldview. Logically speaking, if a proposition contains necessary consequences that are themselves self-contradictory, then the proposition cannot be true. For example, there are no living corpses, there are no unemployed employees, and there is no dehydrated water.

According to a few famous Atheists, here are a few necessary consequences of Atheism. There is no God; there is nothing but the physical world (*Dan Barker – Protest sign at the Washington State Capital*). Humans are nothing but machines that generate DNA (*Richard Dawkins – The God Delusion*). Morality is based on the consensus of human beings (*Gordon Stein – “The Great Debate: Does God Exist?”*). If this is true then it would be impossible to account for things such as moral absolutes, laws of logic, or human dignity; three things that we all understand to be indisputable.

Moral Absolutes

Every Atheist I've ever met believes that murder and rape is evil. But what is evil? I thought all that exists is matter. Is

there anything evil about matter? Does the knife care that someone used it to kill someone? Of course not. Perhaps evil is just something that we experience as decreasing our happiness. Wouldn't that mean that since the rapist increases his happiness by raping people, then raping people would be considered good for him? Who's to say that the rapist's moral judgments are flawed and ours are not?

Once an atheist woman told me that she heard that her co-worker was cheating on his wife with another woman from the office. She told me that she was outraged at how immoral he was and how she lost all respect for him. I asked her "What was so wrong with what he did?" Why does the fact that he's married make the act of sex with another woman immoral? She simply said "Its just wrong!" I agree, but I'd like to know why it's ultimately wrong given the Atheistic worldview.

Laws of Logic

Consider the law of "excluded middle" which says that a proposition is either true or false, there is no third option. What is the ontological foundation of this law? Is this law

just a result of the chemical functions in our brain? If so then how is it universal? Is the law material? Of course not! Laws of logic are immaterial abstract entities, the very things that cannot exist if the only thing that exists is matter.

Dan Barker, in a debate with Dr. James White, attempted to refute this argument by saying that “logic is not a *thing*.” Well if by *thing* he means a physical object then I would agree with him. The problem is that he already said that *things* are all that exist. So according to Dan Barker there is no logic.

Human Dignity

Why do people put on a lab coat and argue that people are simply evolved animals, and then say that we shouldn't treat people like animals? If all that exists is matter, then that would mean that we are nothing but matter as well. If that's true then why do we believe that humans are worthy of respect? In a debate with Paul Manata, Dan Barker asserts that human beings are no more important than broccoli. I find it very interesting that the piece of broccoli known as Dan Barker thinks that other certain pieces of

broccoli are worthy of love and respect, as if they were something more than just broccoli. Every single day we all treat each other with respect and dignity, and we all know that those who disrespect people ought not to do that. This is true for Theist and Atheist alike. Humans really are worthy of respect. This is inexplicable on the Atheistic Worldview.

Conclusion

The Atheist is able to recognize moral absolutes, laws of logic, and the dignity of human beings, three things that cannot exist given the worldview of the Atheist. So the question is, why is the Atheist contradicting his/her own worldview? The answer is obvious, because as we've seen, the proposition "God doesn't exist" entails impossible consequences.

There is however, another worldview that is capable of accounting for the very things that the Atheist cannot account for, namely Christian Theism. On Christian Theism moral absolutes make sense because God is provided as the absolute moral standard. Immaterial, timeless, transcendent entities such as the laws of logic

make sense because they can be grounded in an immaterial, timeless, transcendent God. Human dignity makes sense because humans are created in the image of the only being worthy of honor and praise, God.

Atheism is inadequate and incapable of explaining our experience of the world around us. Atheism therefore cannot be true. This is why I conclude that the best proof for the existence of God is the impossibility of the contrary.

TESTING CHRISTIANITY'S CORE TRUTH CLAIMS

By Kyle Deming

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Jesus of Nazareth once asked his disciples a simple but profound question: "Who do you say that I am?" That question is just as relevant for us today as it was for the ancients. If Christ were a mere good teacher, then Christianity amounts to little more than a curious and fascinating social movement - something for historians and scholars to ponder. But what if, as the Christian faith teaches, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who died and rose for the atonement of our sins? Then our answer to his question takes on weighty significance, a significance with both worldly and eternal consequences.

But how can we know who Jesus is? How can we know if the Christian faith is true? With over 4,200 religions in the world today, any conclusion we come to would seem presumptuous, at best, and bigoted, at worst.

Christianity, however, stands apart from most religions as an eminently testable worldview. Christian doctrine makes several claims about the way the world actually is - claims ranging from the metaphysical to the historical. If reason and evidence support these distinct truth claims at the core of Christian belief, then Christianity is a rational worldview.

