

Reasons for Belief in God

I. Kalam-Cosmological Argument

- (1) Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
- (2) The universe (the chain of physical events) began to exist.
 - a. An actual infinite number of events is impossible.
 - Going from the infinite past to the present is like climbing out of a bottomless pit on a ladder with an infinite number of steps. You can't reach the top.
 - b. Scientific evidence from the Big Bang and the 2nd law of thermodynamics.ⁱ Even most models of cosmic inflation require a beginning.
- (3) Therefore, the universe had a cause.
 - a. This cause must be:
 - i. Uncaused: The first cause of all the events that come after it (the first domino to fall).
 - ii. Eternal and timeless before the universe.
 - iii. Personal: Only a person can be a first cause.
 - Objects must be caused to change.
 - iv. Incredibly powerful.

Objections and Christian CounterResponses

Deny Premise A. The first physical state of the universe came into existence uncaused. **It seems like an intuitive, metaphysical principle that something cannot begin to exist uncaused, out of nothing.**

Deny Premise B. The universe (the causal chain of all physical events):

- (1) goes back infinitely into the past. **This is logically impossible.**
- (2) exists timelessly (like still photos on a projector). **This would eliminate causation making the universe truly inexplicable.ⁱⁱ**
- (3) emerged out of a static quantum gravity vacuum that was stable, unchanging and timeless before the universe. **If the system was static and impersonal, how did the universe emerge from it without being caused to do so?** Quantum physics shows that sub-atomic change can be indeterminate & random. **Within a quantum system of unstable moving energy, not a truly stationary state.ⁱⁱⁱ**

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II. Argument from Fine-Tuning

- (1) The Fine-tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design.^{iv}
 - a. The physical laws of nature and the initial conditions of our universe, when given mathematical expression, contain various numerical constants or quantities, such as the gravitational constant or the density of the universe. There is a wide range of values these constants and quantities could have, only a tiny fraction of which are life-permitting. The rest would make life of any kind in the universe impossible .
 - b. Within that tiny fraction are the actual values of the constants and quantities in our universe.^v

Objections and Christian CounterResponses

If these constants and quantities had different values, perhaps different life-forms might have evolved. **This underestimates the significance of these values. A change in many of them would prevent the existence of physical matter and chemistry, much less planets and creatures capable of extracting energy and reproducing. Fine-tuning is a scientific fact. Virtually all cosmologists recognize that the constants and quantities of the natural laws and initial conditions of our universe must fall into an shockingly narrow range of values for the universe to be life-permitting. Even the most ardently atheistic scientists admit the universe appears designed.**

Any type of universe is improbable. It is like putting your hand in a large bucket of coins and pulling one out. The odds of picking a specific coin are improbable but one of them will get picked. **But the odds against picking the one coin painted red are much smaller than the odds of picking a non-red coin. If a billion North American continents were covered with quarters stacked to the moon, the odds against randomly picking the one quarter painted red are mind boggling. Yet those are the odds of picking a life-permitting universe by chance.**

(2) This Fine-tuning is not due to physical necessity or chance.

- a. There are an astronomically high number of possible configurations of the universe, almost all of which are life-prohibiting. There is no reason to think that our universe had to be the way it is. Its constants and quantities came into existence at the big bang as brute facts.
- b. But the odds against our universe being fine-tuned by chance to permit life are almost beyond comprehension.

(3) Therefore, the Fine-tuning of the universe is due to design.

- a. This design required incredible intelligence.
- b. It is very plausible that this design was intended to make the existence of life possible.

There could be an astronomically high number of other universes due to cosmic inflation. Eventually even highly improbable scenarios are bound to occur. **Everywhere we look, and at every level, we continue to see fine-tuning. If cosmic inflation is true, science has shown that it would still require an absolute beginning. In all models of cosmic inflation, that first state requires very special parameters that appear fine-tuned and invariably trigger an inference to design.^{vi}**

A personal cause would be more complex than the first state of the universe and require even more explanation. **Immaterial minds are not complexed in the sense of being composite physical entities.^{vii} If inflationary theory is correct, we must either end explanation with:**

- (1) **A very unique physical state, fine-tuned for the emergence of life-permitting universe(s), before which it existed timelessly and then changed without being caused to do so; or**
- (2) **A very unique mind with highly intelligent, innate ideas, able to chose to create life-permitting universe(s), before which it existed timelessly. Science will end with the first, but it is instinctive to move on to the second.^{viii}**

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III. Arguments from Consciousness, Rationality & Morality

- Reality is not entirely physical.
 - a. Mental properties like thoughts cannot be located and measured by physics. They are correlated with, but not identical to brain states.
 - b. There are evidential Near Death Experiences.
 - c. Personal responsibility & rationality presuppose a non-physical self that endures through change.
 - d. Therefore, reality is not entirely physical.
- If reasoning processes are merely the product of random evolution, then they cannot be trusted to arrive at objective truth.
 - a. Their only "function" is to enable you to survive and pass on your genes.
 - b. Any true beliefs formed through this process are accidental and not justified.
 - c. But this is irrational and self-refuting.
- Our beliefs can only be justified if we were designed to be able to reason in a way that corresponds to reality.

