

Reasonable Faith Study Questions

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PREFACE

The Preface of a book is often skipped; but in the case of Reasonable Faith, there is some helpful information that you don't want to miss.

1. What two approaches to the subject of Apologetics does *Reasonable Faith* not address? (12)
 1. History of Apologetics – But reading Avery Dulles' book by the same name is highly recommended.
 2. Evangelical Apologetic Systems - But recommend reading Boa and Bowman's book, "Faith Has Its Reasons."

Avery Dulles, the author of A History of Apologetics, recently wrote an article that describes the revival of Christian Apologetics occurring today. Dulles, a Catholic Cardinal and Professor of Religion and Society at Fordham University, says, "All over the United States there are signs of a revival. Evangelical Protestants are taking the lead . . . And their method succeeds. The churches that combine a concern for orthodoxy with vigorous Apologetics are growing. Their seminaries attract large numbers of enthusiastic students."¹ Praise the Lord!

With respect to evangelical apologetic systems, recommended is Five Views on Apologetics, edited by Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000), which contrasts "classical", "evidential", "Reformed", "presuppositional", and "cumulative case" approaches to Apologetics.

2. How is *Reasonable Faith* structured? (12) What were the *loci communes*? (12)
 - **Loci Communes: "Common Places", the chief themes of post-Reformation Protestant theology. The common places are:**
 - Doctrine of Scripture (*De scriptural sacri*)
 - Doctrine of Creation (*De creatione*)
 - Doctrine of Sin (*De peccato*)
 - Christology (*De Christo*)
 - Soteriology (*De gratia*)
 - Ecclesiology (*De ecclesia*)
 - Eschatology (*De novissimus*)

¹. Avery Cardinal Dulles, "The Rebirth of Apologetics," *First Things* (May 2004), p. 20.

Reasonable Faith

*Christian Truth
and Apologetics*

Study Questions

3. What four divisions does each chapter of the book include? (13)
 - Historical information and how past thinkers approached the subject.
 - RLC's views and approach to the apologetic point.
 - RLC's thoughts on applying the topic to evangelism
 - Bibliographical information and follow up resources.

INTRODUCTION

1. Look at the definition of Christian Apologetics (15). What is the significance of the three elements of this definition, that Apologetics
 1. is a "branch of Christian theology"
 2. seeks to provide "a rational justification," and
 3. focuses on Christianity's "truth claims"?

Apologetics provides a rational justification for the truth claims of Christianity. Why is this significant? Because applied Christian Apologetics undergirds Christian truth claims with cogent and coherent arguments that effectively counter prevailing worldviews that teach truth is unknowable or that science is the only means to discover truth.

2. What four purposes does Apologetics serve? (15)
 1. Apologetics serves as a theoretical discipline that has practical applications. It supports and validates the orthodox beliefs of the Christian faith which promotes [orthopathy](#) (deep-felt belief engendered by the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit) and [orthopraxy](#) (spiritual fruit and evangelism stemming from orthopathy).
 2. Apologetics encourages loving God with all your mind ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#), [Matthew 22:37](#))
 3. Apologetics encourages Evangelism – It serves to show unbelievers the truth of Christianity ([Matthew 22:39](#)).
 4. Apologetics serves to connect Christian truths to other truths.

In summary, Apologetics serves to deepen the faith of believers, helping them to trust without a doubt that Christianity is true. It also enables the believer to show that Christianity is true.

3. What three vital roles does Apologetics play? (16-23)
 1. Shaping culture - Going beyond "playing church" and understanding the importance of a culture shaped by Christianity.
 2. Strengthening believers - Saving faith, perseverance, safeguard from lapses, stability.
 3. Evangelizing unbelievers - Cogently arguing that Christianity provides the best answers for life's biggest questions and most important questions.
4. Why is it shortsighted to depreciate the value of Apologetics because "no one comes to Christ through arguments"? (17).

Because that attitude does not consider the greater contextual atmosphere that gives the unbeliever the intellectual permission to consider Christianity as a viable worldview in the first place.

As the great Christian theologian, J. Gresham Machen warned in "Christianity and Culture":

False ideas are the greatest obstacle to the reception of the Gospel. We may preach with the fervor of a reformer and succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation to be controlled by ideas which prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a myth.²

He goes on to warn of the pervasiveness of ideas and that as they emerge in academia and culture, they should be quickly debunked before they can take root at which point it is too late. Machen states:

*What is to-day a matter of academic speculation begins to-morrow to move armies and pull down empires. In that second stage, **it has gone too far to be combated; the time to stop it was when it was still a matter of impassionate debate.** So as Christians we should try to mold the thought of the world in such a way as to make the acceptance of Christianity something more than a logical absurdity.³*

Machen wrote these words in 1913 at a time when orthodox Christianity was under attack from the intellectual community (evolution, materialism, secularism) and Christian liberalism, which denies biblical miracles and promotes a social gospel. Machen's words were prophetic. Clearly, the hyper-secularism that characterizes the zeitgeist of our day can in part find its origins in the ideas that influenced these two movements.

² J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Culture," Princeton Theological Review 11 (1913): 7

³ Ibid.

5. Why is the idea that we live in a post-modern culture a myth? Why is this misdiagnosis of our current cultural situation potentially so disastrous? (18)

Post-modernism proclaims pure subjectivism that rejects all meta-narratives, even those that involve reason and rationality. This radical view is another of Satan's lies meant to discourage those of faith from defending Christianity using logic, reason, and similar objective arguments. To surrender this type of evangelism would reduce Christianity to just another new-age, anti-realism worldview. We should use every apologetic method we can to proclaim the ultimate truth of the Gospel and destroy Satan's lies.

6. Self-examination question: To what degree have I been intellectually engaged with my faith?

As one who loves to learn many things, I have been very dedicated to obtaining knowledge to fortify my faith and deepen it. My struggle is totally trusting it and feel Apologetics will greatly aid in producing an unshakable faith that I can share effectively.

7. In what two respects can Apologetics strengthen believers? (19-21)
1. It can help prevent one from losing his/her faith and safeguard lapses.
 2. It energizes and breathes life into our spiritual life as it gives us the confidence to boldly share the Gospel because Christianity is intellectually sound, offers the best explanation for reality, and answers life's biggest questions.
8. Share some way in which you as a believer have been strengthened through the study of Apologetics. Be specific.
- It has taught me the divine roots of logic and reason.
 - It has broadened the scope of my theological knowledge, expanding it into philosophy, science and history which I believe gives me a greater ability to "walk in wisdom toward outsiders" ([Colossians 4:5](#)).
 - It has made me more confident in my faith.
9. What biblical grounds are there for the use of Apologetics in evangelizing unbelievers? (21-22)
- *Colossians 4:5-6* *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*
 - *1 Peter 3:15-16* *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.*

- **2 Corinthians 10:5** *We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*

As Christians, we are to confront and debunk the false wisdom and sophisticated arguments of the so-called Intelligentsia who shape culture and preach the world's wisdom. It is the spiritual power of the cross that destroys worldly wisdom and as such, is accomplished not through our efforts (flesh) but through the divine power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the proclamation and defense of Christianity.

- **Matthew 28:18-20** *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*
- **Hebrews 11:6** *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

10. Why should we not be discouraged if many unbelievers remain unconvinced by our apologetic arguments? (22)

While many may remain skeptical of our arguments, often the few that are persuaded become very effective evangelists. In many cases, the means that God chose to bring people to faith were apologetic in nature i.e., through rational arguments and evidence. Moreover, those folks in turn tend to exert significant influence on society and culture.

In addition, though unbelievers might not immediately accept our apologetic arguments, nonetheless, the seed is planted in their thoughts, and God willing, it will slowly dawn on them that Christianity is true. As Greg Koukle puts it, the trick is "to put a stone in the shoe" of their worldview.

11. Why should we be concerned about that minority of persons who will respond positively to apologetic arguments? (22)

As stated above, some of those minority end up being some of the most effective evangelists. Examples include Lee Strobel, J. Warner Wallace (cold case detective), Josh McDowell (author), Frank Morrison (author), Augustine, Dr. Tom Woodward (professor and author).

12. List the broad divisions and sub-divisions of Apologetics (23-24).

1. Offensive (Positive) Apologetics:
 - a. Natural Theology/General Revelation: Ontological Argument, Cosmological Argument, Teleological Argument, Moral Argument.

- b. Christian Evidences: Fulfilled prophecies, Evidence for the Resurrection, Christ's own claim of being God, the historical reliability of the Gospels.
 2. Defensive (Negative) Apologetics:
 - a. The purpose is to nullify objections, e.g., God and suffering, the problem of evil, biblical criticisms, science vs. the Bible, evolution vs. creationism/intelligent design, etc.
13. What are the two reasons *Reasonable Faith* focuses on offensive Apologetics? (24-25).
 1. It teaches what to believe (vs. what not to believe). In this pluralistic age, there are too many belief systems that must be understood before we can construct a counter-defensive for all of them.
 2. It equips the apologist with superior pro-Christian positions that overwhelm all competing worldviews. Thus, becoming an expert in all competing worldviews, though helpful, is not absolutely necessary.

DE FIDE - HOW DO I KNOW THAT CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE?

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. After reading this section, summarize some of the basic alternatives for understanding how reason and faith relate. Up to now which of these alternatives is closest to your own thinking? How would you have answered the question in the chapter's title?

Augustine:

Authoritarianism (presupposition that scripture is divine and inerrant) is substantiated by miracle and prophecy. However, Augustine knew that belief based on the biblical testimony of past miracles is questionable. As an alternative, he used the present-day miracle - the church - as the indicia (sign) that scripture is authoritative.

Aquinas:

Faith cannot be solely based on reason; Faith is confirmed epistemologically through accepting things that cannot be proven directly but rather indirectly, e.g., miracles, prophecy, and the like. The Doctrine of The Trinity is an example being only understood through supernatural revelation. These types of truths transcend reason.

John Locke:

Faith and reason are inextricably tied; supernatural miracles are reasonable indicia.

Henry Dodwell:

Anti-rationalism / Existentialism / Authoritarianism. Faith and reason are not connected. Faith is a subjective matter. Dodwell might have influenced the more charismatic First Awakening preachers like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and the Wesleys.

Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann:

Anti-rationalism / Existentialism / Authoritarianism. God cannot be known through reason because he is "wholly other."

Wolfhart Pannenberg:

Evidentialism. History authenticates God's revelation. Pannenberg believes that faith cannot retreat into a subjective fortress. Christianity must be validated by historical testing and verification in the same way secular sciences are.

Alvin Plantinga:

Christianity is rationally sound even without relying on evidence. Belief in God transcends mere rationality.

My thinking is similar to those who support rational and evidential reasoning to support the truth claims of Christianity. That said, I do not deny that there is an emotional/existential dimension of faith. However, what makes Christianity supremely worthy of my belief is its compelling evidence and rationality.

II. ASSESSMENT

1. Key to this chapter is the distinction between knowing and showing Christianity to be true. (43) Explain the difference.

Knowing – It is through the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit that makes Christianity veridical.

Showing – Propounding cogent arguments for the truth claims of Christianity.

2. At the most fundamental level, how does one know that Christianity is true? (43-47)

Through the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit that cements in our heart the truth of God and all He has revealed in Holy Scripture and in nature.

3. What, then, is the role of argument and evidence in our knowing Christianity to be true? (47-48)

It is a subsidiary role but still a role that can help unbelievers come to faith more readily and help them share the Gospel more boldly. The "dual warrant" of the Holy Spirit and evidence can be how the Holy Spirit draws people. It can also sustain the believer in times of doubt.

4. Some object that Christian claims of a self-authenticating experience of the Holy Spirit are invalidated by analogous non-Christian claims, or by artificially-induced experiences. How can one respond to this objection? (48-50)

The experiences induced by other religions are different from those induced by the Holy Spirit. Ex-practitioners of those religions will readily admit that this is the case.

Artificially induced experiences that stimulate spiritual feelings do not invalidate the veridical experience caused by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, such artificially induced experiences generally produce a pantheist sense of oneness with the "All," not a profound awareness of God's infinite love and grace.

1 John 4:1-3:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

5. Explain how one shows Christianity to be true. (51-52)

Search for common ground as a jump-off point to defend Christian truth claims using rock-solid logical reasoning that challenges the unbeliever to question his/her positions. As with any apologetic interaction, always be gentle and respectful ([1 Peter 3:15](#)) and gracious ([Colossians 4:6](#)).

6. What is the difference between a deductive and an inductive argument? (52-53)

A deductive argument is one in which the conclusion is logically true, provided the propositions and premises follow strict laws of logic and do not commit formal fallacies.

An inductive argument is one in which the conclusion depends on the truth claims of the premises. Such arguments depend on supplying strong evidence for the probability of the premises being true. As such, an inductive argument does not guarantee the truth of the conclusion. It is the strength of the premises that determine the probability that an inductive argument is true.