Christianity encompasses a wide swath of doctrine and practice, and it's very easy to get caught up in the minutiae. Critics and defenders of Christianity alike can get bogged down in these side issues, debating the inerrancy of the Bible, the Virgin birth of Mary, and the nature of hell. These are certainly important issues, but when it comes to investigating the truth of the worldview of Christianity, we must focus on the core non-negotiable issues first. What, then, are the essentials of Christianity? I contend that two propositions make up the ineradicable core:

1.) God exists.

2.) Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead.

If these two propositions are accepted, then denying the truth of Christianity would be irrational. Silly theories like the "Alien Jesus" aside, I think any honest non-Christian would adopt a broadly Christian worldview if they accepted these facts.

These two core propositions are points of contact with reality - the existence of God is a metaphysical, philosophical question and the resurrection of Christ is a historical question. So let's take a close look at both of these propositions in their respective areas of focus.

i.) God exists.

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." - Paul ([Romans 1:20](#))

The Apostle Paul claims that God's existence is so well-established through reason that non-believers are literally without excuse. If we want to establish this strong claim, technically sound but very complex arguments for the existence of God won't do. Most people throughout history have not had access to knowledge of obscure philosophy or advanced science. Although arguments inevitably grow more complex as they are criticized, defended, and refined - I think there is a remarkable core simplicity to the case for God's existence. The three basic facts which undergird the case are;

- 1.) Something exists.
- 2.) Life exists.
- 3.) I exist.

Everyone throughout human history has had access to these facts - and their relevance to the case for God's existence has been long-recognized as well. Let us consider in turn how these three mundane truths form the foundation of a strong, intuitive case for God's existence.

- 1.) Something exists.

*"...the first question which we have a right to ask will be, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'"*¹ - Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, philosopher and mathematician.

The mere fact of existence provides the basis for a number of cosmological arguments. God, as an immaterial and eternal purposeful agent, seems a much more plausible "starting point" than an entirely material, purposeless universe. This basic intuition was formalized by Leibniz, who argued that an eternal God independent of the universe must be invoked as an explanation of the contingent facts of the universe.²

Regardless of the strength of the Leibnizian cosmological argument, a remarkably strong version of the argument can be advanced based on the beginning of the universe. This argument, known as the Kalam Cosmological Argument, has recently received much attention. The three simple premises are:

1.) Everything that begins to exist has a cause. 2.) The universe began to exist. 3.) Therefore, the universe has a cause.

While the first principle has strong intuitive support, the second principle enjoys remarkable support from science. The beginning of the universe is strongly confirmed by the evidence for an expanding cosmos. Indeed, the Big Bang theory, which implies a beginning of the universe, is now the most widely accepted account of the origins of the universe due to the overwhelming evidence for the expansion of the universe. Moreover, the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics demonstrates that an eternal universe would already be in a state of heat death, thus entailing a beginning.³ Finally, Borde, Guth, and Vilenkin have published a theorem that demonstrates that any physically plausible universe has a beginning.⁴

In short, scientific findings support the long-held intuition that the existence of a contingent universe is evidence for an eternal personal agent.

2.) Life exists.

"A commonsense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts

seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question."⁵ - Fred Hoyle, astronomer

Life is an incredibly complex phenomena, and throughout history most thinkers have regarded it as prima facie evidence for a creator. Darwin's theory of evolution is commonly thought to have destroyed this argument. But even Darwin's ambitious theory does not attempt to account for the very suitability of life in the universe in the first place. Scientific discoveries are continuing to reveal that the universe is incredibly fine-tuned for life. Without the intention of an incredibly powerful designer, it is fantastically improbable that the universe would be able to support life at all.

Take gravity, for instance - perhaps the most familiar yet mystifying force in the universe. The strength of gravity is extraordinarily weak compared to other fundamental forces. The strength of this force is very important for holding bodies like our sun and planet together. If gravity were too strong, stars would have lifetimes shorter than a billion years, and if it were too weak (or negative), no solid bodies could exist in the universe. Given the range of forces,

gravity must be fine-tuned to one part in 10^{36} for complex life in the universe to exist.⁶

Science continues to uncover such remarkable improbabilities, lending strong support to Hoyle's suspicion of a super intellect at work.

3.) I exist.

"Cogito ergo sum" - I think, therefore I am. - Rene Descartes, philosopher

Consciousness is the most undeniable facet of reality. Even if we were to deny the existence of the physical universe, we can't deny our own conscious life.

Conscious thought is inherently difficult to fit in a materialistic framework. That is why so many philosophers, in an attempt to uphold naturalism, have tried to explain away the conscious mind. Behaviorism, functionalism, and a slew of other materialistic accounts of the mind have taken sway in the scientific community.