Objections and Christian CounterResponses

Conscious states are simply brain states. We see this in neuroscience. **What we see in neuroscience are correlations between brain states and mental states. The nature of a conscious experience (smelling a rose or having a mental image of pizza) is completely different from the neuro-firing in the brain that it is correlated with. The latter has physical mass and location, while the former does not (How much does my experience of smelling a rose weigh? Where is my mental image of pizza located in my brain?). A color-blind person could know all the brain states associated with seeing color and still not know what it is like to see the color red.**

Creatures whose rationality corresponds to reality have a evolutionary advantage. **Not necessarily. It might be more advantageous to live in a hallucinatory state that loosely conforms to the real world but is more understandable and meaningful.** There is no such thing as objective rationality. The goals of science are pragmatic: to predict and control nature. We use our rational thought processes to navigate the world as best we can. The beliefs we call "justified" are the ones that help us the most, and those are based on empirical data. **The first sentence is self-refuting and the last one is simply false. We have many justified beliefs which do not help us much (I believe the stars are bigger than the tiny specks I see in the sky), and many others which are not empirical (I believe that I think thoughts and that murder is wrong).**

- If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist. But, objective moral values and duties do exist.

Therefore, God exists.

a. Some things are objectively good:

- Sacrificial love and respect for persons.

b. Some things are objectively evil:

- Raping and torturing a child.

c. Moral values and duties appear to us as objective features of reality that we recognize, rather than merely subjective preferences and instincts. Otherwise, there could be no genuine moral progress.^x

d. The best explanation of moral values and duties is that Ultimate Reality is a Person.

e. Moral values are an expression of Its nature, and moral duties are an expression of Its will for persons.

Humanistic utilitarianism is an adequate basis for morality. **Why should a person care about what is best for society, especially if it limits her own good?** Because she needs society to make her lifestyle possible. **What if a majority of people in society can make their lives better by oppressing a minority group? What if an individual gains enough power to oppress society for his own good? What if someone enjoys hurting society and don't care what happens to him? Why are these things wrong? What gives human life intrinsic value?**

Moral values are merely instincts and social preferences that evolved because of their survival value for humans. There is no objective basis for saying that something is right or wrong, it is merely an illusion. **We cannot live consistently while denying our intuitive belief in the objectivity of moral values. Atheism would have to be undeniable to justify moral skepticism, since any premises used to argue for that position will be less obvious than the reality of moral values themselves.**

If an all-knowing, all-powerful, good God existed, it seems unfathomable that he would allow so much suffering to exist. **Even an all-powerful God cannot create finite persons who have the ability to choose (itself a good thing) without the potential for moral evil. And an all-knowing, good God could have good reasons for allowing evil to be actualized and suffering to exist.^x The burden of proof is on the atheist to show that this *cannot* be true.** The God of the Bible is immoral for allowing slavery and commanding genocide. **See endnote.^{xi}**

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IV. Arguments for the Gospel

- The Resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - a. Ten facts held by most secular New Testament scholars.
 - i. Jesus was a Jewish man from Palestine.
 - ii. Jesus' contemporaries believed that he did miracles and cast out demons.
 - iii. Jesus was crucified.
 - iv. Jesus was buried.
 - v. His disciples were hiding in fear of arrest.
 - vi. His tomb was found empty by women.
 - vii. The disciples truly believed they had experiences with the resurrected Jesus.
 - viii. Two former skeptics, James (Jesus' brother) and Paul, both converted due to seeing the resurrected Jesus.
 - ix. The disciples proclaimed the resurrection and were persecuted for doing so.
 - x. A very short time after his crucifixion, thousands of Jews were worshiping Jesus as God.
 - b. The best explanation of these facts is the resurrection.
 - i. If viewed from the perspective of an impartial legal court, the case for Jesus' resurrection is beyond a reasonable doubt.
 - ii. Only an *a priori* commitment to philosophical naturalism can make it appear implausible.

Objections and Christian CounterResponses

Perhaps the disciples stole the body so they could keep their movement alive, save their reputations and make money teaching about Jesus. **And they held firm to their lie in the face of ostracization, persecution, martyrdom and the prospect of being sent to hell for false teachings about God?**^{xii} Muhammed and Joseph Smith did. **Both received significant financial, political and marital benefits from their new religions, and neither willingly suffered or died for their faith. Smith's witnesses recanted their stories under pressure. Jesus' disciples had a very real chance of being crucified too. Their sudden change from a state of fear and hiding to bold, life-long witnesses of Jesus' resurrection indicates a genuine transformation. The resurrection accounts show no evidence of collusion nor of creative inspiration from relevant Jewish writings. If they made up the Easter story, why were women so prominent?** Maybe Jesus fainted on the cross, but recovered in the tomb. **And when he visited his disciples in critical health looking for medical care, they believed he had risen with a glorious body and were motivated to proclaim it to the world?** Maybe they were merely claiming that Jesus was "spiritually" alive. **There were plenty of Jewish terms for afterlife, but "resurrection" was not one of them. There is no evidence Christians ever thought of Jesus as just a spirit.**^{xiii} Perhaps the disciples had hallucinations of Jesus. **They all shared the same hallucinations of Jesus while together at different times and locations? Why didn't the authorities point to Jesus' tomb with his body inside to stop claims of his resurrection?** Perhaps the body was lost and disciples had individual visions. **If the body was not buried by Joseph of Arimathea, why make up a story of an empty**

