

CORE FACTS

Why Christianity Makes Sense

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INTRODUCTION

“I am an atheist because there is no evidence for the existence of God. That should be all that needs to be said about it: no evidence, no belief,”¹ said Dan Barker, the president of the *Freedom From Religion Foundation* (FFRF) in his book, *Losing Faith in Faith*. Over the past fifteen years, I’d watched Barker make these kinds of comments in debates against some of my Christian heroes. Like me, he was once a pastor, an evangelist, a Bible teacher; and now he’s the head of an organization aimed at impacting hearts and minds with his commitments. Only, those commitments are no longer Christian ones. I was seated in my office at *Trinity College of the Bible and Theological Seminary* in 2020, staring out the window at the Ohio river which snakes its way past downtown Evansville, Indiana. I’m waiting with anticipation for a livestreaming debate to begin - me versus Dan. I’d been asked to debate a nuanced topic with America’s atheist preacher on one of the most prominent radio programs for dialogue between unbelievers and Christians, Justin Brierley’s *Unbelievable*. How had I gotten here?

I could trace it back to important debates I’d had prior to this one. Surely, they opened some doors. But why had I taken this path? Why did I become interested in reaching atheists, and talking about all the evidence for the truth of Christianity? People become interested in these kinds of things for many reasons. Some Christians just find it interesting, and so they study the evidence out of curiosity, just as one might want to learn some facts about solar power, artificial intelligence or how books are published. Others get into it to find some personal affirmation of their

¹Dan Barker, “Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist,” (Freedom from Religion Foundation, 1992) 87.

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faith. Doubts will come, and this material can help in addressing them. Some become geeks for Christian defense in the way many are geeks for *Star Wars* or *Lord of the Rings*. I have to admit to embodying all of these reasons, but there was one that served as the motivating engine of my desire - I wanted to reach a very close friend who had become an atheist. Everything else has simply been the natural outflowing of my love, and more importantly, Christ's love for him.

We grew up in the American South, and went to a private Christian school. Sunday school, morning services, evening services at least twice a week, youth trips, a believing family, and in his case, even an evangelical undergrad program. The Christian experience was the primordial soup out of which *my friend* had climbed, but it was the nourishing source that still gave *me* strength. *He* was no longer looking to the carpenter from Nazareth, *I* was still totally committed. *He walked away* from the light. *I* was trying to *press deeper into it*.

Was this in my head as the pixels began to define the image of Dan Barker on my monitor just before a debate all these years later? Probably not, but it's what God used to get me there. Love. It has not always been the primary reason, as I've made plenty of mistakes, but it has always been the most important reason. And at the end of that debate with the famous atheist, though I felt it to be an incredibly valuable interaction, my thoughts were on my high school friend. He was still an atheist. So, I press on.

The atheist preacher, Dan Barker, is wrong. There is evidence for God's existence. In fact, many non-theist philosophers working in the field of philosophy of religion would happily tell you that there are certainly "evidential chips that fall in favor of God." Barker's rhetoric is common enough, though. Outspoken atheist activists often say things like that, and for those who don't know about the evidence, it can sound jarring. Some

people have their faith rattled by such claims. Maybe that's you. Still, in this book, I hope to sketch out some of the best reasons to believe, not only that God exists, but that Christianity is true.

In 2008 I began hammering out a method of explaining Christian evidence to the church audience in a way that I hoped would be easier to understand and remember than other resources that were available. The result was C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. Since that time, I have used the method to present the same faithful arguments for the Christian faith that classical apologists have grown to favor in a memorable way. I have used it for evangelism in formal public debates, private conversations, internet radio discussions and while preaching in churches. It has served me well and proved invaluable as my signature method.

This work will explain the arguments involved and how to use them for the affirmation of your own faith or to reach others for Christ. If you are an unbeliever, I ask you to read this work with an open mind. You might even ask the God you do not believe in to speak to your mind and heart during this study. The book is designed in such a way as to be helpful and accessible to all who read it. The cases for God and the case for the resurrection of Jesus, that I discuss here, are not new. They have been studied and used for a long time. What I hope to accomplish with this book is an incredibly approachable explanation of these reasons to believe, and to offer you a handy way of remembering them.²

Chapter one explains the evidence for God's existence from the fact that the universe must have had a "Cause" for its own existence. Think, why is there anything at all. Why does something, rather than

² The material in this book is discussed at an incredible depth by academics in the philosophy of religion. To those who know me because of my work in apologetics, take note that this book has a specific purpose - familiarizing people with the basic concepts.

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nothing exist? Christianity says God is the creator of all of physical reality. God made everything. The argument in chapter one will give you good reason to believe that the Bible is right. The best explanation for the beginning of the universe is God.

The second chapter lays out the phenomenal “**O**rders” of the world in which we live. Why is the universe so seemingly well designed? It definitely seems like my hands, for instance, were *made to* grip things. There seems to be intention and purpose to creation. Scripture certainly speaks of the heavens declaring the glory of God. In chapter two we’ll take a look at the numbers, and I think you’ll be impressed by how fine-tuned the universe seems to be, in order to allow life to be possible.

Chapter three will consider the “**R**ules” that the universe seems to have for human morality. Isn’t it interesting that people everywhere have an awareness that certain things are good and bad, right and wrong? If there is no God, why should we think that our intention to, say, commit some selfish crime, is actually wrong, rather than just a common opinion that it’s wrong? If there’s no God, and someone is told that what they are planning to do is evil, why could the individual not simply retort, “Says who?” As C.S. Lewis reasoned, a moral law³ requires a moral law giver.

In the fourth chapter, the case will be made that individuals can have an “**E**xperience” of God if they are open to the evidence.⁴ This sets the stage for us to consider the resurrection of Jesus.

Leaving the arguments for God’s existence, chapter five will be a

³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York, NY, Harper Collins), 29.

⁴ A move similar to this was often made by William Lane Craig. In demonstration of a classical case, he would cover cosmological, teleological and moral cases, before transitioning to his own approach regarding the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Before making that transition, he commonly discussed the experience one can personally have of the one true God through Jesus.

demonstration that Jesus' wounds on the cross were "**F**atal." In it, we will consider the evidence that Jesus really did die by Roman crucifixion. After all, if we are going to claim that he rose from the dead, then it needs to be demonstrated that he really was, in fact, dead. From there, the investigation will lead us, in the sixth chapter, to consider the claims that Jesus "**A**ppeared" to others after his death. Chapter seven will be an examination of the level of "**C**ommitment" that the disciples had to the message of the resurrection. This will open the door to the "**T**estimony" of early Christians about this whole matter in chapter nine. Finally, chapter ten will be an explanation of the logical conclusion one should draw on the basis of these Core Facts. Namely, Jesus is the way of "**S**alvation."

You may notice that this is a two-step approach. The evidences represented by the acronym "C.O.R.E." are all related to the existence of God. However, this material doesn't specify that the God being argued for is the one true God of Christian Scripture. This is why the evidences represented by the acronym "F.A.C.T.S." show that Jesus is the one true God who has revealed himself in creation. In this way it will not be unreasonable to conclude that Jesus was raised by God from the dead since God's existence is demonstrated in the first half of the case. In other words, if God exists as the creator of the universe, then raising Jesus from the dead is no problem for him.

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Pay attention to these "CORE MOMENT" boxes. If you are a beginner or just need a little clarification, these simplified explanations will help. As long as you watch the boxes, you'll finish with a good foundation.

In Part Two of the book, I explain and respond to some of the most frequent objections to these evidences. In some cases, the responses to objections take up more space than the explanations of the arguments

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themselves. However, there are objections to the points made in each chapter that I simply won't have space to cover in a book like this. That just means that if you finish reading Core Facts, and want to go further, there's plenty more to say.

Just to ensure that I have given readers the best chance of success, an appendix is included which explains a conversational method of defending the faith. It is filled with extra evidence. The second appendix provides an easy reference outline of the C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. so that they can be remembered and shared with others. It is my hope that all readers will close this book with an understanding of why we believe what we believe and how to defend it before a questioning world.

The C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. acrostic is designed in such a way that the primary arguments can be easily remembered. Because the two words that form the acrostic are separate in what they seek to demonstrate, they can be broken up and used separately. That is to say, if an individual already believes in God but sees no reason to accept the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, the Christian can simply bypass C.O.R.E. and focus entirely on the F.A.C.T.S. of the resurrection of Jesus. Perhaps someone would embrace Christianity if only they thought it were possible that God existed. In such a case, one might focus on the C.O.R.E. arguments. This flexibility is one of the strengths of the method.

I might not know you, but before writing this paragraph, I prayed for you. Are you hoping for a stronger faith in the face of occasional doubts? Are you on the verge of rejecting Christianity? Are you a skeptic who is reading this out of curiosity? Maybe, like me, someone you love has said goodbye to Jesus, and your heart aches with a desire to see them in the Kingdom. I'm praying that this material will help you as I believe it has helped others.

A few years ago, after the first edition release of CORE FACTS, I was asked by a local church member if I would be willing to speak to her son who had recently begun identifying as an atheist. I agreed. I shared with him, conversationally, exactly what's in this book. This is what he had to say several months later:

We met for lunch at a local Mexican restaurant, and that's when my life really changed for the better. We continued meeting and discussing God, and the truth about Jesus. I was baffled at how much evidence there really is. No one had ever talked to me about Christian apologetics. It surprised me to hear that there were people out there that are trying to give evidence for God's existence, and who Jesus was. Apologetics made me take a second look at what religion was, and why Christianity is worth believing! –Drew, *Away from Atheism*⁵

Not only did this young man end up committing his life to Christ, but he was so excited about Christian evidence that he ended up working with us at *Trinity College & Seminary*, answering phones so that he could help other people begin studying these things too. He's one of many people in such a category. I hear testimonies like this via my video channel, and other social media outlets, regularly. When I say I believe this material will help, it's because I've seen it used by God in powerful ways.

Whatever the reason you found yourself reading these words, you are about to begin preparing yourself for a culture that is increasingly hostile to Christianity. Your basic grasp of these topics will exponentially benefit you when questions arise. And if you are not yet convinced, I hope you'll see this as a friendly challenge to think this through with me. Get ready for the journey!

⁵ Braxton Hunter, (2015, August 11). *Away from atheism: By Drew Peistrup*. Evangelistic Apologetics. <https://www.braxtonhunter.com/blog/2015/8/11/rgu5r1liligc8zstd8ibo25qquljlsr>

CHAPTER I

"C"

THE UNIVERSE HAD A CAUSE

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. - Genesis 1:1

When one of my daughters was less than a year old, I decided to conduct an experiment. I wanted to see if she had developed the dexterity to catch a ball if I lightly tossed it to her. She hadn't. She spilled over, just before struggling to stabilize such that her small world was once again upright. Don't look at me like that. I can feel your judgment through the pages of the book. It wasn't hard. It was a soft ball. Not a *softball!* but a soft...ball. In any case, she then began looking around for what had caused her to fall over. Aha! My daughter is going to be a philosopher! At this young age, she already understands something amazing about reality. She understands cause and effect. When she saw the ball lying on the floor, she demonstrated an even more incredible awareness. She at least seemed to begin looking around for what had caused the ball to fly through the air, causing her to fall over. My daughter is not *just* going to be a philosopher - she's going to be the *department head!* At this age, she not only gets cause and effect, but she seems to understand causal chains. These things seem to line up. "If the ball hitting me caused me to topple over, then something caused the ball to cause me to topple over." She then put it together, as my hand was still in its extended position. Kids can get even with their dads, though, by causing things in return, perhaps the changing of a diaper,

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which may cause the rookie dad to call out for his wife.

Isn't this an elegant expression of cause and effect? Maybe not, but it certainly seems true that from very early on, kids understand something about how causation works, even if there's a lot more about it they may never know. Those kinds of facts are what we'll use in this chapter to present what I, and many others, find to be the most persuasive reason to believe that God exists. It has to do with causes, and the beginning of the universe. And when it comes to studying the beginning, there seems to be great reason to believe in God.

Take a look at what one physicist had to say about the strength of evidences like the one we'll be talking about here. Frank Tipler writes,

When I began my career as a cosmologist some twenty years ago, I was a convinced atheist. I never in my wildest dreams imagined that one day I would be writing a book purporting to show that the central claims of Judeo-Christian theology are in fact true, that these claims are straightforward deductions of the laws of physics as we now understand them. I have been forced into these conclusions by the inexorable logic of my own special branch of physics.⁶

While many atheists debating these things will say there simply is no evidence for God, Tipler, as a physicist, would disagree. But I really want you to be encouraged that though, in one sense, this will be the section of the book that is the most difficult to grasp, it doesn't require that you know physics, or have a PhD in philosophy. This chapter will be less about me telling you things you don't know, and more about me simply pointing out things you can assess in your own mind using your reason. You're not so much learning facts. You're noticing connections. For many of us, once you see it, it's really hard to unsee.

⁶ Frank Tipler, *The Physics of immortality*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), Preface.

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This first reason to believe in God might sound overly complicated, but actually anyone can learn how to use it. You don't need to have an advanced degree. Regardless of your age or education, you can *get* evidence if you'll only commit to understanding it.

The Universe Had a Cause: Stating the Case

Just like my young daughter understood that things that start to happen must have causes, it also seems true that everything that begins to exist has a cause. Let's make this about YOU. You began to exist. Did something cause YOU to begin to exist? Did something cause YOU? In fact, something *did cause YOU*. It has to do with your parents and it involves a process we don't need to discuss in this family friendly book. But in the most obvious respect, that's what caused you to begin to exist. And it's true for anything and everything that is part of what we call the physical universe. Your car came to exist because someone built it. They built it because people seem to buy cars. They can buy them because someone invented them.⁷ Your chair exists because someone brought wood together in a certain arrangement so that sitting would be more comfortable. Just as things in the physical universe begin to exist, and have causes, if the universe itself began to exist, then it seems reasonable to conclude that the universe must have a cause for its existence.

If you're in agreement so far, then you accept the key points in an argument for God's existence called The Kalam Cosmological Argument.

⁷ There are different kinds of causation. Aristotle described four: Material, formal, efficient, and final causes. Here, we're just trying to get a basic grasp on the concepts in the case we'll cover.

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⁸It says, 1) Everything that begins to exist must have a cause for its existence, 2) the universe began to exist, and 3) therefore, the universe must have a cause for its existence. Now that might not give you strong enough reason to believe in God, but hang with me. Buzz and Woody from *Toy Story* are going to help us see where this road takes us.

The Technical Stuff

Here is how the most popular cosmological argument is put by William Lane Craig:

- 1. Everything that begins to exist must have a cause for its existence**
- 2. The Universe began to exist**
- 3. Therefore, the universe must have a cause for its existence.**

Premises (1) and (2) are both plausible. They are more likely to be true than false. There are no apparent logical fallacies and the conclusion follows directly from the premises. The strength of the argument becomes clear upon the consideration that the only way to challenge it is to attempt a demonstration that premise (1) or premise (2) is false. We will interact with examples of these challenges when we discuss objections to the argument in a later chapter. For now, notice the position into which this argument places readers. They now see that the universe must have a cause for its existence. Nevertheless, we have not narrowed our field of vision such that it is clear what that cause must have been. In order to accomplish this feat, we must draw implications from some simple scientific principles. This will move us to the second broad step of the case.

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Don't worry! I'm only explaining this so you know how arguments work. If you're a beginner, you don't really need to know this stuff. Philosophical terms and arguments look scary, but I'll break down the evidence itself without them.

So far, we've got reason to believe that the beginning of the universe must have had a cause, but how can we know anything about that cause? Well, we can learn some things about the cause by thinking about what CAN'T be true of it. Our universe is made up of three things, generally speaking: time, space, and matter. Those are the things we are trying to explain. That means that whatever caused the universe to come

⁸ Though he has presented variations on the wording, this phrasing is from it's modern champion, William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. (Westmont, Illinois, Intervarsity Press.).

into being must not be in those categories. The cause must not be in time. It must be timeless. It must not occupy space, but transcend space. It must not be made of matter. That means it must be an eternal, transcendent, non material ... something.

Now I've been teaching this stuff for long enough to know that this is where some readers will trip up, or get frustrated. What I'm saying seems kind of strange and abstract, but once it clicks, it's powerful. Nothing that makes up the universe can cause the universe, because the things that make up the universe are the things we're trying to explain. Things don't cause themselves to come into existence.

Imagine that I were asked, "Braxton, who or what caused the *Toy Story* films to come into existence?" I might respond that Buzz Lightyear (my favourite character in the films) might have caused the *Toy Story* universe. Or maybe the little aliens in the movies that worship, "THE CLAWWW!" But...that wouldn't make any sense at all, would it? Those characters are parts of the films. They are parts of that digitally constructed reality that we might, and sometimes do, call the *Toy Story* Universe. Nothing in the films can cause the films. We know that script writers, digital creators, animators, voice actors, musicians, a director and many other people who are OUTSIDE OF the *Toy Story* Universe caused the digital universe to come into existence. Nothing in the *Toy Story* universe could do that because they would be a part of the universe that we're trying to explain. And that's the point!

Just as Buzz and Woody can't be the explanation because they are in the digital universe we're trying to explain, time, space, and matter can't be the causes of the physical universe because they are pieces of the physical universe. We're asking, "What caused this?" Just as the real creators of the *Toy Story* digital universe needed to exist apart from the films

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they are creating, the cause of the physical universe will transcend the physical universe and not be made up of the stuff in it. With the help of *Toy Story*, we can see that the cause of the universe is a spaceless, timeless, and non-material cause. Or put differently - eternal, transcendent, and supernatural!

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It's simpler than it sounds. Time, space and matter make up nature. What we are trying to figure out is what or who caused nature to come into existence. So the cause can't be anything in time, space or made of matter. Those things are nature. Nature is what we are trying to explain. Our cause has to be timeless, spaceless and not material.

But, wait a minute! How do we know that this spaceless, timeless, non material ... something - is God? How do we know it's a personal being like Christians think, and not just some powerful force, like the one Obi Wan Kenobi educates Luke Skywalker about in *Star Wars: A New Hope*? Maybe the force wasn't supposed to be the cause of the universe, but it is an ambiguously divine cause. In the film, the old wizard says of the force, "It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together." It has a light side and a dark side, is stronger in some people than others, and is exceedingly powerful - but it isn't personal. It isn't a person. In this way it borrows from some Eastern ideas. The force allows for some incredible story-telling in a cosmic fairytale happening far, far away, but I don't think an impersonal cause of the universe works in fiction or reality.

We already discussed that the cause would need to be spaceless, and non-material, but we also said it was timeless. What does it mean to exist without time, as the cause of the universe, whatever it was, seems to have existed? It's kind of easy to imagine an existence with no physical objects. We kind of just think of an empty black void. But imagining spacelessness, and timelessness is more difficult. We are time-based

creatures who are used to the passing of time. Timelessness, hard as it is to imagine, would not be a state where seconds are passing by, but nothing is happening. There are no moments passing by. Moments passing by is part of a temporal (time-based) existence. Without the physical universe of time, space and matter, there would be no time at all. If you find that you're developing a headache trying to imagine this timelessness, join the club. It's completely foreign to the existence we are used to experiencing. Still, as difficult as it is to capture timelessness in your mind, think about what it would mean for the cause.

When one lines up a chain of dominoes across a gymnasium floor and flicks the first one over, the others begin to fall in order. The chain of dominoes is also a causal chain, like we've been discussing. But in the physical universe, the falling of dominoes, one after the other, requires time. The movements of the dominoes happen through a series of moments. Without time, there would be no falling dominoes. Now, here is where you need to put on your thinking cap, and tighten it up. If there is no time without creation, then there was no chain of causes leading to the beginning of the universe. It also didn't happen randomly, as random events also require the passing of time. So the cause wasn't the result of a chain of events (like the dominoes), and it wasn't the result of randomness. It seems like there's just no conceivable way the universe could have ever gotten started, but here we are! What kind of cause could begin the universe from a state like that - a state of timeless nothingness? Well, there is a type of cause - the choice of a person. People can freely make choices.

A personal cause could freely act to create the universe. This would not require an impossible causal chain (like the dominoes falling without time), and it would not require randomness (which also requires time). However, that *act* of creation *would* require time. That's why many theists

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(people who believe in God) hold that the act of creation marked the first moment of time.

If you've made it this far, congratulations. There is nothing in this book more complex than what has just been said. In the first chapter, I think we already see powerful reason to believe. The cause of the universe was a spaceless, timeless, non-material mind. This is what we mean when we say, "God."

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Don't let the philosophical stuff overwhelm you. The point is that the best explanation for the beginning of the universe is a spaceless, timeless, non-material, mind. This is what Scripture teaches that God is (John 4:24).

From these implications, the universe must have a cause which is an eternal, spaceless, non-material mind. At the very least, this is what any orthodox Christian theist means when he refers to God. The case that I have just been describing may require some review in order to fully appreciate, but it should be understandable to any thinking person who is willing to devote a little time and consideration to it. The truths that spring forth from these revelations are the sorts of things that have caused agnostics and atheists to say very theological sounding things. This well known quote from Robert Jastrow is a fine example:

For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.⁹

⁹ Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1978), 116.

What caused God?

This is a pretty powerful argument we've been thinking through. For some readers, though, there's a nagging question that hasn't shaken loose. That's why, even though this book is designed with the objections to these arguments in a later section, this one just can't wait. If everything that exists must have a cause... then, who caused God?

When you start to trace causes backward in time, stopping at God might seem a little convenient. Surely, something caused God, and something caused whatever caused God, and on and on until you have a migraine. It reminds me of the centuries-old story of the man who said that the earth sat atop elephants, and when asked what they stand upon, he said a turtle, and when asked what the turtle was standing upon, he said, "Other turtles." And when asked what the turtles were standing on, he concluded, "It's turtles all the way down." That's not a very satisfying explanation, for obvious reasons. You can't have a chain of causes with no *first cause*, and we'll talk about this more in the **objections** section. Still, from what we already know, we can use reason to see why God doesn't need a cause.

In this chapter, we aren't saying everything that exists has a cause. We're saying everything that *begins* to exist has a cause. That is an incredibly important part of this. God did not begin to exist. Now, you might think this is just a claim I'm making to get God off the hook. It's not. Remember when we were talking about those dominoes, and how time is required for events to happen like that? For the same reason, it doesn't even make sense to speak of God as having a cause. The only things that have beginnings and endings are things that exist in time. If there is no time, there is no beginning, and no end. God simply, timelessly, is.

Conclusion

This case is one of the strongest cases for the existence of God. It is not incredibly difficult to understand, although defending it may require a knowledge of some of the deep issues discussed in the objections. In the **technical stuff** box in this chapter, there is an argument that has two premises, and a conclusion. It is structured in such a way that any critic must show a fatal flaw in premise (1), premise (2), or the implications which spring forth from the formal argument. Once you examine the challenges atheists have made against the premises and their conclusion (in **part two** of this book), it should be apparent how strong the case is. In fact, it can be creatively explained to the average individual without much difficulty. For all of these reasons, the case discussed here is a powerful evidence for the existence of God.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the “C.” in C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. stand for *Cause*?
2. Why must the cause be outside of time and space, and not made of matter?
3. How would you respond if someone asks, “who made God?”
4. Why must the universe have had a cause for its existence?
5. Does modern science agree that the universe began to exist?
6. How would you briefly explain “C” to someone else?

CHAPTER II

“0”

THE UNIVERSE HAS ORDER

For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse - Romans 1:20

We named the dog, Indiana. We call him “Indy” for short. I love my dog. He’s a mix of some kind of terrier, and border collie. He’s loyal, adorable, and fairly obedient. He’s not very smart, but you can’t win ‘em all. He never ceases to create a sense of wonder in me. Here is this little furry cartoonish being who lives with us, and to some degree, communicates with us. At times, I almost expect him to stand up on his hind legs and walk around conversing with us like a citizen of Narnia. Maybe he’d wear a monocle. My family can tell you, I sometimes call him The Little Narnia Man. He’s just a bit too perfect. Now, in one sense, that’s just a proud dog owner saying the sorts of annoying things that proud dog owners say. And he’s not really perfect, I guess. But he’s close enough that it starts to make me marvel at the design.

Indy has teeth. Of course Indy has teeth, but at the same time, think about how incredible that is - TEETH! And they serve a purpose. Indy can chew things - oh boy, can Indy chew things. Indy has an incredible olfactory system with up to 300 million receptors, compared to my six million. He has ears too - EARS! And they can hear twice as many

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frequencies as mine can. The technology mounted in Indy's little baseball-sized head, is astounding. Of course, I'm pretty astounding myself. I have hands that seem clearly designed to grip things. I have a mouth that is designed to eat and breathe and talk, and those three things are three of my favourite things. When it comes to eating, breathing and talking, I am a completely satisfied customer.

You already know that I'm not the first to make this point. At least on the face of it, there seems to be some sort of order in the universe.¹⁰ Though there is much destruction, and calamity, there seems to be design. Sean Carroll, a well known physicist who has debated against God's existence, told Joe Rogan,

I mean that's just an obvious idea - like we're human beings. We tend to, as our first guess in understanding the world...we're anthropomorphic. Like, if something exists it must have been designed. There must be a reason. There must be a purpose. Things work in a certain way cuz someone made them that way, and we don't see that person hanging around, so it must be, you know, up there in the sky or something like that.¹¹

Even though Carroll doesn't accept this intuition, he does grant that it's a natural one to have. And though one may push back that while such an idea may have been more powerful in the prescientific era, it doesn't have the force it once had. Is that right? No.

Christopher Hitchens was one of the most famous atheists in the world, and one of the famed "four horsemen" of what has come to be referred to as new atheism. He was viciously condescending regarding religious beliefs, and his confidence, timing, and wit, made him a rhetorical

¹⁰ There are sections in this work dealing with scientific evidence. It should be noted that I am not a professional scientist, and that disclaimer should be kept in mind.

¹¹ The original interview is no longer available, but the relevant portions can be found on the Trinity Radio YouTube channel at the following link. YouTube. (2020). *YouTube*. Retrieved August 16, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfuqjWUpD6g&t=1096s>.

warrior in debate. But when asked about the strength of different cases for God's existence he responded with surprising frankness. He said, "At some point, certainly, we're all asked, 'Well, which is the best argument you come up against from the other side?' I think every one of us picks the fine tuning one as the most intriguing. The fine-tuning, that one degree, well, one degree, one hair different, and nothing." He goes on to say that while he thinks this can be done without God, "You have to spend time thinking about it, working on it. It's not trivial. We all say that." So, not only is this still a relevant and powerfully convincing notion in the 21st century, by their own admission, it's the reason to believe in God that some of the most popular atheist spokespersons think is the best. The late philosopher Anthony Flew, who had been an atheist for most of his career confessed,

I now believe that the universe was brought into existence by an infinite Intelligence. I believe that this universe's intricate laws manifest what scientists have called the Mind of God. I believe that life and reproduction originate in a divine Source. Why do I believe this, given that I expounded and defended atheism for more than a half century? The short answer is this: this is the world picture, as I see it, that has emerged from modern science.¹²

Deeply scientific evidence appeals to many modern minds because science is celebrated in the 21st century as the most reliable guide to truth. Thankfully, Christian thinkers have at their disposal one type of case for God's existence which approaches the matter from a scientific and/or probabilistic perspective. Design arguments (teleological arguments) seek to demonstrate that the complexity of the universe strongly implies the existence of a designer. Don't let the word "teleological" overwhelm you. It comes from the Greek word, *telos* which means "ends" or "purpose." What are commonly thought of as design arguments can formally be referred to

¹² Anthony Flew, *There is a God: how the world's most notorious atheist changed his mind*, (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2007), 88.