Yet, all these materialistic theories fail to truly account for

conscious experience. Consciousness involves states of being that are fundamentally different from the material objects that can be described by chemistry and physics. For example, conscious experiences have a qualia - a "what it's like to be" feeling that material properties lack.⁷

The prevalence of materialistic accounts of the mind is based on the false belief that advances in neuroscience have demonstrated the reducibility of the mind to physical processes. Scientists are becoming ever more adept at uncovering the links between certain physical brain states and their conscious counterparts. Yet, this merely demonstrates their relatedness - it does not prove that they are identical. Indeed, even the ancients knew that something as mundane as drinking certain beverages can lead to drastic changes in conscious experience and behavior. Science has merely given us a greater understanding of how these physical and mental states interact.

Conscious experience is utterly mysterious in a materialistic framework. But in the theistic framework, a conscious God is the most fundamental component of reality, so the

existence of the mind is understandable, and even to be expected. The very existence of our own conscious mind thus provides a strong reason to believe in a personal God.

If these three evidences establish the existence of God, then the case for Christianity has been bolstered significantly. However, the real heart of the Christian faith is to be found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, whom we turn to next.

ii.) Jesus Christ rose from the Dead

"And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." - Paul ([1 Cor.15:14](#))

Christianity is truly a remarkable religion, staking its credibility entirely on a singular historical event that seems, at face value, laughable. Indeed, the very fact that the Christian message survived and flourished, despite many disadvantages, is a strong testimony to its truth. If Christ had not been raised and provided strong testimony to that fact, he would have died as a footnote of history. I'd like to consider three strong disadvantages the Christian message

had to overcome to survive in the ancient world;

1.) Jesus was a man of little repute.

As a Jewish carpenter from the small city of Nazareth, Jesus had disadvantages in ethnicity, occupation, and location that would severely damage his credibility.

2.) Jesus died a disgraceful death.

Crucifixion, "the most wretched of deaths,"⁸ was a method of execution devised by the Romans for intentionally shaming the victim. The theatrics of the flogging, cross-bearing, and naked nailing to the cross were not simply methods to maximize pain, they were intended to destroy the credibility of the victim. Christianity's critics took advantage of this fact, insulting Christians as worshippers of a "god who died in delusions...executed in the prime of life by the worst of deaths."⁹

3.) Jesus preached an unpopular message.

The concept of a physical resurrection was implausible to

the Jews and repugnant to the Romans. Jews expected the resurrection to occur at the end of the world for all people.¹⁰ The Romans, who had little respect for the physical body and much preferred the ethereal soul, believed that physical resurrection was a disgrace - according to Celsus corpses "ought to be thrown away as worse than dung."¹¹

Despite the inherent difficulties, the heart of the Christian message from the very beginning embraced this obscure Jesus of Nazareth, preaching his death on a cross and miraculous resurrection. How did the Christian message overcome all of these obstacles and emerge as the most successful world religion of all time? As the Cambridge historian C.F.D. Moule noted:

If the coming into existence of the Nazarenes, a phenomenon undeniably attested by the New Testament, rips a great hole in history, a hole of the size and the shape of the Resurrection, what does the secular historian propose to stop it up with? ...the birth and rapid rise of the Christian church...remain an unsolved enigma for any historian who refuses to take seriously the only explanation

offered by the Church itself.¹²

Conclusion

We have seen that the core claims of the Christian faith - the existence of God and the resurrection of Christ - enjoy substantial scientific and historical support. While these evidences do not deliver 100% certainty, they do provide an extra punch to that most important of questions, put forward by Jesus of Nazareth 2,000 years ago: "Who do you say that I am?"

NOTES:

- 1.) G.W. Leibniz, "The Principles of Nature and of Grace, Based on Reason," in Leibniz Selections, ed. Philip P. Wiener, The Modern Student's Library (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 527.
- 2.) This is based on Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), which basically states "for every entity x, if x exists, there is a sufficient explanation why x exists."
- 3.) See Craig, William Lane. *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000. Print. pp 130-140
- 4.) Vilenkin, A. (2007). *Many Worlds in One: The Search for Other Universes*. New York: Hill And Wang.
- 5.) Fred Hoyle, "The Universe: Past and Present Reflections." *Engineering and Science*, November, 1981. pp. 8-12
- 6.) Manson, N. (2007). *God And Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science*. Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.
- 7.) For a great exposition of this concept, see Nagel, T. (1974). What Is It Like to Be a Bat? 'The Philosophical Review', Vol. 83, No. 4, pp. 435-450
- 8.) From Jewish historian Josephus, Jewish War 7. 203
- 9.) Oracle of Apollo preserved by St. Augustine; Civitas Dei 19.23; p. 690 CC
- 10.) Craig, William Lane, Contemporary Scholarship and the Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *Truth 1* (1985): 89-95
- 11.) Origen, *Contra Celsus* 5.14
- 12.) C.F.D. Moule, *Phenomenon of the N.T.* (1967) p. 3

SHOWING CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE

By Matthew Flannagan

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“Can you show that Christianity is true?” To help us focus our thinking as to how one should answer this question I will pose some other questions as follows. Can you show that other people exist or that there exists a world that endures independent of our senses, which continues to exist when we no longer perceive it? Can my belief that it is wrong to inflict pain on another person for no reason at all be shown as true? What about my belief that Russell’s sceptical hypothesis that the whole Universe came into existence six seconds ago, including all apparent memories and signs of age – is this false or true?