tomb with women as the primary witnesses and a burier who could easily be disproved? If it was buried by him, why would someone steal it? Pious Jews were not predisposed to hallucinate (or believe stories about) a glorious individual resurrection. It is unlikely that some individual grief visions (even without a body) would have created the conviction and subsequent testimony by *all* of Jesus' disciples that they had *witnessed* his resurrection (take Thomas for example). The idea was too unique in Judaism and there was too much at stake. It would have been more natural to believe that some had seen visions of Jesus after his body had been assumed into heaven and translated into spirit form. Stories about visions and ascensions were known in first-century Judaism, while stories about glorious resurrections (rather than mere resuscitations) were virtually unheard of.^{xiv} Jews did not expect that to happen until the general resurrection in the new age. The earliest historical data, including creeds like 1 Cor 15:3-11, talk about resurrection appearances to individuals and groups and have the raw feel of eye-witness accounts lacking legendary development.^{xv} Jesus predicted his death and resurrection three days later. This may have predisposed his disciples to have visions of him saying he had risen, especially if his body disappeared. The gospels make it clear that the disciples did not understand this prediction, making it unlikely they would hallucinate its fulfillment. The three day motif regarding the resurrection probably originated in Hosea 6:2 as a figurative reference to the final resurrection, which is probably how the disciples assumed that Jesus was using it.^{xvi} Any natural theory is better than a supernatural one.^{xvii} That is an assumption, not a fact.

- The Reliability of the New Testament

- a. Most alleged contradictions are not logical, but mere discrepancies that can be reasonably accounted for. In the ancient Middle East, the retelling of a sacred story could vary from ten to forty percent. However, there were always unalterable core details. This is consistent with parallel stories in the gospels.
- b. The Gospel writers used the genre of ancient historical biography (and have proven correct in many of their historical details). Paul and Peter wrote personal letters. They clearly were not trying to write myths. They also include much material that is embarrassing or hard to understand which they were unlikely to have made up.
- c. The New Testament writers wrote within 30-60 years of Jesus. This was too early for legend to destroy the core details because eye-witness (including adversaries) and their memories were still present.^{xviii}
- d. The N.T. has the most ancient copies of any book. Our modern copies are virtually identical to the originals.^{xix}

Atheist: The New Testament is filled with contradictions and myth. It has been changed by the church. **False. See end notes for more details**

If the Christian God is real and wants all people to know Him, why is he so hidden? Why doesn't he make his existence undeniable? **Perhaps, in order to create room for genuine freedom, faith and character development in humans, God must keep his distance.^{xx}**

- Experience

- a. Miraculous answers to prayer in Jesus' name (such as healings and deliverance) are common, as well as visions of Jesus that give new information, etc. Over 200 million people in the 21st century (1 out of 35) claim to have experienced or witnessed a miracle and over one third of Christians (Pew Report 2006).

The uniformity of nature and human experience makes it impossible to believe in miracles (David Hume). Miracles violate the laws of nature. The probability of a natural explanation is always higher than a supernatural one. People who claim to have witnessed miracles are unreliable or are mistaken due to confirmation error.

The “uniformity” of human experience points *toward* the reality of miracles since countless miracles have been reported throughout human history and millions are reported in modern times.^{xxi} While the mere reporting of a miracle does not prove that it happened, it does show that Hume’s understanding of uniform human experience was based on the experiences of a very small group of European Enlightenment thinkers with a bias against the supernatural.

When Hume says that miracles violate the uniformity of nature, he is simply assuming what he is trying to prove (that nature is uniform without supernatural intervention) and he thus begs the question. There is nothing about cause and effect in nature which precludes the possibility of divine intervention. If a person catches a falling apple, is he violating the law of gravity?

Probability is contextual. To simply weigh a miraculous claim, like Christ’s resurrection, against all the billions of people who never rose with immortal bodies is not enough. Other factors are relevant too, such as whether there is a God who is likely to have supernaturally intervened in such a way, the number and reliability of witnesses, and whether the circumstances surrounding the claim were likely to have developed the way they did if the miracle did not occur.^{xxii}

There are well documented stories of miracles from reliable witnesses (see *Miracles* by Craig Keener). The psychological tendency to look for evidence that confirms one’s beliefs is universal. Therefore, the possibility of confirmation error applies to both miraculous and naturalistic explanations. Specific arguments must be given for and against specific miraculous claims.

- b. General Revelation and the Illumination of the Holy Spirit.
 - iii. God has designed nature and conscience in such a way that we know we are sinners and should seek the true Creature with gratitude, worship and obedience.
 - iv. In addition to this general knowledge of God, the Holy Spirit reveals the unique glory of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures testifying of Him, in a way that is direct and self-authenticating to the person who sees it.^{xxiii}
 - v. If God has designed us to form true beliefs about Him in these ways, then these beliefs are warranted, even without additional evidence.

A simpler explanation is that Christian beliefs are caused by psychological factors such as the influence of authority figures, social pressure and wish fulfillment. **This cuts both ways as an “explanation” for atheistic beliefs as well. Besides, many Christians claim to have experienced the Christian God apart from human influence and despite family and social persecution and the appeal of rival belief systems.**

People in religions which contradict Christianity also claim to experience God (Mormans). Therefore, no one can be sure that they are experiencing God. **Why not? Imagine that my friend and I are each given a cup filled with bright red liquid. We are told that one *may* have merlot, but not both. As we drink I realize that I have the merlot. Its taste is unmistakable. To my surprise, my friend announces that he had the merlot and describes its flavor. *Must* I concede that my experience might be purely psychological and become agnostic about whether I actually drank merlot? No. I know I drank the merlot, even if I don't understand my friend's experience. In the same way, a person who has the Holy Spirit's assurance need not doubt his experience because of another person's alleged experience.**^{xxiv}