7. What two prerequisites are there for a sound deductive argument? (52)

1. The premises are true.
2. The logic is valid and free from any formal fallacy.

8. Try to formulate a valid deductive argument for Christianity.

Modus ponens:

- $(P \rightarrow Q)$ If God raised Jesus from the dead (*antecedent*), then all Jesus' truth claims are veridical ⁴(*consequent*).
- (P) The reliability of the sense perception of the eyewitnesses who experienced Jesus' post-mortem appearances affirmed that he rose from the dead. ([1 Cor. 15:5-8](#), [2 Peter 1:16](#))⁵

⁴ veridical – truthful, coinciding with reality

⁵ There are many other evidences for the resurrection that will be covered in a subsequent chapter.

- (\therefore q) Therefore, Jesus' truth claims are veridical.
9. Construct an argument for a Christian hypothesis like "God raised Jesus from the dead" using Bayes' Theorem. (53-54)

Given the following form of Bayes Theorem where Pr = Probability, H = Hypothesis E = Evidence:

$$\Pr(H|E) = \frac{\Pr(H) * \Pr(H|E)}{\Pr(H) * \Pr(H|E) + \Pr(\neg H) * \Pr(E|\neg H)}$$

Hypothesis = "God raised Jesus from the dead"

Evidence = Eyewitnesses, non-biblical/enemy attestation, flawed alternative theories (e.g., hoax), quality of the historical accounts, fulfilled prophecies, the empty tomb, etc.

Probability Statement:	Score:	Rationale:
Pr(H)	.1	The probability that a resurrection event occurred is extremely low.
Pr(¬H)	.9	The probability that a resurrection event did not occur is exceptionally high.
Pr(E H)	.9	Given the evidence, the probability that the resurrection event occurred is high because the evidence is very compelling.
Pr(E ¬H)	0	Given the evidence, the probability that God did not raise Jesus from the dead is zero, i.e., that Jesus rose from the dead by natural causes.

Numerator: Pr(H) * Pr(H|E) -> Pr(.1) * Pr(.9) = .09

Denominator: Pr(H) * Pr(H|E) + Pr(¬H) * Pr(E|¬H) -> Pr(.1) * Pr(.9) + Pr(.9) * Pr(0) = .09

$$1 = \frac{.1 * .9 = .09}{(.1 * .9) + (.9 * 0) = .09} \quad .09 \div .09 = 1 \quad \text{Hypothesis is confirmed given the evidence.}$$

10. Why is it not enough to present sound arguments to show Christianity to be true? What more is required? (55)

It is to know in your heart of hearts that Christianity is true based on the self-authenticating inner witness of the Holy Spirit (even the spirit of truth – [John 14:17](#)). Furthermore, the fruit of the Spirit ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)) should be evident in all your discourse and palpably felt by those with whom you are interacting.

11. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our showing Christianity to be true? (56-57)

The Holy Spirit can work through rational argumentation (not just preaching). For the Spirit of Truth ([John 14:17](#)) reveals that all truth is God's truth. The Holy Spirit may use rational argumentation to break down the intellectual barriers that prevent people from coming to Christ.

12. How might one respond to the objection that believers and unbelievers have no common ground on which to argue? (57)

There is plenty of common ground, for example, laws of logic, general revelation (mediate revelation – nature), consciousness (esp. of guilty emotions - immediate revelation), history, archaeology, the sciences, the list goes on and on! From there, we can show how the Gospel can revise and reshape those elements that need correcting. The apostles

knew this, and when defending the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, they used the common ground found in their belief systems to address distortions and errors.

13. What points of discussion do you have?
When is the use of Apologetics not appropriate?

Answer: When the unbeliever throws up an intellectual smoke screen to avoid personal, existential involvement with the Gospel. Suppose the unbeliever refuses to accept or at least consider that sin before God lies at the root of unbelief. In that case, it might be best to end the apologetic discussion lovingly and forthrightly. Remember, it is ultimately up to the Lord to bring the unbeliever to faith.

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Did you find the distinction between knowing and showing Christianity to be true helpful? Why and why not?
 - It helps to answer those who reject Apologetics (esp. the traditional arguments for the existence of God) and promote finding common ground (self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit) from which to discuss the merits of Apologetics.
 - It helps with the interaction with non-believers because the knowing aspect of faith (e.g., hope of [1 Peter 3:15](#) and [Hebrews 11:1](#)) can be shown in a way that with the grace of God might remove the impediments that prevent the unbeliever from accepting Christ.
2. What implications does the teaching of this chapter have for your personal spiritual formation?

It gives me peace because the existential and spiritual aspects of faith cannot be had through intellect alone. All the knowledge in the world cannot cause the conviction of things unseen ([Hebrews 11:1](#)). That can only be accomplished through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, knowing and demonstrating that through logic (e.g., deduction, induction, Bayes Theorem, etc.), the reason for the hope that is within me are useful tools by which we can show that Christianity is true, both to unbelievers and myself in moments of doubt.
3. What are the implications of this chapter for evangelism?
 - We can use this chapter as a resource to promote a fervent apologetics program to church leaders.
 - That even absent a church program, the believer can equip himself with the tools necessary to confront secular arguments and offer cogent reasons for faith in Jesus Christ.
4. How is effectiveness in Apologetics to be defined? (60)

Effectiveness is defined or characterized as the ability to present cogent and persuasive arguments for the reality of God's existence and His Gospel lovingly and gently and in a manner that the dissuader can palpably feel the indwelt Holy Spirit and in a way that is glorifying to God.

To paraphrase Greg Koukle, he states that effectiveness is to "put a stone in the shoe of another's worldview"⁶ or a "splinter in the mind".

⁶ Gregory Koukle, *Tactics*, 38

DE HOMINE - THE ABSURDITY OF LIFE WITHOUT GOD

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. What is cultural Apologetics? What is its proper place in building a case for the Christian faith? (65, 86)

Cultural Apologetics explores the disastrous consequences for human existence, society, and culture if Christianity should be false. It "shows" (see the previous chapter) the incongruity of alternative worldviews that purport to provide meaning, value, and purpose where none exists (i.e., it is a "[Noble Lie](#)"). Only the Christian worldview (The Gospel) provides the basis for a meaningful, values-based, purposeful life via a relation with God and eternal life.

2. Share some examples from contemporary music, literature, or film of the human predicament.

- Classical music: 20th-century Serialism (12 tone/atonal) – it lacks melody and harmony. Aesthetically, it is devoid of beauty in the same way many 20th-century art forms are.
- Pop music: Rock genres that at times express glorification of violence, drug usage and sex, devil worship, misogyny, and obscenity, e.g., Grunge, Heavy Metal, Rap/Hip Hop, Punk.
- Art: Abstract genres – Dadaism, Surrealism, Cubism
- Movies: The decades of the fifties and sixties saw the rise of movies that are thematically nihilistic, gratuitously violent, obscene, and pornographic.

A poignant example is from the opening moments from the 1955 film, "Rebel Without A Cause." The high school students go on a field trip to a planetarium and witness a spectacular presentation of the cosmos in which the narrator states:

"Through the infinite reaches of space, the problems of man seem trivial and naïve indeed, and man existing alone seems himself an episode of little consequence... The Earth will not be missed."

- Literature: Jean-Paul Sartre (e.g. Nausea, No Exit), Albert Camus (absurdism), Martin Heidegger ("Being and Time").

II. ASSESSMENT

1. What two prerequisites must be met if life is not to be absurd? (71-72)
 1. The existence of a personal God (a god to whom we can have a relationship) - The purpose of the Bible is to let us know how we can have fellowship and a relationship with God despite our sin.
 2. Immortality.
 - Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 1: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
 - [1 John 2: 17](#) "*But whoever does the will of God lives forever.*"
2. What three broad areas illustrate the absurdity of life without God? (72) How do these differ from one another?
 - Meaning (Significance) – Ultimately, all man's accomplishments are vanity, even if we were immortal.
 - Value – Objective moral values and duties do not exist and are subjective and arbitrary.
 - Purpose – Our lives are no more purposeful than any other living thing.
3. Explain why life is meaningless without immortality and without God. (72-74)

Because without God, man's ultimate destiny is annihilation like the rest of the universe. In the final analysis, all man's accomplishments will perish and amount to nothing and mean nothing. By getting rid of God (killing him), man thinks he can free himself of God's commands (law) – But what he did was cast himself into an absurd, irrational, incoherent existence. He can now only borrow from theism to keep from living in despair and absurdity.
4. Explain why life is valueless without immortality and without God. (74-75)

Without God, there is no right and wrong, good and evil, virtue, and perfidy. Values and morals are simply a subjective set of preferences. Unless the values we treasure are found in an eternal heaven, they will perish with the temporal Earth ([Matthew 6:19](#), [1 John 2:17](#)). Unless there is life beyond the grave and a moral lawgiver who is a perfect judge, there is no ultimate justice, and nothing in life really matters.
5. Explain why life is purposeless without immortality and without God. (75-77)

Without God, nothing distinguishes a man's life from that of a roach. Death would be the end of his miserable existence, and any record of his accomplishments are destined for oblivion. However, even if life were eternal, it would have no purpose without God. Life would be an eternal cycle of futile efforts to manufacture purpose and significance where none exists (eternal existence without God would be hell!). Only God can provide the ultimate purpose and dignity to man's existence.

6. How should you respond to someone who says, "I don't believe in God, but my life is meaningful"? (Hint: [a.*] Is belief in God a prerequisite of life's having meaning? [b.*] What is the difference between saying that life is absurd without God and saying that life is absurd without belief in God? [c.*] Suppose someone believes in God, but God does not exist. Is his life absurd? [d.*] Suppose, on the other hand, that God does exist; is the atheist's life then absurd—or just tragic?)

If one does not believe in God and still contends his life is meaningful, he is putting something else in place of God (aka his "God slot") to manufacture purpose. Perhaps the "*Columbo tactic*" could be used here:

- Christian: "Do you believe the laws of thermodynamics are true?"
 - Atheist: "Yes."
 - Christian: "Then you agree the universe is destined for heat death, yes?"
 - Atheist: "Yes."
 - Christian: "Hmmm."
- a. Is belief in God a prerequisite of life's having meaning?
Yes, one must believe in God (the God of Christianity) for meaning because a transcendent God provides the substance of objective values, morals, and duties that we are accountable for and judged. For if we are not accountable, we don't count.
- b. What is the difference between saying that life is absurd without God and saying that life is absurd without belief in God?
- Without God = Nihilism = life **would be** absurd.
 - Without belief in God = life would **seem to be** absurd resulting in an incoherent and inconsistent worldview.
- c. Suppose someone believes in God, but God does not exist. Is his life absurd?
Yes – consider the following deductive argument (modus ponens):
- P1: If God does not exist, life is absurd (and nihilistic). (if p -> q)
 - P2: God does not exist (p).
 - Conclusion: Therefore, life is absurd (q).
- d. Suppose, on the other hand, that God does exist; is the atheist's life then absurd—or just tragic?
Not absurd, but tragic in the pitiable sense that he decided to choose nihilism over theism – consider the following deductive argument (modus ponens):
- P1: If God exists, life is not absurd (if p -> q).
 - P2: God exists (p).

- Conclusion: Therefore, life is not absurd (q). For the atheist who does not accept the existence of God, his life is a futile waste of time with no eternal significance - indeed tragic.

7. What is the practical dilemma faced by the atheist? (78)

The atheist must choose between being true to his beliefs – that ultimately all is for naught - or lie to himself that life has meaning, value, and purpose. He must accept that nihilism is true and embrace absurdity and despair; else, he must borrow values from theism to dignify his existence. Like the way Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus coped with their view of existence, they must manufacture subjective values, meaning, and purpose to avoid falling into despair, depression, unhappiness, and joylessness. Drug use, alcohol, sex, workaholicism, and the like are other coping mechanisms people use to escape their "meaningless" existence.

8. What should you say to someone who claims that moral values are just social conventions that we can adopt in order to live in harmony? (88)

Using the Columbo tactic, state, "there's something about your claim that bothers me" and ask if he/she believes that child abuse, genocide, beheadings, torture, rape, and other evils are wrong. If the person responds in the affirmative, then ask, "do you believe these things are merely socially contrived to keep the peace?" Using a recent historical example, one could respond using the example of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria). For ISIS, killing the infidel is a convention to bring about peace under Islamic rule. So how can you criticize ISIS for their social convention?

9. What should you say to someone who says, "You don't have to believe in God in order to live a moral life"?

Ask, "What happens when someone else's morality encroaches on yours?" Go on to ask, "How do you feel about those who believe _____ (fill in the blank) is wrong (e.g., murder, pedophilia, genocide, greed)? Whose morality wins? Yours, the other person's, the culture's, who? Either way, on atheism, it is subjective. The atheist can only say that they don't *like* _____ (fill in the blank). They cannot say what they don't like is objectively wrong.

Many atheists try to debunk Christian morality in favor of evolving moral relativism. However, for the honest atheist who admits that man's ultimate end is thermodynamic heat death, he must explain the goal of evolving morals given the inevitable extinction of the human race.