I hope that the point of these examples is clear. Unless we want to fall into a global scepticism that defies all common

sense we have to acknowledge that there are some beliefs which we hold rationally and know are true that, nevertheless, cannot be shown or proven to be true from premises that all intelligent people are required to accept. In fact, somewhat ironically, the claim that one is only rational in believing something unless it can be shown to be true from premises all sane people are required to accept, is self-refuting; after all, many sane people reject it and it has yet to be shown to be true from premises that all sane people accept.

However, one is rational in accepting some beliefs independent of any argument showing the truth of those beliefs; philosophers term such beliefs ‘properly basic beliefs.’ These beliefs typically function as foundational beliefs, a person reasons *from* them as premises to the truth of other propositions one holds. Similarly, they function as the background data against which one assesses hypotheses proposed for one’s acceptance. They arise because ongoing appeals to premises to prove premises to prove premises have to end somewhere. Properly basic beliefs constitute those beliefs where it is rational for the appeal for proof to end.

It needs to be noted that properly basic beliefs are not groundless. While one does not believe a basic belief based on an inference, basic beliefs are often based on some form of experience. Alvin Plantinga discerns two types of experience, “sensory evidence”, such things as appearing to see, hear or feel a given object and “doxastic evidence”, which he refers to as “the belief feels right, acceptable, natural.”¹ Doxastic beliefs appear to be self-evident. An example of such a belief is the corresponding conditional of modus ponens. When one entertains the conditional of modus ponens it just seems to be correct. Modus ponens seems self-evident in a way that an overtly-fallacious inference does not. It is this kind of experience that grounds basic beliefs.

Many philosophers and theologians such as Calvin, Pascal, Alston and Plantinga hold that certain theological beliefs are properly basic. Belief in the existence of God is, from the believer’s perspective, properly basic and grounded directly in some form of religious experience; hence it is justified and rational to believe these doctrines independently of any argument in favour of them.

Although I cannot elaborate it in a small article, I am in fundamental agreement with this position. The request then that Christians show or demonstrate that Christianity is true often relies on an assumption that I think is mistaken; this assumption is that rational Christian belief requires that arguments or proofs be provided for Christianity and failure to provide them renders the believer irrational.

There is another more moderate question which lurks in the neighbourhood. If one grants that the believer is rational in accepting Christian belief in a properly basic way then what reasons can the believer give to those who do not hold to the same properly basic beliefs for accepting Christian belief? Perhaps some people, on the basis of some kind of religious experience, have immediate properly basic beliefs but many people do not have this kind of experience – what reason can be given to them for accepting the Christian faith? This problem is exasperated by the fact that it is extremely difficult to demonstrate the truth of foundational beliefs precisely because they are foundational beliefs. To prove something one needs to appeal to premises and the whole question in this instance is over

what ultimate premises to accept. How then would one show to these people that Christianity is true?

I think several strategies are available but due to space I can only briefly sketch them here.

First, in many instances, one can show Christianity is true by rebutting objections to Christian beliefs. Properly basic beliefs are beliefs that one is rational in believing independently of any argument for them in the absence of any good reasons for them. It does not follow, however, that these beliefs cannot be defeated by reasons offered against them. If I see John screwing his face up and grasping his leg, I might form the belief that John is in pain. However, if later John tells me that he was not in pain but rather rehearsing his death scene in a play he is acting in I might change my belief to believing that he was not in pain. The initial belief that he was in pain was properly-basic; however, because of what I later discovered, its rational status was defeated.

I think many people stand in an analogous position to various Christian beliefs; they reject them not because they

do not see them to be true but because they accept various objections to these beliefs. Consider Richard Dawkins' "All appearances to the contrary, the only watchmaker in nature is the blind forces of physics, albeit deployed in a very special way... it is the blind watchmaker." What is interesting here is the phrase, "all appearances to the contrary," Dawkins admits that, *prima facie*, the world appears and looks like it was designed and in the absence of any reasons for denying design then the natural observation is to say that it is. Dawkins suggests, however, that appearances are deceiving because science has allegedly provided defeaters for this belief. Showing Dawkins' arguments are unsound in such a context enables people to accept appearances.

The second line of argument is to show that various *alternatives* to Christianity are false. Often people fail to see the truth of Christianity because they accept mistaken views of the world and mistaken epistemic standards such as those associated with naturalism. They may experience God's presence in nature but believe this is an illusion because they are convinced that nothing beyond nature exists. They might think that only things which can be

empirically demonstrated can be rationally believed and these experiences are an illusion fostered by evolution to ensure social co-operation. Showing that these pictures of reality are false helps them to re-consider the veridical nature of these experiences. Refuting alternatives to Christianity provides another impetus for seeing the truth of Christianity.