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as teleological arguments because the intent is to show that there is a purpose or end (goal) in the order of the universe. As is the case with the material in the first chapter, properly articulated cases from design are considered to be among the most convincing cases that can be set forth in favor of God's existence, according to many.

In a moment we'll take a deeper look at the powerful evidence revealed by the ORDER of the universe. However, before moving forward, it is important to say a word about evolutionary biology.

Many ardent defenders of the faith expend a great deal of effort in attempts to debunk the claims of evolutionists. It is true that one will rarely defend a design argument without encountering this subject. Commonly, if the defender himself does not refer to the subject, the listener will. There are mountains of materials produced by intelligent design advocates and creationists which assist believers in dealing with this very important matter. Nevertheless, discussions regarding evolution can often distract listeners from the elegance of a powerful case from design by bogging the presentation down with a secondary concern which is not necessary for the strength of the case itself. To be clear, even if evolution is true it would not refute "O" in any way. The reason for this is that an argument from the order of the universe can focus on more than mere biological life. We will be looking at the fine-tuning of the universe to allow for life. The complexity and specificity of the created objects of the universe, including the life permitting aspects of it, demand the design conclusion. Such aspects of the created order are somewhat outside the purview of the evolution of biological life on earth. Talking about evolution may result in an interesting discussion, but it does not result in a necessary one for the purpose of this case.

I realize that this comes as somewhat of a letdown for many

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Robin Collins articulates a design argument as follows:

1. **The existence of the fine-tuning is not improbable under theism.**
2. **The existence of the fine-tuning is very improbable under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.**
3. **From premises (1) and (2) and the prime principle of confirmation, it follows that the fine-tuning data provides strong evidence to favor the design hypothesis over the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.**

Scientists call this extraordinary balancing of the parameters of physics and the initial conditions of the universe the "fine-tuning of the cosmos." It has been extensively discussed by philosophers, theologians, and scientists, especially since the early 1970s, with hundreds of articles and dozens of books written on the topic. Today, it is widely regarded as offering by far the most persuasive current argument for the existence of God. - Robin Collins

readers. Many professional Christian defenders are frustrated by the fact that the evolution debate is the central issue about which outsiders seem to think our discipline focuses. It is not. Likewise, outsiders are often frustrated by the fact that some Christian thinkers refuse to deal with this hotly debated issue. Clearly, this is an interesting and valid area of study for defenders, but it serves to congest and confuse the "O" case. Especially when we're trying to reach others, believers should not involve themselves in secondary issues which will likely do a disservice to the truth about the order of the universe they are attempting to explain.

It would not be feasible, here, to explain and evaluate all historical versions of design arguments. Christian thinkers try to show the strength of the design notion in different ways. Some argue from biologically complex design we see in nature, like my dog Indy. And that is certainly part of the story. Others have argued from analogy, pointing out that just as human inventions seem machine-like, ordered, and complex, so human and animal organs, as well as ecosystems, seem machine-like ordered, and complex. This is also part of the story. However, I will focus, here, on the way the universe seems so incredibly finely tuned to make life possible. If it is the

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case that the “C” is immediately accessible to the listener because it is based upon ideas which are already held by them, then the case from order/design (“O”) is similarly accessible because it is based upon evidence which is immediately visible in the created universe. The universe has ORDER. For this reason, the material which we will consider here is, I believe, digestible to any person of average education.¹³

With the case in the shaded box above in mind, Robin Collins explains,

Suppose we went on a mission to Mars, and found a domed structure in which everything was set up just right for life to exist. The temperature, for example, was set around 70o F and the humidity was at 50%; moreover, there was an oxygen recycling system, an energy gathering system, and a whole system for the production of food. Put simply, the domed structure appeared to be a fully functioning biosphere. What conclusion would we draw from finding this structure? Would we draw the conclusion that it just happened to form by chance? Certainly not. Instead, we would unanimously conclude that it was designed by some intelligent being. Why would we draw this conclusion? Because an intelligent designer appears to be the only plausible explanation for the existence of the structure. That is, the only alternative explanation we can think of—that the structure was formed by some natural process—seems extremely unlikely. Of course, it is possible that, for example, through some volcanic eruption various metals and other compounds could have formed, and then separated out in just the right way to produce the "biosphere," but such a scenario strikes us as extraordinarily unlikely, thus making this alternative explanation unbelievable. The universe is analogous to such a "biosphere," according to recent findings in physics. Almost everything about the basic structure of the universe—for example, the fundamental laws and parameters of physics and the initial distribution of matter and energy—is balanced on a razor's edge for life to occur. As the eminent Princeton physicist Freeman Dyson notes, "There are many . . . lucky accidents in physics. Without such accidents, water could not exist as liquid, chains of carbon atoms could not form complex organic molecules, and hydrogen atoms could not form breakable bridges between molecules." In short, life as we know it would be impossible.¹⁴

¹³ Some citations used in this section are often referenced by William Lane Craig.

¹⁴ Robin Collins, *The fine-Tuning Design Argument* (University of Colorado Boulder). <https://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/phil201/Collins.pdf>

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It's simple! The argument just explains that the fine-tuning of the universe that allows for life to be possible is MUCH more likely if God exists, than if God does not exist. It appears that this fine-tuning without God would require that chance resulted in the fine-tuning for life (which really seems absurd).

Did all this just happen by chance?

What matters first for making this case is to notice that the incredible design of the universe, which allows for life to be possible, exists because of one of two possibilities. Some, as we see from Collins, argue that there are only two possible explanations for why the universe is so remarkably well ORDERED. There is no debate that the universe is undeniably complex in precisely this way. Atheists and theists alike stand in awe of the magnitude and specificity of the world in which they live. It is humbling and amazing. Some argue that such complexity can only reasonably be the result of one of two things. First we will consider the possibility of *chance*.

According to this explanation, mere chance led to the ordering of the universe in such a way that it was appropriate for life. Mankind is simply the happy recipient of the blessing of chance. Of all of the innumerable ways the universe could have come to exist, we are just unbelievably lucky (BIG emphasis on “unbelievably”) that it turned out this way. However, chance will not do as a fitting explanation.

Paul Davies paints the picture masterfully,

The really amazing thing is not that life on Earth is balanced on a knife-edge, but that the entire universe is balanced on a knife-edge, and would be total chaos if any of the natural 'constants' were off even slightly. You see... even if you dismiss man as a chance happening, the fact remains that the universe seems unreasonably suited to the existence of life -- almost contrived -- you might say a 'put-up job'.... Taken together they provide impressive evidence that life as we know it depends very sensitively on the form of the laws of physics, and on some seemingly

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fortuitous accidents in the actual values that nature has chosen for various particle masses, force strengths, and so on. If we could play God, and select values for these natural quantities at whim by twiddling a set of knobs, we would find that almost all knob settings would render the universe uninhabitable. Some knobs would have to be fine-tuned to enormous precision if life is to flourish in the universe.¹⁵

This might seem over the top, but illustrating that is kind of the point. Just giving the data doesn't mean much when we're so unfamiliar with such big numbers. Take for example, the balance necessary between electrons and protons. This alone necessitates an accuracy of one in 10 to the 37th power. Astrophysicist Hugh Ross eloquently describes the chances of this occurring without design as follows,

One part in 10 to the 37th power is such an incredibly sensitive balance that it is hard to visualize. The following analogy might help: Cover the entire North American continent in dimes all the way up to the moon, a height of about 239,000 miles. (in comparison, the money to pay for the U.S. federal government debt would cover one square mile less than two feet deep with dimes.) Next, pile dimes from here to the moon on a million other continents the same size as North America. Paint one dime red and mix it into the billion piles of dimes. Blindfold a friend and ask him to pick out one dime. The odds that he will pick the red dime are one in 10 to the 37th power. And this is only one of the parameters that is so delicately balanced to allow life to form.¹⁶

Clearly, chance cannot explain the complexity and specificity of the universe. Remember, the above quote only refers to one of the necessary parameters. It seems simply implausible that the universe, by chance, resulted in a life permitting situation.

¹⁵ "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Science", in John Marks Templeton, *Evidence of Purpose* (Continuum, 1996) 46. - Thanks to Blake Guinta and his "Beliefmap" site for this source.

¹⁶ Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publ. Group, Enlarged 3rd Ed. 2001), 150.

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This just goes to show that the idea that the universe is so complex and fit for life because of chance is a big stretch. It won't do as the explanation, in light of the other options.

Did it all just have to be this way?

Though Collins does not address this possibility in the quote above, some have reasoned that there are at least three suggestions for why the universe is so finely-tuned, or ordered, for life and complexity: chance, design, or . . . necessity. According to the “necessity” explanation, the universe had absolutely no chance of *not* being life permitting. In other words, the theory of everything (TOE), that theoretical physicists following people like Stephen Hawking¹⁷ are searching for, will one day be discovered and will explain why the universe could not have existed in any other way. There is simply no reason to think this is the case. It is somewhat like a “naturalism of the gaps” in which the atheist assumes that science will one day sort this out. She assumes it as an article of faith, it would seem to outsiders. She imagines that one day her idea will be validated. Moreover, Davies writes,

Even if the laws of physics were unique, it doesn't follow that the physical universe itself is unique; the laws of physics must be augmented by cosmic initial conditions; there is nothing in present ideas about “laws of initial conditions” remotely to suggest that their consistency with the laws of physics would imply uniqueness. Far from it, it seems, then, that the physical universe does not have to be the way that it is: it could have been otherwise.¹⁸

¹⁷ Since the release of the first version of this book, a film was made about the life of Stephen Hawking starring Eddie Redmayne and Felicity Jones. It was called *The Theory of Everything* in honor of the academic mcguffin, sought by Hawking.

¹⁸ Paul Davies, *The Mind of God*, (New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, 1992), 169.

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This means that physical necessity will not do as an explanation.

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In simpler words, the idea that the universe is so complex because it just had to be that way fails. There is no reason to think the universe couldn't have been a lot of different ways. So there must be a better reason why the universe seems to be finely-tuned for life.

Ideas like this are representative of the assumption of naturalism. The sentiment is, “no matter how outlandish the hypothesis may be, it must be a naturalistic hypothesis that does not involve the supernatural.” Now, in one sense that’s okay. People doing work in the natural sciences are meant to study, and seek to understand the natural universe. They are not necessarily philosophers, much less theologians. Even if a given scientist is a Christian, his job is to look for the best natural explanation. Yet, when the scientist takes his lab coat off, and considers these things, he should see that only consulting scientific ways of knowing things, is not appropriate. If one assumes naturalism from the beginning, then it will always be the case that one will arrive at a naturalistic conclusion. The now famous quote from Richard Lewontin resonates here. He says,

It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is an absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.¹⁹

It is because of this that some atheists assert a number of strikingly awkward explanations for the data about reality that modern science has unveiled.

¹⁹ Richard Lewontin, *Billions and Billions of Demons*, (The New York Review, 9 January 1997), 31.

This leaves only one option. Design is the best explanation for why the universe was produced in such a way that it is ordered and life permitting. Critics must either demonstrate that there is some other means by which the universe could have plausibly become so well ordered, or except the design hypothesis.

Toward the end of a book he coauthored with an atheist colleague, astrophysicist Luke Barnes summarises,

We were just innocently wondering what would happen if the Universe were different. We ended up wandering through most of physics and cosmology, stopped by probability theory, dipped into mathematics, stumbled inexpertly through some philosophy, and even tried to put a multiverse in a computer.²⁰

The result, for Dr. Barnes anyway, was this conclusion,

Why does anything at all exist? Why does this particular universe exist? According to naturalism, these questions are unanswerable – you’ll just have to convince yourself that you didn’t really want an answer anyway. According to theism, a perfect being can answer these deep questions. Its necessary existence explains why anything exists. Its moral perfection makes its creation of a moral-agent-permitting universe like ours more likely.²¹

Barnes is right.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have briefly covered the “O” case. The universe is incredibly well ORDERED for life. As complex as this subject can get, readers should be able to digest and present the case from design without much difficulty. Furthermore, if they follow the advice of avoiding the subject of evolution, they do not need to understand complex matters of

²⁰ Geraint F Lewis; Luke A. Barnes, *A Fortunate Universe: Life in a Finely Tuned Cosmos*, (Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition), 352.

²¹ *ibid*, 353.

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biology to persuasively present the argument. As is true of the “C” case, most of the basic ideas at play here are already acceptable to the student and the unbeliever alike.

The “O” argument itself suggests that the universe is either the result of chance or design. As explained above, the former alternative fails and the latter alternative fits the evidence. It is prohibitively unlikely that the universe came to be so well ORDERED for life by chance alone. On the basis of this argument, the most reasonable thing to do is accept the truth of God’s existence as the great designer of the cosmos, and answer to the question of its fine-tuning:

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the “O.” in C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. stand for *Ordered*?
2. What are the two main explanations for the well ordered universe?
3. Why is it that chance will not explain the order?
4. Think about, or discuss, the Bible verse at the beginning of this chapter, and how it relates to what has been said.
5. Why might it be helpful to avoid the subject of evolution?
6. How might you explain this case to someone?

CHAPTER III

"R"

THE UNIVERSE HAS RULES

When the Gentiles who do not have the law do instinctively the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness - Romans 2:14,15

“I ask that you hand down a sentence that tells us that what was done to us matters, that we are known, we are worth everything, worth the greatest protection the law can offer, the greatest measure of justice available.”²² These are the words of Rachael Denhollander, an advocate against the sexual abuse of women and girls. Rachael was one of over 100 who spoke out against Larry Nassar, a gymnastics coach who manipulated and assaulted the girls over a period of years. Many will recall hearing of this horrific story when the news broke. Those same people will almost all recall being shocked, and even angered by the events. What you might not have heard, is Rachael’s *victim impact statement* (VIS), a statement for which Rachael was able to speak to the court, and to her abuser. It will no doubt go down in history as one of the most memorable, and moving impact statements ever given. In it, she passionately speaks, not only for herself, but also on behalf of everyone Nassar preyed on. She demands, “They are real women and children, real women and little girls who have names and faces

²² Cable News Network. (2018, January 30). *Read Rachael Denhollander’s full victim impact statement about Larry Nassar*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/24/us/rachael-denhollander-full-statement/index.html#:~:text=And%20far%20worse%2C%20it%20was,to%20reach%20out%20to%20others.>

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and souls. Real women and children whose abuse and suffering was enjoyed for sexual fulfilment by the defendant.” She means it. She knows it. It has changed her.

What has this got to do with my claim that the universe has rules? Rachael is actually going to show us in her own words from the VIS. Here’s a segment from the statement:

I pray you experience the soul crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me – though I extend that to you as well. Throughout this process, I have clung to a quote by C.S. Lewis, where he says, my argument against God was that the universe seems so cruel and unjust. But how did I get this idea of just, unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he first has some idea of straight. What was I comparing the universe to when I called it unjust? Larry, I can call what you did evil and wicked because it was. And I know it was evil and wicked because the straight line exists. The straight line is not measured based on your perception or anyone else’s perception, and this means I can speak the truth about my abuse without minimization or mitigation. And I can call it evil because I know what goodness is. And this is why I pity you. Because when a person loses the ability to define good and evil, when they cannot define evil, they can no longer define and enjoy what is truly good. When a person can harm another human being, especially a child, without true guilt, they have lost the ability to truly love. Larry, you have shut yourself off from every truly beautiful and good thing in this world that could have and should have brought you joy and fulfilment, and I pity you for it. You could have had everything you pretended to be. Every woman who stood up here truly loved you as an innocent child, real genuine love for you, and it did not satisfy.²³

There is much more in the (VIS), but Rachael ends with, “Judge Aquilina, I plead with you as you deliberate the sentence to give Larry, send a message that these victims are worth everything. In order to meet both the goals of this court. I plead with you to impose the maximum sentence under the plea agreement because everything is what these survivors are worth.”²⁴

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Ultimately, Larry Nassar received a 175 year penalty, and I hope he takes Rachael Denhollander's advice.

For most of us, this story is worse than a nightmare, and though immeasurable harm was done, there is some satisfaction in knowing that some sense of justice was brought. This wasn't fiction. It was as real as it gets! To a lesser degree, we appreciate justice in films, books, and television. It's the sense of satisfaction that washes over us when we see a courtroom drama in which the silver-tongued attorney unravels the case such that the devious defendant is left speechless, the jury convinced, and justice dispensed. We have an intuitive internal awareness of justice. Just as Rachael had quoted C.S. Lewis as saying, we have an awareness of right and wrong. One couldn't call Nassar evil, unless one has knowledge of good. People generally seem to simply be aware of this standard of goodness by which we can compare things, and determine whether they are good bad, right or wrong. Just look inside yourself. Was Larry Nassar wrong to do what he did to those women and girls? Of course. You don't even have to think about it. The answer comes as immediately as the answer to 2+2. And think of how confident you are about this. How likely is it that you are wrong, and what Larry Nassar did was not immoral in the least? No, no, no. You're pretty darn certain. And you know all of this because you know that what he did was not as it was meant to be. It was not good. It was not right. It was very, very, very far from all of that. Instead, you're likely able to look inside yourself, and confidently say, some things are good and some things are bad. Some things are right, and some things are wrong. Lewis had asked himself, "But how did I get this idea of just, [and] unjust?" And that's a fair question. Thanks to Rachael, we've heard a bit of what the great 20th century thinker and author thought about things, but there is much more we can say.

The Technical Stuff

A basic moral argument for God's existence might go something like this:

- 1. Objective Moral Values and Duties exist**
- 2. If objective Values and duties exist, God exists as their foundation**
- 3. God exists.**

When we use the term "objective," we mean (moral truths that do not depend on human thought). Subjective things, for our purposes, are subjective. $2+2=4$ is an objectively true statement (even if no one believed it). Chocolate ice cream as the very best flavor of ice cream, is subjective (it depends on the person). On Premise (1), without God, there is no way to have objective moral values and duties. But, on premise (2) we're arguing that we DO have objective values and duties. But if you can't have objective values and duties without God, and we have them, then God exists.

Shockingly, one of the most intrinsically compelling arguments for God's existence is also one that is often discounted by believers and unbelievers alike. The moral argument has undeniably captured the attention of many skeptics, lifted them out of their intellectual doubts and settled them onto firm belief in God. Yet, some have considered it to be an elaborate case of question begging. What cannot be denied is its usefulness in convincing skeptics of the truth. Francis Collins, the head of the human genome project, describes his experience of the case as follows:

Encountering this argument at age twenty-six, I was stunned by its logic. Here, hiding in my own heart as familiar as anything in daily experience, but now emerging for the first time as a clarifying principle, this Moral law shone its bright white light into the childish recesses of my atheism, and demanded a serious consideration of its origin. Was this God looking back at me?²⁵

Most famously, C.S. Lewis articulated the argument Rachael raised at the start of this chapter in his classic, *Mere Christianity*. Since the second half of the 20th century, atheist philosophers have been arguing against it

²⁵ Francis Collins, *The Language of God*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 29.

and Christian philosophers have been using it. Though it does not rely on the scientific sophistication of the design (“O”) argument, nor the epic grandeur of the cosmological (“C”) argument, it is born out of a reflection upon the human experience and what that experience demonstrates about the nature of reality.

In this chapter, our discussion will focus on understanding the moral case as it has been used by Christian philosophers in the 21st century. The “R” stands for RULES because the existence of moral values and duties result in moral *Rules* for mankind. Ultimately, readers will find a case for God’s existence which is immediately accessible to them and is difficult to dismiss.

For the truth of the case to sink in, thinkers need to be aware of what is meant by objective and subjective moral values and duties. If something is objectively true, it means that it is true no matter what anyone thinks about it. In other words, it is not a matter of opinion. Mathematics are objective in this way. Two plus two equals four. If it were the case that everyone on planet earth disagreed with this claim, it would still be the case that two plus two *does* equal four. This is an objective truth. Conversely, subjectivity does deal with matters that are relative. Whether or not chocolate ice cream tastes the best or bald-headed, bearded men are the most attractive kinds of men are subjective questions. The answers will depend on one’s personal opinions or the consensus of society. Examples are prevalent of the chaos that can ensue when one mistakenly categorizes something as subjective which is actually objective.

Extreme relativism is a fine example of this misstep. Let’s say an extreme relativist holds that all truth is relative. What is meant by this is that truth is subjective. For example, it is not only a subjective statement to

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say that chocolate ice cream is the best flavor, but our extreme relativist might also claim that the existence of the planet earth is also subjective. That is to say, he would have to hold, if he is going to be consistent in his extreme relativism, that whether the earth exists is a matter of opinion. This might extend to all truth. Situational relativists claim that moral truths depends on the circumstances. Moral relativists hold that absolute, or objective, truths do exist, but moral values and duties are not objective in this way. One can see how moral relativism is dangerous territory precisely because it categorizes certain things as subjective which should be considered objective. It is for this reason that Peter Kreeft warns, “No culture in history has ever embraced moral relativism and survived. Our own culture, therefore, will either (1) be the first, and disprove history's clearest lesson, or (2) persist in its relativism and die, or (3) repent of its relativism and live. There is no other option.”²⁶

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It might help to think of objective things as “factual” and subjective things as “matters of opinion.”

Another point of clarification needs to be made with respect to the terms *values* and *duties*. A value is something that is good or bad. A duty is something that is right or wrong. Healthiness is good, but sickness is bad. However, treating others well is right, while murdering others is wrong. This is the distinction between moral values and moral duties.²⁷ From here we can move forward to discuss how the case works.

²⁶ Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Jesus*, (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 1st ed. 2007), 118.

²⁷ This phrasing and distinction is used in premises one and two of William Lane Craig's moral argument, and it was borrowed for premise one of the argument in this chapter.

To begin the case, we want to make the point that our own experience tells us that objective moral values and duties do exist. We then want to show that if they exist, then God is their foundation. We'll see why in a few moments. That means if it really is true that morality is objective, and we intuitively seem to know that it is, then God exists as the explanation of why these moral truths exist. Refer to the "Technical Stuff" box in this chapter to see this written out as an argument.

So let's talk about our central claim, that if objective, fact based, morality exists, God is the best explanation for it. The reason for this is simply that if God does not exist then it becomes a matter of opinion whether something is truly right or wrong. As Francis Schaeffer rightly explains,

If there is no absolute moral standard, then one cannot say in a final sense that anything is right or wrong. By absolute we mean that which always applies, that which provides a final or ultimate standard. There must be an absolute if there are to be morals, and there must be an absolute if there are to be real values. If there is no absolute beyond man's ideas, then there is no final appeal to judge between individuals and groups whose moral judgments conflict. We are merely left with conflicting opinions.²⁸

What higher authority would we appeal to in making the claim that it is wrong to murder, rape, steal or treat others unkindly? One's governmental edicts or laws will not do because they represent the subjective decisions of a nation or national leaders. That is to say, the laws in one nation can, and often do, differ from the laws of another nation. For this reason, when you leave one nation where it is against the law to buy and sell marijuana and enter another nation where it is legal to buy and sell marijuana, you discover that the legality of the buying and selling of marijuana is subjective and dependent on whose laws are at play. Without

²⁸ Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live*, (Wheaton, IL:Crossway, 50th Anniversary L'abri ed., 2005), 145.

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God, moral values and duties are subjective. If God does exist, then moral values and duties are objective.

In a world without God there is no intrinsic purpose to human life. Strikingly, many atheists have admitted this. It is for this very reason that existential atheist, Jean Paul Sartre, described man as creating purpose for himself. He passionately writes,

But in reality and for the existentialist, there is no love apart from the deeds of love; no potentiality of love other than that which is manifested in loving; there is no genius other than that which is expressed in works of art. The genius of Proust is the totality of the works of Proust; the genius of Racine is the series of his tragedies, outside of which there is nothing. Why should we attribute to Racine the capacity to write yet another tragedy when that is precisely what he—did not write? In life, a man commits himself, draws his own portrait and there is nothing but that portrait. . . What we mean to say is that a man is no other than a series of undertakings, that he is the sum, the organization, the set of relations that constitute these undertakings.²⁹

For Sartre, man is what he does. But this, by no means, requires any real purpose of him. His purpose is subjective and dependent upon what obligations he chooses to accept or assign for himself.

Some naturalists might contend that man does have one simple purpose, namely, the propagation of his own genetic material for the sustaining of his species. While this is descriptive of what biological beings do, it is not something that they must do. That is to say, they are not morally culpable for not doing so. So, naturalism can provide no real purpose for the human race. However, it gets worse than that.

Similarly, and flowing from this, in the absence of God there are no moral values or duties. Atheist thinker Frederick Nietzsche recognized this and it was the genesis of his famous, “God is dead” statement. Here, it will simply suffice to say that if there is no God, everything is permissible

²⁹ Gordon Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, (New York, NY: Random House, 2004), 355, 366.

and nothing has ultimate value.

Ultimately, the truth of atheism would mean that we may only properly refer to man as liking kindness and disliking murder. We cannot say that kindness is good or murder is wrong. This strikes most people as horrid, but it is even more deplorable when one considers even more horrendous events in human history. As many Christian defenders have pointed out, the holocaust of the Jews would, if there is no God, not be a bad thing. It would just be a thing. Worse still, there would be no moral difference between humanitarian efforts in Africa and the genocide of the Jews. What these would represent, are just different things that different humans like to do. Only a little better, we could say that they were different things that different humans thought should be considered right. Nevertheless, on atheism they are neither right nor wrong. They just are.

CORE MOMENT

If it sounds complicated, it's not. It's either your opinion that torturing children, stealing and murdering people are morally wrong or it's a matter of fact that they're wrong. If God doesn't exist, then it's only a matter of opinion. In other words, when you say it's wrong to steal, I can always say, "says who?" The problem is that we all know those things are wrong and that other things are right. We know it as a matter of fact. But if it's a matter of fact, then God exists.

What I am not saying is that we should believe that God exists just because of how awful it would be if morality were subjective. What I am saying is that our certain knowledge that acts like the holocaust are deplorable and acts like building wells in Africa are admirable, is clear evidence that morality is objective and that God does exist. This sort of knowledge is wired into humans. It does not seem to be wired into the animal kingdom.

When a snake devours a mouse, or a black widow spider cannibalizes her mate, we recognize that the predator devoured its prey, but

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we would never say that it murdered its prey. Forced copulation occurs with great regularity in the animal kingdom, yet no one charges the male with rape. This is because mankind recognizes that morality is a special aspect of *humanity*, which is not necessarily binding for other earthly beings. All of this serves to confirm the truth of moral objectivity and the existence of God from whom morality springs.

Conclusion

As this chapter demonstrates, it is truly within the realm of possibility for a wide demographic to understand and use a simple version of the “R” argument. The majority of the objections fall into a handful of simple categories. They either misunderstand the argument, misunderstand objectivity, fail to understand that God is the best possible source of objective morality, or refuse to admit that morality is objective. The argument itself is quite simple. Without God, it becomes exceedingly difficult, in my estimation, to defend the existence of real objective moral values and duties. Yet, the existence of true morality of this sort is evident to most self-reflecting people. In the end, God’s existence should be accepted since there are RULES for the human race.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the “R” in C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. stand for *Rules*?
2. What is the difference between objective and subjective things?
3. What does it mean to say that moral values and duties are objectively true?
4. Why is it that God is the best explanation for objective morality?
5. Why is it that mankind can’t make up their own objective morality?
6. What is different about humans and animals when it comes to morality?

