

A Layperson's Introduction to Common Questions

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I. Truth and razor sharp thinking

A. What is truth?

"If you believe that, then it is true for you, but what is true for you may not be true for me."

Question: What is wrong with the above statement?

To respond to the kind of fuzzy thinking that is common in our society, we must have a crystal clear definition of truth.

Truth: A statement or belief is true if, and only if (iff) it corresponds to the way things actually are.¹

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."²

Question: Keeping in mind the definition of truth, what is the implication when Jesus states that He is *the* truth?

¹ This definition is known as the correspondence theory of truth

² John 14:6

Application: In the movie *The Matrix*, the question is asked, "What is 'real'?" If we are to know the difference between what is true and what is not true, we must have a good idea of the way things actually are. In other words we must know what is real. For some things, that may be harder than you expect.

B. How to argue

Argument: A series of statements that lead to a logical conclusion

After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus met two disciples who did not understand or believe that Jesus would suffer, die and rise again. Jesus' reaction was the following:

And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.³

Note that Jesus did not simply insist that they believe it (blind faith). Rather, He put together an extensive argument, beginning with ancient prophecies, that led to the logical conclusion that Jesus must suffer, die and rise again.

Note what Jude wrote:

I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you *contend earnestly* for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.⁴

The Greek word for 'contend earnestly' includes the idea of presenting arguments for the faith.

Application: We should be able to put together a good argument for everything that we believe

In order to know how to argue, you must be able to:

1. put together a good argument and,
2. recognize bogus arguments

³ Luke 24:27

⁴ Jude 3

1. Putting together a good argument

There are various types of arguments, but there are two main types that can carry you a long way.

a. Modus ponens

A *modus ponens* argument goes like this:

- If A is the case, then B must be the case
- A is, in fact, the case
- Therefore, B is the case

Here is an example:

- If a person is standing in front of a speeding transit bus, then they should seriously consider moving
- Bob is standing in front of a speeding transit bus
- therefore, Bob should seriously consider moving

One more example:

- If something has a beginning to its existence, then it must have been caused
- The universe had a beginning to its existence,
- therefore, the universe must have been caused

b. Disjunctive syllogism

A disjunctive syllogism goes something like this:

- It is either A or B
- It is not A
- therefore, it must be B

Here is an example:

- I am either dead or alive
- I am not dead
- therefore, I must be alive

Here is another example:

- Organic life was either produced by natural processes or it was designed
- It cannot be produced by natural processes
- therefore, it was designed

c. Ingredients for a good argument

There are at least two ingredients for a good argument:

- i) The argument must be valid (the conclusion must logically follow from the premises)
- ii) The premises must be acceptable

The premises should generally be accepted as true, or at least plausible. The following is an example of a valid argument, but a poor one since one of the premises is false. It is also an excellent example of argument and counter-argument:

Upon observing Jesus cast out demons, the scribes responded, "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons."⁵

What is their argument? It can be formulated as follows:

- Either one casts out demons by the power of God or the power of Satan (opening premise)
- Jesus does not cast out demons by the power of God (assumption)
- therefore, He is casting them out by the power of Satan (disjunctive syllogism)

Observe Jesus' response (read Mark 3:22-27)

What did He do?

- i) First, He challenged the first premise, implying that the

⁵ Mark 3:22

- argument was not acceptable then,
 ii) He presented an argument to back up His challenge

2. Recognizing bogus arguments

When you hear something that doesn't sound right to you, or that you do not agree with, take the following steps:

- Figure out what their argument is (like we did above with the Scribes' argument). Structure it in the form of premises and conclusion (formalize it).
- Analyze the formalized argument to see if it is good.
- If it is not good, determine why and respond accordingly.
- Always consider whether to put the other person on the defensive (make them do the work and defend their argument) or to take the defensive yourself (defend a counter-argument).

The following are examples of different types of bogus arguments:

a. **Assertions**

An assertion is a conclusion with no supporting argument whatsoever. For example, 'There is no God', 'The Bible is nothing but a collection of myths and fairytales.'

Response: Point out that the person has merely made an assertion and has provided no reason to believe that their assertion is true. Then, ask the person for a supporting argument. Wait for a one and don't let them off the hook.

- b. **The Donkey's Laugh:** Humor or ridicule is used in an effort to cover up an inability or unwillingness to respond appropriately to the other person's position.
- c. **Chronological fallacy:** The assumption that older ideas, attitudes, etc. are inferior to newer ones.

Red flags that indicate the possibility of a chronological fallacy:

- 'lets not turn back the clock'
- 'victorian attitudes toward sex'
- 'outdated values'

- d. **Argument from silence:** assuming a claim is true simply because there is no evidence against it, or assuming a claim is false simply because there is no evidence for it.

Example: In the last federal election, many people fell for this fallacy. The argument went something like this:

- 'nobody knows what Stockwell Day will do'
- therefore, Stockwell Day is 'scary' (will likely do something so awful that just to think about it strikes fear into our hearts)

Notice that the above is not a valid argument; there is a missing premise (e.g., 'if you do not know what someone will do, then that person is scary'). Since there is no evidence to show that he will not do something scary, it is assumed that this is sufficient warrant to believe that he actually will do something scary.

- e. **Genetic fallacy:** assuming the origin of a claim somehow affects the truth of a claim.

'We don't want American values (American healthcare, etc.)'

The thinking here seems to be that if something is American, then it is false or bad. It does not logically follow that if something is American, it is bad. The onus is on the anti-American to provide an argument for their claim.

A claim or an argument must stand on its own merit and not upon something that is utterly irrelevant (e.g., where the claim originated).

- f. **Poisoning the well:** rejecting a persons claim because they might have a motive for advancing that claim

II. Is There a Creator?

Introduction: In this session we shall look at the scientific and logical evidence for a Creator.

A. The origin of the universe

Since the mid-1980's, it has become generally accepted by astronomers and astrophysicists that the universe, consisting of space-time, matter and energy, had a beginning to its existence. The scientific evidence overwhelmingly supports that notion. But this finding has philosophical and logical implications.

1. The universe had a beginning to its existence⁶
2. If something has a beginning to its existence then it must have a cause (cause: produces an effect)
3. Therefore, the universe must have a cause

4. The cause of the universe must be independent of what it caused (space-time, matter and energy)
5. Something independent of the dimension of time is timeless and beginningless
6. Therefore, the cause of the universe is timeless and beginningless (from 4 & 5)
7. An entity can have a cause only if it has a beginning (one cannot cause a state of affairs if it already exists)
8. Therefore, the cause of the universe cannot, itself, have a cause (6 & 7) Subconclusion (B)

⁶ David Hilbert, 'On the Infinite,' *Philosophy of Mathematics*, Prentice Hall (1964), pp. 131,141. See also G.J. Whitrow, 'On the Impossibility of an Infinite Past,' *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, **29**, (1978), pp. 39-45.

9. Something that is timeless must be eternal
10. Therefore, the cause of the universe must be eternal (6 & 9)
Subconclusion (C)
- *****
11. No natural processes of any kind can occur independent of the dimension of time
12. Therefore, the cause of the universe cannot be a natural process of any kind (4 & 11)
13. An effect must be caused by either natural processes or a free agent
14. Therefore, the cause of the universe is a free agent (12 & 13)
Subconclusion (D)
- *****
15. Anything independent of space-time, matter and energy is immaterial
16. Therefore, the cause of the universe is immaterial (4 & 15)
Subconclusion (E)
- *****
17. The cause of the universe is a free agent who is uncaused, eternal and immaterial (8,10,14 & 16) Addition of the four subconclusions
18. If a free agent is immaterial, uncaused, eternal and creator of the universe, than that person is God
19. Therefore, the cause of the universe is God (17 & 18)
20. If the universe began to exist and the cause of the universe is God, then God exists
21. Therefore, God exists (from 2, 19 & 20)

B. The Fine-Tuned Design of the Universe

Over the last 20 years, astrophysicists have discovered that the universe appears to be incredibly fine tuned to support life. The tiniest change in anyone of over two dozen factors would make it impossible for the universe to support life. Here are just a few examples:

1. If the strong nuclear force were just 2% weaker or 0.3% stronger, life would be impossible.⁷
2. The mass of the neutron must be fine tuned to within 0.1%.
3. The number of electrons in the universe must be equivalent to the number of protons to an accuracy of one part in 10^{37} .
4. The expansion rate of the universe cannot differ by more than one part in 10^{55} .
5. The electromagnetic force relative to gravity must have a tolerance of within one part in 10^{40} . (for 3,4 &5, need heads 439 times)
6. The various contributions to the vacuum energy of the universe must cancel out to an accuracy of about 120 decimal places.