People have to live by some vision of the world. In terms of practice, one cannot remain agnostic on many existential questions. If all the viable alternatives to Christianity can be shown to be implausible then Christianity has to be taken seriously by people who cannot, in practice, live a life which suspends judgment on ultimate questions.

Third, even if a person does not accept a given proposition they can still reason about such beliefs. One can reason “conditionally”,² if one accepts certain premises or propositions as properly basic beliefs. Then certain other positions, hypotheses and theories are likely, and people from all sides of the dispute can assess and debate whether the reasoning is cogent. Plantinga notes, The conclusions of theistic science may not be *accepted* by non-theists, but the method - trying to see how best to

explain the relevant phenomena from a theistic perspective - is indeed open to all.³

One can show that when one does reason from a theistic perspective then certain existential and theoretical questions can be given coherent answers. One can explain such things as the origin of the universe, the existence of contingent beings, the existence and nature of moral obligation, the existence of laws of nature, existential questions about guilt and forgiveness and so on. Plantinga notes that the existence of God imports a “great deal of unity into the philosophic endeavor, and the idea of God helps with an astonishingly wide variety of cases: epistemological, ontological, ethical, having to do with meaning, and the like of that.”⁴ Showing that if one accepts theism, then plausible, defensible, comprehensive and unified answers are available to what would otherwise be intractable questions, provides one way of showing others why they should accept belief in God as a properly basic belief.

The fourth and final way is to put a person in a position where that person is likely to have the requisite experience that grounds properly basic theological beliefs. Suppose I see a tree in the park and my wife asks me to show her that

this tree exists. The obvious way to do so is not to construct a proof of the existence of a tree but to take her to a park and show her it. Similarly, many people fail to grasp self-evident axioms of logic because they fail to understand them, but when these are explained to them they become self-evident. The same is true with Christian belief. One way to show agnostics the truth of Christianity is to put them into circumstances where, if they are attentive, they are likely to start seeing the truth.

One can explain the scriptures to them, encourage them to seek God in prayer – this is analogous to the way a person lost in the bush might call out to a rescuer even if he or she were unsure anyone was searching for him or her. One can encourage them to engage in the study of the scriptures whilst taking seriously the possibility that they are the word of God. The person could get involved in a community of believers where God dwells and works, where the person could be encouraged to live in accord with the moral law and honestly confess their failings and seek forgiveness for their moral errors. Pascal made this point in his famous wager; while an agnostic cannot simply choose to believe something he does not believe, he or she can choose to

look, to seek and to understand. When the agnostic sincerely does so, it is likely that he or she will come to experience God. Just as a person who attempts to understand logic will see why its axioms are self-evident or a person who actually looks in the park will see that there is a tree there.

In conclusion the basic doctrines of Christianity, if true, constitute properly basic foundational beliefs. One does not believe them on the basis of argument or proof as they are grounded directly in experience. Typically it is very difficult to prove with argument that a foundational belief is true; however their truth can be shown in other indirect ways. One can argue that the arguments against such beliefs are false, one can argue that the alternatives to accepting them are false or problematic, and one can show that if one accepts Christianity then these beliefs make coherent sense out of the world, they provide comprehensive answers to many theoretical and existential questions. Finally, in the context of all of the above, one can assist the sceptic to adopt the stance of a sincere seeker; to get him to put him or herself into the kind of position where he or she can come to have the requisite encounter with God so as to see

that Christianity is true. This is ultimately how one shows that Christianity is true.

1 Alvin Plantinga *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 110-111.

2 See Alvin Plantinga "Creation and Evolution: A Modest Proposal" in *Darwinism Design and Public Education* ed John Angus Campbell & Stephen C Meyer (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004) 521-232; "Reason and Scripture Scholarship" in *Behind the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation* ed C Bartholomew, C Stephen. Evans, Mary Healy & Murray Rae (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003) 98-100.

3 Alvin Plantinga "On Rejecting The Theory of Common Ancestry: A Reply to Hasker" *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 44 (December 1992): 258-263.

4 Alvin Plantinga "[Two Dozen or so Theistic Arguments](#)" accessed 7 March 2010.

THE WISE MAN SEEKS GOD

by Brian Auten

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Let us imagine that there is no God. Perhaps everything that is came into being out of nothing and for no real reason. The processes of matter coalesced to form chance patterns in an endless collision of atoms and particles. After a certain amount of time, some matter and energy formed self-replicating molecules. By something that cannot even be called luck, what we call life came into existence at the end of a process of materialistic chance. Conscious, self-reflective, thinking beings arose to contemplate, communicate, and populate. So-called morality, society, and humanity came to be.