A Christian is rationally obligated to give up his faith in the Holy Spirit's assurance if evidence disproves its content. **What would disprove its content? Only evidence that is virtually indubitable. Arguments based on partial evidence can be rationally doubted. If the assurance is truly from God, then a Christian is warranted in trusting it in the face of partial evidence. Valid arguments that are well-evidenced and widely held are frequently overturned. Why should a Christian be required to give up on the Holy Spirit's assurance just because an argument cites partial evidence to which Christians have not yet developed a good response?**^{xxv}

Reasons for Belief in God

V. Pascal's Wager

- (1) If the evidence for God's existence is considered inconclusive but plausible, the wise "wager" would be to stake your life on God's existence. It offers the potential for infinite gain (objective significance and moral value along with eternal life). Betting on atheism offers, at best, the potential for finite gain (sinful pleasures) along with the actual loss of objective significance and moral value and the risk of infinite loss (eternal life).
- (2) In fact, atheism is destructive to human flourishing since it makes moral values completely subjective, including the values of seeking / believing truth and respecting human life. Thus, it should not be considered as a live option. The truth claims of universalist religions are not pressing, since everyone ultimately ends up in the same place. Among particular religious claims, those of Christianity are the best attested.

Objections and Christian CounterResponses

Religious people are motivated by fear. **Christians believe in the existence of a perfectly good Being and are motivated by a desire to share in his goodness and the fear of being excluded from it.**

There is not enough evidence to bet on God. Theism cannot be falsified or demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt. It is just wishful thinking. **Neither atheism or theism can be objectively proven.^{xxvi} If the arguments given for theism are plausible, why wouldn't we prefer a worldview that says life has genuine value and significance over nihilism? Perhaps God has partially hidden the evidence for his existence in order to test our desires and develop moral character. Do we want a perfectly good Creator and objective moral values to exist? Or, do we find it convenient to claim that the evidence for them is inconclusive, so that we can feel free to do what we want?^{xxvii}**

Why would a good God send people to hell for not believing in him? **He doesn't, they send themselves by choosing to remain separated from Him.** Besides, which God out of millions are we supposed to bet on? **Investigate and pray.^{xxviii} Genuinely and patiently seek God.**

ⁱ Borde, Guth and Vilenkin (BGV) singularity theorem.

ⁱⁱ If the universe is a four dimensional space-time cone consisting of a static energy field of physical particles, frozen across all points of time, then the world of change and efficient causation that we observe is merely an illusion. An “event” at a one point in the cone could not casually effect an “event” at another point since both are static and equally real. Motion sickness would not actually be caused by the movement of a boat (since movement wouldn’t exist), it would merely be the expression of the physical components of that point in the space-time cone. Similar counter-intuitive examples could be multiplied endlessly.

ⁱⁱⁱ This kind of scenario is exactly what quantum cosmologists like James Hartle, Stephen Hawking Alex Vilenkin, Andrei Linde and others have in mind when they talk about the creation of the universe from “nothing.” There was literally a moment in the history of the universe prior to which there were not any other moments. There is a boundary of time, prior to which there were no physical events, not even a quantum wave function, and therefore there is no sensible notion of prior time. The problem with this view is articulated well by Aguirre and Kehayias: “It is very difficult to devise a system—especially a quantum one—that does nothing ‘forever,’ then evolves. A truly stationary or periodic quantum state, which would last forever, would never evolve, whereas one with any instability will not endure for an indefinite time.”

^{iv} A very similar argument for fine-tuning can be made in biology, even if evolution is assumed. In their paper, *The ‘Hard Problem’ of Life*, Paul Davies and Sara Walker write, “If one insists on attributing the pathway from mundane chemistry to life as the outcome of fixed dynamical laws, then (our analysis suggests) those laws must be selected with extraordinary care and precision, which is tantamount to intelligent design: its states that ‘life’ is ‘written into’ the laws of physics *ab initio*.” John Barrow and Frank Tipler list ten steps in the evolution of *Homo sapiens*, each of which is so improbable that before it would occur, it is far more likely the sun would have ceased to be a main sequence star and incinerated the earth. William Dembski argues that we see evidence of “specified complexity” in nature (high improbability plus an independent pattern). He then argues that the likelihood of such specified complexity occurring by chance is astronomically low.

^v An alteration of the weak force inside the nucleus of an atom by even one part out of 10^{100} would have resulted in too little or too much helium created in the big bang, making the expulsion of heavy elements

from stars impossible (thus no planets). A change in the cosmological constant (which drives the speed of the expansion of the universe) by as little as one part in 10^{120} would have caused the universe either to collapse back upon itself or to accelerate too fast for stars to form. Stars also could not have formed if the initial conditions of our universe had not been in a state of very low entropy (disorder). Roger Penrose estimates the odds of this are one out of $10^{(10)(123)}$. To give these numbers some perspective, compare them to other scenarios with similar ratios: The number of seconds in the history of the universe is around 10^{17} . The number of sub-atomic particles in the universe is around 10^{80} . The odds of firing a bullet to the other side of the observable universe (20 billion light years across) and hitting a one-inch target is about one out of 10^{60} . Penrose estimates that the odds of our solar system’s being formed instantly by random collisions of particles is about $1:10^{(10)(60)}$.