10. Explain L. D. Rue's case for a "Noble Lie." Give some examples where his various options have been adopted in different societies. (85)

Because the honest atheist, who in reality believes life is ultimately devoid of meaning, value, and purpose, must dishonestly fabricate a story ("Noble Lie") to live by to escape the farcical tragedy of his nihilism in order to be happy. Furthermore, he must develop a system

whereby his subjective happiness must somehow be congruent and coherent within a governing societal structure. Examples:

- 20th-century style Communism, e.g., the former Soviet Union, Cambodia (Khmer Rouge), Cuba, Venezuela, China – The Communist form of government⁷ imposes a rigid system of control over its citizens to maintain social coherence in an effort to impose boundaries on individuals' pursuit of self-fulfillment and happiness.
- Socialism, e.g., most modern-day European countries (and the United States shortly) – post-Christian secular societies based on some non-theistic worldview – encourages individuals to depend on the state for their sustenance and moral code without regard for a higher authority. In such cultures, the rate of divorce, drug use, STDs, suicide (especially among younger people ^{citation needed}), abortions, eugenics, and broken families are much higher than when they were Christian influenced cultures. Such societies also run the risk of being overtaken by radical ideologies (e.g., Islam, Marxism) because they do not have the moral or sustaining power to push back against them.

11. How does biblical Christianity solve the human predicament? (86)

To paraphrase [1 Peter 1:3](#), We are (re)born again into a living hope (of eternal life and fellowship with Almighty God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, through Jesus Christ, we have meaning, value, and purpose for eternity. These words express the things that satisfy the prerequisites necessary for life not to be absurd - a relationship with God and immortality.

12. What points of discussion do you have?

Why aren't atheists more honest about the nihilism of their worldview and admit that life, no matter how subjectively virtuous it might seem, is pointless?

⁷ As opposed to the Marxist idea of Communism which is a future stateless utopia

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Did those of you who were once atheists feel the human predicament described in this chapter? If so, describe the experience. If not, why not?

I don't personally know ex-atheists but would site the testimony of Ravi Zacharias, Lee Stroeble, C.S. Lewis, and other leading Christian apologists who were once atheists.

2. Develop some questions to help people who are thoughtless or preoccupied with other things to sense the human predicament.

Some thoughtless unbelievers accuse Christians of making a gratuitous leap of faith in their belief that meaning, values, and purpose are predicated on "hoping" that God exists. Ask:

- Do you believe one must take a leap of faith to believe there are universal morals and values when, by your own admission, believe there is no transcendent lawgiver?
- How do you feel about the evil men throughout history going to their grave without having to account for their atrocities?

3. Does your heart respond to God with worship and adoration for imparting meaning, value, and purpose to your life?

Indeed it does, though I often backslide into deriving meaning, value, purpose through my own devices and self-interests (for example workaholism, works-righteousness, materialism) even though I don't get deep, lasting contentment from them ([Jeremiah 17:9](#) in view here). However, that only leads me back to trusting only God for true lasting meaning, value, and purpose.

DE DEO - THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

With this chapter we come to the first pillar in our positive case for the truth of the Christian faith. It is so important that you may want to invest more time in the study of the next two chapters than others.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. Describe the revolution which has been going on in Anglo-American philosophy since the late 1960s. (93-95)

There has been a resurgence of using natural theology to confront and push back against the views of the brilliant yet misguided atheist thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries who were so influential in shaping modern culture. In academia, Theists could once again integrate their beliefs in the realm of philosophy (however, their views are still not respected in other academic disciplines). This resurgence is important because, since the mid-sixties, assumptions about truth have changed. In the book "*The Closing of the American Mind*" by

Alan Bloom, the author showed that 95% of high school graduates enter college with a relativistic mindset. Bloom states:

"Then what happens in the following four years is that those assumptions that they come to college with out of high school are now set in concrete because the academic community in modern America has a mind that is closed to objective truth. Truth is now perceived as being subjective, as a matter of preference."

Natural theology and the classical arguments for God's existence that flow from it offers a strong case for the reality of God and the Christian Faith that hold up well in the arena of theoretical thought. In fact, when scrutinized thoroughly without bias, they are hard to refute.

2. What are some of the basic types of arguments in favor of God's existence? (95-106) Be able to identify each one with a sentence or two.
 - **Ontological**: Set forth by St. Anselm (1033-1109), based on God's nature (e.g., "*Greatest Conceivable Being*").
Defenders: John Duns Scotus, Descartes, Spinoza, G.W.F. Leibniz, Norman Malcolm, Charles Hartshorne, Alvin Plantinga ("*Maximally Great Being*")
 - **Cosmological**: Directly based on the law of causality (Kalam, Leibniz).
Defenders: Al-Ghazali (Kalam), Thomas Aquinas, Leibniz, Aristotle
 - **Teleological**: From telos, an argument from design.
Defenders: Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, William Paley, John Locke, Pascal, Descartes
 - **Moral**: Based on uniform morality worldwide.
Defenders: Aquinas, Plato, William Sorley
3. Did you notice that the roll of defenders of these arguments sounds like a Who's Who of the great minds of Western intellectual history? What does that tell you about your heritage?

It tells me that the classical arguments for the truth claims of the Christian Faith have direct and indirect support of many of the greatest intellectuals of all time.

II. ASSESSMENT

1. Give from memory the five steps of the Leibnizian cosmological argument. (106)
 1. Anything that exists has an explanation for its existence either in the necessity of its own nature or in an external cause.
 2. If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.
 3. The universe exists.
 4. Therefore, the universe has an explanation of its existence.
 5. Therefore, the explanation of the existence of the universe is God.
2. Why is the first premise not susceptible to the objection that some truths may have no explanation for their truth? (107)

Because the explanation of existence can be explained by one of two means:

 - The necessity of its own nature (e.g., numbers, God)
 - In an external cause (law of causality)
3. What defense might you give on behalf of the first premise of the argument? (107)

Finding an object put in an unexpected place – One would want an explanation of how it got there. Just because the universe is so large doesn't negate the need for its explanation. Reason demands a "Principle of Sufficient Reason" for the universe's existence.
4. Explain why the typical atheist is himself committed to the truth of the second premise. (108)

Second Premise: If the universe has an explanation for its existence, that explanation is God.

Atheist Explanation: The universe exists as a brute force contingent thing; It just exists inexplicably. Alternatively, they might posit it was brought into existence by some unexplained cause, for example, an impersonal force like gravity⁸.

Theist Retort: Ah ha! So, the universe does have an explanation of its existence!

 - Physical reality demands a cause. Rare is the atheist who would deny this.
 - The cause of physical reality cannot be physical. Only an uncaused, immaterial mind can cause physical matter to come into existence.

⁸ For example, the world-renowned physicist/cosmologist Stephen Hawking states in his book, *The Grand Design*, "Because there is a law of gravity, the universe can and will create itself out of nothing." It is astounding that someone as brilliant as Hawking could pen such an incoherent assertion.

5. Why is the second premise quite plausible in its own right? (108)

The physical universe (physical reality) logically cannot have been brought into existence by another physical/material cause. Therefore, that cause must be something non-material, something that space and time do not depend on. Only two things fit that bill:

- Abstract objects, for example, numbers. However, these objects do not have the power to cause anything.
- A transcendent, unembodied mind, i.e., God.

6. What response can be made to someone who claims that perhaps the universe exists by a necessity of its own nature? (108-110)

It is possible that the fundamental material of the universe could have been assembled to produce a different reality. One could further argue that the universe could have had a different nature, which means its nature is not necessary.

7. How does the *kalam* cosmological argument reinforce the Leibnizian cosmological argument? (111)

It provides a logical argument that nothing cannot cause something or stated another way, something cannot be caused by nothing. It employs the law of causality using the universe as an example paralleling the Leibniz Cosmological Argument.

8. Give from memory the three steps of the *kalam* cosmological argument. (111)

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

9. What three reasons can be given in defense of the first premise of the argument? (111-112)

1. It argues that something cannot come into existence from nothing.
2. If anything could come out of nothing, then all things could too - which is absurd.
3. Science is, by definition, a search for causes, and atheistic scientists have the strongest motives and reasons to accept it.

10. What should you say to someone who, like Mackie, says that it makes more sense that the universe came into being uncaused than that God caused the universe to come into being? (112-113)

In a nutshell, Mackie⁹ believes that in the case of the universe, it is more reasonable to believe it came out of nothing than that a self-existent, timeless, eternal-being created it.

However, it can be argued that it is not unintelligible to believe that prior to creation that God operates in a dimension that is not governed by time because for time to exist, matter must exist for time to change from one moment to next. Matter changes with time. Time (at least A-Theory time) is mutable and changes in state every moment. What changes state? Something physical, i.e., matter. As will be argued in subsequent questions, it is not reasonable to posit that matter can be eternal. Thus, it is more reasonable to argue that a self-existent, timeless, non-physical eternal-being created the universe rather than that it popped into existence, uncaused and ex-nihilo.

11. How might you respond to critics who claim that premise (1) is true only for things in ¹⁰the universe, but it is not true of ¹¹the universe itself? (113-114)

First Premise KCA: Whatever begins to exist has a cause.

To assert that anything can pop into existence out of nothing is absurd. To say that this premise applies to everything except the universe is an example of the [Taxicab Fallacy](#).

12. What can you say in response to persons who claim that quantum physics furnishes an exception to the causal principle? (114-116)

- A sub-atomic vacuum is not nothing. Its energy is not nothing.
- Indeterminism does not necessarily involve spontaneous generation ex nihilo.
- Many physicists agree that a deterministic theory will eventually explain quantum phenomena.

13. State in a sentence the four lines of evidence marshaled in support of the second premise of the *kalam* cosmological argument. (116, 120, 125, 140)

Second Premise KCA: The universe began to exist.

Suppose an actual infinite number of physical things cannot be actualized by infinitely adding one to another. In that case, the universe must be expanding from a singular point of organization, which means the universe must have had a beginning as the laws of thermodynamics predict.

⁹ J.L. Mackie (John Leslie) – (8/25-1917 – 12/12/1981) Australian philosopher, known for his works on Metaphysics, philosophy of language, ethics, moral nihilism.

¹⁰ in = physical laws, e.g. gravity, thermodynamics, etc.

¹¹ of = metaphysical, e.g. the genesis of physical reality from something non-physical.

14. Give from memory the three steps of both of the philosophical arguments for the beginning of the universe. (116-120)

Argument 1:

- An actually infinite number of things cannot exist.
- A beginningless series of events in time entails an actually infinite number of things.
- Therefore, a beginningless series of events cannot exist.

Argument 2:

- The series of events in time is a collection formed by adding one member to another.
- A collection formed by adding one member after another cannot be actually infinite.
- Therefore, the series of events in time cannot be actually infinite.

15. Explain the difference between an actual and a potential infinite. (116-117)

A potential infinite is possible theoretically in an abstract sense.

An actual infinite represents an unbounded collection (set) that exists in the real world. We argue that this is impossible.

16. Why is it a mistake to claim that the use of the actual infinite in mathematics proves that an actually infinite number of things can exist? (117)

An actual infinite in the real world is impossible because it would involve counter-intuitive absurdities such as [Hilbert's Hotel](#), dividing something in two an infinite amount of times ([Zeno's Paradoxes](#)), arriving at the present time from an eternal past, etc.

17. Illustrate the absurdity of an actually infinite number of things. (118-119) Invent your own illustration.

A computer program that executes an infinite loop will eventually terminate due to capacity constraints imposed on it by actual forces. Furthermore, something would have to begin this loop; in other words, something would have had to cause it (e.g., KCA premise 1).

18. How should you respond to someone who says, "These absurdities result because our finite minds cannot comprehend the infinite"? (119)

Concepts about Infinity is something we can understand! Brilliant mathematicians have developed it (e.g., Ludwig Wittgenstein, David Hilbert). They conclude that transposing a potential infinite upon non-abstract entities is a fool's errand. If an infinite actual number of things could exist, we would be living in an "Alice in Wonderland" kind of world that permits Hilbert's Hotel and other absurdities to exist. Furthermore, it would permit arithmetic on an infinite number of things, which is impossible.

19. How should you respond to someone who says, "If an actually infinite number of things could exist, then these allegedly absurd situations are exactly what we should expect"? (119)

Indeed, in an imaginary world (not the real world), violations of the law of non-contradiction which occur on infinite collections could occur. But not in the actual real world.

Does $\infty - \infty = 0$? Or $\infty * \infty = \infty$?

20. What should you say to someone who says, "If an actual infinite cannot exist, then God must not be infinite"? (119 note 46)

When we refer to God with a capital G, we are not referring to something composed of a collection of an infinite number of finite parts. Rather, we are referring to a metaphysical being, one that has all the qualities of the "Greatest Conceivable Being" (Anselm's ontological argument) and the "Maximally Greatest Being" (Plantinga's ontological argument).

Therefore, God's nature is qualitative, and the universe's nature is quantitative.

21. Explain the difference between the so-called A-Theory of time and the B-Theory of time. How does the A-Theory underlie the second philosophical argument for the beginning of the universe? (121)

A-Theory: Tensed or dynamic; only the present is real; things come into being and go out of being; mutability.

B-Theory: tenseless; all events are static and are distinguished by their relationship to each other; 4-dimensional space/time; immutable.

A-Theory affirms that each moment in the past was real (past tense). So given an infinite past, we would not be able to get to the present.

22. Illustrate the impossibility of forming an actually infinite collection by adding one member at a time. (121-124)

Counting from infinity past: ..., -3, -2, -1, 0. When would one have finished counting?

An infinite collection (in my mind) is a conceptual set of beginningless events and can never achieve wholeness or closure. As such, it never completes. All the adding in the world will never give it completeness or wholeness. The "Fallacy of Composition" is in view here – just because each event is finite within the part, it does not follow that the whole is finite.