CHAPTER IV

"E"

YOU CAN HAVE AN EXPERIENCE OF GOD

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you - Matthew 7:7

Does God interact in the world in any detectable way, such that we can experience him? A colleague of mine, Dr. Mike Licona, shares an incredible story of “radically answered prayer,” (his words, not mine). He says,

I’m not just talking about the kind of prayers - “Lord, I’m traveling from San Jose, driving up to Sacramento from this afternoon’s event. Please keep me safe.” And I get here safe. “Oh, God answered my prayer!” I’m talking about radically answered prayer. I’ve been a Christian for 45 years, I can say probably I can count them on a single hand - radically answered prayers that I’ve experienced. I’m gonna give you just one, but it doesn’t come from me. It comes from an atheist.³⁰

Mike goes on to describe an email exchange with an atheist friend, who recounts his previous experience of prayer in church as follows:

One time my church desperately needed \$7,641 in order to keep going. After an all-night prayer meeting, my dad went to pick up the mail, and in it was a check for exactly \$7,641 from someone who didn’t even know the church [needed the money] but had heard one of the pastors speak a few years ago. My dad contacted the giver and she said that after she’d heard the pastor speak, she felt God wanted her to put some cash in an annuity and give it to our church. The process took several years, and just days before she’d decided to close the account and send the accrued money to the church. And it happened to be the exact amount that was needed,

³⁰ Mike Licona, (2017), *Does God Answer Prayer?*. Retrieved August 16, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6k50iCB5V2g>.

CORE FACTS

right after an all-night prayer meeting.³¹

Mike concludes by quoting the same atheist as saying, just a few lines later, “I looked as hard as I could, but finally I realized I had no good reasons to think God exists.” Wait, what?

You can have an experience of God, and it’s important to note that there are different ways one might experience him. God’s dramatic response to the prayer, discussed above, could certainly be seen as an experience of God. What else would you call it? People specifically asked God to meet a need for a very, very, very specific amount of money, and he responded with a very, very, very specific amount of money. Whether you have ever had an answer to prayer that was as remarkable as that, most Christians who have been practicing their faith for many years can point to some moments in their lives that, at least for them, demonstrate that they have a relationship to a God who hears. Any one story might not be enough to persuade, but for the Christian who is walking with Jesus, they will likely begin to notice God’s work in their lives through Christian disciplines like prayer. On the other hand, there is a more direct way that believers claim to experience God.

In 2023, philosopher of science, Stephen C. Meyer, appeared on the Joe Rogan podcast. Meyer’s work on the subject of the fine-tuning of the universe for life is more at home in this book’s chapter on the ORDER of the universe. Even though that discussion was the central point of his appearance on the show, Rogan pressed him on his own experience of God. Meyer clarifies that while he does have personal experiences of God, he wouldn’t expect someone else to believe it’s all true, just because he claims to have personally had such experiences. He says, “Because what

³¹ Ibid.

I'm relating are subjective experiences, I would not place any weight on them in trying to persuade anybody else of the existence or reality of God. That's why I wrote the book I did in a completely different vein - on the evidential basis, on objective evidence."³² It's important to realise that this is one of the striking differences between what we're talking about in this chapter and what we discussed in the previous three. In previous chapters we discussed evidence that is available to anyone, because it's based on facts about the universe, or our shared awareness of morality. Personal, and sometimes internal experiences are incredibly convincing to the individuals who have them, but they don't prove anything to those who do not have them. With this caveat, Meyer moves on. He explains,

One of the things that the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament talk about is the role of the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit. What is objectively real in history is . . . confirmed subjectively by the testimony of the Holy Spirit. That's something I have experienced in different ways, and so I have an inner confidence about my faith in God.³³

Christian theology holds that The Holy Spirit of God works in the life of the believer in order to convict him of sin (or draw attention to his sin). This results in a sense of sorrow about that sin. Does that sound like a bad deal? It's not. Here is what Paul had to say in 2 Corinthians 4:9-10 about this "godly sorrow," as some translations put it,

I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret...

In other words, Christians believe that God will warn you when you're about to step into a big pile of sin, or when you just did.

³² Joe Rogan & Stephen C. Meyer, (2023), *Episode 2008*. Retrieved August 16, 2023, from <https://open.spotify.com/episode/3woccDLWfU1cvOcQ5OfIue>.

³³ Ibid.

CORE FACTS

Meyer continues, “I think there is an experience that many people have over time, walking in faith, where they begin to recognize the voice of God in their own life in a more personal way.”³⁴ I agree completely. Most Christians who have served the Lord for very many years can tell you how looking back on recent history, since their salvation experience, there seems to be a pattern of guidance, answered prayer, and an increase in confidence. It’s natural for unbelievers to be skeptical of this, but as it’s an internal and personal experience of God, all that a Christian can say to such objections is something like, “I get why you might see it that way, but as the person who experienced it, I’m convinced.” Watch how Meyer interacts with Rogan, first by explaining his experiences, and then by dealing with Rogan’s concerns:

The first experience upon my Christian conversion was an experience of peace that I’d never had before, and an experience of outward-focused love for other people that was and is completely contrary to all my natural inclination. Why I would suddenly feel love for a stranger on the street or be concerned about a friend in a way that I had never experienced before - I could not explain that on the basis of my own selfish inclinations.³⁵

Rogan fires back:

Yes, but you’re a young impressionable person looking for guidance, and your life is not so good before this. So, then you find something that gives you meaning, and gives you focus, and gives you this beautiful philosophy to change the way you think, and you adopt it whole-heartedly, like young people are inclined to do, or like anybody who’s looking for change in their life - anybody who’s looking for something better is inclined to do. It’s a natural pattern of growth. It’s a natural pattern of recognising there’s a better way and you seek out that way.³⁶

Meyer’s response:

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Sure, I mean, that'd be an alternative explanation. *I experienced it in a way that convinced me that something more than myself and my thinking was responsible* (emphasis added).³⁷

These are at least two ways of experiencing God. One is an experience that is realized and had when the person praying notices what is happening externally - God is answering the prayer by providing material needs. One is experienced completely internally, when the individual experiences godly sorrow as a result of sin. When it comes to answers to prayer, witnessing the miraculous, or other externally obvious experiences of God, some believers report such events, whether they are big or small, as happening quite frequently. Other individuals may sense God's internal working through conviction, affirmation, or when God brings scripture to mind in the right moment, but they do not claim to have ever had any other experience of God beyond the evidences we've been, and will continue to discuss in this book. Jonathan McLatchie has done incredible work defending the faith, and counselling Christians who are dealing with doubt. He admits that, for whatever reason, he has never had what colloquially might be called, a supernatural experience, beyond his experience of God through the "publicly available evidence" of the truth of Christianity. The bottom line is that while I maintain that you can have an experience of God, that experience might not be the same as what you see God doing in someone else's life. We serve a personal God, and as is the case with any particular person, that relationship might be experienced a little differently from person to person.

This box includes a case for reasonably accepting God's existence

³⁷ Ibid.

The Technical Stuff

John Danaher presents an application of Richard Swinburne's "Principle of Credulity," to an argument for God:

1. I have had an experience of God's existence.
2. If I have perceived X to be the case, then I am warranted in believing that X is the case.
3. Therefore, I am warranted in believing in God's existence.

In order to understand why Swinburne might think we should accept premise "2" in the argument, one needs to understand what he thinks makes a person "warranted" in believing an experience they had. He uses "the principle of credulity," (PC). Swinburne explains that if someone perceives something, then they are warranted in believing that this "something" is the case. Naturally, it's possible that such a person is genuinely wrong, and Swinburne is willing to grant that. Still, the PC gives them warrant for believing their experience was the case.

on the basis of religious experiences you may have had.³⁸ It can be very helpful in providing affirmation to those believer who have had their own religious experiences. I invite you to consider it, but this chapter is not so much about providing reasons for others to believe. It's about experiencing God in your own life.

While the previous three chapters represent cases for God's existence, what we're covering here is more of an invitation to realize and accept the united implication these cases make. That is to say, if God exists as I believe these cases demonstrate that he does, then this means something incredibly relevant for the citizens of the world. Ultimately, it means that it is not out of the question that we may have an immediate and personal EXPERIENCE of God. Such an experience further testifies to, and, for the individual who experiences him, strongly affirms God's existence. Clearly, this sort of knowledge of God is a part of one's own personal, subjective, conscious experience, and not available as a proof to

³⁸ Danaher, J. (n.d.). *The argument from religious experience: An analysis*. The Argument from Religious Experience: An Analysis. <https://philosophicaldisquisitions.blogspot.com/2021/01/the-argument-from-religious-experience.html>

unbelievers of the world. However, anyone open to the possibility that God exists can intimately know him by allowing him to speak to their heart as countless others have through the ages.

CORE MOMENT

This one is easy! We'll talk about some interesting and important things, but "E" is just about an invitation to experience God as countless other people have. This is especially important as we prepare to begin looking at Jesus in the next chapter.

The prevalence of experiences of God

Throughout the history of the world the vast majority of humanity has believed in the existence of a god or gods. One is hard pressed to ever locate a community of people who do not have some sort of monotheistic or polytheistic belief. What makes this more interesting is that even in those tribes and cultures wherein polytheistic beliefs are prevalent, closer investigation often reveals that they too are actually monotheistic in a certain sense. While they do believe in a multitude of supernatural beings that we might refer to as "gods," they also often maintain a belief that there is one ultimate creator who was the genesis of even those lesser "gods." This is noteworthy because it shows that humans have so commonly held there is a creator who is the rightful object of our worship. Moreover, people in every culture claim to have had experiences.

CORE MOMENT

The material here is a little different. Instead of an unbeatable argument for God's existence, I'm talking about these claims of experiences of God just to show that it is not unreasonable to remain open to such an experience. If the vast majority of the people of the world throughout history think they have experienced God, then it seems silly not to remain open-minded to such an experience.

CORE FACTS

Narrowing our gaze even further, it is common for atheists to point out that even among the most dominant monotheistic religions of the world, there is such a great difference of belief that no one can be expected to believe any of them. After all, Christians, Jews and Muslims believe in very different creators. While I actually agree with this in the most important sense (as a Christian I do not believe the god described by Islam exists, and I don't believe that the God of the Jews can be reached without Jesus), I do find it interesting that all three of these religions claim that the God of Abraham is the one true God. Christianity affirms the totality of the Old Testament, and Islam (false as it is) is purported to be the answer to the Judeo-Christian story. Thus, the three dominant monotheistic religions in the history of the world all claim that the God of the Old Testament exists.

Naturally, one may be skeptical as to whether anyone has ever actually made contact with this seemingly illusive being, but they are in the minority. I admit that the majority has been wrong in the past about a great many things, yet having already discussed three powerful cases for God's existence, it seems likely to me that many of these experiences are valid. Some who question them in light of the arguments presented in this book, may be engaging in exasperated skepticism. Considering the situation by comparison may help.

Some Christian thinkers have framed this evidence with an analogy. If 99 people in a village claim to have met a particular man (*person Q*), and only one individual (*person S*) claims that *person Q* does not exist, which is the more likely to be true? Should we believe that 99 villagers are wrong about the existence of *person Q*, or is it more reasonable to assume that *person S* is mistaken? *Person S* might demand that *person Q* does not exist because he has never seen him, heard his voice or met him at all. However,

no thinking person would accept that *person S* is correct about *person Q* on the basis of this evidence. If 99 people claimed to have met *person Q*, and could tell powerful stories of experiences they'd had with him, then it stands to reason that *person S* is merely overly skeptical.

Differences in experience

Of all the multitudes of people throughout human history who believed they had experienced God, if only one of them was correct, then God *does* exist. The same can be said of those who feel they have personally come to know Jesus Christ. Conversely, it is not true that if only one of them is wrong then God does not exist. A similar analogy can make this point clearer. Instead of a village, let's consider the island of Nassau in the Bahamas.

Imagine a situation wherein many people claimed that Nassau did not exist. However, there were millions of people who claimed to have set foot on Nassau, but were mistaken. Maybe they had indeed been to other islands that they mistook for Nassau. One man, though, had indeed been to the actual island of Nassau, and declared it to the world. He would be among the throngs who claimed to have walked the beaches of the place, but as long as he is indeed correct, then Nassau's existence is sure. Even if all other Nassau believers were wrong, his presence there would mean it was certain.

It has become popular among atheists to point out that Christians are also atheists when it comes to the thousands of other gods of other religions in the world. They say that the only difference between a Christian and a genuine atheist is that the atheist believes in one less God than the Christian does. Statements like this may make great bumper-

CORE FACTS

sticker sermons for atheists, but they represent an argument that is truly flawed. The point that the atheist seems to be trying to make is that there are so many religions in the world making conflicting claims about the creator that they must all be false. Yet, surely this does not follow. Just because there are many false religions does not mean that there is not a single valid one. As with the case of Nassau, there may be many individuals who genuinely but incorrectly believe they have been to the island, but we would never say that, therefore, no one has ever been to Nassau. Instead, it is possible that if there are billions of people who claim to have experienced God but are incorrect in how they describe him, then he does exist. Some of them are just misinterpreting their experiences of him. This is consistent with Christian belief, to say the least.

As Christians we maintain that God reveals himself to all genuine seekers of truth. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that many Christians and non-Christians have had real experiences of the one true God. The problem, as a Christian understands, is that many non-Christians are misled by the existing religions of their own cultures and human sin. Nevertheless, the testimony of the world is that God exists.

I want to issue a challenge to readers at this juncture. As we continue through the material in the subsequent chapters, open your mind up to the God whose existence has been supported so far. Ask him to make the remaining F.A.C.T.S. clear and digestible for you. Struggle to remain open to his response. Genuine seekers have often reported that God has met this earnest endeavor with affirmation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have invited individuals to be open-minded

enough to begin an experience of and with God. It has been made clear that though an argument has been presented (in the **technical stuff** box) the point of this chapter is not really to present a new argument for God's existence. This is a personal appeal. We also contemplated the fact that individuals claiming to have experienced God is a norm for the human race. Therefore, there is nothing uncommon or out of step with the times about being open-minded in this regard. Ultimately, the most important message of this chapter is that you can have an EXPERIENCE of God by genuinely seeking him with an open mind today.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the "E." in C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. stand for *Experience*?
2. What have most cultures traditionally believed about the existence of God?
3. Based on the "person Q and person S" analogy, what is the reasonable conclusion?
4. What is the author inviting unbelieving readers to do in this chapter?
5. What does the author say is the difference between this chapter and the others?
6. What should believers take away from this chapter?

CHAPTER V

"F"

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS WAS FATAL

And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. - Luke 23:46

In this chapter, we will begin taking a look at the F.A.C.T.S. of the resurrection of Jesus. Surprisingly, when skeptics seek to discredit the central miracle of the New Testament, they seldom begin in the most obvious place. Rather than scrutinizing his appearances or the testimony of the early church, they often begin by questioning whether Jesus actually died when he was crucified. The argument is like this: (1) Jesus had to die in order to rise from the dead; (2) He never really died; so (3) there was no resurrection. The idea is known as the swoon (or apparent death) theory. After all that Jesus endured leading up to the crucifixion and the hours spent hanging on the tree, some claim that Jesus merely "swooned" on the cross. That is to say, he didn't really die. He simply feigned death or perhaps lost consciousness from blood loss. The soldiers thought he was dead, as did the Jews, but his disciples later revived him and then after a short time he began to reveal himself to others, giving the appearance of resurrection.

CORE MOMENT

Believe it or not, all we are trying to do here is show that Jesus died by Roman crucifixion. It's that simple. We just need to demonstrate this so that later we can show that he really did rise from the dead.

When *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, was released in 2015, audiences saw the death of Han Solo. For geeks like me, this was not surprising, but it wasn't what we wanted. Still, when *Lucasfilm* decided to kill my favorite character, they made sure you knew he was dead. He was skewered with a lightsaber through the chest, fell down an impossibly deep hole into the middle of a planet that later blew up. Any one of those things would have been enough, but it really does seem like the filmmakers were going the extra parsec to make sure we all knew he was fully, not just mostly, dead. Now, there are no lightsabers in the story of Jesus, and the gospels aren't fiction, but do we have a strong enough case for his death that, like with Han Solo, we can be confident that Jesus' wounds were fatal? How can we be confident that Jesus didn't just survive the cross? If he did, then the resurrection would either be a lie, or a misunderstanding.

An old theory is making a come back

This sort of thinking is experiencing a renaissance. While it was once a common claim made by atheist and agnostic scholars, it is actually resurfacing in an unexpected place. With the continued rise of Islam, including Islamic apologetics, the tools abandoned by many atheists are now being adopted by Muslims. Because the Quran, in Surah 4:157-158, demands, "He did not die, They did not crucify him. . . ." Muslims have adopted different theories as to what happened at the cross. Many take the words of the Quran to mean that rather than surviving the crucifixion,

Jesus was not even the one nailed to the tree. Instead God made it appear as though he was crucified. Some actually maintain that Judas Iscariot was transformed by God to have the appearance of Jesus so that he was mistakenly killed and Jesus escaped. A few Muslim apologists have simply argued the old swoon theory in the same tradition of atheist scholars. This was the position Shabir Ally took in a 2009 debate on the question, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?”³⁹

The simple problem for this is that to say the evidence for it is weak is to put the matter far too mildly. Islam, including its primary document of faith, did not originate until roughly six hundred years after the events of Jesus’ life and ministry. To give it preeminence over primary texts from the first century is absurd. If the claims of most Muslims are true, that God made it appear as though Jesus was crucified when in fact he was not, then God is a great deceiver. Moreover, there are a number of items that point to the fatal nature of the crucifixion.

The Technical Stuff

Minimal Facts vs Maximal Data

A common way of explaining the evidence for the resurrection involves simply knowing what the relevant scholars (whether Christian or not) consider to be very likely, and then using only those facts to make the case. That’s why it’s called a minimal facts case (championed by Gary Habermas, and Mike Licona). This way, those who are not experts can more manageably make the case without needing to defend everything in the story of Jesus’ life or all the activities of his followers. I recommend this for beginners. On the other hand, many modern Christians are becoming persuaded that one should instead use what is called the maximal data approach, wherein one is not so restricted.

This is a point of considerable current debate, and for more on the maximal data case I recommend listening to Lydia McGrew, and my friends, Erik Manning, and Jonathan McLatchie.

³⁹ William Lane Craig & Shabir Ally, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?,” (<http://www.brianauten.com/Apologetics/Craig-Ally-Debate2.mp3>), Internet. Accessed on 19 July, 2012.

The evidence

First, it must be understood that there is little question among the majority of scholars that Jesus in fact died by Roman crucifixion. Consider the Roman soldiers who carried out the sentence. These men were professional killers. Making an art out of ending lives, they were so brutal in their executions that the thought of a man surviving is unlikely. Added to the crucifixion was the scourging. It was a horrendous ordeal that ended with the subject dramatically injured and fast on his way to death. Clearly, a man could not survive after the scourging for very long. If Jesus had been released after this bloody mess, he still would not have lived. Furthermore, when you remember that this was only the beginning, it becomes obvious how brutal the experience was. Next came the crucifixion itself.

It is hard to imagine any man living through such a thing, particularly without the medical help that we have in the modern world. The claim that the soldiers failed in their attempt to end the life of Jesus will not stick. Eminent New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright explains, “The hoary old theory that Jesus did not really die on the cross, but revived in the cool of the tomb, has likewise nothing to recommend it, and it is noticeably important that even those historians who are passionately committed to denying the resurrection do not go by this route.⁴⁰” But then, Wright is a Christian scholar, and maybe you don’t want a Christian source. Maybe you’d rather hear from an atheist thinker. German atheist New Testament scholar, Gerd Ludemann, writes, “Jesus’ death as a consequence of

⁴⁰ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 709, 710.

crucifixion is indisputable.”⁴¹ But maybe you don’t want to hear from a Christian or an atheist. What about a Jewish scholar? Geza Vermes says, “The passion of Jesus is part of history.”⁴² But maybe you don’t want a Christian, atheist, or Jewish scholar. How about a liberal Christian scholar? John Dominic Crossan writes, There is not the, “slightest doubt about the fact of Jesus’ crucifixion under Pontius Pilate.” He says Jesus crucifixion is, “as sure as anything historical can ever be.”⁴³ But maybe you don’t want a Christian, atheist, Jewish or liberal Christian scholar. How about a liberal Jewish scholar. Paula Fredrickson says, “The single most solid fact about Jesus’ life is his death: he was executed by the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate, on or around Passover, in the manner Rome reserved particularly for political insurrectionists, namely, crucifixion.”⁴⁴ We have non-Christian reports that testify to the death of Jesus from others, like the greatest historian of ancient Rome, Cornelius Tacitus. So, one can maintain that Jesus never died by crucifixion, but one would be arguing in the face of historical evidence to the contrary.

Still, if this were the end of the story we would not be compelled to accept Christianity.

⁴¹ Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Christ*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2009), 50.

⁴² Geza Vermes, *The Passion: The True Story of an Event that Changed Human History*, (Westminster London; Penguin, 2006) 9.

⁴³ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, (New York, NY; Harper Collins, 1995) 145.

⁴⁴ Paula Fredrickson, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*, (New York, NY; Random House, 1999) 8.

CORE MOMENT

We know that Jesus really did die because the scourging alone would have killed him. Roman soldiers were expert killers and it would likely be impossible to survive a crucifixion, even with modern medicine. Teaching historians agree that Jesus was crucified by the Romans.

That Jesus died is important to establish, however, so that the resurrection case can get off of the ground. Once the case is made that the crucifixion was fatal for Jesus, it makes the appearances defended in the next chapter much more interesting. How could it be that a man who was dead was then seen alive by others in various locations and by multitudes of people? Thus, the “F” in F.A.C.T.S. is a vital piece of the case.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have considered the evidence that the crucifixion was fatal for Jesus. This means that the “F” in F.A.C.T.S. should be understandable at this point. Readers should now see that atheist scholars, like Gerd Ludemann and renowned Christian thinkers like N.T. Wright, find the idea that Jesus somehow survived or evaded the crucifixion to be indefensible. We will go deeper into the evidence when considering what critics say (in the **objections** section). Moreover, we have multiple independent attestation to the event in the gospels and writings of Paul. Jesus’ wounds on the cross were FATAL. This means we are ready to move on and discuss the appearances.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the “F.” in C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. stand for *Fatal*?
2. What is the swoon (apparent death) theory?
3. What do Roman soldiers have to do with this issue?
4. What historical evidence from the Bible do we have that Jesus died?
5. What historical evidence from outside of the Bible do we have that Jesus died?
6. What seems to be wrong with the claim that Christians are just biased?

CHAPTER VI

"A"

JESUS APPEARED TO OTHERS AFTER HIS DEATH

*After that he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time -
1 Corinthians 15:6*

I got my first guitar from Broadway in Nashville. As a teenager, our group of friends would drive around that holy ground of music history, daring to listen to rock and roll in a place where country was a sort of musical religion. Every now and then, the city would give a nod to our less midwestern sensitivities, as we would hear The King of Rock from within some honky tonk. Was Elvis really alive, and crooning his old hits? No. An Elvis impersonator was. There are a lot of Elvis impersonators, and in 2005, a writer for Financial Times did the math on the growth rate of Elvis impersonators. He said,

At the time Elvis Presley died in 1977, he had 150 impersonators in the US. Now, according to calculations I spotted in a Sunday newspaper colour supplement recently, there are 85,000. Intriguingly, that means one in every 3,400 Americans is an Elvis impersonator. More disturbingly, if Elvis impersonators continue multiplying at the same rate, they will account for a third of the world's population by 2019.⁴⁵

So, are one in three people on earth, now Elvis impersonators? No. There are lessons to be learned about statistics here, but most readers will be glad to know that isn't really what this book is about. Clearly, there is a

⁴⁵ Richard Tomkins, (2005, June 6), *A Theory on Trends*, Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/ba9e5fc0-d6ac-11d9-b0a4-00000e2511c8>.

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multitude of these people. Now if there had never been an Elvis, and he had never worn blue suede shoes, walked around with pork-chop sideburns, wrote number one hits, nailed the comeback special, or donned bedazzled onesies that no one understood, would there be any Elvis impersonators at all? Of course not. This phenomenon emerged because there really was an Elvis, and he really did those things. Likewise, in just a few decades' time, Christianity (ostensibly, a community of Jesus impersonators) grew so dramatically that it was a known phenomenon. What accounts for that level of growth? If there had never been a Jesus, and he had never healed the blind, and the deaf, and never claimed to be God's special agent to bring about the Kingdom, and taught a matchless message of love - would there even be one Christian today? Perhaps the reason that in a few decades Christians became so numerous, and the message began to spread so impressively is that there really was a Jesus who really healed the blind and the deaf, and really thought of himself as God's special agent to bring about the Kingdom, and really taught a matchless message of love, and really was dead, really was buried, and really was raised from the dead to APPEAR to many. That is the sort of thing that could explain the devotion of these people. The earliest ones saw a man who had been resurrected.

Though we have mounted up evidence for Jesus' death by Roman crucifixion, we would be mistaken to call him Lord if he remained in the tomb. However, that Jesus appeared to others after his death is greatly evidenced as well. In this chapter we will examine this evidence and consider what leaders in the relevant fields have to say about it. While the majority of scholars agree that followers and enemies of the faith believed that Jesus had APPEARED to them as the risen Lord, this is still one of the most controversial aspects of the investigation.

A strong case can be made for the early belief in the resurrection

from 1 Corinthians 15. As cited later in this chapter, skeptical scholars agree that a portion of this passage is valid material for making cases like this. After all, the letter itself has an unarguably early date and, most agree, was in fact written by Paul. In that letter, Paul claims that Jesus died, was buried and later rose again. He explains,

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures⁴⁶

Apologists are justified in using the Bible itself to make this argument. I realize that it is circular reasoning to use some *thing* to prove that same *thing*; although in this case, testimony of Christ's resurrection is defensible. In fact, 1 Corinthians 15:3-5b is accepted by even the liberal, barely-religious *Jesus Seminar* as authentic and true. This leads us to address one of the great criticisms of the resurrection case.

CORE MOMENT

Beginners don't really need to know about *The Jesus Seminar*. Just know that even those biblical scholars who are most skeptical of the bodily resurrection of Jesus still grant that certain biblical passages are historically reliable. The point is that if even enemies of biblical Christianity admit that a verse is true, then there is really no reason to doubt it.

It is sometimes argued that by the time Paul penned his letters, there had been sufficient years for the facts to get distorted and a simple story to become mythical. That is to say, at the time of the events surrounding Jesus' life, people knew that he did not really die and rise

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

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again, but over time the story grew more and more fantastic. The truth is that the Scripture that is agreed upon by even non-Christian scholars demonstrates that individuals were claiming the resurrection of Christ from the dead soon after the events took place.

CORE MOMENT

What follows below is kind of technical, but don't worry. All we're doing is showing that the facts about the resurrection were believed by Christians from the very end of Jesus' earthly ministry. This is important because it means that the stories of the appearances didn't just spring up as fairy tales decades later.