As a result of discoveries such as these some very prestigious, and well-known scientists have made the following statements:

Sir Roger Penrose, Mathematical Physicist

The “accuracy of the Creator’s aim” would have had to be one part in $10^{10(123)}$.⁸

Stephen Hawking, Theoretical Physicist

“The odds against a universe like ours emerging out of something like the Big Bang are enormous. I think there are clearly religious implications whenever you start to discuss the origins of the universe. There must be

⁷ Ross, Hugh, *The Creator and the Cosmos*, Navpress 1993, p.107

⁸ Hawking, S. and Penrose, R., *The Nature of Space and Time*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (1996), 34-35.

religious overtones. But I think most scientists prefer to shy away from the religious side of it.”⁹

Paul Davies, Theoretical Physicist

“I’m convinced on the basis of my scientific work that there is something like a meaning or purpose of physical existence. I base that on a fact that the underlying laws of physics, which are the basic laws of the universe, seem to be remarkably ingenious in the way that they operate ... The real universe is such an exquisite mix of order and chaos, of law and openness and creativity, that this leads me to believe in some evidence of meaning and purpose - that there is something beyond our daily lives which the universe is about.”¹⁰

C. Romans 1:18-25

Question: Considering what Romans 1:20 says, and considering the fact that the above form of scientific evidence was not available at the time, what does this imply regarding the way the evidence is distributed throughout creation?

Observe what the consequences are for denying the obvious:

1. become futile in their speculations
2. decline in moral values
3. exchange God for animals
4. worship the created creatures rather than the Creator

Conclusion: There is overwhelming evidence for the existence of a Creator that exists at every level of creation

⁹ Stephen Hawking, *Stephen Hawkings's Universe*, Boslough, p.109.

¹⁰ Loaded, Issue 70, February 2000, p. 53

III. Is the Creator of the Universe the Christian God?

Argument:

1. Jesus claimed to be God
2. There is warrant for taking his claim seriously
3. Therefore, there is warrant for believing that Jesus is God
4. If Jesus is God, then the Creator is the Judeo-Christian God

Therefore,

There is warrant for believing that the Creator of the universe is the Judeo-Christian God

Jesus' claims to be deity:

1. Jesus' statement to High Priest

Read Mark 14:61-64: Note the reaction of the High Priest. In his opinion, Jesus had just committed blasphemy by what He said. In other words, the High Priest understood Jesus to be claiming to be God. There are two claims to deity in Christ's response:

1. He said 'I am'. The present tense of the verb 'to be' was, and still is to this day, reserved for deity.
2. He referred to himself as 'the Son of Man', claiming the person spoken of in Daniel 7:13,14
 - Jesus referred to Himself as '*the* son of man' a total of 79 times in the four gospels, 30 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, 26 times in Luke, and 9 times in John.
 - Never did Jesus refer to Himself as *a* son of man
 - To refer to oneself as *a* human is nothing remarkable, but to refer to oneself as *the* human implies something very remarkable.
 - In this case, when Jesus referred to himself as *the* son of man, he was referring to Daniel 7:13,14.
 - In Daniel 7, the son of man was seen by the Jews as some sort of manifestation of God. Thus, when Jesus claimed to be the son of man prophesied in Daniel, the Jews understood him to be claiming to be God.

If there is any doubt as to what Jesus said, we have only to observe the reaction of the High Priest. So far as they were concerned, Jesus had just

claimed to be God, thus committing blasphemy. We are therefore not dependent upon our translation of koinai Greek, or how Jesus' words were translated into Greek. The priests' reaction says it all.

2. Jesus accepted worship as God

- Read Deuteronomy 6:13. Note that the Hebrew for 'Lord' is Jehovah
- Read Luke 4:7,8. Note the Greek for 'worship' is *proskuneo*
- What Jesus is saying here is that one is to *proskuneo* only Jehovah God
- There are a total of 11 times where Jesus permitted people to worship (*proskuneo*) him, 7 times in Matthew, 2 times in Mark, once in Luke and once in John. In every case He accepted it and never made any attempt to stop anyone from doing so.
- Whenever another God fearing person or angel had someone attempt to worship (*proskuneo*) them, they immediately prevented the person from doing so. (See Acts 10:25,26 and Revelation 19:10)

Conclusion: Jesus clearly claimed, both by His words and actions, that He was God

Warrant for taking Christ's claims seriously:

All scholars agree that the Old Testament was completed before the time of Christ. This is particularly significant because it contains messianic prophecies that Christ fulfilled against impossible odds. Some examples are:

- Messiah would come from Bethlehem and have existed from eternity past. (Micah 5:2, 700 B.C.)
- Messiah to arrive 483 years after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (A.D. 33). Shortly after His arrival He would be executed. Jerusalem and the temple to be destroyed shortly after. (Daniel 9, 500 B.C.)
- God would one day be valued at 30 pieces of silver. The money would be thrown into the temple and go to a potter. (Zechariah 11, 500 B.C.)
- Direct descendant of King David, heir to the throne.

There are 60 specific prophecies. The probability that one man could fulfill 48 of the 60 prophecies is one chance in 10^{157} .¹¹

¹¹ Stoner, Peter, *Science Speaks*, (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1952), p.108

IV. Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?

There are three lines of historical evidence that Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead.

A. The Empty Tomb

1. No veneration at Jesus' Tomb

- a) The Jewish Talmud indicates that Jesus 'enticed Israel to apostasy.'¹² Both from this account and from the New Testament documents, we see that Jesus had a very large impact on Israel at the time.
- b) During the time of Christ, there were numerous tombs of prophets that were maintained and venerated.
- c) There is no good evidence that Jesus' tomb received such attention. The best explanation for this is that it no longer contained a body.

2. The mutual acceptance of the empty tomb

- a) The empty tomb was accepted by even those who were opposed to Christianity
- b) The response by the enemies of Christianity (Mat. 28:11-15) concedes that:
 - i. The location of the tomb was known to everyone
 - ii. The tomb had been guarded by Roman soldiers
 - iii. The tomb was empty on the third day

Point: Some may argue that the Matthew account was just made up as a response to the story being circulated on the street. Even if we grant that, it is the story on the street *and what it reveals* that is important here.

3. The reference to Joseph of Arimathea

- a) the reference to Joseph as a member of the Sanhedren is thought to

¹² *The Babylonian Talmud*, transl. by I. Epstein (London: The Soncino Press, 1935), Vol. III, *Sanhedrin* 43a, p. 281.

be true (if it were made up, the story would be instantly discredited)

- b) we can conclude that Joseph of Arimathea was a real, historical person and that Jesus was actually buried in his tomb.

4. Objection: The disciples stole the body

- a) To my knowledge, no New Testament scholar holds this view, no matter how skeptical they are
- b) The disciples had nothing to gain but hardship, ridicule and a martyr's death
- c) The disciples were devote Jewish theists. To perpetrate such a hoax would be blasphemy
- d) It would be surprising that none of them would reveal the hoax when faced with torture or death

Conclusion: There is solid historical evidence that the tomb was empty on the third day. A person who wishes to deny that the resurrection occurred must come up with a plausible account as to how the tomb became empty.