^{vi} Stephen Hawking, when assessing eternal inflation models as a source for the multiverse, admits that “for our theoretical models of inflation to work, the initial state of the universe had to be set up in a very special and highly improbable way.” Roger Penrose states that “the need to rule out these ‘no-go’ zones of the parameter space imposes restrictions on the properties of the multiverse that are tantamount to the application of an additional overarching biophilic principle. There would seem to be little point in invoking an infinity of universes only to then impose biophilic restrictions at the multiverse level. It would be simpler to postulate a single universe with a biophilic principle.” Peter Steinhardt admits that “from the very beginning, even as I was writing my first paper on inflation in 1982, I was concerned that the inflationary picture only works if you finely tune the constants that control the inflationary period... The fact that we had introduced one fine-tuning to remove another was worrisome. This problem has never been solved.” Nor is it likely to be. As Luke Barnes has shown, “The fine-tuning of the proton and neutron masses imply fine-tuning constraints on the quark masses, which in turn imply constraints on the Higgs vev and Yukawa parameters. If (broken) supersymmetry holds, then the constraints on the Higgs vev imply constraints on the supersymmetry breaking scale. The fine-tuning of the standard model coupling constants (e.g. B and α) plausibly imply constraints on the parameters of GUTs. The constraints on the initial expansion rate, density and perturbations of the universe imply constraints on the inflation potential, coupling and initial conditions. The constraints on the cosmological constant still apply to quintessence models. The fact that a parameter may be derived does not mean that its fine-tuning will automatically go away. It would be the mother of all coincidences that the only universe permitted by the laws of

nature would happen to permit intelligent life.” In their classic paper on fine-tuning in 1979, Carr and Rees comment that “even if all apparently anthropic coincidences could be explained [by deeper physical law], it would still be remarkable that the relationships dictated by physical theory happened also to be those propitious for life...” Richard Swineburne observed that any proposed multiverse mechanism “needs to have a certain form rather than innumerable possible other forms and probably constants too that need fine-tuning in the narrow sense.”

vii Dawkins and others argue that we would have to explain the existence of the designer and therefore no progress would have been achieved. This is false for several reasons. First, to posit a cause of some phenomenon, we do not have to be able to explain that cause. If astronauts discovered machinery on Mars, they would be justified in inferring that it was the product of intelligent design even if they had no idea who the agents were or how they made the machines. Second, ideas can be complex but minds are not. God’s salient properties, like self-consciousness, rationality, and volition, are not arrangements of physical parts and therefore do not require a physical explanation the way the universe does. Finally, all explanation must end somewhere. For empirical science it ends with a physical universe (or universe generator) that came into existence out of nothing (or exists timelessly) with laws and initial conditions fine-tuned for life against incredible odds. For theists it ends with an eternal mind who is the source of the universe. In contrast to the composite physical universe with its contingent and varied quantities and constants, a divine mind is startlingly simple. Yet, it has great explanatory power. God can create a complex the universe simply by thought. This allows us to posit a cause of the universe while avoiding the problem of an infinite regress of efficient causes. Thus, a Divine Mind is an excellent candidate to be the nature of ultimate reality.

viii The first state was either a physical state unlike any other in physics (fine-tuned and timeless, until it changed uncaused) or a Mind unlike any in other in psychology (unembodied with timeless, innate ideas). The question is which option is the best explanation for the cosmos.

ix If moral values are subjective, then moral reform is not a matter of helping people see how objective moral truth applies to a situation. It’s about creating new subjective moral beliefs. But there is no objective way to adjudicate between the old and new morality. It is simply a matter of personal preference and social conditioning. Martin Luther King’s claim that all humans are equal would be no truer than a white supremacists’ claim that those of African origin are inferior.

We censor humans, not animals, because we believe that humans can go beyond instinct to recognize objective moral values, while animals cannot. Since we take our experience of the external world as good evidence of its existence, why wouldn’t the same be true for moral values? Even if our ability to perceive them evolved, the same is true for empirical experience.

x See my paper on Evil and Suffering. God created an ecosystem where autonomous human sinners can flourish and choose to embrace or reject God’s rule. His presence is made clear enough to be believed in by those who want to, yet hidden enough to be ignored and disbelieved in by those who don’t. Some pain and risk are necessary for the development of character and moral attributes like courage, self-sacrifice and compassion. Suffering helps us to depend on God, and not become spoiled and selfish.

xi The creation account in Genesis gives the foundation for the equality of all humans. Everyone is created equal before God. The laws of Moses were provisional. They were intended for a specific culture and time-period. Ancient slavery was widespread and universally accepted. For example, between 85-90% of the population of Rome in the first and second century were slaves or of slave origin. In the ancient world, slavery served as a social safety net for the poor, and a way of preventing retaliation from conquered peoples. Israel’s laws gave slaves status, rights, and protections unheard of elsewhere. Slaves were included in religious life, given a weekly day off, had to be set free if inflicted with bodily harm, had the opportunity for freedom every seven years and were promised asylum if they ran away from their masters. Job recognized that his slaves were created by God just like he was and he would have to answer to God if he mistreated them.

Old Testament laws allowing slavery or the unequal treatment of women are not perfect representations of God’s will – God’s ideal for humans. Before the coming of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God made concessions that served to regulate a hard-hearted culture (realistic laws that gave slaves and women as many rights as Israelite culture would actually accept and practice). For example, look at how Jesus explained the Old Testament laws on divorce in Matthew 19:3.

God did not command genocide. He commanded the Israelites to drive the Canaanites out of the land. Rahab’s story makes it clear that the Canaanites had heard about Israel’s God, and if they had wanted to surrender and join His people they would have been allowed to. Or, they could have recognized their inability to resist Him and fled. But instead they choose to stay and fight. Canaanite culture was debauched and

cruel, embracing practices like child sacrifice. They were to be destroyed so “that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods...” (Deut. 20.18). God has the right to make people move and take the life of anyone he chooses. Where we live and when we die is up to Him. But why kill innocent children? In commanding the destruction of the Canaanites, God said, “You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons, or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods” (Deut 7.3-4). To preserve Israel’s spiritual health and posterity, they could not be allowed to intermingle. God knew that if these Canaanite children were allowed to live among the Israelites, they would spell their undoing. Moreover, since God extends salvation to those who die in infancy or as small children, then He has shown these children great mercy by not allowing them to grow up and become like their parents.