23. How should you respond to someone who says, "But from every point in the infinite past, there is only a finite distance until today. Therefore, there is no problem in traversing an infinite past"? (123)

That would be true if the infinite set were bounded, i.e., it had a beginning. However, that would contradict the meaning of infinite and attribute to it the characteristic of the finite. Bottom-line – we could never reach the current time given an unbounded series of events with no starting point.

24. Explain how the standard Big Bang model implies an absolute beginning of the universe. (126-128)

The genesis of the universe (the creation event) started as a cosmologically singular point that arose ex nihilo, i.e., out of nothing. This point of singularity contained all physical substance needed for time, space, and matter, which constitutes physical reality. To imply something prior to this point would be to posit an earlier beginning or something that "was not nothing" before an absolute beginning.

25. What should you say to someone who says, "Maybe there was some physical reality prior to the Big Bang which caused it"? (127)

That would be begging the question because one would have to ask, maybe there was a physical reality before that physical reality, and now we get into an infinite regress, which we already argued is absurd.

26. What are the weaknesses of the Steady State model? (128-129)

- It implies self-existence and spontaneous generation (expanding galaxies cause matter to be produced ex-nihilo).
- Cannot be falsified - no empirical evidence, unobservable.
- The Steady State Model cannot produce the photons (light elements) that could only be produced in the extreme conditions present in the denseness of the single point of matter.
- Background radiation from a nascent universe is not possible in the Steady State model.

27. What problems does the oscillating model face? (129-130)

- The oscillating model implies the mass of the universe could gravitationally stop expanding and pull it back on itself. Recent data shows that this is unlikely and that the universe will continually expand.
- Instead of expansion reversing, there is observable evidence that it is accelerating.

28. What is the fatal flaw of vacuum fluctuation models? (131-132)

- Implies a greater "Universe-as-a-whole" that is eternal and uncaused. The UAAW is viewed as a primordial vacuum in a steady state that can manufacture multiple mini-universes through fluctuations.
- It is impossible to predict when a fluctuation will produce a universe based on the vacuum fluctuation models.
- As the UAAW birth to new universes, there is a risk they could collide with each other, which necessitates their creation occur at great distances from each other. Hmmmmm?

29. What does the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem imply for inflationary models of the universe? (133-134)

The Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem postulates that inflation cannot be past-eternal. Hence, eternal incubating universes via inflation are untenable, and that the idea is defeated by the necessity of a beginning point of singularity that the standard big bang model provides.

30. Explain how quantum gravity models support the beginning of the universe. (134-136)

Quantum Gravity Models posit that the beginning of the universe did not start at a point of singularity but rather in a dimension (3-geometry) that enters into inflation. Quantum Gravity Models still involves the concept of an absolute beginning.

31. What fatal flaw afflicts pre-Big Bang (String) scenarios featuring an infinite past? (137-138)

(Note: String scenarios differ from the oscillating model (see #27) in that expansion and contraction occur within a static space)

- These scenarios fail to explain our observable finite universe coming into existence from an infinite past.
- Given an infinite past, our universe should already be in a state of thermodynamic equilibrium.
- These scenarios do not explain how static space came into existence.

32. Why does the Cyclic Ekpyrotic Model fail to avert the absolute beginning of the universe? (138-139)

The Cyclic Ekpyrotic Model, aka membrane cosmology, envisions two three-dimensional membranes existing in five-dimensional spacetime that approach, collide and retract (one of these membranes is our universe). It fails to avert the universe's absolute beginning because it is past-incomplete, meaning it needs a singular starting point. It needs a past boundary.

33. How does thermodynamics imply a beginning of the universe? (140-141)

It implies a closed system in which the universe began with a finite amount of energy and diffuses into an expanding universe until it reaches a state of equilibrium (temperature and pressure are equal/absolute zero). This entropic behavior is what we observe in our expanding universe.

34. Explain Boltzmann's Many Worlds Hypothesis and why it was deficient. (141-142)

The Boltzmann Many Worlds Hypothesis posits that the universe has already reached a state of entropic equilibrium. However, over time and by chance, occasional energy fluctuations occur, causing disequilibrium to occur. Boltzmann calls these regions "*worlds*." The hypothesis is deficient because:

- It involves *chance*, which has no causal power of its own.
- It suggests that the universe has already reached the thermodynamic heat death equilibrium, but by chance, pockets of disequilibrium exist that produce *worlds*.
- Given a fluctuation, one would expect a smaller universe emanating from a dead universe than the one we observe.
- Visions of distant objects/spheres would be illusionary given the time gap.

35. What implications does thermodynamics have for the oscillating model? (144-145)

- Once everything has burned out and coalesced into a blackhole (*big crunch*), there will be no energy to create another universe.
- Even if such a model were possible, it would require a tremendous amount of fine-tuning.
- It would have to violate the second law of thermodynamics.

36. Why is the conjecture that our universe was birthed by a mother universe via black hole tunneling untenable? (145-146)

Because there is no known physics that would permit the reemergence of the universe from its final state (singularity) of heat death (blackhole).

37. What problems face the inflationary multiverse as a means of avoiding the beginning of the universe? (146-150)

- Quantum theory affirms that information (whatever that is) cannot be transferred from a mother universe to a new universe via a black hole or wormhole).
- It conjects that our baby universe came from a high-entropy state, but that is not what we observe.
- The inflationary multiverse theory is untenable given an infinite past.

- The odds of a universe as large as ours that began with such a low entropy is $10^{10(123)}$. It is more probable that it would be the size of our solar system ($10^{10(60)}$).
38. What attributes of the First Cause may be deduced from the *kalam* cosmological argument? (152)
- The First Cause must be:
- atemporal: beginningless, timeless
 - non-spatial: immaterial
 - immutable: timelessness implies changelessness
 - uncaused, i.e., self-existent
 - omnipotent: it created the material universe without material
 - personal: creation was intentional
39. Why must the cause of the universe be personal? (152-154)
- There was nothing before it; therefore, it was created volitionally.
 - There are two types of immaterial and timeless objects – abstract numbers and a mind. Abstract numbers have no causal power, but a mind does.
40. What should you say to someone who asks, "If everything has a cause, what is God's cause?" (155)
- That is a misstatement of the law of causality. It is not "everything has a cause." Rather "every effect" has a cause. God is not an effect. He is an uncaused cause.
41. What should you say to someone who says, "The beginning of the universe cannot have a cause because causes must exist before their effects, but there was no time before the Big Bang"? (156)
- God's metaphysical nature is ontologically atemporal. It is not that there was no time prior to the Big Bang, but it is undifferentiated time. Moreover, this dimension of undifferentiated time is necessary for differentiated time to exist.
42. State the three steps of the teleological argument from fine-tuning. (161)
1. The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design.
 2. It is not due to physical necessity or chance.
 3. Therefore, it is due to design.
43. What is fine-tuning? (158)
- Fine-tuning is the extremely narrow range of values that constrains the laws of nature that allow it to support a life-giving universe. For example, the gravitational constant,

electromagnetic constants – weak force, strong force, cosmological constant, low entropy, to name a few.

44. What should you say to someone who says, "If the constants and quantities had different values than they do, then other forms of life might well have evolved. (159)

In the absence of fine-tuning, atomic elements would not exist for life to emerge. It is quite remarkable that beryllium came to be, let alone carbon for carbon-based life.

45. Why is it irrelevant to claim that in universes governed by different laws life might well exist even though the constants and quantities would have different values than they do. (159-160)

Different laws with different equations and constants are wildly speculative and theoretical. With them, it is impossible to predict whether they would be able to support life. It is a red-herring because it sidetracks the argument from the laws of nature we have an experience of and can confirm to those that are impossible to prove (i.e., cannot be falsified or tested).

46. What are the explanatory options for fine-tuning? (160-161)

- Physical necessity
- Chance
- Design

47. Why is the hypothesis of physical necessity implausible? (161-169)

It requires us to believe a life-prohibiting universe is virtually physically impossible. In other words, it's virtually impossible that a life-permitting universe cannot not be. But surely, any slight difference in the myriad factors that enable life would render a life-prohibiting universe, for example, the thickness of the crust of the earth, size of the sun, size of the moon, etc.

48. How should you respond to someone who says that "just as in a lottery someone has to win, no matter how improbable, some universe must exist, no matter how improbable"? (164-165)

But the universe that "wins" is the more likely to be the one that is life prohibiting given the virtually unlimited range of values that constants and quantities that govern a particular universe can be.

49. What's wrong with saying that "the fine-tuning doesn't require an explanation because if the universe weren't fine-tuned, we wouldn't be here to be surprised about it"? (165-166)

Just because we're not surprised that our own existence depends on a fine-tuned universe doesn't mean that we should not be curious about how it became to be so. That would be an example of the taxicab fallacy.

50. What's the problem with saying that there exists a World Ensemble of randomly ordered universes and our world just happens to be one member of the ensemble? (166-170)

Due to the odds that our world would possess such a low entropy rate, it is unlikely to be the type of world the Many Worlds hypothesis would predict. We would expect a much smaller universe. Furthermore, the theory suffers from the fallacy of insufficient evidence.

51. What two things does Dawkins overlook in his "Who designed the designer" hypothesis? (171-172)
1. He overlooks the problem that arises when one arrives at the best explanation in that an explanation for the explanation is not necessary. In fact, that will result in an infinite regress of explanations. It is a form of the "moving the goalposts" fallacy.
 2. He conflates the complexity of creation with the complexity of the creator, who possesses an unembodied/non-physical mind capable of complex thought.
52. Give from memory the three steps of the moral argument. (172)

The Moral Argument is a classic Modus Tollens:

1. Premise 1: If God does not exist (p), then objective moral values and duties do not exist. (q)
 2. Premise 2: Objective moral values and duties do exist (\neg q)
 3. Conclusion: Therefore, God exists. ($\therefore \neg$ p)
53. Distinguish moral values from duties. (172-173)
- Moral Values: What is the good, what is the bad (e.g., The Ten Commandments)
 - Moral Duties: What is the right thing to do; *oughtness*; choosing by will a moral value (Note that what is morally good and evil is determined by reference to God's wills – page 182).

54. What does it mean to say that moral values and duties are objective? (173)

Objective moral values are intrinsically good or bad independent of whether one subscribes to them or not, and by duty, are obligated to live by them.

55. If naturalism is true, why does it seem that moral values and duties do not exist? (173-175)

As "just another species," whatever moral value imposed on it is illusory and only exists to perpetuate the species up to and until it becomes extinct, for that is the destiny of all life.

56. Why on naturalism do objective moral duties not seem to exist? (175)

Because duties would not be binding. Even if society required them and a person violated them and went unpunished, there would be no consequence beyond the grave. All who

obeyed them or violated them are destined for annihilation. Thus, adherence to them ultimately does not matter.

57. Explain the distinction between moral ontology and moral epistemology and the significance of this distinction for a moral argument for the existence of God. (176)
- Moral ontology is based on the existence of God. God is the origin and substance of objective morals.
 - Moral epistemology relates to how we know what is moral.

58. Why is it premature for the naturalist simply to take human flourishing as his explanatory stopping point? (177)

It does not explain what human flourishing looks like. Societies differ on what moral values and duties drive the flourishing process and thus become arbitrary.

59. What three objections might be brought against Atheistic Moral Platonism? (178-179)
(Atheistic Moral Platonism asserts that moral values exist in an abstract realm disconnected from God, similar to mathematical objects.)

1. Abstract moral values do not exist in and of themselves. They need a person to exercise them and make them real.
2. Abstract morals and duties are not binding.
3. It is improbable that blind evolution would produce creatures whose genetic code would manifest behavior that realizes abstract moral values and duties.

60. Construct an argument for skepticism about our five senses parallel to an argument for skepticism about our moral sense.
- The reliability of sense perception cannot be known for sure by ourselves. What we perceive may be illusory.
 - The reliability of our sense of morality cannot be known for sure within the confines of our own mind.

In both cases, we must get outside ourselves to affirm reality, and that is impossible.

61. How should you respond to someone who says that our moral sense is the delusory result of socio-biological influences? (179-180)

Even if socio-biological influences delude us into adopting moral behavior, that does not defeat the notion that objective moral values and duties exist.

62. Respond to the Euthyphro Dilemma. (181-182)

The Euthyphro Dilemma:

1. Is something good because God wills it? (therefore, it is arbitrary)

2. Or does God will something because it is good? (therefore, something is intrinsically good)
This is a false dilemma! There is a third option (tertium quid):
3. The good is grounded in God's ontological nature as the *greatest conceivable being* and is expressed by His divine commands
63. Why is it not arbitrary and implausible to take God as one's explanatory stopping point? (182)
Because, by definition, God is the *greatest conceivable being (maximally great being)*, and as such, He is the ultimate source and substance of goodness.
64. State from memory the six steps of Plantinga's ontological argument. (184-185)
 1. It is possible that a Maximally Great Being exists.
 2. If it is possible that a Maximally Great Being exists, then a Maximally Great Being exists in some possible world.
 3. If a Maximally Great Being exists in some possible world, then it exists in every possible world.
 4. If a Maximally Great Being exists in every possible world, then it exists in the actual world.
 5. If a Maximally Great Being exists in the actual world, then a Maximally Great Being exists.
 6. Therefore, a Maximally Great Being exists.
65. Explain the difference between epistemic possibility and metaphysical possibility. Why is this important? (185)
 - Epistemic possibility relates to how we know something is possible.
 - Metaphysical possibility relates to whether something is possible regardless of whether we can prove it empirically.