B. The Resurrection Appearances

Almost no New Testament scholar denies that the first believers had some sort of visionary experience of Jesus. Professor Dunn of the University of Durham, England states, "It is almost impossible to dispute that at the historical roots of Christianity lie some visionary experiences of the first Christians, who understood them as appearances of Jesus, raised by God from the dead."¹³

1. they occurred to individuals and to groups as large as 500
2. they took place over a specific period of forty days
3. the most important Greek word used to describe His appearances is *ophthe*, which implies seeing something which was objectively outside the mind.
4. He did not just appear to believers but to unbelievers as well (some or all of the twelve, James the brother of Jesus, and Paul)
5. the witnesses all agreed that Christ appeared in bodily form: He could

¹³ Dunn, James, *The Evidence for Jesus*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia (1985) p.75

- be seen, touched, heard, He could eat. Although solid Himself, He could pass through solid objects
6. the New Testament accounts are subdued and focus on a recounting of the basic facts, unlike later apocryphal writings of the second century on. *The Gospel of Peter*, written in the mid-second century has a cross coming out of the tomb after Jesus and Jesus is so tall that He towers above the clouds. No such fanciful embellishments accompany the first New Testament accounts.
 7. the first disciples were not predisposed to believe in a physical resurrection that occurred before the end of history and there is evidence that they were taken by surprise.

Objection: Hallucinations

1. Since the disciples were not in a frame of mind to expect a resurrection, they would not have been in a state of expectation and longing necessary for a hallucination.
2. Even if they had had hallucinations, they would not have interpreted them to mean that Jesus had risen from the dead.
3. Hallucinations do not occur to two or more people at the same time and place much less to a group as large as five hundred
4. Hallucinations do not give lectures to groups, cannot be felt and do not eat
5. It is hard to believe that Paul or the others would not have reflected on their experience during the hardships and eventual death that they experienced. A simple hallucinations could not have transformed Paul or the others, nor sustained their motivation over the difficult years that followed.

Conclusion: It cannot be denied that the New Testament witnesses had a very real experience of the risen Christ. An individual who would deny this must come up with a plausible account as to what caused such a dramatic change in the disciples, the brothers of Christ and Paul.

C. Three Key Features in the Early Church

1. The Transformation of the Disciples

Dr. J.P. Moreland writes, 'Consider James the brother of Jesus. Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, tells us that he died a

martyr's death for his faith in his brother. Yet the Gospels tell us that during Jesus' life, he was an unbeliever and opposed Jesus. Why did he change? What could cause a Jew to believe that his own brother was the very Son of God and to be willing to die for such a belief? It certainly was not a set of lovely teachings from a carpenter from Nazareth. Only the appearance of Jesus to James (I Cor. 15:7) can explain his transformation.'

2. The centrality and earliness of the resurrection belief

- a) Because of the presence of Semitisms, personal names (e.g., Simon, Mark 14:37) and geographical references (e.g., Golgotha, Mark 15:22) many scholars take the geographical origin of the pre-Markan passion narrative to have been Jerusalem.
- b) William Craig offers some evidence which point to an origin prior to 36 to 38 AD.
 - i. Paul's Last Supper account in I Cor. 11 presupposes the Markan narrative. He had received it well before he delivered it to the Corinthians when he visited them in AD 50. It must have originated, therefore, in the first few years in the Jerusalem Church
 - ii. The passion narrative speaks of the high priest without mentioning his name. This implies that Caiaphas was still high priest at the time the narrative was being circulated. Caiaphus was high priest between AD 18 and 37, which makes AD 37 the latest this account could have been circulated.
 - iii. The order of the narrative corresponds with the pre-Pauline formula found in I Cor. 15.

3. The explosion of the church within 50 days of the resurrection in the face of religious opposition

Conclusion: There is solid historical evidence that the earliest Christians believed that Christ had risen from the dead. A person who denies that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, must give a plausible explanation as to what it was that caused the earliest Christians to believe that Christ had risen and what caused a sudden explosion of belief seven weeks after His resurrection.

III. Conclusion

Many people don't know whether or not the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a historical fact. However the following three items are historical facts:

1. The tomb was empty on the third day.
2. Hundreds of people believed that they saw Him and heard him after His death.
3. The explosion of the early church based on the central belief, from its earliest beginnings, that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

This phenomenon is unique in history. The skeptic must provide a plausible account for, not just one of the three above facts, but for all three of them. The account that best fits all the facts is that Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead.¹⁴

Conclusion: There are good reasons to believe that the Creator is none other than the Judeo-Christian God.

V. Is the Bible the Inerrant Word of God?

Question: Hasn't the Bible Been Translated so Many Times that it is Likely to Differ Substantially from the Original Manuscripts?

First of all, there is a popular but false assumption that our modern translations of the Bible are copied from earlier copies/translations which were in turn copied from earlier copies/translations, and so on, for thousands of years. In this way cumulative error might be substantial. Contrary to popular thinking, however, each generation does not copy the Bible from the translations of the previous generations. All good modern translations of the Bible are translated directly from ancient Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek manuscripts. In this way, cumulative errors are avoided.

The remaining concern is how close these ancient manuscripts are to the original manuscripts. Since we do not have the originals we can't compare, but there are other ways historians can establish the reliability of ancient

¹⁴ Much of the above information is contained in J.P. Moreland's *Scaling the Secular City* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1987) 159-184.

manuscripts. Using such an approach, the reliability of the Bible can be established to an extent that is considerably beyond any other ancient document.

A. Old Testament

1. Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Masoretic manuscripts were the oldest Hebrew texts we had, dating to the 10th century A.D.
2. The Dead Sea Scrolls, dated about 1000 years earlier, gave us an opportunity to see what 1000 years of copying had done in the way of discrepancies. A comparison revealed an overwhelming confirmation of the accuracy of the Masoretic text.
 - Two copies of Isaiah found in Qumran Cave I 'proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% variation consisted chiefly of obvious typos and variations in spelling.' (Gleason Archer).
 - "Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, there are only seventeen letters in question. Ten of these letters are simply a matter of spelling, which does not affect the sense. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The remaining three letters comprise the word 'light', which is added in verse 11, and does not affect the meaning greatly. Furthermore, this word is supported by the LXX and IQ Is^b. Thus, in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word (three letters) in question after a thousand years of transmission - and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage. This example is typical of the whole Isaiah manuscript."¹⁵

¹⁵ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Moody Press (1976), p. 261.

B. New Testament:

In the case of the New Testament, it is very revealing to compare our ancient New Testament documents with other ancient documents as follows:

Author	Written	Earliest Copy	Gap (yrs)	No. Copies
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,000	10
Plato	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,200	7
Tacitus (An.)	100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1,000	<20
Pliny Jr.	61-113 A.D.	850 A.D.	750	7
Suetonius	75-160 A.D.	950 A.D.	800	8
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,300	8
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	1,000 A.D.	1,400	100
Catullus	54 B.C.	1,550 A.D.	1,600	3
Euripedes	480-406 B.C.	1,100 A.D.	1,500	9
Demosthenes	383-322 B.C.	1,100 A.D.	1,300	200
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1,100 A.D.	1,400	5*
Aristophenes	450-385 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,200	10

* of any one work

In comparison, the following is the situation for our ancient New Testament manuscripts:

1. 13,350 manuscripts in Greek, Latin and Syriac dated from 120 AD (Chester Beatty papyri) to 1300 AD (5,000 ancient Greek).
2. Virtually the entire New Testament could be reproduced from

citations contained in the works of the early church fathers (32,000 citations prior to the council of Nicea, 325 AD).

3. The only uncertainties are found in variations between the Greek manuscripts and none of them affect any article of faith or doctrine.
 - There are about 5,000 ancient Greek manuscripts, some of high quality, and some of poor quality.
 - If all the variations are totaled up, including the manuscripts of poor quality, there are about 10,000 places where variations occur.
 - These 10,000 variations represent about .5% of the New Testament. In other words, 99.5% of the New Testament is pure (no variations).
 - Of the 10,000 variations, about 9,850 are trivial (spelling differences, missing letters in a word, etc.).
 - Of the remaining variations, some are significant (e.g., I John 5:7-8) but not one affects any article of faith or doctrine.
 - Finally, the consistency between the majority of the manuscripts give a very good indication as to which reading is the proper one. These variations are usually noted in the margins of today's modern translations.

Conclusion: The text we currently possess is an accurate representation of the original Old and New Testament documents. Most historians accept the textual accuracy of other ancient works on far less adequate manuscript grounds than is available for the Bible.

The New Testament is easily the best attested ancient writing in terms of the number of manuscripts, the period between the writing and the earliest copy and the completeness of the whole.