^{xii} Paul said that if Christ had not been raised, the apostles were to be pitied more than all men because they needlessly faced dangers and testified falsely about God (1 Cor 15:14-19, 30-32). James, the brother of Jesus, chose to be killed rather than deny the resurrection of Jesus. James (the brother of John), Peter, and Paul were harshly persecuted and killed. John was sent to a forced labor camp. Clement’s first letter (95 A.D.) says that the apostles lived with no fear of death and suffered many persecutions, even to the point of martyrdom. There is evidence for the ministries and persecution of Andrew, Matthew, Thomas, and Philip.

Bodily resurrection was not appealing to most Hellenistic Gentiles who believed that the body was evil and the spirit was good. Pious Jews believed the glorious resurrection would not happen until the new age. If the disciples had wanted to honor Jesus as a great teacher and keep his movement alive, they could have done so without burdening themselves with the tale of a resurrected body.

^{xiii} Jews of this period had a well-developed language for visions of the dead (including grief visions), such as seeing a person’s ghost or angel (Acts 4). But the term “resurrected” (risen) was never used to describe these experiences. It referred to: (1) the resuscitation of an ordinary, mortal body; (2) the revivification and glorification of all the righteous in the new age; or (3) a metaphor of the reversal of Israel’s “death” (i.e. its captivity and subjection). Some argue that resurrection was merely a metaphor for the renewal of the church after Jesus’ death. If so, then the apostles did a terrible job of explaining it, since everyone (including Paul, the gospel writers and church persecutors) misunderstood.

^{xiv} Stories circulated among 1st century Jews of how the bodies of Moses, Noah and others had been taken up into heaven and transformed into spirits, but no one said they had risen. Some did believe that one or more of the ancient prophets might rise just before the general resurrection to herald its arrival.

^{xv} The witness of the twelve as a group is a central feature of early Christian resurrection claims. It is very early (1 Cor 15:15) and multiply attested by independent sources (1 Cor 15:5, Mt 28:16-17; Lk 24:33-51 / Acts 1:2-26, 2:14, 32, 3:15; Jn 20:19-29). It is highly unlikely this tradition could have developed within 20 years of Jesus (probably within 10) and continued to be proclaimed, if some apostles denied witnessing the resurrection or left the Jesus movement. It is also hard to imagine the disciples claiming to have witnessed the resurrection (or allowing people to think they had) when it would make them greater targets for persecution, unless they were absolutely convinced of its truth. Though the possibility of a shared group hallucination is sometimes argued for, there are no clear examples of it, or historical parallels to the resurrection. The gospel accounts indicate amazement and reluctance on the part of the disciples to believe that Jesus was physically alive, not just a spirit. Yet their experiences with him after his death and empty tomb were so physical, concrete and corporate (seeing, touching, and talking with him, seeing his scars and watching him consume the fish that they gave him) but also supernatural (appearing at will), that it convinced them against cultural expectations that he was physically alive again with a supernatural, transformed body. If this had not been so, it would have been more natural (in light of the empty tomb) to proclaim the assumption of Jesus’ body from the grave into heaven (with its translation into spirit form), and his post-mortem appearances as evidence of his vindication by God and his status and authority.

^{xvi} No Jew expected a crucified and resurrected Messiah. Crucifixion disproved messianic claims (since the Law said that anyone hung on a tree was cursed) and the glorious resurrection was viewed as a large-scale event at the end of the present age. Therefore, Mark said the disciples did not understand Jesus’ prediction and were afraid to ask him (9:32). In Matt 16:23 Peter rebuked Jesus for making it and in Matt 17:10 the disciples responded by asking why Elijah had to come first, indicating they thought that Jesus was referring to the general resurrection of the dead that many expected Elijah to precede. Three days was also a common idiom for a short period of time. When combined with Jesus’ well-known practice of using metaphor, it is not surprising they didn’t understand him.

^{xvii} That would make him a masochistic, narcissistic, deceiver who planned to die a gruesome death as the martyred founder of a cult whose central teachings he knew were false. It is clear in his teachings and interactions that he was sane, humble, honest, loving, and genuinely believed what he taught and died for it.

^{xviii} The Gospels are the genre of Greco-Roman biography (Lives). The stated goal of this genre was to accurately portray a person's life and character. Writers were expected to use eye-witness sources whenever possible. The Gospels are filled with small, realistic details uncharacteristic of ancient fiction, but natural in eye-witness reporting. The Gospels also include much material that has multiple, independent attestation. The Gospels were written between 30-60 years after Jesus, within the lifespans and living memories of eye-witnesses, both friendly and hostile. Enemies of Christianity would have loved to discredit stories about Jesus as unhistorical. Instead, ancient Jewish writings admit that Jesus did miracles and was killed for blasphemy. The majority of New Testament scholars believe Mark and Luke were indeed the authors of their gospels. They were not apostles or prominent leaders in the early church. They are only referred to in passing in Paul's letters. Thus, they are unlikely names to forge. But both spent time with the apostles. The church fathers unanimously said that Mark accompanied Peter and used his teaching as the primary source for his gospel. According to Acts, Luke travelled with Paul, including to Palestine and Jerusalem where they met with James and the apostles. Paul's letters say Luke and Mark were with him in Rome. The majority of NT scholars deny Matthew and John's authorship based on their age and supposed internal evidence (for example, Matthew's calling as a disciple which is copied from Mark). But the external evidence for their authorship is strong. Again, the church fathers are unanimous about their authorship, and there were no competitors. There is no textual evidence of copies without authorship superscriptions, indicating these were added in the first century, before copies started circulating. In the early 2nd century, Papias, a disciple of John, said John wrote his Gospel. But even if the disciples of Matthew and John wrote their gospels (as many New Testament scholars think) they still used eye-witness testimony.