It is agreed among most scholars that the statements about Christ's death, burial and resurrection as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5b are in the form of a credal statement that was likely intended for use by the community of Christians.⁴⁷ Paul claims, in the third verse, that he received it from someone else, but he does not share who that was. The most obvious possibility that we find in his writings is his visit to the church in Jerusalem described in Galatians 1:18. According to this passage, the meeting took place three years after his conversion on the road to Damascus. Since most scholars place Paul's conversion between one and three years after the events surrounding the crucifixion, this would date Paul's reception of the creed in 1 Corinthians 15 to just between four and six years after those events. Since it was already a credal statement in use by the church at that point, it must have originated prior to Paul's reception of it. This means that we have solid evidence, based on Scripture, that is permitted even by enemies of Christianity, that at least sometime early after Christ left the earth, people were claiming regularly that he had died, was

⁴⁷ See objection: "What if the resurrection is spiritual rather than physical?"

buried and rose again. Thus, there is internal evidence in Scripture that makes the idea that Christianity became more mythical as time went on, unacceptable. Strikingly, this is not the only evidence on hand.

Paul claimed, in the above passage, that Jesus died, was buried and rose from the grave. Imagine that the same thing was claimed about the president. Most would think this was foolishness. But what if researchers were able to locate over five hundred people who all testified that he truly had? What if they all stood in a courtroom and gave a similar report about the same event? The argument would be difficult to refute. This is exactly what is represented in Paul's statements. He claimed,

And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.⁴⁸

Paul said that Jesus was seen after his resurrection alive and well. He wasn't seen by ten, fifty or one hundred. Jesus was seen in several different locations by over five hundred people who were all willing to testify to the event.

It is common for critics to point out that though this is a claim Paul makes, he does not give us the names and addresses of the five hundred witnesses. How can we just take Paul at his word? This is a fair question. Notice, however, that even without Paul mentioning the five hundred, our primary point still stands. In early years after the events of Jesus' life and death, people believed that they'd had experiences of the risen Jesus. I may not be able to alleviate all concerns about the testimony of the five

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:5-8

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hundred, and though their inclusion in our evidence would help to make the case, the case does not rely on it. Still, we can say *something*.

Paul goes out of his way to defend his ministry, and his claims when he can. He's not just someone *making* claims. He's someone who is concerned that people have *reason to believe* his claims. He's trying to tell us facts about what happened. While he doesn't tell us who the five hundred are, he does mention that some of them are alive, and some have "fallen asleep" (meaning some are dead). This indicates some level of continued contact with people in this community. Otherwise, he would not know that some were dead. He could tell people who some of the five hundred were. They could check it out. So 1) Paul opens himself up to having his claims tested by those who originally received the letter we call 1 Corinthians. And 2) It would not necessarily be too terribly difficult for people to check his claim with at least some of the witnesses who composed the five hundred. While this isn't something we can investigate today, like Paul's audience could, it does give us reason to think that Paul, who was so concerned with the authenticity of his ministry and claims, knew this to be true. From what we know of Paul, he would not potentially shoot himself in the foot with a

The Technical Stuff

Group Hallucinations

Some have argued that the appearances of Jesus, including group appearances, where more than one person claimed to see the risen Jesus, can be explained as hallucinations happening to a group.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), a hallucination is a false sensory perception that has a compelling sense of reality despite the absence of an external stimulus. It may affect any of the senses, but auditory hallucinations and visual hallucinations are most common.

Mike Licona contacted clinical psychologist Gary A. Sibcy Ph.D. who has a personal interest in the subject, he reported the following. "I have surveyed the professional literature (peer-reviewed journal articles and books) written by psychologists, psychiatrists, and other relevant healthcare professionals during the past two decades and have yet to find a single case of a group hallucination, that is, an event for which more than one person purportedly shared a visual or other sensory perception where there was clearly no external factor."

statement that could be checked. Recall, though, that the five hundred witnesses would be helpful, but is not necessary for our case.

On the basis of the material mentioned here, early after the events of Jesus' life and death, his followers became convinced that they'd had genuine experiences of the risen Jesus.

Conclusion

The "A." in C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. is one of the most vital aspects of the case. In this chapter we have covered the subject of the appearances of Jesus specifically as they are recorded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Major objections are discussed in a fair amount of detail in the objections chapter that corresponds to this one. On the basis of this evidence, we may rightly assert that those who were in a position to know, believed strongly that Jesus *Appeared* after his death.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the "A." in C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. stand for *Appeared*?
2. In what biblical passage does Paul argue for the truth of the resurrection?
3. Give at least one good reason a proper interpretation indicates a bodily resurrection.
4. How do secular scholars explain the appearances of Jesus?
5. How can the case for the appearances be summarized?
6. Why are the appearances of Jesus so significant for the case for the resurrection?

CHAPTER VII

"C"

THE DISCIPLES WERE COMMITTED

And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions. - Acts 8:1

"C." is for "committed" because of the strong commitment level of early believers. They were willing to suffer for their beliefs in the resurrection. Some of them died. When explaining the importance of this, I often choose someone from the audience as an example. I ask,

What if we all wanted to make up a religion here tonight? We might claim that Mr. Pollard was shot by an intruder and lay dead for thirty minutes before resurrecting. Let's imagine that the bullet hole closed before our very eyes. After the news found out about it we might all be asked to appear on a national morning news program. Now the religion which has come to be called "Pollardianism" is born. The story might catch on and some of us would begin to write books on the subject. Those of us sitting here tonight could soon become wealthy and famous. Now imagine a man catching you in a dark alley, placing a gun to your head and demanding that you admit the truth or else you will be killed. I think we would quickly abandon our Pollardian beliefs.

This is true because men will live for a lie as long as it might mean money, sex or power. When such attractive benefits begin to evaporate and are replaced by the prospect of death, people find it difficult to maintain their deceit.

Now that we have established that Jesus' wounds on the cross were fatal, and that individuals were claiming that he appeared to them after his death, it is time to consider even further evidence that these claims are true by examining the commitment level of those who made them. Though this

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chapter amounts to only one of several necessary steps in demonstrating the truth of the resurrection, it refers to the evidence that may be the most powerful of all.

The evidence

Perhaps the strongest data for the validity of the resurrection is the truth that men will not die for a lie. Church tradition holds that each of the apostles died a martyr's death for preaching the resurrection of Christ with the exception of John, who was boiled in oil and then banished to Patmos. Modern investigators, however, cannot demonstrate with absolute certainty if, or how, all of the disciples were martyred, but what we can say with assurance is that they were *willing* to die, and some of them did. The only group who would have benefited from hiding the body of Jesus would have been the apostles. The Jewish leaders and the Romans both wanted an end to the chaos surrounding the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. So the question remains, "Why would these men all die for something they knew to be untrue?" Men will live for a lie, but they will not die for one. Remember, these disciples were all from different walks of life and it is unlikely that they were all brainwashed. Even if they were lunatics, the fact remains that they would have known about the death of their former leader. Gary Habermas explains,

Remember that their continual willingness to suffer and even die for those beliefs indicates that they sincerely regarded their beliefs as being true. . . . People may die for what they believe is true, but it is not reasonable to think that an entire group of men would be willing to suffer horribly and die for something they all knew was false.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Gary Habermas & Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Press, 2004), 200.

Likewise, J.P. Moreland explains,

The disciples had nothing to gain by lying and starting a new religion. They faced hardship, ridicule, hostility, and martyr's deaths. In light of this, they could never have sustained such unwavering motivation if they knew what they were preaching was a lie. The disciples were not fools and Paul was a cool-headed intellectual of the first rank. There would have been several opportunities over three to four decades of ministry to reconsider and renounce a lie.⁵⁰

Now it is sometimes noted that though church tradition explains the deaths of the apostles, we would need more solidly vetted historical material to speak with confidence. Do we have that? Well, if church tradition alone isn't enough, my friend, Sean McDowell has you covered. In his doctoral dissertation, he took on this question. Working under the supervision of others, McDowell conducted a historical analysis on the subject. Here, he explains his methods:⁵¹

For the purposes of this inquiry, I adopt the following scale for evaluating the historical evidence for the martyrdom of individual apostles: not possibly true (certainly not historical), very probably not true (doubtfully historical), improbable (unlikely), less possible than not (slightly unlikely) possible (indeterminate but not impossible), more possible than not (slightly more possible than not) more probable than not (likely), very probably true (somewhat certain), and the highest possible probability (nearly historically certain). The reliability of the historical evidence for each apostle will be analyzed individually and assessed based upon the quantity and quality of the available historical data.

At the end of his assessment, the following is what he concluded:

1. Peter: the *highest possible probability*
2. Paul: the *highest possible probability*
3. James, brother of Jesus: *very probably true*
4. John, the son of Zebedee: *improbable*

⁵⁰ J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1987), 171,172.

⁵¹ Sean McDowell, (2015) *A Historical Evaluation of the Evidence for the Death of the Apostles as Martyrs for their Faith*. Dissertation. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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5. Thomas: *more probable than not*
6. Andrew: *more probable than not*
7. James, son of Zebedee: *highest possible probability*
8. Philip: *possible*
9. Bartholomew: *more possible than not*
10. Matthew: *possible*
11. James, son of Alphaeus: *more possible than not*
12. Thaddeus: *possible*
13. Simon the Zealot: *possible*
14. Matthias: *possible*

About this evidence, McDowell explains:

The willingness of the apostles to suffer and die for their faith is an important piece of the resurrection argument. It alone does not prove the resurrection is true, but it does show the apostles sincerely believed it. They were not liars. As Blaise Pascal once said, “I only believe histories whose witnesses are ready to be put to death” (822).² The apostles proclaimed the risen Jesus to skeptical and antagonistic audiences with full knowledge they would likely suffer and die for their beliefs. All the apostles suffered and were “ready to be put to death,” and there is good reason to believe some of them actually faced execution. There is no evidence they ever waived. Their convictions were not based on secondhand testimony, but their own personal experience with the risen Christ. They truly believed Jesus was the risen Messiah, and they banked their lives on it. It is difficult to imagine what more a group of ancient witnesses could have done to show greater depth of sincerity and commitment to the truth.

With the evidence that these individuals were willing to face death for their claims, we now have another challenge - don't people die for lies? Some would cite the suicide bombers of extremist Muslim terrorists, but extremist Muslims truly believe in what they are dying for. The difference is that they are not eyewitnesses who know for sure whether their religion is true or false. Others might cite lunatics like Jim Jones, but these cultic leaders were insane. If the resurrection did not really happen the apostles would have

known that they were dying for a lie, and men just do not do that.

The Technical Stuff

Peter & Paul

The first century extra-biblical letter of 1 Clement gives us some information about how a couple of important leaders of the early church were treated.. According to Mike Licona, it "...records the sufferings and probably the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. "

Because of envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars have been persecuted and contended unto death. Let us set the good apostles before our eyes. Peter, who because of unrighteous envy, not once or twice but endured many afflictions and having borne witness went to the due glorious place. Because of envy and rivalries, steadfast Paul pointed to the prize. Seven times chained, exiled, stoned, having become a preacher both in the East and in the West, he received honor fitting of his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, unto the boundary on which the sun sets; having testified in the presence of the leaders. Thus he was freed from the world and went to the holy place. He became a great example of steadfastness. **1 Clement 5:2-7**

Conclusion

In this short chapter it has been shown that the disciples of Jesus, including many members of the early church, were willing to suffer horribly because of their belief in the truth of the resurrection. Their willingness to suffer even extended to the point of death. Men may live for a lie, but they will not die for one. Thus, the *Commitment* level of the followers of Jesus counts as powerful evidence for the truth of the resurrection.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the “C.” in C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. stand for *Committed*?
2. Explain the statement, “Men will live for a lie, but they will not die for one.”
3. Why is the commitment level of the early church different from modern Muslim faith?
4. What is wrong with the claim that the disciples were just brainwashed?
5. Explain the analogy of “Palladianism.”
6. How can one summarize the case that the disciples were so *Committed*?

CHAPTER VIII



THE TESTIMONY ABOUT JESUS

He is not here, but he has risen. Remember how he spoke to you while he was still in Galilee - Luke 24:6

At this point we are prepared to consider the testimony of mankind regarding the resurrection of Jesus. Doing so will demonstrate the centrality of the Christian faith for the flow of human history. First, we will consider the mark that Jesus has left on planet earth. This data must be accepted whether one recognizes Jesus as Lord or not. Involved in this will be an analysis of how the citizens of the modern western world seem to react to the character of Jesus. Second, we will consider the testimony of the gospels themselves. Are they truly reliable? If so, it must be determined whether their testimony is consistent with what the early church was proclaiming in its earliest days. Third, we will consider whether the views of today's skeptical scholars confirm the points we have been addressing throughout the last three chapters, and finally we will consider objections to the case.

CORE MOMENT

Don't get distracted! We'll look at a lot of interesting material in this chapter but the most important emphasis is that the believer should be prepared to share his own testimony of his relationship with Jesus. If you're a skeptic, this is a great chance to consider the testimony of the world about Jesus.

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The testimony of world history

Having never traveled far from his birthplace, written a single document, run for political office, taken a wife, fathered any heirs, or even spoken up for himself in the face of injustice, Jesus of Nazareth is the most influential human being who has ever been born. This alone should be enough to leave observers inquiring as to what the life and teaching of the historical Jesus actually were. Whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, atheist or agnostic, men of every persuasion and cultural origin have attempted to fully explore the story of the man and determine why his influence was so far spread. Why have thinkers throughout history taken the story of Christ so seriously? After all, that impact is undeniable.

Historian, Tom Holland put it this way: “Just as a bishop of Oxford refused to consider that he might be descended from an ape, so now are many in the West reluctant to contemplate that their values, and even their very lack of belief, might be traceable back to Christian origins.”⁵² What does Holland mean? He means that the message of Jesus actually did change the world and help form the Western society’s sensibilities - the ones that many of us enjoy today. Jesus’ emphasis on the downtrodden, and the notion that the last will be first was revolutionary, though it might strike us as common today. The historian summarises, “This book explores what it was that made Christianity so subversive and disruptive, how completely it came to saturate the mindset of Latin Christendom; and why, in a West that is often doubtful of religion’s claims, so many of its instincts remain—for good and ill—thoroughly Christian.”⁵³

⁵² Tom Holland, *Dominion*, (New York, NY; Hachette Book Group, 2019), 15.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 17.

Westerners are immersed in Christianity, even if they don't know it, and even if they are opposed to the faith. In an article for *Unheard*, Holland says,

But how common, in antiquity, are the fundamental tenets of humanism: that humans — no matter their sex, their place of origin, their class — are all of equal value; and that those who walk in darkness must be brought into light? Not common at all, I would say. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that their fusion was pretty much a one-off.⁵⁴

This is why he concludes,

Certainly, the humanist assumption that atheism and liberalism go together is plainly just that: an assumption. It is not truth that science offers moralists, but a mirror. Racists identify it with racist values; liberals with liberal values. The primary dogma of humanism — “that morality is an intrinsic part of human nature based on understanding and a concern for others” — finds no more corroboration in science than did the dogma of the Nazis that anyone not fit for life should be exterminated. The well-spring of humanist values lie not in reason, not in evidence-based thinking, but in history: the history of Christianity.⁵⁵

This alone demonstrates the impact of Jesus on the world, but it is also interesting to note that while loud-mouthed provocateurs are out there, most people won't denigrate Jesus.

Even the most venomous and hate-filled opponents of Christ's church find it difficult to speak ill of the man himself. Even though he warned the world of the reality of a coming judgement,⁵⁶ introduced a view of morality in which even the thoughts of man can be evil, and preached that he alone was the way to obtain everlasting life,⁵⁷ people who live contrary to his teachings are wary of doing any violence to his name.

⁵⁴ Tom Holland, (2022, December 25). *Humanism is a heresy*. UnHerd. <https://unherd.com/2022/12/humanism-is-a-heresy-2/#:~:text=But%20how%20common%2C%20in%20antiquity,at%20all%2C%20I%20would%20say.>

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Luke 12

⁵⁷ John 14

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Naturally, sinners throughout history, in an attempt to accommodate their own shortcomings, have twisted the words of Jesus to sound as though he was more permissive of unrighteousness than he was, but they still find it offensive to disregard him outright. What was so amazing about this Christ that we find in him a nature that is absolutely unobjectionable?

Having spoken in churches around the world, I have often delivered less offensive messages than Jesus and yet been labeled a hell-fire-and-brimstone preacher by individuals who seem entirely ignorant of his difficult teachings on the matter of judgement. On occasion, I have been told, “Jesus just wouldn’t have talked about that,” or “Jesus wouldn’t have said he was the only way to heaven.” Such statements not only demonstrate a lack of biblical knowledge, but they also show that many hearers are fully prepared to shoot the messenger while defending its sender. Would it not be easier to simply abandon the teachings of Christ? Indeed many have, but others find it impossible to treat him in any other way than kingly. Again, we find ourselves asking, “What is still so impressive about this man that we cannot deny him?”

His teachings have been dissected by scholars throughout Christian history. What might cause educated men to take his message so seriously that religious and national divisions have resulted from varying interpretations? Even during the third, fourth and fifth centuries there were already major churches in Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome, Constantinople, Antioch and elsewhere, with each community slightly differing on points of theological significance. This had obvious political ramifications making Christianity not merely a matter important to faith but to the governance of mankind as well. Rounding out the relevance of Jesus’ message to the whole of human experience, faithful believers who credited Christ with their work made scientific discoveries, began scientific institutions, and

established hospitals as a result. Clearly the message of Christ has had a dramatic impact on every aspect of the human life. I believe this is because he is, in fact, the Lord of all creation.

Could it be that the message of Jesus is of such great importance because the events surrounding his death demonstrate that he was speaking the words of the divine? That is to say, could it be that Jesus' message retains its power for us because he is the one person in the history of humanity to have passed through the doorway of death, allowed it to shut firmly behind him and three days later walked back through it to explain everything to hundreds of onlookers?

Such an idea is often dismissed by skeptics outright. Hard pressed are we to find many people of sound mind today who claim to have ever encountered someone who has returned from death. Where such a person is found, we find ourselves hopelessly doubtful of their claims. I have often asked congregants of local churches whether they believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. Without question almost every hand will rise, but when I follow by asking, "Has anyone ever witnessed such a resurrection?" I never render from the audience an affirmation.

Rejoicing is in order for the faith of the believer; still this demonstrates two things. First, it shows that very intelligent people in the Christian faith believe something that, to outsiders, seems extremely unlikely. There must be some good reason for their acceptance of these teachings. This is not, in itself, an argument that Jesus rose from the dead. Rather, it is yet another of the examples we have been considering of how this simple carpenter has impacted learned and unlearned people since the time of his preaching. Since the enlightenment emphasis on rationality in epistemology, it is unlikely that all of these believers would take such a divine claim seriously unless they had some reason for doing so. Second,

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the fact demonstrates that unbelievers have a good reason to ask questions. Even if Jesus truly died and rose again, and those who were his contemporaries were witnesses of it, we are still left wondering what valid reason we have in the 21st century for buying into his claims. After all, we stand two thousand years after the time of the supposed Messiah and surely there cannot be much left to convince us.

If Jesus has returned from the grave, any good reason to believe this is not only disintegrated beneath the dirt of the ancient world, but contrary to our present experience. Why then should we accept this claim as anything more than what we hear from opposing ancient religions? It seems that the only way to make sense of what modern believers think about Christ is to assume that they take it all on blind faith. Nevertheless, what if this is not so?

What if it truly is the case that there is good reason to believe that Jesus lives today? Wouldn't this be utterly life changing for anyone who recognized such a truth? Obviously, believers take the claims of Christ so seriously that they do more than simply mentally agree with him. They tend to change their lives. This is not to say that they are somehow perfect people, but believers throughout history begin to attempt the modification of the way they treat themselves and others. Furthermore, they change the way they view the person of Christ. No longer is he some ancient rabbi of minimal consequence, but he is alive. Springing forth from this belief of his present existence, Christians recognize a need to pray to him, thank him for his sacrifice for their sins, and live lives of gratitude. What is more, if his resurrection is evidence that he is the God of Scripture, then believers see him as the object of worship.

This is exactly what we see when we look at the position of the church. Atheists often point out the differences between Christian

communities, but they fail to recognize that almost all mainstream groups do share certain issues that are of fundamental importance. Since its inception, the true church has recognized Jesus as being the way of salvation and the only hope for reaching the Father.

Let's consider what we have before us so far. In Jesus we find a man, the likes of which would commonly not have been influential, but who has influenced the world for two thousand years to the extent that his followers have shaped it in amazing ways. They have changed the courses of nations, inspired major technological advances, devoted their lives to his service, worshipped him as God, combed through his teachings as though they were the words of God, and demonstrated that they were willing to die to defend the truth of his message. Ultimately, the community of faith has done this because of the central claim of the Christian faith; namely, that Jesus was raised by the Father from the dead.

Yet, as we have said, the hope of the believer is misplaced unless Jesus really has done what Christians claim that he has. If he merely died and remained dead, then there is no hope. If Jesus' resurrection did not take place, then his life came to an end as any other man. The ramifications of this are abundant, for not only would this mean that he died, but Augustine's *City of God* would become like any other kingdom in history. Ultimately, it would fall to the foreign invaders of some other faith, and indeed if it is built on a lie then it should.

Maybe Jesus was out of his mind. Certainly we are not at a loss of lunatics throughout history who have functioned as radical and insane leaders, but good psychology doesn't show this. Jesus displayed no signs of insanity. Even at the turning of tables, there seems to have been a time of consideration and planning before he proceeded. He had no desire for great power. Surely he wanted people to follow him, but even his disciples

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were disillusioned that he did not come to establish an earthly kingdom. Besides, many times he finished his miracles by telling people to remain quiet about what they had seen. Finally, his message was one of peace. He did not encourage mass suicide, sexual orgies, holy homicide or hatred of any person. Psychologists today should conclude that Jesus was a sane man. Imagine what it would mean if this were untrue.

Jesus made such a mark on planet earth that belief in him is still changing people for the better as no drug, counselor or psychological therapy is able to do. No reference for this is needed. Almost everyone knows someone who has altered their way of living because they have converted to a Christian lifestyle.

What we have been arguing here is basically that not only was Jesus a man of incredible influence, but also a man to whom the charge of insanity or dishonesty will not stick. C.S. Lewis believed that this was great evidence for the divine nature of Jesus. His argument is referred to as the “trilemma.” Lewis explains it like this,

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of thing Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.⁵⁸

What Lewis was trying to convey was the fact of Jesus' Lordship by process of elimination.

⁵⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2002), 36.

Often in today's culture we hear individuals referring to Jesus as a good moral teacher. By this they mean to stay faithful to the idea that he was a good man but not the God-man. This becomes problematic for Lewis in that it does not seem that one can logically say that Jesus was a good man and nothing more. As the above quote indicates, Jesus is either a lunatic if he really thought he was God, a liar if he was trying to deceive men about this, or he was Lord if it was true. If he was not a lunatic, then he must have either been a liar or the Lord. If he was not a liar, then he must have been a lunatic or Lord, and if he was not Lord, then he must have been a lunatic or a liar. Yet, none of these possibilities leave the idea of Jesus as simply a good man open to us as a live option. It has been suggested that perhaps another "L" title should be added for consideration - "Legend." Perhaps the beliefs about Jesus just developed over time. Maybe he was simply a good moral teacher, but as his followers moved forward through the following decades, his status grew with the retellings, like a game of telephone. The problem is that this is unlikely given what we know historically about the early claims of his followers (discussed in chapter six). With that in mind, Lewis' trilemma remains intact: Liar, Lunatic, Legend, or Lord.

Where this gets even more interesting is when one considers which of these three remaining titles seems most attributable to him. Based on the evidence above, it does not seem rational to picture him as a lunatic. Moreover, he could not have been a liar and yet retained the good moral character that even unbelievers wish to ascribe to him. His identity is then left as nothing less than the Lord of all creation. Perhaps you can see the attraction of the trilemma. Most people are not prepared to condemn Jesus as a lunatic or a liar. However, if they are to deny the Lordship of Christ, then they must relegate him to one of these categories.

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It should be noted that the trilemma argument is usually only persuasive if one of two things is true. If an individual is not willing to grant that the gospel record is trustworthy, then they will likely not be persuaded by this sort of presentation. Only an individual who already grants this will find value in the argument. Second, the argument might be helpful after evidence for the validity of Scripture has been established. If an apologist presents good evidence for the trustworthiness of the gospels, it is reasonable that he might move forward and advance Lewis' case. The only point *I* am putting forth *here* is that on the basis of what we do have, Jesus appears to be an honest and well-balanced individual. This claim is based on *some* evidence, even if critics do not trust the biblical record. Any claim that he was mentally imbalanced would be based on *zero* evidence.

Lastly, since the opening chapters are meant to establish that God exists, even if those chapters do not demonstrate the truth of Christianity completely, we are now free to bring God in to help us think about what the widespread impact of Christianity says about its truth. If God is interested in morality, as chapter three establishes, and if he is a personal God, as chapters one and two establish, then it stands to reason that God would want to impart morality, and have some sort of relationship with mankind. Or, put differently, if God intended to create beings that love and crave relationship, it seems likely that he would have entered into relationship with them. If one takes that conclusion seriously and decides to take a look at the world's religions to see if God has done this, they may (and probably will) first start looking in the most obvious place - the biggest and most dominant religion in the world. Right there, as quickly as their search begins, they will find a man smack in the middle of that religion who is claiming that what his followers are gaining is exactly that - God coming to them in expression of the moral and relational intentions he

built into mankind. Even if one did not have a case for the resurrection, when considering what a God who created man for relationship might want, Christianity is easily the most likely candidate for God's solution.

The testimonies of the gospels

Multiple attestation

One of the tools for determining history properly is called multiple attestation. For obvious reasons, the more witnesses one is able to collect data from, the stronger a case can be made that a given event actually occurred. Critics of the Christian message recognize and advocate the use of this principle. Noted agnostic scholar, Bart Ehrman writes,

I have repeatedly stressed that a tradition appearing in multiple, independent sources has a greater likelihood of being historically reliable than a tradition that appears in only one. . . . If it is found independently in a number of sources, the probability of its being reliable is increased, assuming, of course, that it is contextually credible.⁵⁹

Despite the fact that a strong case can be made in favor of the resurrection merely from Paul's writings, historians find multiple attestation in the gospels. Since these documents can be reasonably believed to have been written within the first century, they are strong sources for our consideration.

Many critics discount the gospels for varying reasons. One common complaint is that the gospels should not count as evidence in favor of the resurrection because they represent individuals who clearly had a bias in favor of Christianity. Nevertheless, there are at least two reasons why this charge will not stick. First, proponents of such an idea fail to

⁵⁹ Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2012), 290.

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recognize the value of seeking out primary source material. The gospels are among the primary sources on the life and teachings of Jesus. Historians pursuing terminal degrees would never graduate if they refused to consider the earliest sources available with respect to a particular historical matter. Why should the rules change when it comes to historical documents related to the life of Jesus? After all, the fact that they are the primary sources is why they were included in the canon of Scripture. F.F. Bruce explains,

One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect.⁶⁰

Second, the implication is that the only sources that should be considered are those written by disinterested third parties. However, looking for a non-Christian source which contains an eyewitness account of the resurrected Jesus would be a fruitless search. It would be like looking for eyewitness testimony regarding a traffic accident from someone who witnessed the accident but does not believe it actually happened. For these reasons, it is fair to include the gospels in the discussion. John Warwick Montgomery demands, “To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 5th ed., 2011), 20.