Question: Even if the Bible we Have Today is an Accurate Representation of the Original Documents, isn't what was Originally Written Down just a Collection of Myths or, at best, Historical Inaccuracies?

Anyone who asks this question has made an unwarranted assumption. We should not allow anyone to simply dismiss the historicity of the Bible without providing some good reasons for doing so. Such a move is a fallacy known as the Cavalier Dismissal. Before a person can dismiss an historical document, they must demonstrate that it is sufficiently historically unreliable. Even if that person were to actually find one or two historical discrepancies, it does not follow that all the other historical statements are

false. If it did, then we would have to dismiss virtually every ancient historical work. Having pointed this out and having asked the appropriate questions of the other person, you can then move on to provide some evidence for the historicity of the Bible as follows:

A. The Old Testament

The two most common discrepancies raised against the Old Testament have to do with creation and the exodus from Egypt.

1. Creation

- a. If you are committed to a young earth (created around BC 4000), there is warrant for the belief that God may deliberately make it difficult for the majority to see the truth.¹⁶ There is an ongoing theme running throughout the Bible that, for those who do not wish to acknowledge God, He permits them to embrace another explanation so that they can live their lives without having God 'in their face' day after day. He may permit the majority to be deceived by appearances while at the same time leaving a written record of how creation actually happened, for those who have the faith to take the first two chapters of Genesis at face value. The underlying premise is that things may not always be as they appear to be on the surface. God selectively discloses the truth only to those who are willing to believe in faith, the remainder are all allowed to live in deception.
- b. If you are committed to an old earth view, then a good approach has been put forward by Hugh Ross that effectively removes most discrepancies between science and Genesis while, at the same time, taking a reasonably close interpretation of Genesis.¹⁷

Of the two approaches listed above, it is generally agreed that the face-value approach (a) has the best exegetical fit with the rest of Scripture. In science, there are still very large unknowns and discrepancies when it comes to the origins of the universe and of life. Science is not even remotely close to having its house in order when it comes to these questions. There are difficulties all around and, ultimately, it may be a question that has to be resolved on grounds of faith.

¹⁶ For example, see Matthew 13:10-13.

¹⁷ Hugh Ross, 'Genesis Creation Account,' *The Fingerprint of God* (Orange, Promise Publishing, 1989), 161-169.

2. The Exodus

The generally accepted date (GAD) for the exodus is in conflict with the Biblical dating. There are serious problems with the GAD, however. The Biblical dating actually fits the archeological evidence far better. For a good review of the evidence in support of the Biblical dating, see Bimson's and Livingstone's 'Redating the Exodus,' *Biblical Archeology Review*, **XIII**, 5 (1987), 40-53.

B. The New Testament:

The question is often asked, how do we know that Jesus actually fulfilled the prophecies? The New Testament documents present evidence that He actually did. It is impossible to verify every historical statement made in the New Testament, but there is historical and archeological evidence that does verify some. In every case where we can compare the historical narrative in the New Testament with history and archeology, it is verified. There are no known discrepancies.¹⁸ The following is some extra-biblical evidence for the life of Christ.

1. TACITUS, CORNELIUS (55-120 A.D.); Roman historian. The "Annals":
 - Christians were named after their founder, Christus.
 - Christus was put to death by the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilatus (procurator of Judah from 26-36 A.D.).
 - Execution occurred during the reign of emperor Tiberius (1437 A.D.).
2. JOSEPHUS, FLAVIUS (37-97 A.D.); court historian for emperor Vespasian. The "Antiquities" (This information comes from the Arabic manuscript, and it is the conclusion of Schlomo Pines and David Flusser, Hebrew University, that it has not been tampered with.):
 - Jesus was known as a wise and virtuous man, recognized for his good conduct.
 - He had many disciples, both Jews and Gentiles.
 - Pilate condemned him to die by crucifixion.
 - The disciples reported that Jesus had risen from the dead and that he had appeared to them on the third day after the crucifixion.
 - Consequently, the disciples continued to proclaim his teachings.

¹⁸ There are popularly held discrepancies, most commonly the case of Quirinius in Luke, but these are answered in the resources listed at the end of this section.

- Perhaps Jesus was the messiah concerning whom the Old Testament prophets spoke and predicted wonders.
 - Jesus was the brother of James.
 - Some called him the messiah.
3. THE TALMUD (Mishnah organized by Rabbi Akiba before 135 A.D., revised by Rabbi Meir, completed about 200 A.D.)
- Jesus was crucified.
 - The crucifixion occurred on the eve of the Jewish Passover.
 - Jesus was judged to be guilty of "sorcery". (Here we have confirmation that Jesus did things that appeared to be supernatural).
 - Jesus was also judged to be guilty of leading Israel into spiritual apostasy. (Here we have verification of the impact that Jesus had on Israel at the time).
 - Five of Jesus' disciples were brought before judges and sentenced to execution.
 - He was treated differently from others who mislead the people for he was connected with royalty. (A possible hint that He was of the line of King David).

Resources:

1. Gleason Archer, 'Introduction,' *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, Regency Reference Library (1982), 19-44.
2. Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, IVP (1987).

VI. Evolution and Intelligent Design

The following article is written as a non-technical introduction for the layperson who is interested in the concept of intelligent design, but has little or no science background. The author holds a B.Sc. (Physics), B.Sc. (Mech. Eng.), M.A. (Philosophy), all from the University of Manitoba, Canada, and is currently working on a Ph.D. in Biophysics, specializing in the application of information theory to DNA and protein sequences, at the University of Guelph, Canada.

A. Introduction

The term *Intelligent Design* (ID) refers to the hypothesis that an intelligent agent was involved in producing an observed structure or effect. For example, the origin of the Egyptian Sphinx is lost in history. It appears, however, to be the product of ID. Thus, ID is relevant to archaeology, forensics, criminal investigations, and even analyzing radio signals in the search for extraterrestrial life (SETI). Applied to organic life, ID is the hypothesis that an intelligent agent was involved in the origin and diversity of organic life rather than, simply, blind natural forces. This article will focus on ID and organic life.

It has been known for thousands of years that variation occurs within organic life. Thus, variation is a pre-Darwinian observation which was exploited to develop, for example, new types of dogs and grains with more desirable features, long before the time of Charles Darwin. *Variation* can be thought of as diversity within a species or genus and can be due to either different genetic combinations, complexity in gene regulation, or mutational changes in the genetic information encoded in a genome.

Darwin's contribution was not the notion of variation, which was already well observed. Rather, it was an explanation for the diversity of life forms. One of his fundamental assumptions was that variation had no taxonomic limits. To clarify, variation was not limited to the species or genus level, but could continue to produce even new phyla and kingdoms in the taxonomy of life. Given this assumption, small changes in an organism could accumulate from generation to generation. With enough time and changes, Darwin postulated, a completely new organism could appear. For example, a human could be a descendant of a lobe-finned fish. This entire process was steered by *natural selection*, the observed natural process of the elimination or reduction of organisms that either cannot survive in their natural environment or, if they can survive, cannot compete well with other organisms. As a result, they tend to be eliminated or at least reduced in numbers. Thus, Darwin suggested that the full disparity and diversity of life was due to variation beyond normal taxonomic boundaries, moderated by natural selection. The result was the complete taxonomy of life due entirely to natural processes without the aid of ID.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of rigor when it comes to defining evolution, to the extent that the term can be used to refer to the descent of birds from an

ancient worm-like chordate named *Pikea*, or it can be used to refer to variation within a species, such as the variation in beaks among finches on the Galapagos Islands.¹⁹ Variation is an empirical fact and is common to both the ID hypothesis for organic life and Darwinian evolution. It is very commonplace, however, for Darwinists to argue for the superiority of Darwinian theory by pointing to examples of variation within taxonomic limits in spite of the fact that Darwinian evolution requires variation *beyond* taxonomic limits. An example of this confusion can be seen below in an excerpt from a resolution against ID at a recent medical conference,

Methods and principles from evolutionary biology have contributed to understanding the links between genes and human genetic diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease. Evolutionary methods help to trace the origins and epidemiology of infectious diseases, and to analyze the evolution of antibiotic resistance in pathogenic microorganisms.²⁰

What the writers have failed to realize, is that awareness of Darwin's contribution of the idea of common descent is utterly irrelevant to each of the instances cited above. Each example cited is an instance of the typical variation found within a species. None of the examples provide any support for the Darwinian assumption that variation has no taxonomic limits. For the sake of avoiding this confusion so often promoted by Darwinists, Darwinian evolution will be understood in this article as variation without taxonomic limits, modified by natural selection, resulting in the common descent of all organisms.