It takes many generations for legendary accretions to reach a point where they wipe out the historical core of a famous person's life (especially when there were hostile witnesses) Most ancient biographies were composed hundreds of years later, yet we still view them as generally reliable. The Gospels record much hard or embarrassing material they are unlikely to have made up. Jesus' rejection by his family

would have been very shameful in the ancient world (Mark, John). If your own family didn't believe your claims, why should others? Peter, the most prominent leader of the church was called Satan by Jesus and betrayed Jesus with curses (Mark/Matt). Jesus got tired on long journeys (John) and couldn't perform many miracles in his home town (Mark). How does that fit with his deity? Jesus said ppl must hate their family to be his disciples (Mark, Matt, Luke) when family loyalty was the most important virtue in the ancient world. Jesus appeared to call a Gentile woman a dog in a gospel primarily written for Gentiles (Mark 7:25). Jesus could be understood as saying he would return in one generation (Mark, Matt, Luke), yet he admitted he didn't know when he would return, only the Father knew. Again, as God, why didn't he know? Jesus called his apostles evil (Matt 7:11) and throughout the Gospels they often look like idiots. Jesus asked God the Father to remove the cup of death that was necessary to atone for the sins of the world, making him sound weak and indecisive (Mark, Luke). On the cross he asked why God had forsaken him (Mark). Finally, in all the Gospels the first witnesses of the empty tomb and resurrection were women whose testimony was not allowed in court. These are just a few examples.

On the other hand, some topics of great concern in the early church are addressed indirectly or not at all in the Gospels. If the Gospel writers made up teachings of Jesus this is hard to explain. Why didn't "Jesus" explain the relationship b/w Jewish and Gentile believers, and whether the Gentiles needed to be circumcised? Or explain the Trinity and his ontological relationship to the Father? (To be fair, there is some explanation in John but most of it is not attributed to Jesus). Jesus' favorite self-designation in the Gospels is "the Son of Man" a super human figure described in Daniel. Though that fits Jesus' Jewish cultural setting, that title was awkward in Greek and was rarely used in the early church. It could easily be misunderstood by Gentiles to mean that Jesus was not God.

But how did the disciples remember Jesus' teachings so well? They lived in an oral culture that valued memorization of important material. The main job of Jewish disciples was to memorize, live out and pass on the rabbi's teachings. I still remember teachings from my college professors decades ago. How much more would disciples in an oral culture who were trained in memorization and expected to pass on their rabbi's teaching? Written material was not nearly as commonplace as it is today. At this time, communication was primarily oral. Memorization, even of entire books, was common. So it is reasonable to suggest that the disciples of Jesus were committing to memory what they heard from Jesus, especially the teachings which ended up in his biographies. Many

of Jesus' teachings are in story or poetic form (with meter, balanced lines, parallelism) and were probably taught multiple times making them easier to memorize. Short-hand note taking was practiced by some and seems very plausible for a guy like Matthew. After Jesus' ascension, the 11 disciples and others repeatedly told the teachings and stories of Jesus that they remembered so that they became public memory.

But why did the Gospel writers wait so long to write? Again, they lived in an oral culture. Papias, a disciple of John, wrote he would rather hear the "living and abiding voice" of someone than read about it. In other words, he preferred stories as they were told through oral tradition. This was common in virtually all ancient cultures, which were largely illiterate and heavily valued oral tradition. But when those "living and abiding" eyewitness voices began dying, there was a need for their testimony to be written down. It also takes significant time free from distraction to write a book. Non-eyewitnesses like Mark and Luke needed time for research. And the editing process could take years. But the apostles initially were very busy spreading the gospel and leading the early church. It wasn't until most had died and those left were slowed down by old age that they took time to write biographies about Jesus. Finally, they (probably) needed secretaries. Most ancient people did not have the level of literacy needed to write a book and depended on scribes. As scribes became Christians, they began to help people like Paul and Peter write letters, and likely helped Matthew and John

^{xix} Since there are over 200,000 textual variants in copies of the New Testament, some say it has been insolvably corrupted. NT textual authorities Westcott and Hort estimate that only about one-sixtieth of these rise above "trivialities" and can be called "substantial variations." Greek expert Ezra Abbott says that about 19/20 (95 percent) of those variations are "various" rather than "rival" readings, and make no appreciable difference in the meaning of the passage. Thus, the text is 99.75 percent accurate. The real concern is with about a thousandth part of the entire text (.1%). Philip Schaff says that of the thousands of variations in all the manuscripts, only 50 are of real significance and not one affects "an article of faith." Even agnostic NT critic Bart Ehrman admits that "In fact, most of the changes found in early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology. Far and away the most changes are the result of mistakes pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another" (Misquoting Jesus, 55).

^{xx} Perhaps the kind of character that God wants to form in us would not be possible if God did not keep his epistemic distance. If humans constantly saw God's glory, they could not help worshipping Him. But God's worth to us is revealed by how we seek, love and trust him when conditions are difficult and his purposes are not clear. If God's goal is to test and deepen our love for him, then hard times are necessary. Just as separation during dating can reveal and deepen love, dark times in faith when God seems hidden can do the same.