⁶¹ John Warwick Montgomery, *History and Christianity*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1986), 29.

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The more sources that confirm the same event, the greater the likelihood that the event is true. If someone tells you that the Queen of England has been assassinated you might believe them. If ten people tell you that the Queen has been assassinated, you are more likely to believe them.

Some point out that there appear to be contradictions between the gospel accounts. Bart Ehrman demands, “The Bible is filled with discrepancies, many of them irreconcilable contradictions.”⁶² Nevertheless, one must understand that the way modern thinkers report history is strikingly different from the way it was recorded in the first century. If the gospels are in the form of Greco-Roman biography, as they appear to be,⁶³ it was quite common to rearrange the chronology of events and explain how certain things happened in varying ways. Thus, what we might refer to as problems, bad form or contradictions amount to 21st century historians forcing their views of historiography onto a first century paradigm. These were not problems for historians working in the ancient world.⁶⁴ Besides, many of the alleged contradictions reveal themselves to be nothing of the kind even by modern standards.⁶⁵ One author reports that there is “an

⁶² Bart Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009), 5.

⁶³ Mike Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 34.

⁶⁴ Mike Licona’s followup work to the above citation was his comparison of the “Lives” of Plutarch with the gospels in order to demonstrate that the gospel authors were using literary conventions that were common at the time. Licona, Mike, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels*, (Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁶⁵ Lydia McGrew would press a maximal (as opposed to minimal) approach. It’s worth noting that she has also brought attention to what seem to be “undesigned coincidences” between the gospel narratives. That is, instances where one gospel author seems to unintentionally corroborate what another gospel author is saying. Her approach has become very popular among Christian apologists. - Lydia McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidence in the Gospels and Acts*, (Tampa, FL; DeWard Publishing, 2017).

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angel” at the tomb of Jesus, whereas another author reports more than one angel at the tomb of Jesus. It does not take much thought to work out that when you find more than one angel, it is true to say that there was “an angel” present. Lastly, though I would never concede that there are contradictions in Scripture, even if there were, it would not mean that the historical document in question was not trustworthy.

Differences between the documents may even increase the trustworthiness of those documents. If, for instance, four alleged conspiring thieves were asked to recount the events of the night of the theft, a word for word identical testimony would be damning. This would be evidence that they had agreed on a party-line. If our suspects were innocent, investigators would hear slightly differing details, while the major facts would be the same. Thus, any way a critic spins the story, the gospels count as valid source material for doing work on history. If these texts represent trustworthy authorship, then historians can consider the resurrection of Jesus to include multiple attestation.

The principle of embarrassment

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I know this sounds like some complicated tool of scholarship but don't worry. The principle of embarrassment helps historians determine if something in a document is true. If someone who was claiming to be writing history records information that would be embarrassing, then he's probably telling the truth.

The veracity of the gospels is equally debated. How do historians in the 21st century judge such a document? The honesty of the authors is of the utmost interest. One important tool historians use is known as the principle of embarrassment. If an author includes something that is personally embarrassing, then this counts in favor of the event as having

actually happened and the author as retelling it honestly. We find this throughout the gospels. Women, for example, are the discoverers of the empty tomb. This was a patriarchal culture in which the testimony of a woman was considered to be greatly inferior to that of a man. If the authors were fabricating or embellishing the story, it is highly unlikely that they would have imagined the women followers of Jesus as the discoverers of the empty tomb.⁶⁶

Moreover, Jesus is recorded as saying that he is unaware of the day or hour of his return. Habermas points out,

It is unlikely that an author would invent an account so as to include the details that are embarrassing and potentially discrediting. In Mark 13:32, the gospel writer states that there is something Jesus does not know, the time of his coming. One would think that in an evolving theology where Jesus was assigned a divine status, even of being God himself, a statement emphasizing his limitations of knowledge would not be included. This is why most scholars agree that this verse is an actual statement of Jesus.⁶⁷

Believers are able to explain why this is the case without difficulty, but if the story were deceptively constructed it would not have included this seemingly embarrassing fact about its protagonist. Finally, the disciples are found regularly confused by Jesus' teachings⁶⁸ and hopelessly at a loss following his death.⁶⁹ None of these are the sorts of details one would expect to find in a fabricated story.

⁶⁶ Mike Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 350.

⁶⁷ Gary Habermas & Licona, Michael, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Press, 2004), 169.

⁶⁸ Luke 24:25-27, 44-45; John 13:21-29.

⁶⁹ John 20:19; John 18:13-27; John 20:24-29

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Enemy attestation

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If the opponents of a given position affirm a fact that supports that position, then it is more likely to be true.

Another mark in favor of historical events having really happened is known as enemy attestation. Habermas illustrates this principle thusly:

If your mother says you are an honest person, we may have reason to believe her, yet with reservation, since she loves you and is somewhat biased. However, if someone who hates you admits that you are an honest person, we have a stronger reason to believe what is being asserted since potential bias does not exist.⁷⁰

If a document authored by someone who is, or was, hostile to the cause of another historical figure concedes the truth of his enemy's claims, then the probability that the events in question are true is raised. This is found in the testimony of Paul who had previously persecuted the church and Jesus' own brother, James, who had been a skeptic.

Thus, the inclusion of the gospel accounts further strengthens the case for the resurrection. It conforms with the proper tools of historiography, and the events in question are best explained by the hypothesis that Jesus was raised from the dead. Yet, the testimonies of the gospels are consistent with the proclamations of others.

The testimony of the early church

As I pointed out in chapter six, 1 Corinthians 15:3-5b is considered to be in the form of a creedal statement. It is actually referred to as "The Creed of the Early Church." In that chapter, I demonstrated that this was

⁷⁰ Gary Habermas & Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Press, 2004), 71.

likely in use by the community of Christians within the early years after the events in question. This means that the testimony of the early church was that Jesus was executed, buried, and then raised from the dead in perfect symphony with what the gospels record.

The testimonies of skeptics

Surprisingly, all three of the previous facts (the previous three chapters) that I have laid out in this case are admitted by atheist and agnostic critics in modern scholarship. That is, they grant that 1) Jesus' wounds on the cross were **FATAL**, 2) the early followers of Jesus had experiences that they at least took to be **APPEARANCES** of the risen Jesus, and 3) that those early believers faced the potential of persecution, and were **COMMITTED**. In chapter five, I recorded German atheist New Testament scholar, Gerd Ludemann, admitting the fatality of Jesus. That early believers had what they thought were appearances of the risen Jesus is conceded by liberal, Jewish scholar, Paula Fredricksen. She explains,

The disciples conviction that they had seen the Risen Christ, their permanent relocation to Jerusalem, their principled inclusion of Gentiles *as* Gentiles - all these are historical bedrock facts known past doubting about the earliest community after Jesus' death.⁷¹

The commitment level of the early church, that they were willing to die for their belief in the resurrection, was documented in chapter seven. Moreover, William Lane Craig affirms,

One of the things that surprised me most in doing my doctoral work in Munich on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection was the dawning realization that most historical Jesus scholars who have written on the subject agree that (1) Jesus' burial by Joseph of Arimathea, (2) the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb by some of his female followers, (3) the post-mortem appearances of Jesus to various individuals and groups, and (4) the original disciples' coming sincerely to believe that God had raised

⁷¹ Paula Fredrickson, *Jesus of Nazareth*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1999), 264.

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Jesus from the dead despite their strong predisposition to the contrary are historical.⁷²

So, even though they don't affirm the supernatural aspects, modern scholars affirm "F, A, C," and on the basis of this chapter "T," of our case, but yet somehow deny the resurrection. It seems to me that if

The Technical Stuff

The Testimony of the Believer

While this is not really an argument, I would say that those seeking to use cases like the ones in this book in order to persuade others of the truth of Christianity should be prepared to explain their own testimonies of what Christ has done in their own lives. Not only is this a practice in which Christians have always engaged, but it provides a compelling personal aspect to the truth of the resurrection. Such a powerful aspect of the believer's life should never be neglected.

Jesus was dead, seemed to have appeared later to others, and those others were so convinced of it that they were willing to die, then the resurrection is the most reasonable explanation.

Conclusion

After studying this material, readers should understand that the testimonies of the gospels, the early church and modern believers are consistent. By demonstrating that the gospels are historically reliable regarding the events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection, it

⁷² William Lane Craig, "Contemporary Scholarship and Jesus Resurrection," (<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/contemporary-scholarship-and-jesus-resurrection#ixzz2858nFaOa>) Internet. Accessed 1 October, 2012.

becomes clear what the actual testimony of those writers was. Based on 1 Corinthians 15:3-5b, it is evident that the early church had a belief from the start that was consistent with the gospel story. Finally, by showing that modern man recognizes the remarkable impact that Jesus has had on history, and the incredible standard he provides for moral living, it is clear that the testimony of even today's unbelieving world is consistent with the message of the church.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the "T" in C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. stand for *Testimony*?
2. What is the testimony of the modern world about the person of Jesus?
3. Why can readers trust the gospels as historical material?
4. What is the testimony of skeptical scholars about "F, A, C, and T?"
5. How has Christianity impacted the Western world?
6. What is the most important thing for *believers* to remember about "T?"

CHAPTER IX

"S"

JESUS OFFERS SALVATION

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. - John 3:16

The arguments have been made, the case has been set forth, the evidence has been revealed, and the truth has been presented. After exploring these things it seems that the most reasonable move an individual can make is to surrender their life in commitment to the one true God as he has presented himself in Jesus. This short chapter will be my passionate invitation to unbelievers to make this most important decision. It will also be a clarion call for believers to share these C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. with others.

What we have reason to believe

A short summary of the case that is before us seems to be in order. During the first chapter it became clear that the evidence indicates that a being most adequately described as "God" must exist as the uncaused **Cause** of the natural universe. Next, we learned that the universe is suspiciously well **Ordered** to permit life. Third, the moral argument demonstrates that if objective moral values and duties exist, then God must exist as a grounding for these **Rules**. On the basis of these arguments, it is reasonable to become open-minded to the prospect of having an

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immediate and personal **Experience** of God. The evidence shows that Jesus' wounds on the cross were, indeed, **Fatal**. It was then shown that he **Appeared** to various individuals after his death, alive and bodily. To firm up this truth, it was demonstrated that the disciples of Jesus had such a level of **Commitment** to this message that they were willing to die for it. The **Testimony** of the world, including skeptics, scholars, the early church, whole nations, and modern man, is that Jesus was dead, buried and that others believed he had appeared to them. He is regarded as the most influential human being who has ever lived. On the basis of this, Jesus is also the way of **Salvation**.

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We have shown that there is a God and that he is revealed in Jesus. Based on the C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S., it seems logical to trust Jesus and commit to serving him.

As of this writing, it has been almost ten years since this book was published in its original form. During that time, I have heard from many people who have trusted in Christ, in part, because of the evidence presented here. One of my favorite stories is detailed toward the end of the introduction to this book, but it would be hard for me to think of a better story than the one you're about to read - at least it's one of the best for illustrating how The Holy Spirit can work through Christian defenses like the ones in this book.

In 2017 I was asked to speak at Rathcoole Baptist Church in Northern Ireland. Though this might sound strange to anyone who is not a Christian, or who has never experienced this as a Christian, I believe I was in the midst of serious spiritual conflict. Despite my longstanding desire to teach and preach in Northern Ireland, the entire week I was completely depressed, anxious, and even paranoid. Every sinful thing I had ever done

was coming up in my mind, seemingly out of nowhere and almost constantly. Only once before have I ever experienced this. There was no real obvious trigger for these feelings. I remember sitting in my bed in the pastor's house, feeling like the world was coming to an end, and I was feeling this way - for no obvious reason at all. On the last night of the event, we were doing a question and answer hour. Anyone could ask me anything, and I would answer, if I could. The place was absolutely packed. After that hour, I no longer wondered why I had been feeling this way. From within my Christian worldview, the answer was clear. I believe that the enemy was at work to distract, and demoralise me.

Just before the service began, I gathered with some of the church members in a room behind the sanctuary. There we sat on three pews that were facing each other in the room. We prayed, as we had done for the previous few nights, that God would use what we were doing to change someone's heart, and bring them to faith in Christ. As I sat on the edge of the pew, and starred vacantly at the spot on one of the other pews, directly in front of me, I said, "Father, I pray that for at least one person tonight, they would have **all their questions answered**, and they would receive . . . like . . . **a gift of faith**. I pray that a **lightbulb would be turned on** in their mind. That they would **stop fighting this**." When I finished, others present said, "Amen." After the service, as I was talking with some of the attendees, I was informed that a woman would like to speak with me in another room. With two other people, I walked into the room where she was waiting - the same one where we had prayed. She was sitting on the same spot on the alternate pew that I had been starring at as I had spoken to God from a demoralized heart. The following was what she wrote on her own later. I have added emphasis where my prayer requests, and her answers are extremely similar, if not exactly the same. She said,

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I genuinely believe and always have believed, that **faith is a gift** and up until September 13th, it was a gift I had yet to receive ... On 13th September I was invited to a Q&A in Rathcoole Baptist Church with Braxton Hunter and I had been many times to church before out of respect to Tommys Family but I found myself genuinely enjoying what was being said. That night **every question I had was answered** and a **light bulb just came on** saying "Why are you **fighting this**, just trust and believe"

There were several witnesses to what happened that night at Rathcoole Baptist. I publish this knowing that they will read these words ... that Amy will read them. Still, I may not be able to convince readers by sharing with you what I, and others who were present, know happened, but it has marked me deeply. God used Christian answers like the ones in this book, along with answers to specific prayers by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Recently, however, I asked my pastor if I could have access to the testimonies of believers in our own fellowship. When a believer is baptised, their testimony, written for the event, is read by someone else just before they publicly identify with Christ through the ancient practice. I include some of those here, because Christianity is a faith expressed in community. Hearing from modern believers can be powerful.

"Did someone lead you to Christ?"

"My brother has been at it for years"

I have never felt God the way many people in the church said I should. Growing up I couldn't feel the Holy Spirit and I can't recall seeing it displayed around me. At a young age I lost all interest in Christ and decided I would figure out life on my own. My guides in self discovery became scientists and poets. Once I became an adult, it wasn't hard to tell I had a huge void in my heart. I searched every form of science I could. All in hopes to find out

who I am and who we are meant to be. I thought this would fill the void I felt. When it did not and my hope was gone, I turned to the bottom of a bottle. With the prayers and support of people like my brother and my wife, I turned my search to Christ. After seeing all the evidence of The Resurrection and the truth laid out in The Bible, I realized my search was over. The faith I have tells me I am to ask Christ what he wants me to be and what to do. When I listen and do as He instructs, that void is filled. I May never feel the Spirit and I may always be a misfit but I know now that is one of His blessings on my life. My walk with Jesus has meant a change in every aspect of my life. It has made me aware of how selfish I've lived my life and even though I've always thought I was a good man, I can't live without him.

Truly, I feel my story is just beginning...

*"I was an atheist, but I'll spend
the rest of my life as a Christian."*

I was an Atheist my entire life. *I believed that God was a wonderful crutch for people who needed that sort of reassurance.* Then, three years ago, I met a cute boy, and I *really* liked him. Unfortunately, as it turned out, this cute boy *really* liked Jesus. But, that was something I could deal with. Did I mention he was cute? So, every Sunday I dutifully followed him to church. I began to entertain the idea that maybe I could be a Christian. I read articles and skimmed through books. Nothing I saw convinced me.

Then, one evening that cute boy said something very wise. **He told me that faith was a decision.** God probably wasn't going

to come down and say "Hey, I'm the real deal!". If I wanted to be a Christian, I needed to make that choice. **I didn't need to have all the answers beforehand, I just needed to want a relationship with God.** I decided to take a leap. On a scale of one to ten, I was about a 5.5, but I was over the line. I said a prayer alone and asked for forgiveness. This January, that cute boy became my husband. We had a Christian ceremony where we vowed to keep God at the center of our marriage. I meant every word. But, I still wasn't really comfortable advertising my faith. I preferred to keep God in church and in the privacy of my own home. Then, two months after we were married, my husband was diagnosed with cancer. As we saw the doctors, we got good news. He caught it early. We were lucky. My husband and I started to talk about why God chose for us to walk this particular path.

I think that God has always had a plan. He led me to that cute boy because He knew that boy would lead me to Him, and we would follow Him together. God also knew that I am a victim of my own pride and insecurity. I don't believe that God gave my husband cancer just so that I would see the bigger picture, *but the experience has helped me to understand that no matter how well I compartmentalize God, He can't be contained; and, that loving Him doesn't make me weak.* So, today I am ready to proclaim my faith in Jesus Christ. **I was an Atheist, but I'll spend the rest of my life as a Christian.**

*"I wondered and questioned on a constant basis
why a God of love and passion would let so much evil happen."*

From the time I was born until I was 18 years of age, I went to church with my mother and father. I was "saved" at a young age, but I think it was because it was what everyone did. I didn't follow the book much and kind of took my own path. At 17, I joined the United States Marine Corps and left for boot camp at the age of 18 after high school. I served for 4 years with one 11 month tour overseas. Because of a sequence of events, I found myself an atheist. I wondered and questioned on a constant basis why a God of love and passion would let so much evil happen. It destroyed my life. I struggled with the question to the brink of often suicidal thoughts. Don't get me wrong, I have a heavy passion for the Marine Corps and always will. I took my question to my mother who all my life I remember being extremely strong in her beliefs and could not be moved from them. She didn't have a direct answer, but she told me to come to church with her one Sunday at One Life. I entered the church an atheist with very heavy doubt that I would find answers to questions that drove me close to an end. I started right before the series on suffering, and It posed the same question I wanted answered. My interest was sparked instantly, and I made an agreement with my mother that I would give it a try. After hearing the messages in the following weeks, I was hooked. Between my mother and the passion for Christ, I had seen from One Life members my life started to change. I broke down one night and begged the Lord for peace. Peace of mind and

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a hint of direction was all I wanted. Shortly after my prayer, it felt like a massive weight was lifted off my shoulders. I'm not using a metaphor. It seriously felt like peace had found my life. Through continuous prayer and services on Sundays I knew there was a Christ. I visited the last baptisms optimistic and before it was half over had decided that Christ was the answer to all things. He has blessed me for months now being my rock and helping me through all endeavors. I trust in Him to get me through every day even when the thoughts of lost lives overwhelms my heart. ... I have found the answers to my questions. If it ultimately wasn't for Christ using my mother as His tool to reach me by bringing me to this great place of love, faith and passion for Christ, I might not have made it through my mental torture. I still have my issues and from time to time lay sleepless nights from memories of a soon to be past life. I now know without a doubt that Christ will make everything ok. Now my drive is to one day guard the Gates of Heaven in my Dress Blues and spend eternity with my brother and sisters with no sign of pain or sorrow. True peace!

*"[I] spent many years of my life
as not just a militant atheist, but as a firm anti-theist."*

I fell from Christianity after the death of my grandfather years ago and spent many years of my life as not just a militant atheist, but as a firm antitheist. On November 2nd of this year, I died by my own hands and had to be brought back to life. In that moment of death, I felt a cold, lonely blackness darker than anything I could ever

imagine. In the presence of that darkness, I grew so afraid. Then out of the gloom, I heard God's voice. He asked me to recite the Lord's Prayer and I did. He then asked me if I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. I told him yes and faded into a warmth before I woke up a day later in the ICU. The Living Son of God died for my sins and gave me a new life, literally. I wish to be baptized in the Holy Spirit to show Him my obedience and my promise to lead a new life.

*"I believed religion
was the root cause of division in the world."*

I grew up in the church but I would see people using the bible as a tool to pass judgment on others and shut out logic. When I went into the world on my own, I distanced myself from God and became a self-proclaimed atheist. I believed religion was the root cause of division in the world. I believed I knew everything through science and intellectual pursuits. [Someone] asked me to come to church at One Life several times before I finally agreed to come. Over the past two years, I've slowly grown in faith. *One Life's* values of "bringing your brain to church" has literally brought me back to church. I now have daily conversations with God and fully trust in His plan for my life. I now know Jesus tells us to love each other without judgment and encourages us to reach out to one another.

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Conclusion

In this chapter it is made clear that the most reasonable response to the truth of the C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. is to embrace the message of *Salvation*. There are many evangelistic strategies that could be employed at this juncture. What is supplied here is a simple way of confessing belief and committing to the Christian message. I have given an explanation of why the sacrifice of Jesus was necessary for the salvation of mankind and described the urgent need for men and women to embrace this offer. *Salvation* is the final, and most important truth of the C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the “S.” in C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. stand for *Salvation*?
2. Why should someone commit their life to Jesus?
3. Why was it necessary for Jesus to die as a sacrifice for sin?
4. What does the word *repent* mean?
5. What are some things a Christian might do after salvation?
6. How might one summarize the C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S.?

PART II

Dealing With Objections

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These objections can get kind of technical. If you're a beginner, it might be a good idea to just focus on the actual arguments we've covered so far. You can always come back to these objections once you've grown in your understanding a little more. If you think you're ready then keep reading. Just don't get discouraged if it's tough at first.

OBJECTIONS: *The Universe Had a Cause*

Objections to Premise 1

Doesn't physics demonstrate that some things come to exist without a cause?

In the 21st century, some critics have attempted to apply the findings of physicists⁷³ working on quantum mechanics and related fields to the subject of the beginning of the universe. Many have postulated interesting theories of time and space that might lead to the rejection of premise (2), but recently quantum theorists have challenged premise (1) by asserting that it actually is possible that the universe came to exist, uncaused out of absolutely nothing. Most famously, theoretical physicist, Stephen Hawking, argued the following,

Because gravity shapes space and time, it allows space-time to be locally stable but globally unstable. On the scale of the entire universe, the positive energy of the matter can be balanced by the negative gravitational energy, and so there is no restriction on the creation of whole universes. Because there is a law like gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing in the manner described in Chapter 6. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue torch and set the universe going.⁷⁴

However, there are a number of problematic statements found in Hawking's comments if one wished to use them, and statements like them, to respond to the case we've made from the beginning of the universe.

First, Hawking argues that because gravity has the power to shape space-time, universes will result. This seems to show that what we're talking about here are the tangible material aspects of the physical universe. That is to say, the tangible substance that we think of when we usually refer to

⁷³ It should be noted that I am not a professional scientist, and this section should be read with that disclaimer in mind.

⁷⁴ Stephen Hawking, *The Grand Design*, (New York, NY: Bantam, 2010), 180.

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physical things. Nevertheless, what our argument addresses in actuality is the totality of the contents and make up of the universe itself. Gravity is an aspect of the physical universe which itself is contingent and requires explanation.

Similarly, the existence of positive and negative energy requires explanation. Hawking sees the energy of the universe to have a balance of zero because of the positive versus negative energy. However, this is not zero in fact. Zero in fact would be no positive and no negative energy in existence at all.

Finally, our argument addresses the existence of space and time. In order for there to be a balance of energy, gravity and any sort of activity at all, there must exist space for these interactions to occur within. Yet, the existence of space itself is the existence of something. What Hawking calls nothing is not actually nothing.

What his work amounts to, when considered alongside our case, is a difference in terminology. What Hawking calls nothing isn't nothing and what he thinks is an explanation of why the universe exists is actually his explanation of why it turned out the *way* that it did. This evokes the words of philosopher Thomas Nagel. He writes,

The existence of our universe might be explained by scientific cosmology, but such an explanation would still have to refer to features of some larger reality that contained or gave rise to it. A scientific explanation of the Big Bang would not be an explanation of why there was something rather than nothing, because it would have to refer to something from which that event arose. This something, or anything else cited in a further scientific explanation of it, would then have to be included in the universe whose existence we are looking for an explanation of when we ask why there is anything at all. This is a question that remains after all possible scientific questions have been answered.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Thomas Nagel, *Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperment* (New York, NY, Oxford University Press: 2009), 28

The fact that a physicist may say that a given particle came into existence uncaused does not mean that it did. It means that one cannot determine what the cause was. This also depends somewhat on what one means by causality. If space exists for events to occur in, then the space itself is a type of cause. For example, if I place a book on a shelf and ask what is causing the book to be suspended in the air, the natural answer is that the shelf is causing it to be suspended. Space is the shelf that causes many events to be possible.

Ultimately, none of this demonstrates that something can come to exist uncaused out of nothing. It is a semantic appeal to how we understand certain terms. These objections don't seem to directly address all the points made in a case like the one we're discussing. Worse still, the very items that need explanation are admittedly contingent and in need of a CAUSE.

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The atheist is trying to say that the universe could have come to exist without a cause because physics has shown that some things do happen without a cause. The problem is that physics hasn't shown this and there is a huge difference between something in the universe happening and the whole universe itself coming into existence from nothing.

Who created God?

One of the more common objections to premise (1) is actually a commission of the "*tu quoque*" fallacy. What this means is that the critic simply claims that the proponent of a given argument has the same problem that he is asserting the critic has. It would be like responding to the charge, "You lied about cheating on the exam" by saying, "Well, you've lied to me about things too." Rather than responding to the charge, one points

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out that their opponent has the same problem. However, even in light of this obvious fallacy, there is a clear defense.

What is important to note, is that premise (1) claims “Everything that **BEGINS** to exist must have a cause for its existence.” Clearly, if something did not begin, then it does not need a cause. Since God is timeless and eternal, he does not require a cause. Only and all temporal things begin and stop existing. More clearly, time is necessary for beginnings and endings. Thus, if God exists in eternity, where time is not, then he does not require a cause for his existence. Remember, this is not a cop-out. This is a proper category placement. If God is timeless, then temporal terms cannot be meaningfully ascribed to him. Thus, the objection fails.

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God has no beginning, so God doesn't need a cause. The only kind of things that need causes are things that start to happen or exist.

How do we know that the universe is not the one temporal thing that needs no cause?

In order for this to be maintained, one would have to demonstrate two things. First, if such a claim is meant to be considered plausible then it would have to be shown that anything has ever come into existence uncaused out of nothing. Second, it would have to be explained how this is even philosophically possible. Neither of these two items has ever been successfully accomplished.

Some philosophers have set forth an object lesson for understanding why this is untenable in the following way. Imagine finding

an orb of some kind in a field. You might not know what it is or where it came from, but you can be certain that it had a cause of some kind. Now imagine that the orb is as large as the field itself. Clearly, all that was true about the smaller orb is still true of the larger orb. The fact that it is now much larger does not explain its existence. It still needs a cause. Think of an orb as large as a planet. Does it need a cause? Clearly it does. What about an orb the size of the universe itself? Does this orb now need a cause? The objector now claims that it does not. Yet, nothing changed about the orb except for its magnificent size. It still requires a cause.

What about "the composition fallacy?"

One makes the mistake of the composition fallacy when he asserts that if something is true of the individual parts of something, then it must be true of the whole. For example, someone might mistakenly argue the following:

1. Dogs are made of atoms.
2. Atoms cannot be seen by the naked eye.
3. Therefore, dogs cannot be seen by the naked eye.

Clearly, this is false.

Atheists sometimes argue that theists make the same mistake. The fact that everything in the physical universe requires a cause does not necessarily mean that the universe itself requires a cause. However, this is merely a more firm presentation of the former objection. The second item mentioned above still needs to be satisfied in order for this objection to stand.