Variation within taxonomic limits is common ground between ID and Darwinian theory. Natural selection is also empirically observed and is also common ground between ID and Darwinian theory. Variation modified by natural selection is common to both theories. The fundamental difference between the two theories is as follows. Darwinian theory assumes that variation has no taxonomic limits under natural processes. ID theory argues that variation beyond the genus level (some would say the species level, although the term 'species' may be too narrowly defined) requires ID. The work that Darwinists must do is to show that variation without taxonomic limits is possible without the aid of ID. Merely citing examples of variation within the species level of taxonomy does nothing to support the Darwinian

¹⁹ Klug, W.S. & Cummings, M.R. (2000). *Concepts of Genetics*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 715.

²⁰ Drutman, S., Shyu, J., Resolution 26, American Medical Association, Student Section, 2005.

assumption that there are no taxonomic limits to variation by natural processes.

B. The empirical options

There are, at present, two candidate theories for the origin and diversity of life. The first is ID and the second is Darwinism. To qualify as an empirical option, both must have some observable, or empirical, evidence to support them.

Regardless of whether or not organic life is the product of ID, there are many aspects of life that at least give the appearance of design. Darwinist, Michael Ruse, has stated, “Even the most hardened atheist must agree that plants and animals are design-like in appearance in a way that rocks and planets are not.”²¹ Ruse is not suggesting that life is the product of ID, but merely commenting on the design-like appearance of life. Since, empirically, life gives the appearance of being designed, it therefore follows that ID is an empirical option. To clarify, there is empirical, or observable, evidence that life is the product of ID. Of course, it does not follow that empirical evidence for a theory is proof that a theory is correct.

With regard to the Darwinian theory of evolution as an explanation for the origin and diversity of life, we can look for empirical evidence in either the fossil record, or we can look for empirical evidence for Darwin’s fundamental assumption of no taxonomic limits to variation. If the full diversity of organic life is the product of slow, cumulative changes involving tens of thousands or millions of discrete steps, the vast bulk of the fossil record should consist of fossil forms marking these tens of thousands or millions of steps, with fossils falling into clearly defined taxonomic categories being the rare exception rather than the norm. In actual fact, the opposite is the case, with fossils that could be interpreted as transitional forms being the exception, rather than the norm. Nevertheless, there are occasional fossils that do appear to be transition-like and, thus, provide empirical evidence for Darwinian evolution. As stated earlier, however, it does not follow that empirical evidence for a theory is proof that a theory is correct.

²¹ Ruse, M. (1998). *Philosophy of Biology*. Prometheus Books, 16.

We have, therefore, two empirical options for the origin and diversity of life. A theory or hypothesis, even if it has empirical support, fails if a prediction that follows from the theory is falsified.

C. The failure of Darwinian theory

It is very common to encounter the thinking that, if we have a natural explanation for the diversity of life, then the design hypothesis is false. This reasoning is logically false. It does not logically follow that if we have an explanation for an effect, any other explanation is therefore false. Under the scientific method, a hypothesis should give rise to some predictions that can be tested. If the predictions are falsified, then the theory is no longer scientifically tenable. The ID hypothesis for organic life can, therefore, be falsified if predictions arising out of ID theory are shown to be false. Similarly, Darwinism can be shown to be false, if predictions arising out of Darwinian theory are shown to be false. In this section we shall look at the scientific failure of Darwinian theory as an explanation for the origin and diversity of life.

Darwinian theory is founded on two empirical facts and one assumption. The two empirical facts are variation and natural selection. The fundamental assumption of Darwinism is that variation has no taxonomic limits. Darwinism is often defended by pointing to variation within organisms, as pointed out in an earlier quote. A similar fallacy is committed by David Quammen in his appeal to bacterial and viral variation.²² Such an approach, however, is bad science. Darwinian theory is an hypothesis that arises out of observations of variation and natural selection. Variation, therefore, is not a prediction of Darwinism, but the empirical basis upon which Darwinian theory is built. A test of Darwinism, therefore, is not to predict variation, an empirical fact upon which the Darwinian hypothesis is built, but to predict something that arises out of the Darwinian hypothesis. The fundamental assumption of the Darwinian hypothesis is that variation has no taxonomic limits. A primary prediction that arises out of this assumption can be stated as follows:

- P1: Breeding experiments utilizing variation and selection should not encounter taxonomic limits.

²² Quammen, D. (200). Was Darwin Wrong?, *National Geographic*, Nov. 17 issue.

To clarify, individual experiments involving a particular trait may encounter a dead end, but given the millions of different organisms on the planet, evolutionary pathways to a novel genus, order, or phylum should be relatively easy to find with some experimentation if Darwinian evolution is possible. We should not expect to encounter dead ends for 100% of our experiments.

Unfortunately for Darwinian theory, in every attempt to push beyond the species level to a new genus, without exception, natural limits to biological change have been empirically observed, where further change in that direction was either not possible, or further change drastically impaired the fitness of that organism to the point where it could not survive to reproduce. Over 100 years of breeding experiments with *E. coli*, or *Drosophila*, for example, have consistently encountered boundaries beyond which further change was not possible under any realistic natural scenario. This should not be confused with the developing science of genetic engineering, which requires ID (human) to make large changes that cannot be realistically obtained in nature. If anything, genetic engineering provides support for the ID hypothesis; large, positive changes require ID.

Given that P1 is consistently falsified, the fundamental assumption of Darwinism appears to be false. Darwinism should no longer be regarded as scientifically tenable.

Darwinian theory also requires another prediction:

- P2: Since an average, 300 amino acid protein requires approximately 500 bits of functional information to encode, and even the simplest organism requires a few hundred protein-coding genes, variation and natural selection should be able to consistently generate the functional information required to encode a completely novel protein.

Functional information is information that performs a function.²³ When applied to organisms, functional information is information encoded within their genomes that performs some biological function. Typically, the amount of functional information required to encode an average, 300 amino-acid protein is in the neighborhood of 500 bits and most organisms contain

²³ Szostak, J.W., (2003). Molecular Messages. *Nature*, **423**, 689.

thousands of protein-coding genes in their genome. Most combinations of amino acids will not produce a stable, three dimensional folded protein structure.²⁴ Furthermore, the sequence space that encodes a stable folding protein tends to be surrounded by non-folding sequence space. Thus, to generate a novel protein with a stable fold, an evolutionary pathway must cross non-folding sequence space via a random walk, where natural selection will be inoperative.²⁵ Thus, it requires functional information to properly specify a biological protein with a stable secondary structure.

Recent computer simulations have failed to generate 32 bits of functional information in 2×10^7 trials, unless the distance between selection points is kept to 2, 4, and 8-bit steps.²⁶ Such small gaps between selection points are highly unrealistic for biological proteins, which tend to be separated by non-folding regions of sequence space too large for the evolution of a novel protein to proceed by selection. Organic life requires thousands of different proteins, each requiring an average of 500 bits to encode. 32 bits is far too small to encode even one, average protein. An approximate and optimistic upper limit can be computed for the distance between selection points that could be bridged over the history of organic life if we postulate 10^{30} bacteria, replicating every 30 minutes for 4 billion years, with a mutation rate of 10^{-6} mutations per 1000 base pairs per replication. The upper limit falls between 60 and 100 bits of functional information, not sufficient to locate a single, average folding protein in protein sequence space.²⁷ The Darwinian prediction P2, therefore, appears to be falsified. Variation and natural selection simply does not appear to have the capacity to generate the amount of functional information required for organic life.