It is important because some things are true or false (possible or impossible) metaphysically regardless of our ability to know if they are possible.
66. What intuitive warrant is there for the first premise of the ontological argument? (185)
That the Maximally Greatest Being (MGB) is a coherent notion because MGB has maximal intrinsic values unlike other excellent things (islands, lions, etc.). MGB is greater than a quasi-MGB because only an MGB could create a quasi-MGB (e.g., quasi-MGB is contingent on MGB). An MGB can be the only thing in a possible world; a quasi-MGB cannot. An MGB has priority over any other alternative possibilities a priori.
67. How do the usual parodies of the argument fail? (185-186)

They fail because the attributes of God are divinely maximal and perfect, whereas the attributes of any other entity are not. For example, God is omniscient; can He not know something? No. Can the greatest conceivable island have more palm trees? Maybe. It is subjective. God's maximal greatness is based on objective notions. Any entity other than God conceived of as maximally great is based on subjective preferences.

68. How can we defend our intuition that a maximally great being exists in the face of the intuitive possibility that a quasi-maximally great being exists? (186-187)

- A quasi-MGB does not have to exist in every possible world.
- A MGB can exist in a possible world by itself; a quasi-MGB cannot.
- A quasi-MGB is contingent on the MGB.

69. What *a posteriori* warrant might we offer for the first premise of the ontological argument? (187-188)

We have a warrant to test it in the same manner we do for discerning other propositions ([Romans 12:2](#)). We are then free to accept it or reject it after careful analysis. Therefore, if we accept it using a sound methodology, we are in our rational right to accept it.

70. What response can be offered to the objection that the ontological argument is question-begging? (188-189)

It is not question-begging as the conclusion, "God exists", is not the foregone conclusion of any of the premises. The attributes of the MGB must be considered and deemed to be necessary in a modal sense. Also, the other arguments for the existence of an MGB should be considered when arguing for the truth of each premise (cosmological, teleological, moral, etc.).

III PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. What does the revolution in Christian philosophy tell you about the so-called new atheists' claim that "theists are morons"?

I believe it turns the tables back on them and exposes the deficiencies of the atheistic doctrine in every area of critical thought, for example, science, philosophy, logic, etc. However, per [1 Peter 3:15](#), we would not call them morons but would challenge their assumptions with gentleness and respect, meekness and fear, out of reverence for Christ ([Eph. 5:21](#)).

2. Suppose someone, upon hearing the Kalam cosmological argument, accuses you of "God-of-the-gaps" reasoning—using God to plug the holes in our scientific knowledge. What should you say?

It is not "God of the Gaps" reasoning because many brilliant and respected physicists (e.g., Alexander Vilenkin, Arvine Borde, Alan Guth) have concluded that the universe cannot be past-eternal, which supports premise 2 of the argument – the *universe began to exist*.

3. Suppose someone says that appealing to God as Creator or Designer is not a legitimate explanatory hypothesis but just a way of expressing our ignorance. How might you respond?

The presence of design in creation points to intentionality (teleological argument).

Moreover, it is illogical to posit unintentional intention. Creation (cosmological argument) is a volitional act by a maximally great being (ontological argument).

It is not from ignorance but through careful consideration of well-reasoned arguments drawn from cosmology, biology, ethics, historiography, logic, archaeology, etc.

4. Suppose that someone responds to the moral argument by saying that religion is not a reliable guide to the discovery of moral values and that the God of the Bible is in particular morally repugnant. How should you answer?

Gently point out that their line of reasoning shows that they aver the second premise of the moral argument (Objective moral values and duties do exist).

In many cases, such an attitude stems from a lack of study and understanding of the cultural, historical biblical contexts and the complexities of language grammars and literary genres found in the Bible.

5. Which of these arguments do you find the most persuasive and why?

The moral argument seems to hit home with most people. I believe that is where the most profound personal involvement with reality begins. It is usually the place where most people do not want to go, but when they do, they begin to realize their need for a Savior and a relation with God.

DE CREATIONE - THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

Having laid our theistic foundations, we now begin to construct the groundwork for a later presentation of Christian evidences. A case for God's decisive revelation in Jesus requires that objective knowledge of the past is attainable and that God's supernatural action in the world is possible and identifiable. In the next two chapters these crucial questions are addressed.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. Wherein lies the uniqueness and the scandal of the Christian religion? (207)

The uniqueness rests in the mediation of revelation through historical events (George Ladd). Christianity is unlike other religions in that it is rooted in the truth of historical facts.

2. How did the medieval use of signs of credibility serve as a precursor to historical apologetics? (209-210)

The signs of miracles and fulfilled prophecies were used to authenticate the truth claims of the miracle worker and the prophet and that it was ultimately God that wrought them.

3. How did the rise of historical apologetics parallel the development of modern historiography? (211-215)

The historicity of the signs of the Christian faith found strong support from the fruit of the emerging development of modern historical science.

4. Why was this parallel development aborted? (215-219)

Objectivist historical methodology sought to discover the historical Jesus without considering his supernatural nature and without His miracles. Also, the emergence of historic-relativism (historicism) posited that the accuracy of retelling historical events was not possible, and any attempt could only be accomplished through the sensibilities of the historian.

II. ASSESSMENT

1. What are the two major objections to the objectivity of history? (219-222)
 1. We do not have direct access to the past. We cannot directly observe past events as they unfolded.
 2. We are not neutral observers of past historical events because we bring our own personal thoughts and attitudes into our analysis.
2. What is the difference between historical constructionism as a philosophy and as a methodology? (222-223)
 - As a philosophy (ontological) – Ontological constructionism holds that there is no past in and of itself, only a past constructed in a person's head.
 - As a methodology (praxial) – Constructionism that lets the evidence lead to the reality of historical events.

To distinguish further, here is an excerpt from "*Objectivity, Method and Point of View: Essays in the Philosophy of History*"¹²:

We can sharpen this point by distinguishing praxial constructionism from ontological constructionism. The praxial constructionist holds that what counts within the practice of history is constructed, without going on to pronounce upon the truth or falsity, coherence or incoherence, of an ontological theory of historical events beyond the practice of history. The ontological constructionist, more broadly, holds that what is constructed within the practice of history is all there is. He makes a knowledge claim about entities beyond the reach of the praxial. I favor the more modest first claim. Goldstein affirms the bolder second claim. In what follows, I shall argue that Goldstein is mistaken to do so, and that he need not do so for the purpose of affirming his correct view that constructionism is to be embraced at the praxial level. Given a distinction between methodology and philosophy (or ontology), Goldstein is right to offer a methodological or praxial constructionism. But he is wrong to boldly conclude that there is no warrant in affirming historical realism as a philosophical position.

3. What's wrong with constructionism as a philosophy? (223-225)

It is subjective and leads to a distorted view of the past that consequently can blur the reality of the present.
4. Why is constructionism as a methodology not a problem? (225-226)

¹² (W. J. van der Dussen (Author, 1997)

It relies on evidence to objectively construct a picture of the past as it happened.

5. Assess the supposed difference between a scientist and a historian with regard to their access to their objects of study. (226-227)

For the most part, scientific knowledge is evidence-based and relies on what is observable in the here and now. However, this is not always the case (e.g., physics), and conclusions must be drawn from the evidential byproducts of unseen phenomena. Likewise, the historian cannot observe the past, but he or she can access the evidence of it through archaeology, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, numismatics¹³, etc.

6. Why does the "theory-ladenness" of observation not undermine the objectivity of science or history? (227-230)

- One's theory (*Weltanschauung*¹⁴) of what he or she observes has no bearing on the reality of the thing.
- In observing something we do not know, we can objectively theorize what it is not.
- As Columbo would say, "*Just the facts, ma'am.*" Evidence-based facts transcend one's theory about them. Quoting John Adams, "*Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.*"¹⁵

7. What is a historical fact? (231)

A historical fact can be conceptualized by one of the following two descriptions:

- The historical event itself, for example, a birthday, anniversary, etc.
- A piece of accurate information about the event, for example, its cause.

8. What's wrong with saying that historical facts exist only in your mind? (231)

Absent the memory of historical events in people's minds, the effects of such events can still be felt. In reality, denying the existence of facts would make its effects unexplainable, which is absurd.

9. Criticize the notion of a "meaningless fact." (231-232)

Meaning is inherent in a fact. Without meaning, a fact would not be a fact. It is a contradiction and incoherent, much like a married bachelor. There may be useless facts, but even they have meaning.

¹³ Numismatics – the study or collection of coins, paper currency, and medals.

¹⁴ *Weltanschauung* – a particular philosophy or view of life; one's all-embracing worldview

¹⁵ See https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/john_adams_134175. Adams was probably quoting Tobias Smollett or Alain-René Lesage.

Also, the notion of a meaningless fact is a statement that means something, and as such, it is self-defeating.

10. What criteria can be used in testing historical hypotheses? (233)

1. The hypothesis, together with other true statements, should be high in explanatory scope, power, and plausibility vis-à-vis the present observable data.
2. The hypothesis must imply greater observable data than its rivals (explanatory scope)
3. The hypothesis must imply more probable data than its rivals (explanatory power)
4. The hypothesis must imply more accepted truths and negated by fewer accepted truths than its rivals.
5. The hypothesis must be less ad hoc (have less conjecture) than its rivals.
6. The hypothesis must be less disconfirmed than its rivals (*i.e., It is in accord with accepted beliefs*).
7. The hypothesis must exceed its rivals in fulfilling points 2-6 above so that there is little doubt about its truth claims.

11. Why does the lack of neutrality on the part of a historian not support historical relativism? (234-235)

Because when all is said and done, what matters is not the historian's bent on the facts but the facts themselves and how they were arrived at. The historian's hypothesis must be supported by facts reinforced by the evidence and arrived at using a sound historical methodology (like the one outlined in question #10).

12. List three considerations which reveal that historians do believe in the objectivity of history. (235-237)

1. Certain facts are so incontrovertible that not to accept them would be nuts.
2. That there is a difference between historical truth and propaganda that distorts or rewrites it.
3. Poor history can be criticized and judged as fiction or non-fiction.

13. What is the importance of naturalism as a presupposition of historical inquiry? Is it justified? (238-240)

Naturalism presupposes that supernatural explanations of historical facts are not possible. It is not justified because doing so would possibly eliminate the *best explanation* of the historical facts.

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. How can we avoid making unrealistic claims about the historical evidence for the Christian faith? What fundamental dilemma should we insist on? (242)

We can present objective facts based on well-established evidence. For the historical skeptic, he must choose between embracing a life lived with no concept of truth or admit that truth found in the past informs his present reality.

2. Sometimes historical skepticism among laymen is based on unsophisticated objections such as, "You can't prove anything about what happened so long ago!" What confusion does this objection embody? (Hint: Which is crucial to historical proof: the gap between the evidence about some event and today or the gap between the event and the evidence about that event? Does good evidence become poor evidence just due to the passage of time?)

It confuses the truth of a historical event with the time of the historical event. If an event's truth was arrived at using a sound historical methodology, it does not matter how long ago it happened. Some might argue that events that occurred in antiquity cannot be reliably ascertained however, to deny them would be absurd given the current state of affairs.

DE CREATIONE - THE PROBLEM OF MIRACLES

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. How did Newtonian physics make God's miraculous intervention in the world seem incredible? (248-249)

The Deists of the Age of Enlightenment argued that if God created such a finely tuned world machine, it would seem rather unlikely He would go out of his way to disrupt it.

2. Summarize Spinoza's two arguments against the possibility of miracles. (249-250)
 1. The unchangeable laws of nature flow from God's immutable knowledge meaning that if God performed a miracle, it would be a violation of his own nature.
 2. Spinoza argues that it is by the unchangeable order of nature that we know for certain God exists. Thus, a miracle would raise doubts about the existence of God.
3. Summarize David Hume's two-step argument against the identification of miracles. (250-251)
 1. *In principle*, even if the proof of a miracle was strong (full proof), there is more proof for the laws of nature the miracle violated.
 2. *In fact*, even if there were full proof that a miracle actually occurred, that proof pales significantly compared to the proof of the immutable laws of nature. *In fact*, the laws of nature are so unlikely to be violated that it would be crazy to believe that the miracle occurred.

II. ASSESSMENT

1. Why does the indeterminacy in nature allowed by some interpretations of quantum physics not suffice as a defense of miracles? (259-261)
 1. Not all laws of nature are affected by quantum indeterminacy, e.g., Relativity Theory. Relativity Theory is not statistical or based on indeterminacy.
 2. Biblical miracles such as Jesus' post-resurrection state could not be realized through quantum indeterminacy.
 3. Because certain laws of quantum physics are statistically quantifiable, divine intervention can affect those laws. Even quantum laws could be violated miraculously.
2. Why are miracles not "violations of the laws of nature"? (261-263)
 - On Regularity Theory, laws of nature are not laws but descriptions and are not subject to violation.