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What if we're completely wrong about causation?

One of the more counterintuitive criticisms of the premise was pressed by Scottish philosopher, David Hume in his two works, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Much ink has been spilt on this in the history of philosophy since Hume, and this will not cover everything that might be discussed. For our purposes it will do to offer a brief explanation, and two brief responses. Hume reasoned that though any particular person knows that when, say, a bowling ball makes contact with a bowling pin, the pin tends to fall, one might not be able to confidently say that the ball caused the pin to fall over. Because of our experience with objects like bowling balls and pins, we know that when a ball encounters a pin, the pin then falls. Those are two claims - only two. However, we all immediately infer with incredible confidence that the ball caused the pin to fall. That, a critic might say, is a third claim. All you really observe is the movement of the ball and the movement of the pin. You do not really know that the ball is causing the pin. Since you are inductively relying on what has happened in the past (your previous knowledge of what happens), you cannot guarantee that the next time a bowling ball physically makes contact with a pin, the pin will not turn into a bouquet of flowers, or that the ball will not simply pass through the pin.

First, inductively noticing that cause and effect is incredibly useful, and seems to produce reliable results in the world, has led us to the point of being able to confidently say, 100 percent of our experience seems to tell us that causation is real, and the everything we know of that begins to exist has a cause. ALL OF IT! Perhaps we can't have some sort of absolute, can't-be-wrong, impossible-to-doubt, cartesian certainty about that, but most people won't lose too much sleep over the worry that bowling

championships will be ruined because, for all we know, the balls and pins might start acting like the brooms from Disney's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Induction may not give us that level of certainty, but that doesn't mean it isn't helpful in inferring the best explanation of something.

Second, we are here talking about whether the universe could have come to exist without a cause. This means we begin the discussion in a state of timeless nothingness. In a state with no space or time, there are no possibilities, potentialities, powers, or properties. If there were, it wouldn't be nothing. We would need some explanation of what it even means to say that the universe might begin from a state with no possibilities or potentialities. If we're looking for the best explanation, its going to be the one that at least seems to have all the evidence behind it.

Objection to Premise 2

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If the universe has just always existed and had no beginning, then it doesn't need a cause (such as God). That's why some atheists argue that the universe has always existed. Don't be fooled. It hasn't always existed. We'll see why.

What if the universe is infinite in its existence?

This objection challenges the truth of premise (2) directly. Many thinkers have argued that if premise (1) is true but premise (2) is false, then there is no good reason to conclude that the universe requires a cause. On this view, the universe had no beginning. Instead, history stretches infinitely into the past. However, the 21st century is a difficult time for advocates of such a view to make their cases. Though it was not the case a century ago, modern science has arrived at a sense of clarity regarding the beginning of

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the universe. That is to say, that it did happen.

As far back as 1993, George Smoot claimed, “The question of ‘the beginning’ is as inescapable for cosmologists as it is for theologians.”⁷⁶ His compatriots have echoed this sentiment with a resounding declaration that according to the best scientific evidence available, the universe did indeed begin to exist a finite time ago. Alexander Vilenkin writes,

It is said that an argument is what convinces reasonable men and a proof is what it takes to convince even an unreasonable man. With the proof now in place, cosmologists can no longer hide behind the possibility of a past-eternal universe. There is no escape: they have to face the problem of a cosmic beginning.⁷⁷

Such certainty has come for a couple of reasons. First, in 1964, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson discovered what is known as the “cosmic background radiation” of the universe. This is a field of radiation unaffiliated with any specific star or body and is uniformly dispersed throughout the universe. It represents clear evidence of a cosmic event that took place in and via the origin of the universe itself.

Arno Penzias explained, “Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, one with the very delicate balance needed to provide exactly the conditions required to permit life, and one which has an underlying (one might say ‘supernatural’) plan.”⁷⁸ Clearer scientific support for the truth of premise (2) would be difficult to find.

Second, in 1925, Edwin Hubble demonstrated that the universe is

⁷⁶ George Smoot, *Wrinkles in Time*, (New York, NY: William Morrow & Co. 1993), 189.

⁷⁷ Alexander Vilenkin, *Many Worlds in One*, (New York, NY: Hill & Wang, 2006), 176.

⁷⁸ Arno Penzias, *Cosmos, Bios and Theos*, (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1992 ed.), 83.

in a state of expansion by documenting the speeds of distant galaxies compared to their distances from the earth. If the universe is expanding from a central point, then it follows that it began to expand. If one considers the reverse of the expansion it becomes clear that the logical origin was an incredibly small and dense point outside of and before which there was literally nothing. As some of today's top physicists explain,

The universe began from a state of infinite density. . . Space and time were created in that event and so was all the matter in the universe. It is not meaningful to ask what happened before [the event]; it is like asking what is north of the north pole. Similarly, it is not sensible to ask where the [event] took place. The point-universe was not an object isolated in space, it was the entire universe, and so it can only be that [the event] happened everywhere.⁷⁹

The conclusion which demands to be made is that this infinitely dense universe would continually have grown smaller (if it is viewed in the reverse) to the point of non-existence. Thus, we have a second scientific argument for the beginning of the universe. For both of these reasons, it is not scientifically feasible to conclude that the universe existed infinitely into the past. However, there is powerful evidence from philosophy that counts against an infinite universe.

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All we have shown in our response so far is that everything we observe in science indicates that the universe began to exist. Get ready! The rest of our response is the most complicated point of the whole book. Just stay with it!

When we start talking about infinite points in time, it can get overwhelming. This response requires a bit of stalling off into space and mulling it over before it clicks, but once you see it, you can't unsee it. The universe simply cannot have existed infinitely into the past because this

⁷⁹ Richard J Gott, et. al., "Will the Universe Expand Forever?," (Scientific American, March 1976), 65.

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would necessitate an actual infinite number of events throughout its history. If there are an actual infinite number of events, then “today” would never have come simply because it would be impossible to cross an actually infinite amount of time.

In order to understand this claim, one must have an understanding of what is meant by the phrase *actual infinite*. A *potential infinite* represents an idea which exists conceptually. For example, we can imagine that time may continue into the future infinitely. This means that it will never end. We can likewise imagine dividing a line an infinite number of times. These are *potential infinites*, but not *actual infinites*. A simpler way of saying this is that infinity exists as a concept, but an actual infinite number of events, moments, or physical objects leads to mathematical “absurdities,” as William Lane Craig puts it. We use the term infinite in common parlance in improper ways quite often. One may refer to an infinite number of grains of sand on the beach, but there really is not an infinite number. The number may be monstrous and nearly inconceivably high, but there is a number we may ascribe to it. An *actual infinite* means that there simply is no such number.

A variety of analogies have been advanced by philosophers to illustrate why the universe could not have an actually infinite number of points in its history. If there are an infinite number of what we would call years stretching back infinitely into the past, then there would be odd numbered years and even numbered years. Now imagine if every odd numbered year was removed so that only the even numbered years were left. How many years would there now be? There would still be an infinite number of years in the history of the universe because infinity minus half of infinity would still equal infinity. Thus, time could have never arrived at today because it would never have been able to traverse an actually infinite

number of points.

Another analogy involves a hypothetical library with an infinite number of books. If all of the books in the infinite library were either black or red so that all even numbered books were red and all odd numbered books were black, imagine removing all of the red books. Now how many books would be left? There would still be an infinite number of books, they would just all be black books. To put it as simply as possible, no matter how many points in time past in the history of the universe, time would never have arrived at today because no matter how much time has passed there is still an infinite amount of time yet to overcome. Thus, the universe cannot extend infinitely into the past because it would involve an infinite regression of time.⁸⁰

It is important to mention that there are arguments from science claiming that the universe could have existed prior to the event which caused the expansion and background wave radiation, but even if this were so, it would not escape the truth revealed by the Kalam argument. Thus, premise (2) holds true. The universe began to exist a finite time ago.

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Just relax! All that philosophical talk is just a complicated way of saying that if there was no beginning for time then we would never have gotten to this point in time. That means the universe had a beginning.

⁸⁰ Christian apologist, J.P. Moreland, has used this analogy in many of his debates and lectures.

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Objections to the God Conclusion

Isn't this a commission of the "god of the gaps" fallacy?

It is quite common for skeptics to demand that in spite of the truths of premise (1) and premise (2), God is not the proper explanation for the cause of the universe. They claim that theists are guilty of committing the "god of the gaps" fallacy in positing God as the cause. The "god of the gaps" fallacy occurs when some god is given as the explanation of some phenomenon, not because there is any positive reason to believe God is the causal agent, but rather because it is unclear what the cause is. Illustrating this, some ancient religions argued that lightning must be an act of a god simply because they had no knowledge of what caused lightning. The criticism is that theists are committing the "god of the gaps" fallacy because they simply don't know what *is* the cause of the universe.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the cosmological argument, theists are doing no such thing. It is not the case that we have no positive evidence for God as the cause. In fact, the evidence points squarely to God's existence as the cause. There simply is nothing else in existence that is eternal, spaceless, non-material and has causal powers. Only a mind independent of a body would qualify. Therefore the "god of the gaps" fallacy does not apply. What would be necessary to demonstrate the fallacy would be an explanation of any other philosophically possible cause besides God.

Do we have any evidence of a mind that is not attached to a physical body?

On the heels of the last objection, some skeptics demand that we have no examples of a mind that is independent of a physical body.

Because of this, it must be *ad hoc* for theists to claim that a mind independent of such a body could possibly exist as the cause of the universe. Two responses must be made. First, there is nothing internally incoherent in the idea of a mind independent of a body. Second, the cosmological argument itself serves as an argument for the existence of such a mind. If it is the case that the cause of the universe must be eternal, spaceless, non-material and retain causal powers, then it must also have the power of the will in order to decide to create the universe from nothing.

Isn't it possible that science will one day provide a natural cause for the universe?

The problem with this question is threefold. First, it represents unbridled skepticism. Rather than a “god of the gaps” fallacy, this is something like a “naturalism of the gaps.” We don’t know what the cause is, so it must be some natural cause that we will later understand. Second, because nature is what requires an outside cause, the supernatural is the only possible explanation. Third, this is not something that requires future explanation. The God hypothesis is already a satisfactory answer. As with any scientific hypothesis, scientists should always be open to the testing of this claim, but as it stands, God is the best explanation. However, philosophically I see God as the only explanation.

OBJECTIONS: The Universe Has Order

What if there are numerous other universes?

Such a challenge appeals to the possibility that the universe came to be life permitting by sheer chance. Of this, Ed Harrison writes, "The fine tuning of the universe provides *prima facie* evidence of deistic design. Take your choice: blind chance that requires multitudes of universes, or design that requires only one."⁸¹ Nevertheless, the idea behind this objection is that the more universes exist, the greater the probability that one individual universe would happen to be life permitting. It is referred to commonly as a *multiverse* or *universe/world ensemble*. Prominent biologist and atheist spokesperson, Richard Dawkins, has famously argued for this explanation. Nevertheless, despite Dawkins' rejection of this main criticism, the existence of multiple universes would result in a much more complex situation than currently exists. Dawkins describes a simple mechanism by which some believe these complex universes were created. The *oscillating universe* is detailed by Dawkins as follows:

Our time and space did indeed begin in our big bang, but this was just the latest in a long series of big bangs, each one initiated by the big crunch that terminated the previous universe in the series. Nobody understands what goes on in singularities such as the big bang, so it is conceivable that the laws and constants are reset to new values, each time. If bang-expansion-contraction-crunch cycles have been going on forever like a cosmic accordion, we have a serial, rather than parallel, version of the multiverse.⁸²

The problem with this hypothesis is that cosmologists have strong reason to believe that if an oscillating model exists, universes would get

⁸¹ Ed Harrison, *Masks of the Universe*, (New York, NY: Collier Books, Macmillan, 1985), 252, 253.

⁸² Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, (New York, NY: Bantam Press, 2008), 174.

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larger with each new universe created. This would mean that as the history of the multiverse is traced backwards, the universes would become much smaller with each generation. In fact, astronomer, Joseph Silk, has determined that there can only have been 100 universes or less if this model is correct.⁸³ What this means is that the oscillating model, if true, would produce far too few universes to justify a belief in order by chance.

It is also worth addressing the resetting of values of which Dawkins speaks. Even if these values were reset, there must be underlying values that are constants. They themselves require explanation. Anthony Flew explains,

Some have said that the laws of nature are simply accidental results of the way the universe cooled after the big bang. But . . . even such accidents can be regarded as secondary manifestations of deeper laws governing the ensemble of universes. Again, even the evolution of the laws of nature and changes to the constants follow certain laws. We're still left with the question of how these "deeper" laws originated. No matter how far you push back the properties of the universe as somehow "emergent," their very emergence has to follow certain prior laws. So multiverse or not, we still have to come to terms with the origin of the laws of nature. And the only viable explanation here is the divine Mind.⁸⁴

Though Flew is not specifically referring to an oscillating model, his claims regarding the emergence of new laws is applicable. Something constant determines the laws of new universes, and those constants require an explanation themselves.

⁸³ Joseph Silk, *The Big Bang*, (San Francisco, CA: Freeman Press, 2nd ed., 1989), 311, 312.

⁸⁴ Anthony Flew, *There is a God: how the world's most notorious atheist changed his mind*, (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2007), 121,122.

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The atheist is saying that the universe may have happened over and over so many times that the chances of a universe being life permitting is more reasonable. The problem is that even if the universe had gone through cycles like this, it couldn't have happened enough times to increase the odds in any serious way.

A second mechanism for the development of numerous universes which is explained by Dawkins is a sort of evolutionary cosmology suggested by Lee Smolin. Dawkins explains it thusly,

Daughter universes are born of parent universes, not in a fully fledged big crunch, but more locally in black holes. Smolin adds a form of heredity: The fundamental constants of a daughter universe are slightly “mutated” versions of the constants of its parent. . . Those universes which have what it takes to “survive” and “reproduce” come to predominate in the multiverse. “What it takes” includes lasting long enough to “reproduce.” Because the act of reproduction takes place in black holes, successful universes must have what it takes to make black holes. This ability entails various other properties. For example, the tendency of matter to condense into clouds and then stars is a prerequisite for making black holes. Stars also. . . are the precursors to the development of interesting chemistry, and hence life. So, Smolin suggests, there has been a Darwinian selection of universes in the multiverse, directly favoring the evolution of black hole fecundity and indirectly favoring the production of life.⁸⁵

The difficulty with this claim is that physicists have determined that Smolin's theory is flawed. Stephen Hawking was once hopeful of this sort of mechanism but regretfully admitted, “There is no baby universe branching off, as I once thought.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, (New York, NY: Bantam Press, 2008), 175.

⁸⁶ Stephen Hawking, *Information Loss in Black Holes*, (<http://arxiv.org/abs/hep-th/0507171>). Internet. Accessed on 10 July, 2012.

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This time the atheists are saying that universes might “give birth” to new universes. Maybe this would result in enough new universes to raise the odds of a life permitting one by chance. Nope. Even one of the most famous atheist thinkers (Hawking) admits that it doesn’t work.

For these reasons, the multiverse hypothesis will not do as an adequate defense of chance as the means by which the universe became so well ordered for life. Furthermore, the obvious and apparent reason to reject such a hypothesis is that it is completely *ad hoc*. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest such a universe ensemble. Therefore, we may move forward to consider another objection.

What about the anthropic principle?

Another objection to the design argument is that regardless of how the universe came to be so well ordered for life, the claim by humans that it appears to have been designed is just what we should expect based on the anthropic principle. In other words, if the universe were not life permitting, no one would be here to notice that it is not life permitting. Thus, any universe that is life permitting is, by definition, going to seem well ordered for life.

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What atheists want to say here is that the universe only seems well designed to you because you happen to be here. It doesn’t sound like much of an argument, does it?

There are a couple of comments that need to be made about this objection. First, this does not actually deal with “O.” directly. It is more of a cop-out. Second, the anthropic principle is more of a description of the nature of reality than an evidence against theism. Finally, this sort of an

explanation would never be accepted by thinkers in any uncontroversial area.

Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Wesley Richards describe an analogy of this problematic use of the anthropic principle.

Imagine an American Intelligence officer, captured by the Nazi SS during World War II, who is sentenced to death by a firing squad. Because of this officer's importance, the SS assign fifty of Germany's finest sharpshooters to his execution. After lining him up against a wall, the sharpshooters take their positions three meters away. Upon firing, however, the officer discovers that every single sharpshooter has missed, and that instead, their fifty bullets have made a perfect outline of his body on the wall behind him. What would we think if the officer reflected on his situation, and then responded, "I suppose I shouldn't be surprised to see this. If the sharpshooters hadn't missed, I wouldn't be here to observe it"? We would rightly wonder what he was doing in intelligence, since the more sensible explanation would be that, for some reason, the execution had been rigged. Perhaps the sharpshooters had been ordered to miss, or they had colluded with one another for some unknown reason. In short, the best explanation would be that the event was the product of intelligent design. Shrugging one's shoulders and concluding that it's a chance occurrence is just dense.⁸⁷

What these authors are attempting to get across is that the fact of the anthropic principle does not speak against the truth of theism. Thus, this objection fails as a compelling defense of the claim that the universe is finely-tuned because of chance or physical necessity. With this, we may now move forward to discuss even more objections.

⁸⁷ Guillermo Gonzalez & Jay Wesley Richards, *The Privileged Planet*, (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2004), 267.

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Are there not many highly unlikely things that happen which are not the result of design?

What this question seeks to demonstrate is that chance could result in a life permitting universe since there are many examples of highly unlikely events that are clearly the result of chance. After all, everything that happens is, in a certain sense, highly unlikely. When one considers the fact that the odds were against the birth of any one person on planet earth, this becomes clear. Of all the random sperm cells and all the random eggs that could have met, you were the happy and highly unlikely result of exactly the sperm and egg that joined. Is not this a highly unlikely yet random event?

A similar example was given by Harvard graduate and Florida International University professor of world religions, Daniel Alvarez, when we debated the evidence for God's existence in 2010. He argued that the winner of a nation-wide lottery might feel as though there must have been some design in his fortunate success. Moreover, there had to be a winner, and even though the chances of any single specific person winning were incredibly low, chance led to their incredibly unlikely good fortune. However, this misses the point in a noteworthy way.

When Christian defenders talk about the fine tuning of the universe, they are not merely referring to the unlikely complexity of the universe. They are referring to the *specified complexity* of the universe. The difference should be clear. When cards are dealt in a poker game, every possible arrangement of cards is incredibly unlikely. In fact, they are all equally unlikely. Nevertheless, when a player is dealt a royal flush they have received the most powerful hand in the game. This represents specified complexity. Naturally, this has happened by chance. Yet, when the same

player receives the royal flush, other players have good reason to be suspicious. If he gets the royal flush more than once in the same game, or even in the same month, they may be justified in questioning his honesty in the game. Perhaps he is cheating. In more specific terms, it looks like his hand was dealt by design. The specified complexity of the universe being life permitting is not just a matter of complexity, like any weak arrangement of cards. Rather, it is like getting a royal flush almost every time you play the game.

In the case of the lottery, everyone involved knows that one thing is certain, someone will win the game. If two adult humans of opposite sexes with healthy reproductive systems attempt to procreate, it is highly likely that they will ultimately succeed in joining some sperm cell with some egg. For this reason, these are poor analogies, and the argument still stands.

What about poorly designed things?

It is not uncommon for atheists to attack the idea of a designer by arguing that there are a number of things in the universe which seem poorly designed. If there truly is a designer then why would he create a universe with so many apparent problems? The claim is that this counts as evidence against the existence of God. The late atheist (or to use his term “anti-theist”), Christopher Hitchens commonly put the objection thusly,

Of the other bodies in our solar system alone, the rest are either far too cold to support anything recognizable as life, or far too hot. The same, as it happens, is true of our own blue and rounded planetary home, where heat contends with cold to make large tracts of it into useless wasteland, and where we have come to learn that we live, and have always lived, on a climatic knife edge. Meanwhile, the sun is getting ready to explode and devour its dependant planets like some jealous chief or tribal deity. Some

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design!⁸⁸

There are at least two responses that need to be made with respect to such an objection.

Initially, it should be said that alleged examples of bad design are best discussed case by case. For example, issues like the explosion of our sun are not problems for Christian theists, as all Christians believe in some basic eschatological truths which involve the resurrection and glorification of the natural world at the end of time. Moreover, there are a number of claims like this, which when carefully examined, fail because the item which seems poorly designed turns out to be incredibly appropriate for its function.

Second, even if something is poorly designed, it is still *designed*. In 2010 I had the privilege of holding an apologetics conference in Miami, Florida at a church which was overwhelmingly made up of Cuban-Americans. Over lunch we discussed Cuban culture in great detail. One of the interesting facts they shared was the existence of a poorly designed automatic transmission automobile manufactured in Cuba known as a Futingo. Futingos, as best I could gather, have become infamous for their lack of reliability. They are something of a joke to Cubans. Nevertheless, while everyone admits that a Futingo is a poorly designed car, no one denies that the Futingo was actually designed. Thus, while most Christian theists will deny that the designer is a poor one, the existence of what seem to be poorly designed items in the universe is not evidence of a lack of design in the universe.

For all of the reasons listed here, Christian theists should feel

⁸⁸ Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, (New York, NY: Twelve Hachet Book Group, paperback, 2009), 80.

confident in the argument that the universe is well ordered. Repeatedly, atheists and agnostics have attempted to demonstrate that the argument fails and have failed in their endeavors. Until some skeptic is able to show and defend either a third option (other than chance or design) which explains the fine-tuning of the universe, or is able to successfully articulate a defense of the existing alternative to design, the argument that the universe is ORDERED because of design stands undefeated.

OBJECTIONS: *The Universe Has Rules*

Can't culture decide on moral principles that we then consider objective?

This points to an argument that morality can become objective on the basis of what the consensus of a given nation or people group thinks is best. What becomes problematic is that while there will be moral principles which overlap between any two people groups, there will also be moral differences. If the only authority on morality is represented by the consensus, and the consensus differs from one group to the next, then in what way would the morality be objective? J. Budziszewski points out that,

The whole meaning of morality is a rule that we ought to obey whether we like it or not. If so, then the idea of creating a morality we like better is incoherent. Moreover, it would seem that until we had created our new morality, we would have no standard by which to criticize God. Since we have not yet created one, the standard by which we judge Him must be the very standard that He gave us. If it is good enough to judge Him by, then why do we need a new one?⁸⁹

In fact, a better explanation of moral subjectivity would be hard to locate. Also, we find that for any given nation in the history of the world, accepted moral principles have undergone change.

Furthermore, most people do not realize what they are saying when they argue that nations could create objective moral values. What if extreme Muslim fundamentalists succeeded in overthrowing the western world's major powers and instituted their view of morality as law? Suddenly it would become objectively morally right for women to hide their faces, for all to worship only Allah, and to put infidels to death. I find it hard to believe that any atheist would find this morally right. The reason for this is that such a view of morality as is decided by any human being is

⁸⁹ J. Budziszewski, *What We Can't Not Know*, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003), 12.

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not objective but subjective. If it is subjective then it is not objective. If it is not objective, then nothing is *really* right or wrong, good or bad. C.S. Lewis clarifies,

If 'good' or 'better' are terms deriving their sole meaning from the ideology of each people, then of course ideologies themselves cannot be better or worse than each other. Unless the measuring rod is independent of the things measured, we can do no measuring, For the same reason it is useless to compare the moral ideas of one age with those of another: progress and decadence are alike meaningless words.⁹⁰

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If a group of people decide what should be good or bad, right or wrong, then that morality is definitely their opinion (subjective). It doesn't work.

Isn't humanity's shared desire for happiness an objective foundation for morality?

The idea here is that since all men desire happiness, we can locate objective moral values without God by recognizing morality as the principles which lead to human happiness. Still, this objection fails to recognize that humans find happiness in very diverse ways. While one man finds happiness in treating others kindly, some men achieve happiness by committing theft, devouring human flesh, sexually abusing children, and ignoring the well-being of others. Even if it were the case that all mankind found happiness in the same activities, simply deciding that this is a foundation for moral values or duties is still subjective. That is to say, it is still just an opinion about what people should do. It would not mean that it

⁹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 73.

is necessarily wrong to break free of the societal opinion and act alternatively.

Isn't humanity's shared desire to flourish an objective foundation for morality?

Differing slightly from the previous objection, this idea recognizes that men find happiness in diverse and conflicting ways. Instead, it refines the notion to an understanding of objective morality based on how humans might best live in harmony. The final response from the last objection still stands. This would still be subjective simply because it represents an opinion about how man should view his own desire for flourishing. Moreover, even if this did demonstrate objective moral values, it does not demonstrate objective moral duties. Just because something is good does not mean man is mandated to do it. From whence does the mandate come? Furthermore, morality based on human flourishing would conflict with man's certain knowledge of what morality is.

If human flourishing is the foundation for moral values, then it would lead to a situation in which it would be a moral good to eradicate certain individuals who demonstrate genetically detrimental illnesses and disabilities. Why restrict the flourishing of the world by expending so much effort and money on the treatment of AIDS patients? If the flourishing of our race is the goal, then it would be best to simply euthanize these patients or, at the very least, quarantine them. It is likely the case that many of them will procreate. If they procreate, our collective genes will continue to be corrupted and flourishing will be threatened. Yet, our innate moral values would conflict with such a wicked plan for eradication.

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If God is necessary for objective morality, why do atheists often lead moral lives?

This represents a serious misunderstanding of the argument. Christian defenders are not saying that atheists cannot act morally. The fact that they do is evidence of the objectivity of moral values. They too have knowledge of the moral truths that have been hardwired into the human race. This becomes apparent when atheists begin talking about the evils that religion has brought on the human race. Frequently, atheists will argue that the crusades, Spanish inquisition, fundamentalist views on homosexuality and abortion, and misogyny of religious people are all evils that resulted from belief in God. However, their recognition that some of these things are evil is an evidence of their belief in the objectivity of moral values.

If God is necessary for objective morality, why do some believers live immoral lives?

Reversing the problem does not make the point any stronger. That many believers live lives that conflict with morality does not mean that God is not the source of morality. Both atheists and theists can act morally or immorally. This is no better than asking, "If vegetarians believe that eating meat is bad for them, then why do some vegetarians occasionally eat meat?" That vegetarians sometimes eat meat and non-vegetarians sometimes eat salad does not speak to whether or not it is true that eating meat is a bad thing. This is simply a red herring.

How do we know that morality is objective?

First, one must recognize what this question entails. If morality is not objective then it is necessarily the case that the rape and murder of children is not actually wrong. All we can say, philosophically speaking, is that we don't generally like it. The same is true for any evil thing one can imagine. Conversely, nothing is really right or good. Kindness, mercy and philanthropy are just things that certain people like. It should be clear to any thinking person that this is simply not the way things are.

Second, it is hard to imagine a successful argument for the subjectivity of moral values. In order for an argument to be a good one, the premises of the argument need to be plausible. There is simply no argument in favor of the subjectivity of moral values which contains premises which are more likely to be true than our own immediate and certain knowledge that morality is objective. This may sound like a cop-out, but it is not.