Two essential predictions of Darwinism appear to be falsified. Darwinian theory, therefore, appears to fail as a scientific explanation for the origin and diversity of organic life. ID still remains as an empirical option. It should also be noted that the argument for ID as an empirical option is not, as so often suggested, the we-do-not-know-how-it-happened-therefore-it-must-be-ID approach, so often mistakenly suggested by some. First, many aspects of organic life appear to be design-like, so it is already an empirical option.

²⁴ Axe, D., (2004). Estimating the prevalence of protein sequences adopting functional enzyme folds. *J. Mol. Biol.* **341**, 1295-1325.

²⁵ Blanco, F.J., Angrand, I., Serrano, L. (1999). Exploring the conformational properties of the sequence space between two proteins with different folds: an experimental study. *J. Mol. Biol.* **285**, 741-753.

²⁶ Lenski, R., Ofria, C., Pennock, R., Adam, C. (2003). The evolutionary origin of complex features. *Nature*, **423**, 130-144.

²⁷ See appendix.

Second, it is an empirical fact that intelligent agents, such as humans, can produce millions of bits of functional information. ID, therefore, is a live, empirical option independent of the falsification of Darwinian theory.

D. The role of science in ID

As we have just seen, the theory of Darwinian evolution fails, on scientific grounds, as a tenable scientific theory for the origin and diversity of life. The question still remains, however, as to how ID theory fares. It is common to encounter assertions made by various scientists to the effect that ID was not involved in the origin and diversification of organic life. However, no scientist can say that ID was not involved in the origin and diversification of organic life without a scientific method to test for ID which indicates that organic life is ID-negative.

The first step that science must take in determining if ID was involved in organic life, is to develop a scientific method to test for ID. Such a method would be useful not only for organic life, but for other applications such as archeology, forensics, and SETI. Until a scientific method to test for ID is developed, science is not in a position to determine whether ID was involved in the origin and diversification of organic life.

Perhaps the most common objection to ID in organic life boils down to the thinking that if life is the product of ID, and if God is the most likely candidate for the role of the intelligent agent, then ID is essentially a philosophical or religious discussion, outside the arena of science. This line of argument fails to distinguish between the role of science and the role of philosophy/theology. As has been pointed out, the role of science is to develop a scientific method to test for ID. The philosophical/theological implications can be left up to the philosophers and theologians, but the test for ID sits squarely in the realm of science. Until science develops a scientific method to test for ID, no scientist can assert, on scientific grounds, that ID was not involved in the origin and diversification of organic life. If, however, such a test indicates that ID was *required* for the origin and diversification of organic life, then we would then have scientific grounds for advancing ID as the most scientifically tenable explanation for life.

E. A scientific method to test for ID

Let us represent any object, configuration, or sequence that can be produced by natural processes or ID, as 'x'. There are three categories that x can fall into:

1. x is produced by natural processes, but ID could also produce x
2. x is produced by ID, but natural processes could also produce x
3. x requires ID; it cannot be produced by natural processes

If x falls into categories (1) or (2), it does not require ID. A scientific method to test for category (2) would be difficult and may even provide inconclusive results. Thus, if the origin and diversification of organic life falls into categories (1) or (2), it may be very difficult to devise a scientific method that would answer the question as to whether ID was involved.

A scientific method that tests for any x that falls into category (3) can provide conclusive answers. Therefore, the method proposed in this article will focus on category (3) candidates.

From a *Homo sapiens* perspective, it is difficult to anticipate how other intelligent agents will carry out ID. What may seem to be important requirements of design to us may not be important at all to an entirely different intelligent agent. Our notion of aesthetics, for example, or the weight we assign to efficiency, may be trumped by other considerations in the mind of other, non-human intelligent agents. There is, however, one criterion C common to all intelligent agents, and it follows from category (3) above.

C: If an intelligent agent desires a particular function, and the physical system (i.e. nature) will not provide that function within the constraints desired by the intelligent agent, then the agent will be forced to impose ID on the physical system in order to achieve the desired function.

For example, if a person desires to have a home on a country estate, since natural processes are not likely to produce a home on that estate, the individual must exercise ID to accomplish her desire. When the home is finished, it will form a functional anomaly within the physical system, where a *functional anomaly* can be understood as something that has both a

function within a larger system, and a low probability of occurrence within the overall physical system.

One method of quantifying the magnitude of a functional anomaly is to quantify the amount of functional information required to specify that anomaly. Natural processes can produce anomalies, and some anomalies may even be functional in some way. Functional anomalies falling into category (3), however, will require more functional information than natural processes can reasonably be expected to produce. From section C we saw that the upper limit for the generation of functional information between selection points for organic life is going to be about 60 to 100 bits, under optimistic scenarios. I will take the lower bound of 60 bits as a more realistic upper limit. With this in mind, a hypothesis H can be advanced, that forms the foundation for a scientific method to test whether ID is required for x.

H: For any function, if the quantity of functional information required to achieve the function exceeds 60 bits, then ID is required.

Hypothesis H follows from category (3), criterion C, and the functional information generating capacity of natural processes. H is potentially falsifiable on the basis of two predictions that arise out of the hypothesis:

PH1: Any observed increase in functional information that is greater than 60 bits, within any structure or sequence, will always have an intelligent agent responsible for the increase.

PH2: No observed increase in functional information that is greater than 60 bits will ever be observed to occur without the aid of an intelligent agent.

From the above, a scientific method to test whether ID is required or not, can be summarized as follows:

Step 1: Identify an object or sequence that appears to have a function.

Step 2: Compute the quantity of functional information required to achieve the functional configuration.

Step 3: If the value is greater than 60 bits of functional information, then ID is required.

For example, the 33-residue Ankyrin repeat requires about 93 bits of functional information to encode.²⁸ From the method proposed above, it follows that the coding of the Ankyrin repeat is a product of ID. On the other hand, a 6-amino acid mutation in the UBX protein resulting in limb suppression, only requires about 26 bits of functional information.²⁹ ID, therefore, would not be required.

The simplest theoretical life form would require on the order of 150 protein-coding genes.³⁰ If the average gene requires on the order of 500 bits of functional information to encode, then the simplest theoretical life form would require about 75,000 bits of functional information. As for the diversification of life, each time a novel protein was required, an average of about 500 bits of functional information would be required to search for and find that protein-coding gene within non-folding sequence space. It appears, therefore, that this proposed method for testing for the requirement of ID indicates that the origin and diversification of organic life requires ID. This proposed method, however, has the potential of being falsified through either PH1 or PH2. It remains, however, to see if falsification is forthcoming. Until this method is falsified, we can say that there is a scientific method to test for ID in organic life, and organic life tests ID-positive. There is scientific basis for ID in organic life.

F. Conclusion

There are two empirical options for the origin and diversification of organic life, ID and the Darwinian theory of common descent. The Darwinian theory is consistently falsified and no longer appears to be scientifically tenable. A scientific method to test whether ID is required can be constructed. When applied to organic life, it appears that the origin and diversification of organic life may require ID.

²⁸ Durston, K. & Chiu, D.K.Y. A functional entropy model for biological sequences, Proceedings of the 4th International DCDIS Conference on Engineering Applications and Computational Algorithms, forthcoming, 2005.

²⁹ Durston & Chiu.

³⁰ Koonin, E. (2000). How many genes can make a cell: the minimal genome concept. *Annu. Rev. Genomics Hum. Genet.*, 99-116.

Appendix

The number of expected trials T to bridge an gap in functional information I_f between two selection points is given by

$$T = 1/\{[(-I_f/\log_2(n_f/n))(1-n_f/n)]! [n_f/(n(-I_f/\log_2(n_f/n)))]^{-I_f(\log_2(n_f/n)(1-n_f/n))}\}$$

where

n = options/site

n_f = functional options/site

For amino acids and nucleotides, $0.05 \leq n_f/n \leq 0.70$. Using MAPLE to solve for I_f , and using the values stated in section (E), we obtain $60 \leq I_f \leq 100$ bits of functional information. This is the maximum distance between selection points, in terms of functional information, that could be expected to be bridged over the history of organic life.

VII. Why Does God Allow Evil?

If a person tries to use the occurrence of evil to prove the non-existence of God, it is helpful to consider the following:

1. If there is no God, then there are no moral absolutes
 2. If there are no moral absolutes, then there can be no moral evil
 3. But there *is* moral evil in this world
 4. Therefore, there *are* moral absolutes
- Therefore, God exists

Read: Genesis 45:5-8

Question: Should God have allowed Joseph to be sold into slavery? Should God have allowed Joseph to have been falsely accused by Potiphar's wife?