- On Nomic Necessity Theory¹⁶, natural laws are taken to be universal inductive generalizations such that any anomaly should be considered part of such generalizations.
- On Causal Dispositions Theory, naturally caused events can be disrupted if God so chooses.

From the above schools of thought concerning natural law, one can conclude nature itself has nothing to do with its violations or interruptions - God does.

3. How should miracles be defined? (263)

A miracle is an extremely rare naturally or physically impossible event caused by something that falls outside the natural realm. It is an event that results from causal interference with a natural propensity that is so strong that only a supernatural agent could impede it.

4. What could conceivably bring about an event which is naturally impossible? (263) What are the implications of this for Apologetics?

Only a metaphysical, transcendent, and omnipotent God can cause something that is naturally or physically impossible to occur. For the Christian Apologist, he can offer an explanation of how God can enter into the phenomenal realm to interrupt its normal operations and behaviors and cause what is seemingly impossible to occur.

5. What is the flaw in Spinoza's first argument against miracles? (264)

Spinoza argues that God's essence is based on the doctrine of divine simplicity, which states that His knowledge and will are one and the same. Furthermore, Spinoza argues that they must be identical. Thus, the flaw is that this divine simplicity limits God's free will and concomitantly His knowledge resulting in a myopic view of God's omnipotence and omniscience.

6. Why is Spinoza mistaken in thinking that the admission of a miracle would overthrow a natural law? (265-266) How is this relevant in the case of someone who responds to the evidence for Jesus' resurrection by shrugging his shoulders and saying, "I guess that dead men do rise after all!"?

A natural law would only be overthrown if its violation (the miracle) were to occur repeatedly.

So, in the case of Christ's resurrection, if one were to skeptically say, "I guess dead men rise after all", a response could be "men" imply more than one man. However, Jesus' resurrection was a singular event that occurred in a unique religio-historic context. It had never occurred before and had not occurred since.

¹⁶ Nomic Necessity Theory or nomological necessity is necessity according to the laws of physics.

7. What would allow us to identify Jesus' miracles and resurrection as genuine miracles rather than the effects of unknown natural causes? (266-268)
- The profound impact of the life of Jesus on history and religious thought is as well documented as other historical figures of the time whose impact was less felt.
 - Alternate explanations are clumsy and ad hoc, e.g., swoon theory, empty tomb conspiracy, and similar alternative theories.¹⁷
 - Natural causes, known or yet to be discovered, could never explain the miracle.
 - If Jesus' resurrection were naturally caused, one would expect that another resurrection should have occurred in the over 2000 years since.
8. What two more or less independent claims does Hume's "in principle" argument make? (270)
1. Miracles, by definition, are improbable.
 2. No evidence for a purported miracle can serve to overcome the miracle's intrinsic improbability.
9. In asserting that no amount of evidence could ever establish a miracle, what factor did Hume overlook (270-272)?

Hume puts so great an emphasis on the intrinsic impossibility of the miracle that he overlooks the explanatory power of the evidence for the miracle occurring or not occurring.

How does this factor come to expression in the probability calculus?

Bayes Theorem Odds Form:

$$\frac{\Pr(M|E\&B)}{\Pr(\neg M|E\&B)} = \frac{\text{Intrinsic Probability: } \Pr(M|B)}{\Pr(\neg M|B)} \times \frac{\text{Explanatory Power: } \Pr(E|M\&B)}{\Pr(E|\neg M\&B)}$$

← Hume overlooks the explanatory power of the evidence for the miracle occurring or not occurring.

M=Miracle, B=Background Knowledge, E=Evidence

10. How is the following slogan false in light of probability calculus: "Extraordinary events require extraordinary evidence"? (273)

In the probability calculus, an extraordinary event (miracle) is expressed as the intrinsic probability of that event occurring or not occurring based on background knowledge, i.e., $\Pr(M|B) / \Pr(\neg M|B)$. However, in the second part of the equation - $\Pr(E|M\&B) / \Pr(E|\neg M\&B)$, the evidence is introduced, including the ordinary means of evidential discovery, such as basic sensory perception. Add to that the reliability of the sense perception of multiple sources,

¹⁷ See "[The Problem of Miracles: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective](#)" on the Reasonable Faith website for other examples.

and what begins to become "evident" is that ordinary evidence is sufficient to affirm the extraordinary event. Ironically, it would be more extraordinary that ordinary evidence would be deceiving.

11. Why can it not be assumed that the intrinsic probability of a miracle is terribly low? How would the inclusion of the fact of God's existence in one's background knowledge affect the intrinsic probability of a miracle claim? (275)

Suppose one were to thoroughly consider the classical arguments for God's existence¹⁸ and conclude that they are reasonable and rational. In that case, belief in a God who can perform miracles also becomes reasonable and rational. Thus, the intrinsic probability of a miracle does not have to be low if one were to include the existence of God into the background knowledge variable of the equation.

12. What should you say to someone who claims that in order to study history, one must presuppose that miracles do not happen? (276-277)

- To presuppose that miracles do not happen is to subscribe to a methodological naturalism that seeks to interpret the past based solely on similar patterns of present naturally occurring events.
- To presuppose that miracles do not happen is to constrain historiographical analysis only to include phenomena known to occur naturally in the present. Further, it excludes other explanatory phenomena that can be logically accepted or rejected as the case may be.¹⁹

13. Why are Hume's "in fact" arguments not insuperable? (277-278)

Because the evidence for the reality of the miracle could have more explanatory power than the evidence against the miracle.

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

14. All of the illustrations in this section about the importance of the question of miracles for biblical criticism and the science/religion dialogue are epitomized in James D. G. Dunn's treatment of the virgin birth of Jesus in his *Remember Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), p. 347. Dunn suggests that belief in Jesus' virginal conception was a theological elaboration of the basic affirmation that Jesus' birth was from the Holy Spirit (which need not imply a virginal conception). He admonishes the reader that "Here we also need to be aware of the biological and theological corollaries of the insisting that the virginal conception/birth was a historical fact" and cites approvingly Arthur Peacocke's assertion that

¹⁸ Classical arguments include the cosmological, teleological, design, moral, ontological arguments

¹⁹ For example, consider Jesus' post-resurrection appearances – to presuppose miracles don't happen would exclude from consideration the merits of alternative explanations e.g. hallucination, conspiracy, etc.

"any theology for a scientific age" has to start with the assumption that in order to be fully human Jesus had to have a human father.

This is nonsense. In order to be a fully human male, Jesus had to have both X and Y chromosomes. But he had to get genetic material from a human father only if miracles are impossible. The presumption that he had to get genetic material from a human father is a corollary of Peacocke's naturalism. By contrast, the biological corollary of the historicity of the virginal conception is that at least some of Jesus' genetic material was supernaturally created. The theological corollary is that God can create a fully human being out of nothing should He so choose (*cf.* the cases of Adam and Eve on creationist views of origins). We see here how a gifted biblical scholar can be led astray through his philosophical naivete.

Can you point to other examples of this problem?

One example is the rejection by liberal theologians of biblical miracles such as the resurrection. For example, John Shelby Spong²⁰ rejects on scientific grounds that Jesus was not resurrected physically but only symbolically in one's mind. However, if one believes that God can create the universe *ex nihilo* based on the classical arguments for the existence of God, a resurrection should be child's play!

²⁰ [John Shelby "Jack" Spong](#) (born June 16, 1931) is a retired American bishop of the Episcopal Church. From 1979 to 2000, he was the Bishop of Newark, New Jersey. A liberal Christian theologian, religion commentator and author, he calls for a fundamental rethinking of Christian belief away from theism and traditional doctrines.

DE CHRISTO - THE SELF-UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. How has the portrait of the historical Jesus changed from the Old Quest through the New Quest to today? (287-296)

The "Old Quest" was a post-enlightenment period effort of the late 18th - early 19th century that sought to explain the life of Jesus apart from any supernatural attributions. The "Old Quest" leaves only a Jesus-inspired theology and an incomplete picture of who Jesus really was in history, who He is today, and who He will always be.

The "New Quest" seeks to recover and examine the true life of Jesus using well-established means of historical research. The "New Quest" also attempts to construct a complete and comprehensive portrait of Jesus that considers the authenticity of the events of Jesus' life, both natural and supernatural, that carry theological significance.

2. How does the "burden of proof" issue underlie the negative use of the so-called criteria of authenticity? (292-293)

The "burden of proof" issue is characterized by an implicit assumption that elements of the Gospel narrative are presumed to be inauthentic unless proven authentic (sort of like presumed guilty until proven innocent). The burden of proof issue uses a broad set of criteria to prove authenticity, which includes but not limited to the following:

- Dissimilarity to Christian Teaching - seeks to distinguish the authentic Jesus material from that originating later from the early Church by highlighting material dissimilar to Christianity (for example, John the Baptist, a sinner, baptizing Jesus, the righteous Son of God).
- Multiple Attestation
- Linguistic Semitisms – grammatical/syntactical behaviors in a language (e.g., Aramaic, Hebrew) influencing another language
- Traces of Palestinian Milieu
- Retention of Embarrassing Material
- Coherence with Other Authentic Material

When employed negatively, each criterium's standards are raised to the point that no amount of evidence can adequately meet the standard for authenticity. In addition, even if a criterium seems to meet these demands satisfactorily, the same inflated standards will be imposed on the other criteria. Lastly, it makes meeting all these standards for every criterium

necessary rather than sufficient. This approach cannot help but create an inaccurate, distorted picture of the real Jesus.

II. ASSESSMENT

3. Why is John Meier's distinction between the historical Jesus and the real Jesus inept? (296-298)

Meier²¹ reduces the person of Jesus to a collection of propositions that are disconnected from the person of Jesus in his totality. In this way, Meier is guilty of committing the informal fallacy of composition known as the *Modo Hoc* fallacy²². That is because the collection of all these propositions in and of themselves do not have the necessary explanatory power to help us understand the quintessential nature of Jesus.

How should the distinction be rightly drawn? (296-298)

Distinctions should not merely take the form of an ad hoc collection of disconnected propositions. Instead, distinctions should be connected in a way that seeks to craft a cohesive, coherent, and holistic view of the subject.

4. Why is "the criteria of authenticity" a misnomer? How are they to be rightly understood? (298)

The word *criteria* is misused to refer to a strict set of rules by which things are judged. When used in this fashion, the judgment demands a binary verdict such as true/false or innocent/guilty. In other words, the criteria in view here must be deemed to be *necessary* conditions of historicity. Such a rigid approach to historical analysis is sure to lead to an incongruous and faulty narrative. Instead, the criteria should be considered as *sufficient* conditions of historicity. WLC suggests that the better expression should be "Indications of Authenticity" of the "Signs of Credibility".

5. Explain some of the most important criteria of authenticity. Think of examples of events/sayings in the Gospels which are shown to be authentic by use of such criteria. (298)

- **Historical Congruence:** A Gospel saying or event is best understood in view of the historical context in which it occurred. For example, a man named Jesus who lived 2000+ years ago is an accepted historical truth because many historians accept the New Testament Gospels as

²¹ John Meier – Author of "A Marginal Jew". Meier distinguishes the "Historical Jesus" from the "Real Jesus" and never the two shall meet. For Meier, the Jesus who actually lived cannot be known fully as there is no overlap between these two categories.

²² The *modo hoc*, or "just this," fallacy is the informal error of assessing meaning to an existent based on the constituent properties of its material makeup while omitting the matter's arrangement. For instance, metaphysical naturalism states that while matter and motion are all that comprise man, it cannot be assumed that the characteristics inherent in the elements and physical reactions that make up man ultimately and solely define man's meaning; for, a cow which is alive and well and a cow which has been chopped up into meat are the same matter but it is obvious that the *arrangement* of that matter clarifies those different situational meanings.

generally reliable biographical sources. In addition, respected historians such as Tacitus, Josephus, and Suetonius affirmed the historical figure of Jesus. Also, extra-biblical sources such as those written by Clement and Barnabas attest to the biographical Jesus.

- Independent Multiple Attestation: A Gospel saying or event appears in multiple sources and is near to the time at which it is alleged to have occurred and which depend neither upon each other nor upon a common source.
 - Jesus' self-identification as the Messiah - Jesus's execution as "King of the Jews" by Roman authorities is attested to by the Gospels, Josephus, and the Talmud.
 - Jesus's self-identification as the Son of God - The Parable of the Vineyard (Mark 12:1-9, alluding to Isaiah 5:1-7) is multiply attested by the Gospels and the Gnostic gospel of Thomas.
 - WLC gives a great example of this criterion in the Question of the Week regarding the empty tomb – see <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/independent-sources-of-the-empty-tomb>
- Embarrassment: A Gospel saying or event is awkward or counterproductive for the persons who serve as the source of information. For example, women as witnesses, cowardly disciples, John the Baptist's wavering faith while he was in prison, and Jesus calling Peter "Satan".
- Dissimilarity: A Gospel saying or event is unlike antecedent Jewish thought-forms and unlike subsequent Christian thought-forms.
 - Jewish Thought Forms:
 - That Jesus thought himself to be the Messiah, He fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9-10, arriving in Jerusalem as a King riding on a donkey. However, in the Jewish thought form of Jesus' time, this would not have been viewed as a literal messianic prophecy.
 - That Jesus refers to Yahweh as Father, for example, in the Lord's Prayer.
 - Christian Thought Forms: The plaque nailed to the Jesus' cross read "the King of the Jews" (Mark 15:26, John 19:19). "The King of the Jews" was never a Christian title for Jesus.
- Coherence: Some saying or event in the Gospels is consistent with established facts about Jesus.
- Semitisms: Gospel sayings or events contain traces of Aramaic or Hebraic linguistic forms.