Imagine a similar case. An individual's knowledge of his own existence is a strikingly powerful certainty for him. He (*person A*) may not be able to present external evidence of this truth, but he simply knows that he exists. Now imagine another individual (*person B*) presenting him with an argument that seeks to demonstrate that *person A* does not exist. Perhaps *person B* is able to present powerful data and evidence which counts against *person A's* existence. *Person B* shows *person A* that there is no record of his birth and that there are a number of others who also do not believe that *Person A* exists. *Person B* also provides an elaborate explanation of how *person A* came to believe that he actually exists when, in fact, he does not. Will *person A* accept the claim that he, himself, does not exist? It is very doubtful that he will. The reason for this is simple. No matter how compelling the

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evidence is that *person A* does not exist, the immediate and certain knowledge *person A* has of his own existence is more plausible than any premise of any imaginable argument *person B* might bring.

Now consider morality. The immediate and certain knowledge that it is wrong to rape and torture children is more powerful and plausible than any premise brought by one who claims that morality is not objective. This may amount to a conversation stopper, but it is what every thinking human, deep down, knows to be true.

Some might say that these “awarenesses” of the objectivity of morality are based on intuition, which can be wrong. Not everything that strikes us as intuitive true is, in fact, true. However, intuition is extremely valuable in these waters. When we are considering morality, the only way to directly observe it is to look inwardly and consider your own moral intuitions. That’s how they present to us.

Doesn't societal evolution explain why people believe morality is objective?

On this view, morality is just the current result of what is best for the herd. As the idea goes, throughout the evolutionary process our ancestors began to function in a way that would foster survival. It turned out that divisive elements in a group, like what we now call theft and murder, led to a societal implosion with negative effects for every individual in the group. These negative effects naturally extended to the perpetrator of the divisive act as well. Thus, a norm developed within the group which shunned such activities. As this sort of thing continued and became more refined, the negative feelings attached to the self destructive tendencies became more entrenched in the cognitive processes of the mind. Likewise, that which was good for the group, such as an interest in mutual progress,

also became a part of the human psyche. Ultimately, the values and duties that humans express today are, therefore, a result of the evolutionary process in a certain sense. What was good for the herd is what we call morality.

This is an attempt to ground human morality in the realm of science. In 2010, Sam Harris released a bestselling work entitled, *The Moral Landscape*, in which he argued that morality is not necessarily subjective on the level of one's favorite flavor of ice cream, but that it really isn't entirely different either. Both can be explained and gauged scientifically. In the afterward of the book he responded to critics who claimed that evaluating morality scientifically merely resulted in a sophisticated yet still subjective framework. Harris provided the argument of his critics and his response by analogy:

It seems to me that there are three, distinct challenges to my thesis put forward thus far:

1. There is no scientific basis to say that we should value well-being, our own or anyone else's. (The Value Problem)

2. Hence, if someone does not care about well-being, or cares only about his own and not about the well-being of others, there is no way to argue that he is wrong from the point of view of science. (The Persuasion Problem)

3. Even if we did agree to grant well-being primacy in any discussion of morality, it is difficult or impossible to define it with rigor. It is, therefore, impossible to measure well-being scientifically. Thus, there can be no science of morality. (The Measurement Problem)

I believe all of these challenges are the product of philosophical confusion. The simplest way to see this is by analogy to medicine and the mysterious quantity we call "health." Let's swap "morality" for "medicine" and "well-being" for "health" and see how things look.

1. There is no scientific basis to say that we should value health, our own or anyone else's. (The Value Problem)

2. Hence, if someone does not care about health, or cares only about his own and not about the health of others, there is no way to argue that he is wrong from the point of view of science. (The Persuasion Problem)

3. Even if we did agree to grant health primacy in any discussion of medicine, it is difficult or impossible to define it with rigor. It is,

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therefore, impossible to measure health scientifically. Thus, there can be no science of medicine. (The Measurement Problem)

While the analogy may not be perfect, I maintain that it is good enough to nullify these three criticisms.⁹¹

Clearly, Harris thinks that he has escaped the problem by demonstrating that no one questions the importance of the science of medicine or its focus on human physical health. However, there are two points that need to be made in response. First, health is the self-stated goal of medical practitioners. It is not clear that well-being is the greatest goal in discussions of morality. Harris must assume that it is *a priori* in order for his argument to get off the ground. Second, despite Harris' intent, even his own parallel of the criticisms, does not escape the problems shown by them. It is the case that "There is no scientific basis to say that we should value health, our own or anyone else's." and that, ". . . if someone does not care about health, or cares only about his own and not about the health of others, there is no way to argue that he is wrong from the point of view of science." Thus, instead of rebutting the criticisms of his adversaries, Harris has only served to make their point again for them.

A major problem with the idea that our morality is based on evolution is also that this would not explain the incredibly selfless acts that some people display. While it might explain why a mother would jump in front of a car to save her genetic material (her son), it would not explain why an individual would do this for others. Attempts have been made to circumvent such a rebuttal, but in the end, the willingness to give one's own life counts against morality as merely an evolutionary adaptation.

One final response is important for understanding the moral

⁹¹ Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2010), 198-199.

argument in a robust way. The objectivity of morality is a different subject from the discovery of objective morality. Just as humanity progressively discovers objective mathematical truths, humanity has continued to refine its understanding of objective moral truth. This does not mean that the objective moral truths change. The mathematical principles were always present and true as man refined his understanding of them. While I reject the idea that morality is the result of societal evolution, even if it were the case, it would only speak to how man discovered moral truths. It would not mean that man invented them.

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Here the atheist suggests that we evolved our morality. First, that doesn't work. Second, it doesn't matter how we learned what is right and wrong, good or bad. What matters is whether or not those things are factual (not matters of opinion).

What about the Euthyphro dilemma?

In Plato's *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks the character for whom the dialogue is named, whether something is good because it is loved by the gods, or if it is loved by the gods because it is good. Modern atheistic philosophers have pointed to this problem in an attempt to show one of two things. If the good is good because God loves it, then we have a form of voluntarism. This means that God decided on his own moral framework. Yet, this is problematic because most theists (at least Christian theists) view God as *being* good, not just arbitrarily deciding on goodness. Conversely, if God loves the good because it is good then there must exist some higher authority to whom God himself must conform. For obvious reasons this debate has continued since the time of Plato.

There is, however, a third option. If the good flows from God's

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very nature, then he neither arbitrarily commanded it or recognized it as an external phenomenon. It springs forth from the very being of God. This resolves the dilemma and makes for a view of morality that is truly objective. Hence, both premises of the argument still stand.

OBJECTIONS: You Can Have an Experience of God

Doesn't this just amount to taking it on faith without evidence?

What some skeptics want to say about a point like this is that when believers bring up their own personal experiences they are just appealing to faith, and there is no way that one can know for sure whether another person's own experience is real or not. First, this is why I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter that "E." does not amount to an argument or proof for God's existence. The previous three chapters accomplish that objective. Rather, "E." is an invitation to seekers of truth to have an immediate and personal *experience* of God themselves.

Second, while I am forthright that this does not amount to an argument for God's existence, this chapter does provide a piece of data that requires explanation. The majority of human beings claim to have had experiences of God. This may not be an argument in any formal sense, but it certainly counts as evidence.

What about the ad populum fallacy?

The *ad populum* fallacy states that appealing to what the majority of people believe as a way of establishing truth is inadequate. After all, at one time the majority of people thought that the earth was the center of the universe with the sun in orbit around it. The majority of people were clearly wrong. When someone points out the multitude of religious experiences, atheists will often demand that that person has committed this fallacy. However, this is not what we have done.

First, I have been clear that "E." is not an argument but an invitation instead. Second, I am not claiming that the multitudes of

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individuals who claim to have had experiences with God proves that God exists. I am presenting this fact about the world as a piece of data that requires explanation. The atheist will answer it in one way, and the believer will answer it in a very different way. The question is, “Which is the more plausible explanation?” I think that of the two options - that they are all mistaken, or they are genuinely interacting with something objective - the second is more plausible.

OBJECTIONS: *The Crucifixion of Jesus Was FATAL*

How do we know that a New Testament author didn't fabricate the crucifixion?

This objection is somewhat moot since the majority of scholars will grant that Jesus did, in fact, die by crucifixion. However, something should be said as to why this is taken to be historically true. We have multiple independent attestation for the death of Jesus. That is to say, several authors refer to it in separate writings. The story of the crucifixion appears in all four of the gospel accounts and is referred to in the letters of Paul. That this is recorded by various authors lends credibility to the case. However, if one wishes to lay eyes on evidence from outside of the Bible, it is ample. The greatest historian of ancient Rome, Cornelius Tacitus, records,

But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome. Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.⁹²

This refers to the death of Jesus explicitly and may indirectly refer to his resurrection in that it seems to be the only way of understanding the phrase, “pernicious superstition.” Yet, the testimonies from ancient literature abound. Lucian of Samosata explains, “The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day - the distinguished personage who

⁹², Robert Maynard Hutchins, *Great Books of the Western World: Vol. 15, The Annals and the Histories*, (Chicago, IL: Benton, 1952), XV, 44.

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introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.”⁹³ Finally, Mara Bar-Serapion asks,

What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished.⁹⁴

Therefore, we have considerable data from Christians and non-Christians, and from within and outside of the Bible that testify to Jesus’ death.

Aren't Christians just too biased about this?

As there are not many serious objections to the claim that Jesus’ wounds at the cross were FATAL, let us focus on a more general objection. Since this chapter is the first of those related to the resurrection of Jesus, it is appropriate to now consider the allegation that Christians have difficulty being objective about the resurrection because of personal bias. This issue is one that the Christian carries so close to his chest that it is reasonable to assume that he cannot honestly assess the facts. We must consider our own motives. Are we merely captives of our own biases? Is it possible that we are driven by our own dreams of an afterlife just so that we can have some sense of peace during this one? Reasonable thinkers must admit that bias is a live factor. Mike Licona, in discussing the Christian conclusion he drew from his research admitted, “I experienced a return to my default position

⁹³ H. W. Fowler & F. G. Fowler, *The Works of Lucian of Samosata: Death of Pelegrine*, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1949), 11-13.

⁹⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 114.

of belief. Still, although I am aware that I cannot overcome my personal bias, I maintain that I can be adequately objective and that my present research is, to the best of my knowledge, an honest investigation of the data.”⁹⁵ As Licona frankly explains, no scholar can completely eradicate his biases when considering any serious subject, but he can work to limit them. So let us now consider the Christian bias.

The Freudian idea that religious beliefs are the product of wish-fulfillment is a charge that may stick to some faiths, but it will not work with Christianity. The idea is that we cannot suffer through this life without some hope that there is more to come. Indeed, this would be horrible. It would lead to the nihilism that we find in the writings of Nietzsche. He is often credited with gallantly claiming a victory for existential atheism, but this is a misconception. Nietzsche, upon arriving at atheism, was horrified by the way it rendered life meaningless. Regarding the passage wherein the claim of God’s death is made, one author points out,

The first thing to notice about this passage is that it is not directed at religious believers but at atheists. It is the atheists who mock the God who isn’t there, and it is the atheists that Nietzsche’s prophet considers to be the real fools. They are fools because they have not come to terms with the meaning of the death of God. They think that they can get rid of God and immortality but hold on to Christian values and Christian morality.⁹⁶

For Nietzsche, this meant that there was no hope for overcoming the reality and imminence of the grave.

Clearly, it would be horrible to live in a world, Nietzsche’s world, without the possibility of everlasting life, but the fact that everlasting life is a

⁹⁵ Mike Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 131.

⁹⁶ Dinesh D’Souza,, *Life after Death*, (New York, NY: Regnery Press, 2009), 205,206.

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wonderful idea does not mean it is not also a fact of reality. This is the first major problem with the charge that Christianity is simply wish-fulfillment. It assumes that just because we would like it to be so, it must not be so. Where is the logic in this? There are many things throughout our lives that we hope will happen that actually do happen. Girls dream of the wonder of their wedding day and the day comes. Men dream of becoming wealthy and they become wealthy. It makes no sense to say that Christianity is false and there is no afterlife simply because we would like it to be the truth. Problems persist, however, for the wish-fulfillment case against Christianity.

If our faith merely developed out of a desire to have our wishes fulfilled, then heaven makes perfect sense. One would expect a fabricated afterlife to be rather heavenly. On the other hand, the wish fulfillment hypothesis makes no sense of the Christian teaching regarding the reality of judgement. How would we be comforted by the possibility that one day we would pass through a doorway into a world of shame, judgement and second death? For this reason, our desires cannot be credited with the creation of the afterlife. Moreover, it would also fail to explain the moral guidelines that we are meant to live by as Christians in this world. If I am running on wish fulfillment, why would I not create a faith that allowed me to indulge in every pleasure of present earthly existence and then have the promise of heaven on top of that? Wish fulfillment simply does not explain the Christian teachings on judgement and obedience.

CORE MOMENT

If Christians just made up their religion then why did they include the possibility of judgement and all the talk of obedience? If early Christians just made it up, it would seem that they would have made all things permissible.

This is already enough reason to doubt the claim that Christians just dreamed it all up, but there is one more issue to consider. Such an idea

ignores the evidence we are offering for the truth claims that we make. We are not saying that Christianity is true because we hope that it is. We are saying that there is good reason to believe that what Jesus taught was factual. The argument that this is simply wish fulfillment just ignores the evidence. I would not want to be in the same boat with Nietzsche, but if he was right and atheism was true, I would be forced to join him in God's funeral dirge. Thankfully, he was wrong. I believe in Christian theism not because I would like it to be true; there are things as a human I wish were different, but I believe because they *are* true.

OBJECTIONS: Jesus APPEARED to Others After His Death

What if Paul fabricated the appearances of Jesus?

Paul claimed in 1 Corinthians 15 that most of those who saw the risen Christ were still living at the time he wrote to the Corinthians. If Paul lied in a claim that was repeated world wide, mentioned specific names of people who saw the risen Lord, and that in one outstanding sociological event Christ revealed himself to five hundred people, shouldn't there be someone who refuted this? Indeed, wouldn't the Jewish leadership that was so opposed to Christianity find Israelites who would deny that a gathering of five hundred ever claimed to have seen such a thing? Wouldn't those whose names Paul mentioned speak out against him? Of the countless manuscripts that support Paul's claims, not one single trustworthy manuscript has ever been located anywhere in the world at any time stating that what Paul said was untrue.

Some might claim, "By the time Paul's letter to the Corinthians was circulated and reproduced those critics would be dead." Yet, this was a world in which verbal communication and written dialogue were paramount to a successful society. N.T. Wright demands, ". . . at a time when many regarded the spoken word as carrying more authority than the written, history as speaking-about-events-in-the-past is not to be sneezed at."⁹⁷ The Hebrews are known for their verbal history. Even today, orthodox Jewish families pass on what they know of the past from one generation to the next with virtually no discrepancies. American men tell their kids they caught a catfish that weighed fifteen pounds and three weeks

⁹⁷ N.T Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 13.

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later it is reported that a catfish the size of a Volkswagen was pulled out of the lake. Hebrews are not like this. They are exact. Even if it could be said that the original critics were dead by the time Paul's letter had gained popularity, the offspring of those critics would have set the record straight. However, this is not likely. Most critics date 1 Corinthians as one of the earliest Pauline letters we have, probably written around 55 AD.

Lee Strobel, in his book, *The Case for Christ*,⁹⁸ explains that the testimony of this many witnesses would be an insurmountable case that the event was true. If each was given just fifteen minutes to give testimony and the court took no recess, it would take at least an entire week to hear each argument. Any jury would love to have that kind of assurance. This lends great weight to the case that the appearances were legitimate.

What if the disciples merely had visions, dreams or hallucinations of Jesus?

Because of the strong evidence for the death and later appearances of Jesus, some researchers have adopted the view that rather than actually encountering the real Jesus, early believers were experiencing some form of mental anomaly. The claim is that an admittedly highly unlikely and unusual event occurred in the New Testament at which multiple individuals experienced similar hallucinations, dreams or visions. This resulted in the mistaken belief on the part of first century Christians that Jesus was indeed raised from the dead. This contention is manifested in a variety of forms. Either early Christians experienced individual hallucinations, group hallucinations or some sort of disorder based on their own grief.

Gerd Ludemann argues that the disciples, including the five

⁹⁸ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 237.

hundred, experienced ecstatic mass hallucinations in which they were all convinced that they had seen Jesus alive because of religious expectation.⁹⁹ The problem with this hypothesis is that religious expectation would not result in a similar hallucination for the individuals of this specific crowd. The differences in their religious backgrounds, including differences from what Jesus taught, would have resulted in a wild variety of differing hallucinations. Moreover, any argument that a given event is merely a hallucination brought on by religious expectation is merely question begging unless the proponent can already demonstrate that the event was false by some other means.

In the cases of Paul, Peter and James, skeptics often argue that a mental phenomenon known as conversion disorder was at play. Conversion disorder is a problem experienced by individuals who have a serious and dramatic onslaught of emotional distress. If, to illustrate, Paul suddenly recognized the horror that he had been persecuting and killing individuals for practicing a strange offshoot of Judaism, he might experience blindness or paralysis (both of which are symptoms of conversion disorder).¹⁰⁰

The problems with this hypothesis are apparent. First, even if one could explain the events of Paul's testimony by appealing to this strange and rare disorder, it would say nothing of the hundreds of others who claimed to have seen the raised Jesus. Second, when Paul describes his former life, we are painted a picture of a guiltless, cavalier crusader.¹⁰¹ That Paul was grief-stricken is narrated nowhere in his writings prior to the

⁹⁹ Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2009), 106,107

¹⁰⁰ Maria Borowski, "Conversion Disorder," (<http://www.med.nyu.edu/content?ChunkIID=96743>) Internet. Accessed on 27 July, 2012.

¹⁰¹ Acts 22:1-5

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events of his conversion itself. With respect to Peter and James, critics are relying on even less evidence. In brief, just because something could have been the case does not mean that it was the case, in fact. This argument is merely *ad hoc*.

CORE MOMENT

The idea that those who claimed to have seen Jesus risen from the dead were all experiencing a hallucination is based on zero evidence. This is an example of stretching as far as you can to avoid having to accept the truth.

What if the resurrection was spiritual rather than physical?

This objection requires some extended and intricate evaluation. The skeptical group of liberal scholarship known as The Jesus Seminar has argued in favor of this position regularly. The view of The Jesus Seminar regarding the resurrection of Jesus is primarily that if it occurred, it was metaphorical rather than physical in nature. That is to say that various scholars within the Seminar do not view the resurrection as having occurred in any sense, but no scholar seems to affirm that the resurrection was physical in nature. This becomes blatant when reading what Jesus Seminar founder, Robert Funk, claims about the body of Jesus, “His body may have been left to rot on the cross, to become carrion for dogs and crows. What we have come to call the resurrection (by a kind of theological short-hand) is nowhere narrated directly except in the highly imaginative account in the Gospel of Peter.”¹⁰² Clearly Funk denies a bodily resurrection, but what of his compatriots? Other figures among the most well known in the Seminar have made similar claims which narrow the

¹⁰² Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millenium*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1997), 219.

scope of what the resurrection could have been. Marcus Borg,¹⁰³ John Dominic Crossan,¹⁰⁴ Gerd Ludemann,¹⁰⁵ and Robert Price¹⁰⁶ all claim that when one observes the evidence regarding the historical Jesus, only naturalism appears on the surface. While many of them urge Christians that this does not rob the faith of the meaning of the resurrection, they do agree as a Seminar that it is not the bodily resurrection of orthodox Christianity. Undeniably this is a bold claim.

As they promote their view, The Jesus Seminar makes a case for the non-physicality of the resurrection by appealing to Scripture and historiographical precedence. Not only do the fellows envision a *prima facie* naturalistic Easter account, but they claim that Paul even understood the resurrected body of Jesus to be ethereal and spiritual rather than physical. In discussing Paul's words, Crossan and Borg write, "First he says there are many kinds of bodies (1 Cor. 15:38-41) Then, in a series of contrasts, he writes about the differences between physical bodies and resurrected bodies. . . . The resurrected body, including the body of Jesus, is a spiritual body."¹⁰⁷

Conversely, conservative evangelicals maintain the belief that the resurrection was indeed bodily in nature. Offering an apologetic in favor of

¹⁰³ Marcus Borg; John Dominic Crossan, *The First Paul*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne 1st edition, 2009), 151.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Christ a Historical Inquiry*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2009), 189.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Price, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2003), 336.

¹⁰⁷ Marcus Borg; John Dominic Crossan *The First Paul*. (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne 1st edition, 2009), 151.

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the orthodox view, proponents of this position argue for the bodily resurrection of Jesus and the likewise future bodily resurrection of the saints by demonstrating that a proper hermeneutic and understanding of history leads one to the conclusion that the resurrection was physical. The specific arguments that bear this out will follow. Nevertheless, the manner in which apologists such as Gary Habermas present their defenses demonstrates that they are self-consciously aware of the assertions of The Jesus Seminar. That is to say, even when not debating with Jesus Seminar fellows, the arguments involve concessions made by the Seminar.

Habermas has become known for his minimal facts argument in favor of the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁰⁸ He crafts the argument in such a way that each fact is accepted by the majority of New Testament scholars including The Jesus Seminar. Most importantly, 1 Corinthians 15: 3b-5 is the launch pad from which Habermas begins and it is precisely the vital resurrection passage permitted by The Jesus Seminar as authentic in their book, *“The Five Gospels.”* Therein the Seminar confesses, “The earliest version of the oral gospel preserved for us in written record is the ‘gospel’ Paul reports in 1 Cor 15:3-5.”¹⁰⁹ With such an approach in mind, Christian apologists have recently sought to build a case for the bodily resurrection on the basis of only those passages granted by the Seminar, therefore, bypassing much of the debate. Moreover, conservative scholars maintain that viewing the resurrection as merely spiritual or metaphorical would not account for the change in and background of Jewish belief.

It should be said that there are those in the Seminar who would

¹⁰⁸ Gary Habermas, & Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI:Kregel Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁹ Robert Funk & The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, (San Francisco, CA: Polebridge Press, 1993), 24.

tread so far as to claim that Jesus may have never existed even as a mere human.¹¹⁰ There are those in the conservative camp who claim that we can prove the bodily resurrection to almost a certainty. Norman Geisler claims, “Unlike most other religious worldviews, Christianity is built on historical events and can therefore be either proven or falsified by historical investigation. The problem for all the skeptics and critics is that all the evidence points toward the resurrection.”¹¹¹ Yet, these are extremes indeed. They are mentioned because they place a magnifier on the matter. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to conclude that these scholars are too accommodating. The disagreement is fierce. This may be in part because of their backgrounds.

One may wonder, “Why is there so much disagreement on issues as seemingly uncontroversial as how to do historical inquiry?” Taking a look at the guiding principles of The Jesus Seminar and those who oppose them may provide some light on their reasoning. In *The Five Gospels*, the Seminar provides some insight into the decision making process which they employed. A firestorm of controversy developed when these principles were originally published.

Regarding the very “first pillar of scholarly wisdom” set forth as a guiding principle in culling away material which does not reflect the true Jesus of history, is to make a bifurcation between the Jesus of fact and the Jesus of faith. To articulate which items the Seminar recognizes as false, it credits the idea of David Friedrich Strauss that one should disregard, “. . . the ‘mythical’ (defined by him as anything legendary or

¹¹⁰ Robert Price, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2003), 336.

¹¹¹ Norman Geisler; Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 374.

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supernatural). . .”¹¹² In this way the fellows hoped to successfully remove the fictitious ideas about Jesus that were incorporated into the gospels by later followers who, upon reflection, mythologized and romanticized the story. For a prime example of such embellishment, the group would direct readers to the obviously fabricated Jesus of the fourth gospel (The Gospel of John). Furthermore, the rejection of John constitutes their second pillar. It is their contention that John presents a thoroughly “spiritual” Jesus not found in the proper reading of the earlier synoptic gospels.¹¹³ Little is given by way of a basis for the first pillar, save the implied validity of Strauss’ work for further reading, other than that it appears to be a bare assertion.

With respect to the second pillar, it is argued that the oral tradition will clearly be earlier and thus the Gospel of John normally dated, at the earliest, to the end of the first century would not have been directly based upon them. Moreover, the second pillar seems to be somewhat established on the basis of the first in that it contains a thoroughly “spiritual” Jesus. Conservative scholars wasted no time in responding to this, and still continue to articulate what they see as glaring difficulties with these first two pillars.

Responding to the first pillar, William Lane Craig demands, “Now this presupposition constitutes an absolute watershed for the study of the gospels. If you presuppose naturalism, then things like the incarnation, the Virgin Birth, Jesus’ miracles, and his resurrection go out the window before you even sit down at the table to look at the evidence. . . In other words, skepticism about the gospels is not based on history, but on the

¹¹² Robert Funk & The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, (San Fransisco, CA: Polebridge Press, 1993), 3.

¹¹³ Ibid.

presupposition of naturalism.”¹¹⁴ Gary Habermas echoes this concern and points out the ramifications that this has for the resurrection. Besides the obvious result that the resurrection couldn’t have been a physical reanimation of the corpse of Jesus, The Jesus Seminar does not affirm any material from the resurrection narratives.¹¹⁵ It would seem that the opponents of The Jesus Seminar would recognize this as a major bias in their project.

Eminent New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright, who has repeatedly responded to the Seminar (specifically Crossan), explains how he views this bias affecting their work on the Gospel of John, “But here we see quite sharply, what we shall observe in more detail presently: the Seminar’s method has not been to examine each saying all by itself and decide about it, but to start with a fairly clear picture of Jesus and early Christianity, and simply run through the material imposing this picture on the texts.”¹¹⁶ According to Wright, the approach would have otherwise resembled a case by case examination of the words of Jesus rather than a wholesale rejection of what seems to conflict with a naturalistic understanding. Nevertheless, this discussion may beg the question, “Do these comments betray some unfounded presuppositions on the part of the conservative apologists?”

The Jesus Seminar makes no official defense of their claims that the “Jesus of faith” (the supernatural Jesus) should be rejected. However, they do claim, in stating their seventh pillar, that the burden of proof is now firmly on the part of those who posit such a Jesus. In this scientific age,

¹¹⁴ William Lane Craig, *Rediscovering the Historical Jesus: The Presuppositions and Presumptions of The Jesus Seminar*, (Faith and Mission, 15 1998), 3-15.

¹¹⁵ Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), 123.

¹¹⁶ N.T. Wright, *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans. (Boston, MA: Brill Press, 2002), 83–120.

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the believer in the miraculous must demonstrate that the miraculous exists, or at the very least existed with respect to Jesus. Perhaps it is the case that the presupposition of naturalism on the part of The Jesus Seminar is no worse a sin than the apparent presupposition of the miraculous on the part of conservative scholars.

In response to this, Michael Licona demands that whether or not the historian (because he is not doing theology) is allowed to come to a theological conclusion, he must be allowed to consider the possibility of the miraculous if it is the most plausible explanation available. If it is the case that a divine miracle has occurred, then excluding it as an option *a priori* negates the possibility of a successful account of the actual historical events. He claims, “If the resurrection of Jesus was an event that occurred, in history, those who refuse the historian the right to investigate it or who *a priori* exclude miracles as a possible answer could actually be placing themselves in a position where they cannot appraise history accurately.”¹¹⁷ This seems to be the position taken by conservatives in a general sense. Moreover, such scholars, whether the burden of proof is theirs or not, do attempt to respond to the challenges faced by them using biblical and historiographical argumentation, the former of which will be discussed below. However, the biases which may exist are clear.