Question: When you consider how God worked within the activities and decisions of human beings, what conclusion can you infer about how God might work in this world in general?

In order to know whether or not God is justified in allowing a certain evil, we must know two things:

1. The ultimate value of that event, which is calculated by taking into consideration not just the intrinsic value of that event, but of all its consequences to the end of history. Let us call this value 'A'.
2. The ultimate value of the best alternative God could have brought about instead, which is calculated by taking into account the intrinsic value of the alternative event with all its consequences to the end of that alternative history. Let us call this value 'B'.

If the value of A is greater than the value of B, then God was justified in allowing the event. If, however, the value of B is greater than the value of A, then God was not justified in allowing the event. In effect, we must know if A-B is positive or negative before we can judge whether or not God was justified in allowing any event.

There are some problems, however. Every event that occurs in this world produces consequences that increase exponentially down throughout future history affecting an increasing number of causal chains. The same goes for alternate histories. Our knowledge of the consequences of any event is miniscule in comparison with the billions of future consequences that we have no knowledge of. Furthermore, God cannot actualize just any history that contains free agents,³¹ for any history involving free agents requires their cooperation and they may choose not to cooperate. The result is that we are completely in the dark about what alternate histories involving free agents God could actualize.

The problem we face then, in trying to figure out what God should have allowed is similar to the following arithmetic question:

Let

A = -1 + 3 + 2 - 1 + eight million unknown numbers of unknown sign

B = 4 + eight million additional unknown numbers of unknown sign

Question: Is A-B positive or negative?

Such a question is absurd, we are missing far too much information. Yet every time we contemplate whether or not God was justified in allowing

³¹ Free agents being defined as agents who can make decisions that are not determined by any antecedent conditions and for any decision could have decided otherwise.

some particular event, we are faced with a similar question. Our knowledge is far too miniscule to consider such a question.

Our concern when we observe instances of evil also extends to the individual who suffers, not just the consequences to the end of history. There is the Judeo-Christian notion of compensation in the afterlife which includes two things. First, all memories of the incident are permanently blotted out of her mind in the afterlife so that as far as she is aware, such an incident never happened.³² Second, she is personally compensated in the afterlife for the suffering she did not deserve, in a way that more than outweighs whatever suffering she experienced in this life.³³

Question: Why do good or innocent people suffer?

1. They have found favor with God and no longer have to remain in this sorry world with all its pain and suffering (e.g., Jeroboam's son)³⁴
2. Discipline (not punishment) for things going on in their own private lives, for our own good, so that we may become more like God.³⁵ (Similar to John Hick's 'soul making'.)³⁶
3. The natural consequences of their own private and internal sin. Don't ever assume that you have a pretty good idea what is going on in an individual's personal life.³⁷
4. The natural consequences of living in a fallen world. The poor and the innocent may actually be in a favorable position.³⁸

VIII. Which Religion is True?

³² Isaiah 65:17.

³³ Gospel of Luke 16:25

³⁴ I Kings 14:12,13

³⁵ Hebrews 12:5-13

³⁶ John Hick, "Soul-Making and Suffering," *Evil and the God of Love* (Harper & Rowe, revised edition, 1978), p. 255.

³⁷ Galatians 6:7,8

³⁸ James 2:5 and the parable of Lazarus Luke 16:19-31

Question #1: Isn't it Narrow Minded to Say that Jesus Christ is the Only Way to God?

Before responding, it is good to ask the person what they mean by 'narrow-minded'. In post-modern society, many people have a false notion as to what 'narrow-mindedness' is. A proper definition should be close to the following:

A person is narrow minded if and only if they are,
 a) not willing to consider a wider range of ideas or,
 b) selectively considering only those facts that support their belief.

First let us consider the idea that all major religions lead to God. Should we be open to that idea? Although many religions appear, on the surface, to be the same (they promote good and virtuous living) they have conflicting fundamental truth claims some of which are as follows:

About God

Buddhism	There is no personal creator or God. The world operates by natural power or law, not by divine command
Hinduism	Not a personal being, undefinable, a philosophical absolute, millions of lesser gods
Islam	Explicitly not triune, both evil and good come from God
Christianity	Personal, unique and Triune,

About Salvation

Buddhism	The goal of enlightenment can be achieved through observing certain precepts and disciplines
Hinduism	The goal of release from reincarnation and self annihilation is achieved through works, knowledge or devotion
Islam	The goal of eternal life in heaven must be earned
Christianity	Eternal life, cleansing from sin and a personal relationship with God cannot be earned, but is a free gift, accepted through Jesus Christ

Two contradictory statements cannot both be true. The truth of one entails the falsity of the other. For example, consider the statement, 'Jesus is the only way to heaven' and the statement, 'Jesus is not the only way to heaven'. Can they both be true? No, the truth of one of those statements automatically entails the falsity of the other. At the most, only one can be completely true. Since they have contradictory fundamental truth claims, the truth of any one of the major world religions automatically entails the falsity of all the others. This being the case, the idea that all major religions lead to God is logically false. No thinking person who is concerned with logic ought to even consider such an idea as being possibly true.

As we have just seen, Christianity cannot be accused of being narrow-minded according to the first condition in the definition of narrow-mindedness. What about the second condition?

If there is one true religion, it must correspond to reality. In other words, The facts must support the credibility of the fundamental theological claims made by that religion. A key question to ask is, 'Why should I believe this religion is true?' If there is no evidence to give credibility to the theological claims of that religion, then there is no rational justification to believe it is true.

Of all the world's religion, only Christianity has evidence to verify it. All of the other religions in the world have virtually nothing in the way of evidence for the truth of their theological claims. As we have just seen Christianity has been verified by fulfilled prophecy and the historical evidence for Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Conclusion

Due to the contradictions of their fundamental claims, logic dictates that only one religion can be true. The truth of one entails the falsity of all the others. Of all the religions in the world, none except Christianity can provide any substantial evidence to believe that it is true. The most rational position to hold, therefore, is that Christianity is the one true religion. This being the case, it is false that Christianity meets either one of the conditions for narrow-mindedness.

Suggested Resource: www.leaderu.com

IX. Is There Evidence that We have Souls?

I. Introduction

Case I:

A young girl by the name of Katie had almost drowned in a pool. She was taken to the hospital in a state of coma, which lasted three days. After arrival at the hospital a CAT scan showed massive brain swelling and the doctor had an artificial lung machine attached to her to keep her breathing. When she recovered three days later, she relayed an amazing story.

She accurately described the physical appearance of the doctors involved in her resuscitation, details of the hospital rooms she was taken into, and reported particulars of the specific medical procedures used on her even though she was 'profoundly comatose' with her eyes closed, the entire time.

She also reported following her family home during the time her body was comatose in the hospital and remembered seeing specific details such as the selections for the evening meal prepared by her mother, how her father was reacting to her accident and which toys her brother and sister were playing with at the time. Her doctor investigated the claims made by Katie, both those observations she made in the hospital and those at home and found them all to be accurate.³⁹

Case II:

Another case involved five-year-old Rick. He contracted meningitis and fell into a coma. An ambulance picked up his body at the house and rushed him to the hospital. Rick, however, decided to stay behind for a few minutes. He observed different family members and their grief stricken responses. He then rushed off to the hospital, arriving ahead of the ambulance, which contained his body, and watched hospital personnel move a girl

³⁹ Katie's own physician, the pediatrician who revived her and investigated the details, reports this account along with many others. See Melvin Morse with Paul Perry, *Closer to the Light: Learning from the Near-Death Experiences of Children*, New York: Random House/Villard, 1990), pp. 3-9.

about 12 years old out of the room he was to occupy. Rick remained in a coma for several days afterward. Again, the details of his story checked out.⁴⁰

II. NDE's

A. Some Interesting NDE's

1. Explanation: Objective is to look at a variety of NDE's that reveals interesting phenomena.
2. Illustrations:

Item #1: Blind people

A chemist, after being blinded a year earlier in an accident, correctly reported the visual details surrounding his NDE. Other individuals, who had been blind for years and continued to be blind after the NDE, accurately described the design and colors of clothing and jewelry worn by those around them during the time they were having the NDE.⁴¹

Item #2: During prolonged heart stoppage

According to Russian scientist Negovskii, 'considerable experimental material ... indicates that 5-6 minutes is the maximum duration of the state of clinical death which the brain cortex of an adult organism can survive with subsequent recovery of all its functions.'⁴²

An eight-year old girl got her hair caught in a swimming pool drain and drowned. It took 45 minutes of CPR to get her heart beating again. Later she said that she had floated free of her body and watched the entire procedure. She was able to totally and correctly recount the details from the time the paramedics

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-154.