God's goal is not belief *per se*, its saving faith which involves trusting God though He is unseen and choosing to earnestly seek Him in spite of opposition (Heb 11:1, 3; Prov 25:2). This goal causes God to act quite different from how He would if He was just trying to prove His existence. His actions may not be effective at coercing universal belief, but they may be very effective at creating the conditions for saving faith and other virtues that God wants.

If God's existence was undeniable, it may not cause more people to love and obey Him. It does not do so in highly religious cultures where his existence is assumed. For sinners, familiarity breeds contempt. While everyone may believe that God exists, many only grudgingly submit or try to manipulate Him (and become bitter when He doesn't do what they want). Under such conditions, hearts can harden and take Him for granted or not fear Him. That is what happened to the Hebrews in the wilderness. Revivals and religious history demonstrate this as well. Perhaps much of humanity would eventually be in a state of conscious rebellion against God (like demons). Thus, for the time being, perhaps God has limited the amount and extent of supernatural encounters in the physical world, so that *more* people will be saved, not less.

^{xxi} At minimum, 200 million people in the 21st century (1 out of 35) claim to have experienced or witnessed a miracle. Over 1/3 of Christians. Pew Report 2006.

^{xxii} Hume's slogan that "extraordinary events require extraordinary evidence" has been disproven by Bayes Probability Theorem. Rationally believing in a highly improbable event doesn't require an enormous amount of evidence. All that is necessary is that the evidence is far more probable given the occurrence of the event, then it would be if the event had not taken place.

^{xxiii} "Seeing" the glory of Jesus in a properly basic way beyond empirical, inferential reasoning is similar to how we perceive moral and logical truths, and know the existence of the external world and other minds.

xxiv Believers from different religions can use objective evidence to help adjudicate between their claims of having experienced God. Such evidence could include miraculous answers to prayer and apologetics. A believer may become convinced that her assurance is not from God when faced with the evidence for, and the assurance of, the true God.

xxv In the Soviet Union, people were indoctrinated with atheism and Christian arguments were suppressed and caricatured. Were Russian Christians rationally obligated to give up their faith? Not if they had true assurance from the Holy Spirit.

xxvi The existence of the Christian God cannot be directly falsified like many hypothetical entities in scientific theories (such as sub-atomic particles in physics, the multiverse in cosmology, common descent in biology, unconscious urges in psychology, etc). But God's existence can be shown to be more or less plausible based on the evidence given in this paper.

xxvii In a court of law we believe that people are innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, since the consequence of a wrong conviction is so serious. The same is true for belief in God. The consequences of disbelieving in God are so terrible that we ought to believe in Him unless atheism was undeniable. Yet, the Bible is clear that we are not impartial jurists when it comes to looking at evidence for God. Sin has biased us against Him and damaged our ability to see reality clearly. It has given Satan power to deceive and blind human minds to God's existence and His nature. Thus, no one wholeheartedly seeks God. No one hungers for righteousness. All have turned away and suppress the truth by our sin. As God draws a person, He gives warrant for belief in Him.

xxviii While religions throughout history have worshipped millions of spirits, they were still viewed as creatures within the universe. The idea of a Being who is the ultimate source of all things and who exists necessarily and eternally with maximum power, knowledge and goodness is prevalent in many religions and animistic cultures across the globe. Alison Gopnik, a professor of psychology at UC Berkeley and an atheist, says, "By Elementary School age, children start to invoke an ultimate God-like designer to explain the complexity of the world around them, even children brought up by atheists." However, this Being was often viewed as distant and inaccessible to the point of being practically

forgotten, while intermediary spirits with greater "pragmatic" significance were emphasized. This can be seen in the indigenous animism of Africans, Native Americans, Eurasians and Pacific Islanders as well as in Hinduism, Daoism, and ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman religions. Abrahamic traditions represent a return to the worship of the supreme "sky" God.

Some Good Resources:

A Fortunate Universe: Life in a Finely Tuned Cosmos by Geraint F Lewis & Luke Barnes

Cosmic Chemistry and God and Stephen Hawkings by John Lennox.

Faith, Science and Understanding by John Polkingham

The Language of God by Francis Collins

Why There Almost Certainly Is a God by Keith Ward.

Reasonable Faith and *On Guard* by William Lane Craig. Also www.reasonablefaith.org

The Reason for God and *Making Sense of God* by Timothy Keller

Monopolizing Knowledge by Ian Hutchinson

The Existence of God 2nd Edition by Richard Swinburne

Mind and Cosmos by Thomas Nagel.

Commentary on "Psychophysiological and Cultural Correlates Undermining a Survivalist Interpretation of Near-Death Experiences" by Bruce Greyson

Near Death Experiences and the Evidence - A Review Essay by Gary R. Habermas

What We Can't Not Know by J. Budziszewski

The Resurrection of the Son of God by N.T. Wright.

The Resurrection of Jesus by Michael Licona

On the Resurrection volumes 1, 2, 3. Gary R. Habermas

Jesus and the Eye-Witnesses by Richard Bauckham

Can We Still Believe The Bible? by Craig L. Blomberg

On The Reliability of the Old Testament by K.A. Kitchen.

Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts by Craig Keener

Dreams and Visions by Tom Doyle

Warranted Christian Belief by Alvin Plantinga.

A Peculiar Glory by John Piper

Demonic Foes by Richard Gallagher, MD