This is an atheistic universe. No intention. No purpose. No direction. No design. It came to be in a flash of space-time and all will eventually burn out into cold nothingness --

with no one watching, no one caring, and no one aware. All that was, is, and that will be -- it is only a mindless construct. With no God, death is merely a re-shuffling of atoms; the loss of a certain type of molecular organization. Whatever was happening in one's neurons has simply ceased. There will be no memories. No consequences, no rewards, no regrets. The one who is alive at this moment can pause to reflect: *Why am I alive right now? Why am I not dead yet?*

Yet the wise man will seek God.

But why?

The purpose of this essay is to show that, given the data that is before us, in the absence of certainty that God does not exist, it is the wise man that will seek God.

Furthermore, this essay will argue that one should seek the Christian God, for, if the Christian God truly exists, He can be found by those who seek Him on His terms.

Before going further, let us define the terms within the title. By *wise*, we mean acting with good judgment. Wisdom is

inherently tied to the implication of choices and actions to one's life. Wisdom includes sound judgment, good sense,¹ or making the best use of available knowledge.² If one is to be wise with money, for instance, one should think not only of the needs of the moment, but look to retirement. Or consider the wise farmer; taking actions early in the year with a view to the harvest. The wise man uses the knowledge available presently (most times lacking certainty) and makes far-sighted choices for the future. So in the context of this essay, it can be emphasized that wisdom means choosing a prudent course of action with the longest possible time-horizon in view.

Can we define what we mean by *God*? Here we are talking about the Christian God revealed in the Bible. However, it should be noted: for the purposes of this essay we are *not* proposing to "construct a God" by an accumulation of only parts or attributes won through logical argumentation. The means by which we are approaching the God question here is not from the "bottom up" -- instead we are approaching Christianity as a self-contained hypothesis, one with claims of built-in verifiability. With this approach it is completely acceptable to *use the definition* of God as the Christian God

of the Bible without the need to prove it first.

That being said, we can look at how the Bible describes God and see certain clear and basic attributes to consider. For instance, the Christian God is the creator and giver of life. He is righteous and just. He is loving and merciful. He has revealed Himself, yet He has hidden Himself ([Isaiah 45:15](#)). He promises justice and offers salvation. He is perfect and worthy of worship. Of course, these are only some elements of the picture of God we see in the Bible. However, for the purposes of this essay it is sufficient to mention only a few. Again, these attributes need not be proven to be used as part of our definition of God.

Let us also define the word *seek*. The word *seek* can be defined as "to go in search of; look for; to try to discover; to ask for; request; to try to acquire or gain; aim at"³ Seeking implies action and intention. It also implies the possibility that the object one seeks may be found; that it actually may exist to be obtained. If a parent has lost a young child in the wilderness, he begins to search. All his energies focus on finding that precious child. Perhaps the parent calls for a search party; hundreds of people all actively looking to find

the lost daughter. As long as there is even a *possibility* of finding that child, the parent continues to search.⁴ In this essay we will use the word *seek* to mean "an active, intentional quest to find."

With these basic terms defined, how can we say that the wise man is the one who will seek God? There are a few steps in this line of reasoning.

First, it is not certain that God does not exist. For some, this point could be acknowledged as obvious and therefore dismissed as irrelevant. But regardless of how obvious the point may be, it is very relevant. For in the absence of certainty of atheism, the search for alternative views of the world is a live option. Indeed, if the atheistic picture of the future is "game over," while a theistic view of the future is, "to be continued," wisdom requires us to investigate the theistic option seriously and carefully.

Second, the *prima facie* evidence we find in the world is against naturalism (the view that the natural, physical world of matter and energy is all that exists). While not being able to prove that matter is all that exists, the naturalist also has

the weight of countless personal spiritual experiences against him.⁵ Consider the spiritual experiences of millions who have claims to have encountered something transcendent. Regardless of which religion one ascribes to, these numerous experiences now and throughout history of “I’ve found something” count against the claim, “there’s nothing to be found.” Even if only one of the millions of experiences is true and the rest are delusions, this shows naturalism false. So it seems that the *prima facie* evidence for naturalism is weak, while evidence for some type of supernaturalism is strong.

As Geisler and Corduan point out:

...the denial of the reality of the Transcendent entails the assertion that not only some people have been deceived about the reality of God but that indeed all religious persons who have ever lived have been completely deceived into believing there is a God when really there is not. For if even one religious person is right about the reality of the Transcendent, then there really is a Transcendent.⁶

Third, there exist good reasons and arguments in favor of theism in general and Christianity specifically. These are

not indisputable proofs that show that theism or Christianity is certain, of course. Instead, the overall evidential weight in favor of Christian theism in terms of philosophical, historical, scientific, and experiential arguments and reasons is substantial. These cumulative evidential arrows all count towards the truth of the Christian view of the world and against an atheistic view. The ultimate question in this essay is not “can we prove that God exists?” but the question is, “do we have sufficient reason to seek out this God?”