⁴¹ Kenneth L. Woodard, 'There is Life After Death,' *McCall's*, Aug. 1976, p. 136; J. Kerby Anderson, *Life, Death and Beyond*, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1980), p. 91; Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Children and Death*, New York: Macmillan/Collier Books, 1983, p.208.

⁴² For this discussion, quotation and source, see Sabom, *Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation*, p.8.

arrived in her yard through the work performed later in the hospital emergency room. It was a detailed blow-by-blow account.⁴³

Item #3: After the brain stops

Distinguished cardiologist Fred Schoonmaker conducted an eighteen year study of 1,400 NDE's including over 50 cases where the NDE occurred during the time when flat EEG readings were recorded, sometimes for periods as long as 30 minutes to 3 hours.⁴⁴ This is of particular interest because of the person's corroborated ability to perceive and remember details even though their brain registered no activity on the EEG.

Example: A woman who had both a flat EEG reading and no vital signs had been declared dead. She spontaneously revived about 3 1/2 hours later as she was being taken to the morgue. She was able to precisely describe not only the procedures that were used in her attempted rescue but also the number of persons who came into the hospital room, what they said (she even repeated a joke told to relieve the tension), and described the designs on the doctors' ties. All of these claims were carefully checked with the medical records and the doctors present. It was determined that her entire description was correct, even though her EEG reading had been flat during that entire time.⁴⁵

Item #4: Electrically stimulated NDE's

Wilder Penfield, often cited as the father of modern neurosurgery, electrically probed the brain during surgery while the patient was fully conscious. He was able to do this by using only a local anesthetic because the brain, itself, feels no pain.

⁴³ Morse, *Closer to the Light*, pp. 24-26, 165.

⁴⁴ John Audette, 'Denver Cardiologist Discloses Findings After 18 Years of Near-Death Research,' *Anabiosis*, 1, 1979, pp. 1-2; Dina Ingber, 'Visions of An Afterlife,' *Science Digest*, vol. 89, no. 1, Jan.-Feb. 1981, pp. 94-97, 142; personal conversation (Habermas) with Fred Schoonmaker, 1 June 1982.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, 'The Experience of Death,' *The Vestibule*, Jess Weiss, ed. New York: Pocket Books, 1972), pp. 57-64; 'When Face to Face With Death,' *Reader's Digest*, Aug. 1976, p.84; cf. 'Life After Death?', *Newsweek*, July 12, 1976, p.41.

In some of his operations, he electrically stimulated the Sylvian fissure in the right temporal lobe. Several patients indicated, as he did this, that they were leaving their body. They also reported experiencing the same phenomena common to NDE's including hearing wonderful music, life review and seeing deceased friends.⁴⁶

What I find of particular interest here is the shifting of the person's reference frame from the body to coordinates outside the body. It is this that makes me suspect that this is not just an electrically stimulated hallucination.

B. Credibility and explanations of NDE's

1. Explanation: The key type of NDE I am focusing on is that where a person's frame of reference shifts from that of their body to a point outside their physical body and their experiences can be corroborated. I think that the data suggests that it is actually happening.
2. Testing NDE's
 - a. Could the brain be supplying the experience?

Cardiologist Michael Sabom conducted an experiment with 25 control patients who had backgrounds similar to near death experiences. All 25 were seasoned cardiac patients. They had had ample opportunity to observe instruments, various procedures, as well as having watched televised examples of relevant techniques. Each of the 25 persons was asked to imagine observing a medical team resuscitating an individual whose heart had stopped beating.

Two out of the 25 could contribute nothing. 20 of the remaining 23 who attempted a description made one or two major errors. Of the 3 who made no errors, none gave more

⁴⁶ Wilder Penfield and T.B. Rasmussen, *The Cerebral Cortex of Man*, New York: Macmillan, 1950). For details, see Morse, *Closer to the Light*, pp. 99-104, 169-172.

than a limited description, lacking in the details normally provided by those who had had a NDE.⁴⁷

b. NDE's seem to be initiated by being close to death

Melvin Morse and his team of researchers selected two groups of children. One was a control group of 121 children who were critically ill, but were estimated to have less than a 5% chance of dying. The other study group consisted of 12 children who came close to death but were saved by medical intervention.

At the conclusion of the study, the researchers found that none of the 121 children in the control group had anything resembling an NDE. However, 8 out of the 12 children in the study group had had an NDE.⁴⁸ Conclusion: NDE's have some association with the dying process.

c. Could NDE's be drug-induced hallucinations?

In a large sample of NDE's studied by Osis and Haraldsson, 61% received no drugs and another 19% were given drugs that have no effect on consciousness.⁴⁹

In Morse's study of critically ill children who did not come close to dying, 37 children had been treated with a large variety of mind-altering medications. Not one of them had an NDE.⁵⁰

Osis and Haraldsson found that hallucinatory factors tended to *reduce* rather than generate NDE's.⁵¹

d. The most powerful verification: Corroboration of details that could only have been perceived while outside of the body.

⁴⁷ Sabom, *Recollections of Death*, chap. 7 in particular. Also, Michael B. Sabom, 'The Near Death Experience: Myth or Reality? A Methodological Approach,' *Anabiosis*, vol.1, no. 1, July 1981, pp. 44-56.

⁴⁸ Morse, *Closer to the Light*, pp. 17-24, 40-42.

⁴⁹ Osis and Haraldsson, *At the Hour of Death*, New York: Avon, 1977, p.71; cf. pp. 82-83, Table 3, p. 219.

⁵⁰ Morse, *Closer to the Light*, p. 21.

⁵¹ Osis and Haraldsson, *ibid.*, pp. 73, 82-83, 104-105, 156, 188.

C. What Conclusions can we Draw?

1. The fact that thousands of people who have almost died had their reference frame shift from the region of their body to an external reference frame, and they made detailed observations and perceptions that their body was in no position to make, and that were later corroborated by medical personnel, supplies strong evidence that there is more to us than just a body. We have a non-physical, immaterial component that I would call a soul/essence/mind.
2. In all the accounts that I have read, the loss of the person's body seemed to be of little loss to the person's identity, their ability to perceive, to remember or their consciousness. In fact, they would often experience remarkable clarity of thought and outstanding recall (memories would be recalled in parallel rather than in serial). I get the impression that our bodies are really an important, but minor part of what really constitutes us as an individual.

This may have implications for our preoccupation with our bodies at the expense of the development of our inner character (e.g., sex and sexual freedom), or concern about our soul or mind.

3. I have not dealt with other aspects of NDE's that cannot be corroborated (strange beings, lights, supernatural entities). When it comes to these sorts of experiences, there is less consistency as well as evidence that one's worldview can bias one's interpretation of what one is seeing or perceiving. Since we can't corroborate any of it, it is much harder to separate truth from fiction.
4. The apparent ability for a person to range far from their body during an NDE (several miles at least), suggests that a person's mind or soul is not dependent on the body for existence. In other words, there is good reason to believe that we will survive our physical deaths. (If it was dependent, we would need some sort of natural 'link').

5. All this indicates to me that we have good evidence that we have a soul and that there is an afterlife. Furthermore, the soul appears to constitute the bulk of what we are as an individual. Our bodies, though important, are a minor component of our being.

III. Conclusion: We cannot gain knowledge of eternity from these accounts ... no one has ever passed the point of no return and then returned, except for Jesus Christ. The evidence from NDE's, however, does seem to indicate that we have a non-physical soul.