6. What fundamental problem confronts those who deny that Jesus made any claims implying his divinity? (300)

They would have to explain how, within twenty years of Jesus' crucifixion, a fully developed theology emerged (Christology) in which followers proclaimed that Jesus is the eternal Son of God by whom salvation is made available to those who believe in His atoning death on a cross and subsequent resurrection. It would be inexplicable that anyone would believe such truth claims had not Jesus himself expressed these truths about himself.

7. Give a defense of the authenticity of Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. What is the theological significance of Jesus' messianic self-understanding? (301-310)

Within ten years of Jesus' death, followers were already referring to Him as Jesus Christ (i.e., The Messiah/Anointed One). Had Jesus not taught about His messianic mission during His earthly ministry, it would be hard to explain why people would declare their belief in Him as their King after His resurrection. In other words, if people believed Jesus was raised from the dead but did not teach He was the Messiah, why would people believe him to be the Messiah?

8. Give a defense of the authenticity of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. What is the theological significance of Jesus' filial self-understanding? (310-314)

- Jesus often spoke about himself in the third person as the Son. For example, [Matthew 11:27](#) and [Luke 10:22](#):

All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

These verses are connected to the very early Aramaic Q source, which counts in its favor as authentic (Palestinian milieu, Historical Congruency criterion).

- It is dissimilar to Christian thought forms because it states only the *Father knows the Son*, whereas the post-Easter church says we can know the Son in an informal way.
- The coherence of the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John – they all contain quotes by Jesus referring to himself as the Son of God.
- Using the criterion of embarrassment, while referring to himself as Son of God, Jesus admits He does not know the Day of the Lord, i.e., He is not omniscient ([Matthew 24:36](#)).

Theologically, Jesus is affirming His deity through announcing His relationship to God the Father.

9. Give a defense of the authenticity of Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man. What is the theological significance of Jesus' self-understanding as the Son of Man? (315-318)

In the four Gospels, Jesus refers to himself 48 times as the "Son of Man", yet only one other time is that title used in the New Testament. Therefore, based on the criterion of dissimilarity, it is safe to say that using the title Jesus gives to himself in the third person is unique to Himself and not imposed on Him by the Apostles or by other Christian traditions.

Jesus thought of himself as the *Danielic* "Son of Man" who, from all eternity, was given dominion and authority over all creation which elevates His being as the same essence of God.

10. What is "implicit Christology?" (319)

It is the concepts, themes, behaviors, commands, and beliefs of Jesus that, when considered against the backdrop of the first century religio-cultural milieu of Palestinian Judaism, presuppose and point to the titles of the office, purpose, and mission He gives Himself and the Apostolic teachings attributed to Him.

11. Explain several examples of implicit Christological claims made by Jesus. (319-327)

- Jesus taught that his twelve disciples who followed Him would be enthroned as judges of the twelve tribes of Israel (a political entity, therefore a nation or kingdom), implying that Jesus would be their King.
- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught as one who had authority ([Matthew 7:28-29](#)). Typical rabbinical teaching style consisted of quoting extensively from learned teachers, but Jesus did just the opposite – for example, his "You have heard it said" quotes.
- Jesus' use of "Amen" and not "Thus says the Lord" expresses divine authority (truly, truly = amen).
- Jesus was an exorcist, a sign of his divine authority over demons. The ability to cast out demons, Jesus says, indicates the Kingdom of God has come upon you ([Luke 11:20](#)). What Jesus was saying is that the reign of Satan as the spiritual ruler of the earth is over – there's a new sheriff in town!
- Jesus claims he can do what only God can do – to forgive sins ([Mark 2:1-12](#)).
- Jesus claims he can do what only God can do - to perform miracles ([Matthew 11:4-5](#)).
- Jesus prayed to the Father as Abba, an Aramaic term roughly translated to "Daddy", a term reserved for the filial, intimate relationship of a father and child.

- Jesus taught that a person's eternal destiny depended on their response to Him ([Luke 12:8-9](#)).
- Jesus taught that his death was necessary to atone for the sins of His people ([John 10:11](#), [John 10:14-18](#)).

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

12. How is popular anti-Christian polemics still largely stuck in the Old Quest?

It uses a naturalistic/materialistic approach that rejects supernatural explanations out of the box.

It overemphasizes Jesus's humanity and underemphasizes his deity and messianic mission, thus painting an incomplete picture of who Jesus really is. We see this played out in the "He gets us" TV campaign ads.

13. How is the material discussed in this chapter useful in sharing the Gospel with Muslims?

Muslims are taught that Jesus did not profess to be God and that he thought of himself merely as a man because he often referred to himself as "son of man". This shows a lack of understanding about the origin of the meaning of the expression "The Son of Man", especially in Daniel 7.

14. How can the material discussed in this chapter serve to contextualize the evidence for Jesus' resurrection?

It provides the religio-historical context in which the resurrection becomes significant as it vindicates all the truth claims made by Jesus. Taken together with the evidence for Jesus' miracles and fulfilled prophecy, the radical claims of Jesus become a powerful apologetic for defending the Christian faith.

DE CHRISTO - THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. What was the dilemma posed by the traditional apologetic for Jesus' resurrection?

The dilemma that the disciples were either deceivers or they were deceived.

What further argument did the traditional apologetic offer on behalf of Jesus' resurrection? (342)

The Church's existence would be hard to explain if the founders were a rag-tag team of lower-class, under-educated, gullible men who could influence not only common folk but also politicians and philosophers.

2. How did Strauss undercut the traditional dilemma? (345-347)

David Friedrich Strauss²³ offered a tertium quid that asserted the miracles and resurrection of Jesus never happened. Instead, they were stories produced by a long process of legend telling and religious imagination. In other words, they were myths propagated through the early oral transmission of the Gospel narrative.

3. Describe the recent change in scholarly opinion concerning the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. (349)

During the last half of the 20th century, theologians and church historians took up the task to reexamine the miracles and resurrection of Jesus using a new set of lenses, turning away from the subjective/liberal narratives of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

II. ASSESSMENT

4. A historical case for Jesus' resurrection will comprise what two steps? (350)
 1. Establish the facts that serve as historical pieces of evidence (e.g., empty tomb).
 2. Argue those facts by assessing the comparative merits of rival hypotheses and demonstrating which one offers the most reasonable explanation.

²³ David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) was a German liberal Protestant theologian and writer, who influenced Christian Europe with his portrayal of the "historical Jesus", whose divine nature he denied. His work was connected to the Tübingen School, which "revolutionized" (in a liberal way) the study of the New Testament, early Christianity, and ancient religions. Strauss was a pioneer in the historical investigation of Jesus.

5. How should we respond to Bart Ehrman's claim that there can in principle be no historical evidence for Jesus' resurrection? (350-353)

Our response should argue that just because the resurrection hypothesis involves a supernatural/metaphysical dimension does not mean the facts surrounding that explanation cannot be subject to vigorous historiographical analysis. Also, just because the historian does not have direct access to the supernatural realm does not mean it cannot be excluded as an explanation in the same way other sciences do. For example, physics, paleontology, and the like postulate explanations that are not accessible to direct observations.

6. Why are John Meier's reservations about a historical case for Jesus' resurrection misconceived? (353-357)

Meier asserts that Jesus' resurrection was an actual bodily event but that it did not occur in time and space. Thus, it fails to meet a criterion of historical inquiry. However, as Wolfhart Pannenberg²⁴ points out, somebody (the women) observed the empty tomb at a particular point in time (30 A.D.) and a specific place (Palestine), thus qualifying it for objective historical inquiry.

7. Why are Dale Allison's doubts about Jesus' physical resurrection unfounded? (357-359)

Dale Allison is a dualist who believes the resurrected state is not physical. He doubts the bodily resurrection of Jesus because he believes that spatio-temporal continuity of the physical entity (his/her physical identity as opposed to personal identity) is a necessary condition of identity over time (spanning mortal, resurrection states). Strangely, Allison would doubt the physical resurrection of Christ because Jesus' body was not destroyed between his death and resurrection. Whether God resurrected Jesus' physical body or if his spatio-temporal state discontinued and he received a duplicate body does not undermine a doctrine of physical, corporeal immortality. Allison's commitment to dualism causes him to construct philosophical straw-man arguments to physical, corporal immortality that have little to do with the facts as they relate to Jesus' resurrection.

8. What are the inductive grounds for inferring Jesus' resurrection? State the three facts to be explained. (360)

1. The Empty Tomb: The tomb of Jesus was found empty by a group of his women followers on the first day of the week following his crucifixion.

²⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928 – 2014) was a German Lutheran theologian. He has made a number of significant contributions to modern theology, including his concept of history as a form of revelation centered on the resurrection of Christ.

2. Resurrection Appearances: After the discovery of the empty tomb, various individuals and groups experienced on different occasions and under varying circumstances appearances of Jesus alive.
 3. Origin of the Christian Faith: The first disciples came sincerely to believe in Jesus' resurrection in the absence of sufficient antecedent historical influences from either Judaism or pagan religions.
9. Which of the lines of evidence supporting the fact of Jesus' empty tomb do you find the most convincing? Explain it. (361-371)

First, a review of the options:

1. The historical reliability of the story of Jesus' burial supports the empty tomb.
2. The discovery of Jesus' empty tomb is multiply attested in very early, independent sources.
3. The phrase "1st day of the week" reflects ancient tradition.
4. The Markan story is simple and lacks legendary development.
5. Women probably discovered the tomb.
6. The earliest Jewish polemic presupposes the empty tomb.

They are all compelling, but I find #2 is most convincing. Here is why:

- The Pre-Markan source most likely included a narrative about the empty tomb featuring attestation from the women who saw the stone covering the tomb as well as discovering it uncovered and empty.
- Matthew is clearly working with a different source than the Markan source because it includes the narrative of the guard at the tomb.
- All three synoptic gospels employ different vocabulary, indicating that their narratives were from fundamentally different sources.
- John's gospel contains the same narrative found in Luke's gospel. Note that John's gospel is not a synoptic and thus from another independent source.
- The Apostolic sermons in the book of Acts, e.g., Peter's ([Acts 2:29-32](#)) backed up by Paul's ([Acts 13:36-37](#)), both assume what Peter and the other disciple witnessed – the tomb was empty.
- The early creed of [1 Corinthians 15:3-5](#) implies there were witnesses that saw the empty tomb specifically on the 3rd day.

10. Using McCullagh's criteria for justifying historical hypotheses, assess one of the naturalistic hypotheses offered to explain the fact of the empty tomb. (371-377)

First, let's review the options:

- Conspiracy Hypothesis – The disciples stole the body and lied about it.
- Apparent Death Hypothesis (Swoon) – Jesus survived the crucifixion.
- Wrong Tomb Hypothesis – The women lost their way to the tomb that Sunday morning, and the caretaker at another unoccupied tomb told them that Jesus was not there.
- Displaced Body Hypothesis – Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus in his tomb temporarily but then moved the corpse to a criminals' graveyard.
- Docetism Hypothesis – The crucifixion of Jesus was just an illusion.
- Myth Hypothesis – The empty tomb and resurrection narratives were not meant to be taken literally true or literally false. Instead, they are to be viewed symbolically or spiritually.

I will assess the Apparent Death (Swoon) Hypothesis as that is the one that many Muslims use to explain the empty tomb.

1. *The hypothesis, together with other true statements, must imply further statements describing present, observable data.*

The hypothesis meets this condition as it implies that the New Testament's literary evidence will exist due to the events described in this hypothesis.

2. *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory scope than rival hypotheses.*

This condition is met by virtue that it explains the empty tomb, Jesus' post-mortem appearances, and the origin of the disciples' belief in his resurrection.

3. *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory power than rival hypotheses.*

The explanations supporting this hypothesis are feeble. They include:

- How could a swooning half-dead man move the large stone placed in front of the door of the tomb?
- How could the disciples, upon seeing Jesus in desperate need of medical attention, believe Jesus is the risen Lord of glory worthy of proclaiming him the Messiah and then risk their own lives to do so?
- How could a half-dead man, after moving the stone, get past the Roman guard?

- Where did Jesus go after he awoke from his swoon? There is no data, not even false, fantastic, imagined, about Jesus' life after his crucifixion in any sources, friend or foe at any time early or late.

4. *The hypothesis must be more plausible than rival hypotheses.*

As compared to other hypotheses where Jesus dies, this is highly implausible. The Romans were very good at crucifixions.

5. *The hypothesis must be less ad hoc than rival hypotheses.*

Many ad hoc explanations must follow for this hypothesis to lead one to conclude its veracity. For example, the disciples would have had to deceive others into believing Jesus died and came back to life. They would have had to conspire with the Sanhedrin, risk their lives, etc. There is no evidence of this.