Of course there are many other worldviews out there. But wisdom suggests that we begin with the best “live options.” What qualifies as a live option? Although many criteria could be offered, it seems reasonable to start with at least two: 1) those that claim to have the greatest ultimate impact on one's existence, both now and in eternity; and 2) those that have the most evidential support with the least evidential disconfirmation. Christianity fits these criteria. As John Bloom suggests:

Given that we have a limited amount of time in this life to study religions, we can dispense with those that offer us a second chance in the afterlife, or

which will reincarnate us if we make a mistake in this life, or which promise us that all will be well eventually no matter how we live now. Prudence dictates that we first ought to consider the claims of those religions which say that everything depends upon the decisions made and lived in this life.⁷

Therefore, given the uncertainty of atheism and the *prima facie* evidence that naturalism is likely false, if one has fair reasons supporting the possibility of the theistic hypothesis, then theistic options should be explored in order to discover if they can be verified to be true. The theistic arguments, then, while not *proving* God exists, *do* prove that one has good reason to *seek* God, as we will explore now.

What if atheism is true? What are the implications for life? For the wise man, perhaps something like this line of thought would be appropriate: “Live your life for all it’s worth, because it will soon be gone.” On the atheistic view of the world, this is wisdom; for the longest possible time-horizon is the scope of this life – maybe 70 years, maybe 17 years. However, there is no life after this life. All illusions of meaning are only in the moment. There is no ultimate

accountability. On atheism, one may assume that death entails nothingness. One's personal experience of death means no conscious awareness of the life that was lived. For the dead man, it will be as if his existence never happened.

What if theism is true? What are the implications for life? For the wise man, perhaps something like this line of thought would be appropriate: "Live your life for all it's worth, for it will soon be gone. And the actions and choices in this life matter (and have implications) for eternity." On the theistic view of the world, this is wisdom; for the longest possible time-horizon is the scope of eternity. The actions and choices in this life are crucial for they have bearing on eternity. There is ultimate accountability. Meaning is no illusion. Meaning is objectively real. On theism, one may assume that death is an appointment with one's Creator and just Judge. One's personal experience of death means the threshold to a fuller knowledge of reality, lived out in the appropriate reward or punishment due him. For the dead man, it is as if this life was just a brief, albeit crucial, moment at the beginning of a life that does not cease.

But, one may argue that theism is *also* not certain, nor is Christianity for that matter. From an evidential perspective this may be true. Certainty is a rarity; enjoyed by the mathematician, not the metaphysician. To require indubitable proof (certainty) before believing something means rejecting the majority of beliefs -- including atheism. Instead, one can be satisfied only with a degree of certainty or a high degree of confidence (from an evidential standpoint). *But the crucial difference here is that of verification.* Atheism lacks any means of verification, while Christian theism offers personal, existential verification in addition to its strong evidential support. Put simply, if Christianity is true, not only will the external evidence give support to it, but also one can encounter God personally.

What else does this lack of evidential certainty imply for both worldviews?⁸ This implies that the “wisdom” of the atheist (living only for this life) is really not wisdom, for, in a sense, he is being penny-wise but pound-foolish. Without certainty in the atheistic view, living with no eternal perspective is an eternal gamble. It should be noted that this is not an appeal to consequences to suggest that one should somehow “fake” belief in something just to be safe.

The point here is that when lacking *evidential* certainty for two competing views, one should favor a view that provides verification over one that cannot be proven.

On the Christian worldview, the lack of evidential certainty is not a liability, for it also entails that one can find sufficient existential and personal verification. So Christianity has both substantial evidential support *and* promises personal, existential verification. ([John 8:31-32](#), [2 Cor. 1:22](#), [Gal. 4:6](#), [1 John 3:24](#), [1 John 4:13](#), [Rom. 8:14-16](#)) It should be noted that this existential verification is called personal because it cannot offer proof for others. However, it can provide sufficient proof for the individual, even when that person has not yet encountered substantial evidential support for the truth of Christianity. For, if God exists, He is well able to make Himself known apart from being arrived at through the processes of reason and the five senses.⁹ And if proof is so hard to come by, why should we be surprised if only God can furnish it?

Imagine you are told you have a long lost brother. Research and investigation provide a lot of evidence – but it is inconclusive. Your only sister is adamant that you have no

good reasons to believe you have a brother. However, your mother insists that you do indeed have a long lost brother. Of course, if you did have a brother, she would be in a good position to know that to be true. You ask her for proof, but all she can provide is more inconclusive evidence. However, your mother does have an address that she claims belongs to your brother. In this case, you could decide to “just believe” one way or another, based upon whatever personal interests you may have in the issue. Or, if you want to find out if you actually have a brother, you can begin to search for him. Of course, if your brother knew that he is being sought, he could simply reveal himself to you at whatever time he sees fit. The bottom line is this: will you take steps to seek him out?