On the one hand, The Jesus Seminar admittedly begins with an assertion which is, if not exactly, very similar to naturalism. This drives their operations to an end which is not unsurprising. Is it circular reasoning to begin in such a way and then conclude that nothing supernatural is true of the Jesus of orthodox Christianity? For Licona, Craig, and Habermas it certainly seems to be. Moreover, this philosophy seems to have a trickle-

¹¹⁷ Mike Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 198.

down effect on other guiding principles. As Habermas has stated, the discussion of John's Gospel is compromised from the outset because of this. Rather than a case-by-case approach to the sayings of Jesus, the bias against the supernatural has removed the very possibility that the author of John would receive a fair hearing. Conversely, these same apologists must face the taxing challenge of demonstrating that their belief in the miraculous is not a similar, albeit, antithetical bias.

The biblical data accepted as early authentic Christian material by both sides seems to be a reasonable measuring stick for determining whether the resurrection was a supernatural physiological raising of the dead or a mere meaningful metaphor. This places highly limiting parameters on the discussion since The Jesus Seminar has eliminated almost all resurrection material from the canon. Still, this limitation may serve as an asset for expediting the discussion. Thus, attention may now be paid to the teaching of the remaining resurrection account validated as an early oral creed of the Christian church.

As already stated above, the Seminar could not deny that the statements of 1 Corinthians 15:3-5b represent an early creedal statement which dates back to only a short time after the Easter events. The only remaining question is, "What did early believers mean by this?" Fellows of the Seminar have been quite outspoken on this issue.

Seminar fellow, Marcus Borg, provides four reasons why he believes that the resurrection mentioned in this passage is simply a metaphor. Namely, Paul makes no mention of the empty tomb, the verb translated "appeared" is often used in the New Testament in conjunction with visions, and Paul later claims that the resurrection body will be to regular bodies as plants are to the seeds from which they grow. He then concludes his discussion of the passage with a claim about verse fourteen. He asserts,

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“Verse 14 is often cited by our fundamentalist brothers and sisters in support of the absolute centrality of a physical resurrection. . . but the verse is found in a chapter that strongly suggests that the resurrection body is not a physical body.”¹¹⁸ These are serious challenges.

In evaluating these four contentions, the first point would turn out to be irrelevant if it is the case that the resurrection was bodily. That is to say, if he was dead, buried and then physically seen by others, then it goes without saying that there was an empty tomb. N.T. Wright makes the point, “The fact that the empty tomb itself, so prominent in the gospel accounts, does not appear to be specifically mentioned in this passage is not significant; the mention here of ‘buried then raised’ no more needs to be amplified in that way than one would need to amplify ‘I walked down the street’ with the qualification, ‘on my feet.’”¹¹⁹ Point number two is irrelevant in that one cannot import the way other New Testament authors used a word and assume that Paul meant it in the same way. His third claim seems to be a straw-man argument in that orthodox Christianity does not claim that the body of Jesus is exactly the same as it was prior to death. If nothing else, Jesus’ resurrection body is immortal. Lastly, Borg’s comment on verse fourteen relies on the truth of his first point which he is attempting to demonstrate, in part by the fourth point itself, rendering the argument circular. With respect to this debate, it would seem that the liberal scholar’s argument will not stand. Yet, Borg is not the only critic of the orthodox position.

In making a case that the author of Mark fabricated the discovery

¹¹⁸ Marcus Borg; N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus*. HarperCollins, (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2007), 132,133.

¹¹⁹ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 321.

of the empty tomb by a group of Jesus' women followers, John Dominic Crossan cites the creedal statement recorded by Paul as evidence that the empty tomb was not initially taught.¹²⁰ As already demonstrated by Wright, this speaks not to the emptiness of the tomb. Yet, it is noteworthy that Crossan seems to hold that by the supposed manufacturing of the story of the women by the author of Mark, the actuality of the empty tomb is rendered less probable. First, this is based upon the claim of the Jesus Seminar that the resurrection narratives are not reliable, which is likewise based upon the *ad hoc* assertion that such narratives be removed because they imply the miraculous. Secondly, there is enough internal evidence in the creedal statement to demonstrate that it was referring to a physical resurrection, according to Kirk MacGregor.

MacGregor finds the teaching of 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 to teach bodily, physical resurrection for at least one glaring reason. He claims that the Greek verb translated "raised" denotes this. He says, "Quite significantly, the verb εγείρω (lexical form of ἐγήγερται) means 'to cause to stand up from a lying or reclining position with the implication of some degree of previous incapacity.'"¹²¹ He further argues that if the physical body of Jesus was raised and then the creed immediately refers to the appearances with no intermediate qualifier, one can only surmise that what was raised (the physical body of Jesus) was what was seen. On the basis of 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, therefore, it is difficult to accept anything but a bodily resurrected Jesus.

The Jesus Seminar has allowed for very little resurrection data from

¹²⁰ John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne 1st ed., 1999), 551.

¹²¹ Kirk R MacGregor, *1 Corinthians 15:3b-6a,7 and the bodily resurrection of Jesus*, (Journal of the evangelical theological society, 49 no 2, Je 2006), 230,231.

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Christian Scripture. Yet, with what it has granted, conservative scholars have convincingly developed a case for the resurrection based on proper biblical interpretation. Thus, from the biblical data one would be justified in accepting the position of these conservative evangelicals. It appears that according to the Bible, as approved by The Jesus Seminar, the earliest Christians held to a bodily resurrection. This means that the appearances must be understood as physical appearances.

CORE MOMENT

Give your brain a rest. Beginners don't need to know all the ins and outs of what was just explained. I only included it because the bodily resurrection is so central to evangelical Christian belief.

OBJECTIONS: The Disciples Were COMMITTED

How do we know that early Christians died for their beliefs?

This contention is an attempt to undercut the claim that the disciples (or early Christians) were committed even to the point of death. However, this is a misunderstanding of the claim. Though a historian would be hard-pressed to deny that Christians were martyred for what they believed, the case that we make for “C” hinges on the truth that these believers were *willing* to die for their belief. This may seem like a subtle difference, but we are able to conclude that members of the church were willing to die for what they believed. In chapter five, I cited Cornelius Tacitus’ assertion that Nero blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome. This alone demonstrates their persecution. Moreover, these persecutions are so well documented in¹²² and outside¹²³ of the Bible that the greater burden of proof would be on a skeptic to show that they did not occur. Lastly, in chapter seven, we took a look at Sean McDowell’s investigation into the deaths of the apostles. We can have high confidence that at least some apostles were likely martyred.

¹²² Acts 7:59,60, Acts 8:1-4, Acts 12:1,2,

¹²³ Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, (Book XX Chapter Nine., Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*).

OBJECTIONS: *The TESTIMONY About Jesus*

Don't extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence?

As an actual avoidance of the arguments, some skeptics demand that the resurrection simply will not do as an explanation of the evidence merely because the claims are so outlandish. The belief in the resurrection is so extraordinary that it must require evidence that is similarly extraordinary. Such an objection sounds appealing but falls short of a refutation for several reasons. One problem with this kind of criticism is that it relies on a completely subjective new standard. Who is to say that an extraordinary claim requires extraordinary evidence? Worse still, who is to say what counts as an extraordinary claim? After all, for a theist, the claim of the resurrection is not nearly as extraordinary as it is for an atheist. If God exists as the creator of the entire space-time universe, then the idea that he could raise Jesus from the dead is entirely reasonable. Moreover, the bare-bones claim of the Christian apologist is that Jesus was dead for three days, then alive again. It is not extraordinary to claim that someone is dead. No one would see the claim that a person is alive as extraordinary either. What they find difficult to believe is how this state of affairs came about. Yet, if both of these simple claims can be demonstrated and defended, then it seems Christians have all the evidence they need to determine that Christ was raised, whether skeptics like this idea or not.

OBJECTIONS: *Jesus Offers Salvation*

Why Should I Make the Commitment?

Despite the fact that his teachings are not politically correct, the divine Son of God should be regarded as the greatest purveyor of truth imaginable. He personally taught that he was the only way to experience God,¹²⁴ that in order to have this experience one must be born again,¹²⁵ and that apart from this, one will experience a very real separation from God.¹²⁶ Naturally, there have been many who have committed their lives to the truth of the Christian message initially so that they could be “saved” from a future judgement. However, genuine believers quickly come to realize the joy of a relationship with God. This union is the greatest reason to embrace Jesus’ sacrifice.

Why did Jesus Need to Die?

God’s nature is one of justice. This cannot be changed anymore than a human can change the fact that he has a nature that is human. Thus, God must act justly. The problem is that when men and women commit sins they are sinning against an everlasting God. This means that the only just punishment for sin is an everlasting punishment. Unbelievers often criticize the faith because they feel that doctrines like this sound made up. However, all of us have an innate understanding of justice that bares this out.

¹²⁴ John 14:6

¹²⁵ John 3:3

¹²⁶ Luke 12:5, Mark 9:42-50, Matt. 10:28

CORE FACTS

Imagine the case of a man who kills his neighbor's pet cat. What is the just punishment for this. The man may have to pay a fine of some kind. Depending on where the event takes place, the penalty may be more serious. However, there is usually some kind of legal consequence for "sinning" against a cat, so to speak. Yet, what if the same man instead killed his human neighbor? There is a more hefty penalty for this. Based on the circumstances, he may be sent to prison for the rest of his life. He may end up receiving capital punishment. In other words, there is a much more serious legal consequence for "sinning" against another person. The reason for this is that we recognize a higher value for human life than we do for animal life. For most people, this seems to be the *just* response. The offender must pay for the crime of ending a life with much or all of his own life. Following this vein, imagine the just penalty for sinning against an everlasting God. If we continue to follow the innate sense of justice that led us to the understanding of the difference between "sinning" against an animal versus "sinning" against a man, then it should be clear that the penalty for sinning against God must be an everlasting penalty because of his everlasting nature. If God must act justly, because justice is a part of his nature, then he must allow sinners to receive this penalty in full.

The only way that such a penalty can be satisfied without condemning mankind to judgement, is if an everlasting person could pay it for us. However, the only everlasting person capable of this is God himself. For this reason, God was loving enough to become a man himself and pay the penalty for the sin of human kind. Understood in this way, the atoning death of Jesus makes sense philosophically.

CORE MOMENT

Because God is just, he must punish sin justly. The just penalty for sinning against an everlasting God is an everlasting one. There is only one everlasting person. That person is God. So, God was the only one who could pay the everlasting penalty for the sin of man.

What Must I Do?

It is not about doing something. The point of the message is what Jesus has done for you. However, Scripture explains that individuals who want to engage in a relationship with Jesus, and be sure of their salvation, will believe in Jesus, repent of their life of sin, and commit to live a life that testifies to this fact. It is appropriate to then follow the tradition and command of Jesus to be baptized as even he was and begin attending a group of likeminded believers in order that Christians can support each other and learn to become students of the Scriptures.¹²⁷ Moreover, those who accept this life will want to share the truth of this message with others. This is what it means to live the Christian life.

¹²⁷ Matthew 28:19,20.

APPENDIX A

CONVERSATIONAL EVIDENCES FOR THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIAN THEISM

In order to offer readers a more robust explanation of Christian defense, it is sometimes appropriate to discuss items other than those covered by the theistic and resurrection arguments. While those cases I believe are the strongest ones that can be made for the truth of Christianity, there are other facts about the nature of reality that tend to implicate the truth of the faith. Rather than attempting to put forth clinching philosophical arguments, some apologists will simply point out these facts about reality that may count as evidence for the truth of the Christian worldview. It would not be possible to cover all of the evidences that one could imagine. Nevertheless, what follows is a discussion of some of the types of facts used by these defenders so that readers can gain a sense of how to do a more conversational form of apologetics. Objections will not be given a great deal of consideration in this appendix. After all, these apologists do not necessarily maintain that their cases can be defended tooth and nail as do the proponents of other methods. The strength of the approach is not meant to be found in the defense of any individual evidence but in the weight of the totality of evidence.

A word should be said with regard to the difference between the terms “argument” and “evidence.” As I use the term, an argument is a formal presentation of reasoning which leads to a valid conclusion. An evidence, however, may simply be a single piece of data that requires explanation. For example, the ORDER argument of chapter two includes premises and a conclusion. However, the fact that human DNA is a highly

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complex blueprint of life, is a piece of evidence that needs to be explained. It is a piece of evidence that is often used in the ORDER argument, but is itself just a piece of data. C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S. apologists will setup their arguments and then begin mounting up evidence in support of each premise. In a conversational method apologists will, instead, mention the complexity and then point out that the complexity is best explained by a designer. It should be clear that there is a difference in formality between the two apologists, but they are aiming at the same target. If a conversational apologist makes a formal case in favor of his position, then he is using an argument. Conversely, if he is merely pointing out facts about the nature of reality, he is simply supplying evidence. It is, of course, usually true that what the conversational apologist is trying to say could be framed as an argument, but the real difference is in the methodology. Rather than formally making a case he is usually simply supplying evidence in a *conversational* way.

It is for this reason that I use the term *conversational* for this type of defense. The ideal setting for a conversational method, as far as I am concerned, is not on a platform in a formal debate. Rather, it is on a park bench, at a coffee shop, in the parking lot of a theater, or in homeroom. Whenever and wherever facts are presented or stories are told, an apologist can point out how the subject at hand counts as evidence for the truth of the Christian message. As G.K. Chesterton wrote in *The Daily News*,

You cannot evade the issue of God; whether you talk about pigs or the binomial theory, you are still talking about Him.... Things can be irrelevant to the proposition that Christianity is false, but nothing can be irrelevant to the proposition that Christianity is true. Zulus, gardening, butcher's shops, lunatic asylums, housemaids and the French Revolution — all these things not only may have something to do with the Christian God, but must have something to do with Him if He really lives and

reigns.¹²⁸

Thus, evidences often emerge in common places. It is because of this that the methodology is flexible.

Evidences for God's Existence

Freewill

One of the common evidences used in this approach is the perceived reality of free will. By free will I mean the idea that man has the actual ability to choose between two options. Typically, what is being referred to is known as libertarian free will in which an individual has freedom to make a non-determined choice. He may be influenced by outside factors but not to the point of coercion. This is, of course, the antithesis of determinism wherein all of man's choices are determined by the chemistry of his body, his past personal subjective experience, and little else. A type of determinism that incorporates the idea of human freedom is called compatibilism. On compatibilism, man has freedom to do what he wants, but has no control over his desires. His desires, however, are what determine his actions. The term compatibilism is applied because the idea is that the existence of man's free will is compatible with the existence of some soft determinism over his desires. Nevertheless, it would seem that the type of free will that the cumulative case apologist is referring to is the commonly understood meaning of the term free will. It is libertarian free will.

Most individuals will not find anything all that impressive about the fact of free will, but this is precisely the point. Most people already accept

¹²⁸ G.K. Chesterton, (*The Daily News*, December, 1903).

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that they experience genuine freedom to make real choices. What the apologist wants to say is that free will is best explained by the existence of God. It may not seem immediately clear, why this is the case, but at further investigation God's existence is the only live option. If naturalism is true, and by this I mean the natural universe is all that exists, then determinism is simply a fact of life. No one has the ability to make real choices, because whether or not they are aware of it, they are merely responding to the impulses, triggers and stimuli which have subtly nudged them toward each "decision." In the end, all events, whether caused by man or by the wind, are like a train of falling dominoes. No choice exists.

Conversely, if one is convinced that real choices do exist, then there must be a God who provided man with a special supernatural ability to make actual creative choices. The existence of free will is not as much something that is argued for by the conversational apologist as it is perceived. For this reason, the skeptic could conceivably deny that free will does exist. However, the apologist has set forth a piece of evidence for consideration that will be appealing to many.

Religious experience

Another piece of data that requires explanation is the fact that hundreds of millions of people throughout the history of the world have claimed to have experienced an obvious encounter with God. Whether in terms of a vision, prayerful communication or actual sensory contact, many humans seem to be absolutely convinced that God has connected with them in a real way. How can this be best explained? One might posit wish-fulfillment, delusion, the power of suggestion, or a misinterpretation of the believer's conscious experience, but these would seem to be a stretch.

The simplest and most obvious explanation is that many people have, indeed, had experiences of God.

In chapter four, I mentioned that this is not really a robust argument, but that makes it perfect as a piece of evidence for the conversational approach. If 99 people in a village claim to have met a particular man (*person Q*), and only one individual (*person S*) claims that *person Q* does not exist, which is the more likely to be true? Should we believe that 99 villagers are wrong about the existence of *person Q*, or is it more reasonable to assume that *person S* is mistaken? *Person S* might demand that *person Q* does not exist because he has never seen him, heard his voice or met him at all. However, no thinking person would accept that *person S* is correct about *person Q* on the basis of this evidence. If 99 people claimed to have met *person Q*, and could tell powerful stories of experiences they have had with him, then it stands to reason that *person S* is merely overly skeptical.

Furthermore, of all the multitudes of people throughout human history who believed they had experienced God, if only one of them was correct, then he does exist. The same can be said of those who feel they have personally come to know Jesus Christ. Conversely, it is not true that if only one of them is wrong, then God does not exist. A similar analogy can make this point clearer. Instead of a village, let's consider the island of Nassau in the Bahamas.

Imagine a situation wherein many people claimed that Nassau did not exist. However, there were millions of people who claimed to have set foot on Nassau, but were mistaken. Maybe they had indeed been to other islands that they mistook for Nassau. One man, though, had indeed been to the actual island of Nassau and declared it to the world. He would be among the throngs who claimed to have walked the beaches of the place,

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but as long as he is indeed correct, then Nassau's existence is sure. Even if all other Nassau believers were wrong, his presence there would mean it was certain.

The evidence of religious experience is perhaps best explained by a theistic worldview. With the prominence of Christianity, it could be said that religious experience is best explained by biblical theism. After all, the three largest monotheistic religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Jews and Christians claim to be serving the God of the Old Testament. This means that two of the world's three largest monotheisms claim the same God. In fact, Islam sees itself as coming after Judaism and Christianity. Though we would deny that our understanding of God is consistent with Islam's understanding of Allah, Muslims claim to be worshipping the God of Abraham. Thus, all of the three largest monotheistic religions say they are focused on the God of the Old Testament. What I am not saying is that Islam is somehow true. Nor do I mean to say that I, in any sense, believe that Christians and Jews worship the same God that Muslims worship. What I am saying is that because the largest monotheistic religions in the world all point to the God of Abraham as their God, the vast majority of religious experiences claimed by monotheists are not just evidence for some generic philosopher's god but the God described by the Old Testament.

To be sure, there are criticisms that can be leveled against this explanation. On the surface, this strikes hearers as an example of the *ad populum* fallacy. That is to say, it sounds like the claim that something is true because many people adhere to it. It, like the other evidences in a conversational cumulative case approach, is just one piece of data that seems to lend favor to Christianity. There may be reasonable objections to this explanation of religious experience. For the advocate of this approach,

however, it represents one more item that will help tip the scales in favor of the Christian worldview.

Consciousness

Current apologists, such as J.P. Moreland, have drafted formal arguments for God's existence on the basis of consciousness. However, for this approach, the human consciousness can be cited as an evidence in favor of the existence of the supernatural. As with the free will evidence, this issue is one that is perceived more than inferred. It seems obvious to most individuals that they have a subjective conscious experience of the world. This is an evidence against naturalism.

Most people are aware that they are not synonymous with their physical bodies. The way we talk and think about these earthen vessels demonstrates that we see ourselves as inhabiting but not being the same as them. If, for instance, we saw the human body as being synonymous with personhood, then an amputee would necessarily be less of a person. The same would be true of a physically smaller individual. Yet, we don't think of an infant as being less important, human or whole than an adult with larger stature or wider stance. Such would be ridiculous. However, if naturalism is true, then the human body *is* the person. What a man experiences as consciousness is merely the result of neurons firing in an intricate pattern. The truth of such a view would necessitate that we are little more than highly advanced computer software programs. There is no identifiable "self." There is only the machine. Average individuals will recognize this as surely false. Via perception, they simply know the truth. After all, if we were just highly advanced computers, then would we not lack consciousness? However, this does not explain why the existence of an

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intangible “self” would necessitate the falsity of naturalism.

Those who demand that there is an intangible self, are known as “substance dualists.” They believe that man has both a physical body and an immaterial mind. Thus, he has two substances. Most models of substance dualism grant that the mind functions in the world via the physical body, but it is not synonymous with the material construct. If substance dualism is true, then it means that there is a supernatural “substance” of which the mind is a part. Because most individuals grant that they are not synonymous with their bodies, they unknowingly affirm substance dualism, including the existence of the supernatural realm.

Beauty

If God exists as the creator of the natural universe, then one might expect that the universe would be a basically beautiful one. While there are certainly features of the universe which one might rightly define as unattractive, ugly, or unpleasing to the senses, the overarching picture of the world is one that is intrinsically and amply ravishing. This amounts to a piece of data that requires explanation. If there were no God, then one might assume that the universe would be an unorganized, senselessly and unappealing conglomerate of material and color. Yet, as philosopher Richard Swinburne puts it,

And finally, of course, God has reason to create a beautiful inanimate world - that is, a beautiful physical universe. Whatever God creates will be a good product; and so any universe he creates will be beautiful, as are humans and animals. Consider the stars and planets moving in orderly ways, and plants growing from seed into colorful flowers and reproducing themselves. Even if no one apart from God sees such a world, it is good that it exists.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 121.

To put it a bit differently, if we had no sample universe from which to make a judgment call, it might be reasonable to imagine that a universe without a designer (as if such a thing were possible) would be a universe with only occasional and incidental beauty. Contrarily, we would imagine a designer would fill his universe with intentionally beautiful features. When one considers the absolute majesty of the actual universe, the most likely explanation is that there is a majestic artist by whom it was created.

Near-death experiences

Though there is much eye-rolling at the mention of this phenomena, the fact that many individuals have demonstrated what might rightly be called supernatural events at times in which their bodies were slipping off into death is worth considering. It is precisely the sort of evidence that fits within a conversational approach. Consider the data.

According to a 1982 Gallop poll “. . . five percent of the general population in the United States had undergone a near-death experience. That was around eight million people then; now five percent is closer to fifteen million.”¹³⁰ This alone should be reason enough to give such accounts a second look. Many of these meet the requirements we laid out above. One example is the research done in 1998 involving congenitally blind patients who were able to see for the first time during their near-death experience.¹³¹ Just imagine. These individuals were born blind, but for the

¹³⁰ P.M.H Atwater, *The Big Book of Near-Death Experiences*, (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2007), 9.

¹³¹ ,Janice Miner Holden & Bruce Greyson, *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences*, (Santa Brarbara, CA: Praeger, 2009), 120

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first time were able to describe the images of the world that seem so common to everyone else. Regarding the same study, Dinesh D'souza explains, “. . . They could give detailed descriptions of their medical procedures and even identify the jewelry and the colors of clothing of people around them.”¹³² This evidence is so hard to ignore because it was documented by professionals shortly after resuscitation, is not inconsistent and is testable. How were these individuals able to see if their physical eyesight was impaired? Could it be that they saw without the aid of their bodies because they were momentarily free of them?

Perhaps the most well-known work ever published on the subject of these experiences is the bestselling *Life after Life*¹³³ by Raymond Moody, MD. In it he lays out several commonalities of most near-death stories. Not every scenario contains all of these elements. Nevertheless, they are the most regular:

- Ineffability, beyond the limits of any language to describe
- Hearing yourself pronounced dead
- Feelings of peace and quiet
- Hearing unusual noises
- Seeing a dark tunnel
- Finding yourself outside your body
- Meeting “spiritual beings”
- A very bright light experienced as a “being of light”
- A panoramic life review
- Sensing a border or limit to where you can go
- Coming back into your body

¹³² Dinesh D'Souza, *Life after Death*, (New York, NY: Regnery Press, 2009), 64.

¹³³ Raymond Moody, *Life After Life*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2001).

- Frustrating attempts to tell others about what happened to you
- Subtle “broadening and deepening” of your life afterward
- Elimination of fear of death
- Corroboration of events witnessed while out of your body
- A realm where all knowledge exists
- Cities of light¹³⁴

The existence of the New Testament

The fact that the faith of the early church resulted in the production and collection of the books of the New Testament, and that we have these documents in the 21st century is evidence that counts in favor of the reliability of those books. If these works were historically flawed, philosophically unsound, in indisputable conflict with each other or contained obviously fabricated stories, then they would have likely been discarded long ago. They have undergone serious scrutiny for centuries. Nevertheless, new generations of biblical scholars and historians are converted every decade.

The existence of the church

If the resurrection did not occur, then why is it that reasonable people devote their lives to the truth claims of Christianity? The central teaching of the church is the resurrection of Jesus. Absent of the resurrection, it makes no sense that educated individuals in the 21st century, let alone the 1st century, would have devoted their lives to the church. This is similar to the argument from religious experience. However, this fact

¹³⁴ P.M.H Atwater, *The Big Book of Near-Death Experiences*, (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2007), 10.

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pushes the case beyond God's existence to the divinity of Jesus as Christ.

Conclusion

What is provided in this chapter is merely a snapshot of some of the pieces of data that may comprise a conversational approach to Christian apologetics. The method differs in very important ways from other methodologies in the field, but the goal is the same. Providing evangelicals with the means to incorporate apologetics into their evangelistic endeavors is vital, and the conversational method is yet another tool in the belt of the modern believer.

APPENDIX B

AN EASY REFERENCE OUTLINE OF THE C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S.

CAUSE - The universe had a CAUSE.

- Everything that begins to exist must have a CAUSE for its existence.
- The universe began to exist, therefore;
- The universe must have a CAUSE for its existence.

The universe involves three things: TIME, SPACE and MATTER/ENERGY.

- Whatever CAUSED the universe must then be ETERNAL, SPACELESS and NON-MATERIAL.

Nothing exists that meets these requirements and can do anything

except

“God.”

ORDER - The universe has ORDER.

- It happened by chance, or there is a designer.
- It didn't happen by chance.
- There must have been a designer.

RULES - The universe has RULES.

- If objective (real) moral RULES exist, then God exists as their foundation.
- Objective RULES do exist, therefore;
- God exists.

EXPERIENCE - People can have an EXPERIENCE of God.

- Every culture in history has believed EXPERIENCES of God happen.
- You can EXPERIENCE God right now.

FATALITY - The crucifixion of Jesus was FATAL.

- Roman soldiers were expert killers.
- Scholars agree that Jesus died on the cross.

APPEARED - Jesus APPEARED to others after his death.

- People were claiming he had APPEARED from the start.
- Scholars admit that people thought Jesus had APPEARED to them.

COMMITTED - The disciples were COMMITTED to the point of death.

- People will live for a lie, but they will not die for a lie.
- The disciples were willing to die for their belief in the resurrection.
- They would have known if it was a lie.

TESTIMONY - The TESTIMONY of man is that Jesus was raised.

- Scholars agree on the facts about the resurrection mentioned above.
- The gospel TESTIMONY is that Jesus was raised.
- The TESTIMONY of the early church is that Jesus was raised.

SALVATION - Jesus offers SALVATION.

- Based on the C.O.R.E. F.A.C.T.S., God exists and Jesus was raised.
- Jesus died for the sin of the world.
- The most reasonable thing to do is accept Jesus right now.