6. *The hypothesis must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than rival hypotheses (i.e., It is in accord with accepted beliefs).*

The medical facts concerning the likelihood of a scourged, crucified man surviving lend themselves to disconfirm this hypothesis. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the severely wounded Jesus appeared with the disciples in such a medically compromised state.

7. *The hypothesis must significantly exceed its rivals in fulfilling (2)-(6).*

This theory has virtually no defenders among New Testament historians for the reasons documented in points (2)-(6).

11. Explain how the post-mortem appearances of Jesus are multiply attested. (376-381)

In [1 Corinthians 15:3-8](#), Paul lists several individuals and groups who witnessed the resurrection of Christ as documented in the Gospels and the book of Acts:

1. Peter (Cephas) and James (Jesus' half-brother) - Paul met with them and knew them personally ([Galatians 1:18-20](#)). Barnabas took Paul to meet them during his Jerusalem visit ([Acts 9:27](#)).
2. The "Twelve" – They were Jesus' disciples who became the first apostles.
3. The Apostles – A larger group of apostles who had personal access to Jesus.
4. Five hundred brothers and sisters – Christian believers, most of whom were still alive at the time, implying that they were still alive to attest that they saw Jesus in the body post-mortem.
5. Paul himself, whose testimony and life attest to the truth, claims that he experienced the Risen Jesus.

Note that if Paul wrote [1 Corinthians 15:3-8](#) in A.D. 55 as most biblical scholars believe, that was 25 years after Jesus' death and resurrection in A.D. 30. As such, it is not unreasonable to conclude that people would have remembered such an event as if it was yesterday. Modern-day versions of vividly recalling historic events decades after they occurred are the assassination of JFK and 911.

12. Defend the physicality of Jesus' post-mortem appearances. (382-384)

When Jesus appeared, he could be seen, heard, and touched in the physical world by more than one person at more than one time. If His post-mortem appearances were visions, that implies that they were experienced by only one person at a time because visions occur in one's mind, disconnected from the physical world. However, this is not what the New Testament teaches about the matter (see [1 Corinthians 15:3-8](#)).

13. Using McCullagh's criteria for justifying historical hypotheses, assess the Hallucination Hypothesis as an attempt to explain the post-mortem appearances of Jesus. (384-387)

1. *The hypothesis, together with other true statements, must imply further statements describing present, observable data.*

This condition meets this criterium as it implies that the New Testament's literary evidence will exist due to the events described in this hypothesis.

2. *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory scope than rival hypotheses.*

This explanation has narrow explanatory scope for the following reasons:

- It ignores the empty tomb.
- It does not explain the origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection, e.g., a vision of someone who recently died implies that they are no longer living in the physical world.
- Jews at the time (even the disciples who had been with Jesus) would have never expected a physical bodily resurrection.

3. *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory power than rival hypotheses.*

This explanation is weak vis-à-vis appearances. For example, there are no cases in the psychological record where different people in different places at different times experience visions of the exact same person.

4. *The hypothesis must be more plausible than rival hypotheses.*

This explanation is not plausible for the following reasons:

- A. Is it plausible that Peter and Paul labored under guilt complexes that found release in the hallucinations of Jesus as per Gerd Lüdemann's explanation²⁵ ? Peter and Paul's guilt complexes are implausible for three reasons:
- Lüdemann's "depth psychoanalysis"²⁶ view is based on disputed theories of Jung and Freud.
 - There is insufficient data on the psychoanalysis of Peter and Paul. Besides, they are no longer living. It is hard enough to psychoanalyze a living person.
 - The Book of Acts and the Pauline epistles seem to indicate that the Apostle Paul did not struggle with guilt in the same manner in the same way, for example, that Martin Luther did.
- B. Paul's experience of the risen Christ on the Damascus Road, even if different from the other disciples', does not mean it was a hallucination.

5. *The hypothesis must be less ad hoc than rival hypotheses.*

This hypothesis is quite ad hoc because:

- It assumes the disciples fled to Galilee after Jesus' arrest.
- Peter's guilt caused him to hallucinate a vision of Jesus.
- The other disciples were prone to hallucinations.
- It assumes Paul struggled with Jewish law and was secretly attracted to Christianity. There is no evidence for that.

6. *The hypothesis must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than rival hypotheses (i.e., It is in accord with accepted beliefs).*

The beliefs of most New Testament scholars that disconfirm this hypothesis:

- Jesus received an honorable burial by Joseph of Arimathea.
- The hallucination theory cannot explain the empty tomb despite evidence for burial.
- The tomb was found empty by women.
- The psychoanalysis of historical figures is not feasible.
- Paul was zealous in prosecuting Christians up to his Damascus Road experience.

²⁵ See [Visions of Jesus: A Critical Assessment of Gerd Lüdemann's Hallucination](#)

²⁶ [Depth psychology](#)

Reasonable Faith

*Christian Truth
and Apologetics*

Study Questions

7. *The hypothesis must significantly exceed its rivals in fulfilling (2)-(6).*

As implausible as this hypothesis is, many skeptics view it as a viable explanation, possibly because it is better than the naturalistic alternatives. Nevertheless, is it better than the Resurrection Hypothesis accepted by most orthodox Christians?

14. How can the traditional argument based on the origin of Christianity be effectively recast? (387-389)

The traditional argument for the origin of the Christian Faith (empty tomb, post-mortem appearances, [1 Corinthians 15:3-8](#)) can be recast by encouraging the skeptic to try to put themselves in the place of one of the disciples or one of Jesus' followers. They expected Jesus to be a type of Davidic King commanding allegiance of both Jew and Gentile alike. Just think how their hopes were dashed when Jesus was executed like a common criminal. There would be only one way that the disciples' hope could be restored, and that would be to see the resurrected Jesus with their own eyes and to hear him speak with their own ears and to touch him with their own hands.

15. Why can the origin of the disciples' belief that God had raised Jesus from the dead not be plausibly explained in terms of pagan influences? Of Jewish influences? (390-395)

Pagan Influences:

Pagan beliefs of dying and rising gods were closely related to the seasonal cycles paralleling seasonal plant life. Jesus' death and resurrection were onetime events. Jesus and his disciples would have militated against such religious beliefs. They would have found them repugnant.

Jewish Influences:

The Jews believed the resurrection would occur after the end of the world, not as an event in history. For example, when Jesus told Martha that her brother Lazarus would be raised after dying, she thought he meant the resurrection at the end of the world as all Jews of the time did. When he predicted his own resurrection, they asked him why the scribes taught Elijah would come first (the orthodox Rabbinic teaching was that Elijah would come before that great and terrible Day of the Lord). Even the disciples believed this. Jesus' predictions would have confused them as they thought once a person dies, even Jesus, that person stays dead and buried, perhaps preserving their bones with a shrine. They also understood that the resurrection would be for all righteous people. Nowhere in the Jewish teachings at the time was there any concept of the Messiah's resurrection occurring before other people – there was no concept of a Messiah rising at all.

Translation vs. Resurrection:

If the disciples believed that Jesus was assumed up to heaven, they would not have preached he was raised from the dead.

16. Using McCullagh's criteria for justifying historical hypotheses, assess the Resurrection Hypothesis. (397-399)

1. *The hypothesis, together with other true statements, must imply further statements describing present, observable data.*

The Resurrection Hypothesis, together with other true statements, meets the standards of this criterium for it indeed prompts and alludes to further statements describing the present observable data, which includes:

- The historical texts that form the basis of the historian's reconstruction of the events of Easter.
- The Empty Tomb – There was no evidence of any tomb containing the remains of Jesus, unlike David, Peter, and others. The empty tomb explains the Christian belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection.
- The existence of the Christian faith itself

2. *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory scope than rival hypotheses.*

The Resurrection hypothesis provides complete and thorough explanations for all three significant questions surrounding the resurrection:

- 1) The empty tomb.
- 2) Post-mortem appearances.
- 3) The origin of the disciples' belief in the resurrection leading to the existence of the Christian faith

The competing hypothesis only explains one or two.

3. *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory power than rival hypotheses.*

The observable data found in both biblical and non-biblical sources offer powerful explanations that make the Resurrection Hypothesis's probability more significant than its rivals. For example, what hypothesis better explains the cause of the disciples' belief and proclamations that Jesus was who he said he was? What hypothesis better explains the disciples putting themselves at risk of mockery, torture, and death if they had not seen Him in his resurrected body after being humiliated and brutally crucified as a common criminal?

4. *The hypothesis must be more plausible than rival hypotheses.*

What makes the Hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead more plausible than the others is that given Jesus' claims to deity and His prophecies about Himself, it would be very

reasonable to expect that the events of Easter unfolded as they did. Indeed, more reasonable than that of the rival hypothesis. For example, Jesus told the Pharisees that He would give them no sign of His deity except for the sign of the prophet Jonah ([Matt. 12:39-41](#), [16:4](#), [Jonah 1:17](#)). If Jesus had not risen on the third day, His prophecy would have made no sense. As long as one does not have a philosophical bias against miracles, this hypothesis is no more implausible than its rivals.

5. *The hypothesis must be less ad hoc than rival hypotheses.*

As "ad hoc"-ness means how many suppositions are assumed in the background knowledge of the hypothesis, the Resurrection Hypothesis is much less ad hoc than its rivals because it assumes only one supposition – That God exists. For the theist, that is already supposed in our background knowledge based on natural theology.

Compare this to some of the other hypotheses:

- The Conspiracy Hypothesis supposes that the disciples were a bunch of scheming liars, which is not supposed by the knowledge we have of them. Blaise Pascal explains in his Pensées:
"The hypothesis that the Apostles were knaves is quite absurd. Follow it out to the end and imagine these twelve men meeting after Jesus' death and conspiring to say that he had risen from the dead. This means attacking all the powers that be. The human heart is singularly susceptible to fickleness, to change, to promises, to bribery. One of them had only to deny this story under these inducements, or still more because of possible imprisonment, tortures and death, and they would all have been lost. Follow that out."
- The Apparent Death (Swoon) Hypothesis supposes that the crucifixion did not achieve its goal and that the centurion's lance into Jesus's side only caused a superficial wound. Interestingly, for those who deny miracles, given the background knowledge of what we know about Roman crucifixions, this would be a miracle.
- The Hallucination Theory supposes that some or all the disciples were susceptible to imagining things that do not exist in reality, much how a person with schizophrenia imagines things that are not real. There is nothing in our knowledge of them that would suppose this is the case.
- The Myth/Legend hypothesis supposes that the Gospel authors intended their writings to be read as mythical fiction, fictionalized biography, realistic fantasy, or perhaps as a fairy tale. This supposition does not align with our background knowledge as the Gospels were written concisely without grandiose embellishment, which one would expect from an objective historical and biographical narrative.

Furthermore, the Myth/Legend hypothesis supposes that the Gospel writers, who were eyewitnesses and whose sources were eyewitnesses, injected miraculous events into their history, thus inventing the genre of realistic fantasy nineteen centuries before it was invented in the twentieth century. Lastly, myths do not emerge so close in time to the events themselves and not during the eyewitnesses' lifetimes.

To summarize, when one considers the religious and historical context in which the resurrection events occurred, the theory is hardly ad hoc because it comports with all the background knowledge we have of Jesus' life, ministry, and prophecies. It is much less concocted than the other theories, as outlined in the points above.

6. *The hypothesis must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than rival hypotheses (i.e., It is in accord with accepted beliefs).*

The only belief that one may have to disconfirm the Resurrection Hypothesis is "dead men don't rise." That would assume the one holding that belief rejects the possibilities of miracles.

Those rejecting miracles would have to subscribe to one of the other rival hypotheses, which are much more disconfirmed. For example:

- Conspiracy Hypothesis (disconfirmed by the instability of conspiracies)
- Apparent Death/Swoon Hypothesis (disconfirmed by the likelihood of surviving a crucifixion)
- Hallucination Hypothesis (disconfirmed psychological characteristics of hallucinatory experiences)
- Myth (disconfirmed by literary analysis and authorship dating)

7. *The hypothesis must significantly exceed its rivals in fulfilling (2)-(6).*

Once one gives up the prejudice against miracles, it is hard to deny that the resurrection of Jesus is the best explanation of the facts. The agnostic philosopher, David Stuart Mill, once said, "If, therefore, it be once conceded that a being of the attributes ascribed to God exists, the possibility of miracles is admitted."

17. How can the theological significance of the fact of Jesus' resurrection be accurately discerned? (399)

To quote William Lane Craig, "That is the divine vindication of Jesus' radical personal claims". These are the claims that the Jewish leaders deemed as blasphemous, and the Gentiles simply dismissed.

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

18. Isn't it quite amazing, when you think about it, that the historical evidence for an event so extraordinary as the resurrection of Jesus should be so good?

What makes it so good is that all the alternative resurrection theories, when scrutinized thoroughly, are extremely weak compared to the literal biblical accounts - so much so that they help make the case that God indeed raised Jesus from the dead. Whether one applies Bayes Theorem, inference to the best explanation, or C. Behan McCullagh's seven criteria for testing a historical hypothesis, the honest seeker of truth cannot help but conclude that Jesus rose from the dead through the power of God. If one still rejects God and miracle, perhaps a review of the classical arguments for God and miracles presented in Reasonable Faith and other sources would be helpful.