The point of the illustration is that even when evidence is inconclusive, it can still be sufficient to warrant a search. Moreover, one can go beyond a bare evaluation of the available evidence in order to *find out* if Christianity is true. And what is more: there is something to be found in Christianity beyond simply the truth or falsity of a metaphysical proposition. In Christianity there is a *person* to be found.

This may lead to the question: If God exists, why doesn't He simply make Himself known? But this may be the wrong question to be asking right now. Instead, maybe we should ask, *If God may exist, why are you not seeking Him?* The reason *this* is the right question to be asking right now will become evident as we turn our attention to the claims of the Bible – for if Christianity is true, then the means by which one may seek and find God are also true. It could be that the unbeliever has simply not been seeking God on God's terms.

From the Bible we can see that God desires us to seek Him out. In the book of Acts, Paul declared that God has created all people “and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” ([Acts 17:26-27 NIV](#)) Jesus himself said that those who desire to find should first seek: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be

opened.” ([Matthew 7:7-8 NIV](#)) If what Jesus said is true, then a posture of intentional seeking is in order, for the scriptures also declare that “he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” ([Hebrews 11:6 NIV](#))

In addition, Jesus indicated that the attitude of one’s *will* plays a part in his quest for God: “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” ([John 7:17 ESV](#)) And the Bible records God’s attitude toward his people, whom He implored to seek Him: “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” ([Jeremiah 29:13 NIV](#))

These scriptures suggest that there is more to the big question than simply the affirmation or denial of the metaphysical proposition that God exists. Instead, if the Christian view is true, man’s knowledge of this question is inseparable from the issue of his willingness to come under the ultimate authority of the Creator. *For if the Christian God exists, finding him requires you to humble yourself.* We may ask: If a loving God exists, would you submit to Him? If Christianity were true, would you embrace it?

Imagine you have awakened in a large forest. All around you is a wooded wilderness of trees. You don't know where you are, how you got there, or what you should do. You manage to walk a long distance through the woodland, only to realize that without food and water you won't last long. You must find your way to civilization. Even with no evidence of people anywhere near you, you decide to call out for help. Fortunately, it is this very call for help that saves you. Unbeknownst to you, a rescue team was close enough to hear your call.

Perhaps you are uncertain of the existence of God. Like the lost man above, even in uncertainty, calling out is wise if it is possible that someone may hear your call. According to the Bible, if God is real, He can be found – by those who seek Him. So if the Christian God did actually exist, would you be willing to surrender to Him? The point here is *not* that one should force oneself to believe something that one cannot presently believe. Instead, the point is to acknowledge that if it is *possible* that the Christian God exists, then why not ask God (who may exist) to reveal Himself? Why not pray, “God, I don't know if you exist,

but if you do, I am willing to be persuaded.” Praying “hypothetical” prayers seems completely legitimate when one lacks certainty, for they can only help in discovery.

“God, if you are real, I want to know it. I don't feel willing, but I want to be in right relationship with you if you are real. Reveal yourself to me, if you are there, and make me willing. Change my heart and open my eyes.”

So what can the wise man do? In the absence of certainty, the wise man looks to the ultimate outcome of his life and must choose his path. He does not know what to believe yet about God, as the evidence seems inconclusive.

However, there is sufficient evidence to warrant a search. He humbles himself, calls out to God, and is willing to surrender – for if God exists, He is both able to hear and ready to make Himself known to those who are willing. The wise man seeks God.

“There are only three sorts of people: those who have found God and serve him; those who are busy seeking him and have not found him; those who live without either seeking or finding him. The first are reasonable and happy, the last are foolish and unhappy, those in the middle are unhappy and reasonable.” - Blaise Pascal, Pensées (160 / 52)

1 <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wisdom>

2 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisdom>

3 <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/seek>

4 This story is adapted from illustrations used by Dr. Phil Fernandes.

5 As C. Stephen Evans explains, “experience provides prima-facie evidence which should normally be accepted unless we have stronger evidence that leads us to doubt or discount the experience.” –

Philosophy of Religion: Thinking About Faith (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), p. 90.

6 Norman Geisler and Winfried Corduan, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 76.

7 John A. Bloom, “Truth Via Prophecy,” in *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery; Cornell Symposium on Evidential Apologetics, 1986 (Dallas, TX: Probe Books, 1991), p. 175.

8 When using the term evidential certainty in this context, this includes physical and empirical evidences as well as philosophical arguments, reason, etc.

9 For more on the subject of Christian epistemology, see the essay [*Can the Christian Know?*](#)