

ANSWERING THE NEW ATHEISM

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I. Introduction: The New Atheism and Its Proponents

A. Atheism, of course, has a long history. The psalmist declared in Ps. 14:1 and 53:1 that the fool says in his heart "There is no God." Some ancient Greek and Roman philosophers were *essentially* atheists because they thought that any deities that existed were uninterested in and thus irrelevant to human existence. For example, the Greek philosopher Epicurus (4th-3rd centuries B.C.) and the Roman philosopher Lucretius (1st century B.C.) thought that matter was all there is and that when you die that's the end of it.

B. You may be familiar with the names of some more recent atheist philosophers. The seventeenth century brought us Baruch Spinoza and Thomas Hobbes; the eighteenth century brought us Denis Diderot; the nineteenth century brought us Ludwig Feuerbach, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Karl Marx; and the twentieth century brought us Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Bertrand Russell, J. L. Mackie, and Anthony Flew. Representatives of atheist philosophy have continued into the twenty-first century.

C. So what is meant by the term "*New Atheism*"? That term was coined by Gary Wolf in a 2006 article in *Wired* magazine. It refers to a new breed of atheists that arose in the aftermath of the Muslim attacks on America on September 11, 2001.

1. Sam Harris, a neuroscientist, began writing his book *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* on September 12, 2001. It was published in August 2004 and spent thirty-three weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

2. In 2006 the British zoologist Richard Dawkins, who at the time was the Charles Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University, published a similarly successful book titled *The God Delusion*. The book received rave reviews in the secular press, and Kirkus Reviews selected it as "Best Book of the Year" for 2006.

3. That same year, Harris published another book, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, and philosopher Daniel Dennett published *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. These also were *New York Times* bestsellers.

4. In 2007 the late journalist Christopher Hitchens (died in December 2011) published *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. *Library Journal* described it as a "provocative, challenging, and passionate work," and it was another marketing success.

5. These four men have been called "The Four Horsemen" of the New Atheism. Since Dennett is a bit more measured in his attacks, three of the four horsemen – Harris, Dawkins, and Hitchens – have been called the "unholy trinity" of the New Atheism. Of these three, Wolf in his 2006 *Wired* article crowned Dawkins "the leading light of the New Atheism movement."

6. Ronald Aronson remarked in *The Nation* (June 25, 2007): "The most remarkable fact is not their books themselves—blunt, no-holds-barred attacks on religion in different registers—but that they have succeeded in reaching mainstream readers and in becoming bestsellers."

7. Others often associated with the New Atheism include the physicist Victor Stenger, biologist Jerry Coyne, and physicist Lawrence Krauss. In 2008 Stenger published *God: The Failed Hypothesis – How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist*, which he followed in 2009 with *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* and in 2012 with *God and the Folly of Faith: The Incompatibility of Science and Religion*. In 2009 Coyne published *Why Evolution Is True*; and in 2012 Krauss published *A Universe from Nothing*. Further down the New Atheist ladder are bloggers like P. Z. Myers, Hollywood types like Bill Maher, and others.

D. These atheists are a new breed not because of their arguments or intellectual sophistication. What is new about them is their open hostility toward religion in general and Christianity in particular, though some have recently begun to say more about Islam. (Dawkins states that he has "Christianity mostly in mind" [p. 9]; Harris titled one of his books *Letter to a Christian Nation*; and Dennett claims Christianity in particular is addicted to blind faith [p. 230-231].) They are not content to argue against the truth of religious claims. Rather, they insist that religion is so irrational and harmful to society that it is unworthy of *respect and toleration*; it is something that needs to be ridiculed and eliminated. Lest you think I exaggerate:

1. In 1997 Dawkins wrote in *Humanist* magazine (Jan./Feb., p. 26): "It is fashionable to wax apocalyptic about the threat to humanity posed by the AIDS virus, 'mad cow' disease, and many others, but I think a case can be made that faith is one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate."

2. In the fall 2002 issue of *Free Inquiry*, Dawkins wrote: "The *mental* abuse constituted by an unsubstantiated *threat* of violence and terrible pain, if sincerely *believed* by the child, could easily be more damaging than the physical actuality of sexual abuse. An extreme threat of violence and pain is precisely what the doctrine of hell is. And there is no doubt at all that many children sincerely believe it."

3. In a program that aired in 2006 in the United Kingdom titled *The Root of All Evil?* Dawkins stated, "When it comes to children, I think of religion as a dangerous virus. It's a virus which is transmitted partly through teachers and clergy, but also down the generations from parent to child to grandchild. Children are especially vulnerable to infection by the virus of religion."

4. In his 2006 book *The God Delusion*, Dawkins wrote (p. 5), "When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion it is called Religion." Toward the end of that book he wrote (p. 287), "I have described the atonement, the central doctrine of Christianity, as vicious, sadomasochistic,

and repellant. We should also dismiss it as barking mad but for its ubiquitous familiarity which has dulled our objectivity."

5. Harris declared in his 2004 book (p. 48), "It is imperative that we begin speaking plainly about the absurdity of most of our religious beliefs." Wolf describes Harris in the *Wired* article as touting the notion that "unless we renounce faith, religious violence will soon bring civilization to an end." And in an interview published in the September 2006 issue of *The Sun* magazine, Harris stated, "If I could wave a magic wand and get rid of either rape or religion, I would not hesitate to get rid of religion."

6. In his 2007 book *The Portable Atheist* (p. xviii), Hitchens said it is time to "withdraw our 'respect' from such fantastic claims" as a "creator [who] only chooses to 'reveal' himself to semi-stupefied peasants in desert regions."

7. British journalist Bryan Appleyard wrote in "The God wars," the cover story of the February 27, 2012 issue of the British magazine *New Statesman*, "To hardline atheists, it is now unreasonable and 'dramatically peculiar' to argue that religion is not altogether evil. How did such intolerance become acceptable to rational minds?"

8. On March 1, 2014 Victor Stenger wrote in the online journal *Science, Religion & Culture* ("A Defense of New Atheism: A Reply to Massimo Pigliucci"), "New Atheism recognizes religion for what it is—a set of unfounded superstitions that have been the greatest hindrance to human progress that ever existed on this planet."

9. On January 7, 2015 Bill Maher, the host of HBO's *Real Time*, declared on the Jimmy Kimmel show, "[T]here are no great religions, they're all stupid and dangerous. And we should insult them."

10. Here is what Richard Ostling, a religion writer for the Associated Press, posted on his blog on October 12, 2013 explaining what is "new" in the "New Atheism": "What's new about New Atheism? No, not substantive arguments for disbelief, which are as perennial as the case for God. Rather, a tactical lurch toward emotion-laden partisanship and take-no-prisoners rhetoric that might make a Fundamentalist blush."

E. And these New Atheists are evangelistic; they are aggressively seeking to turn people from religious faith, to convert them to atheism.

1. Wolf writes in the 2006 *Wired* article:

[T]he atheist movement, by [Dawkins's] lights, has no choice but to aggressively spread the good news. Evangelism is a moral imperative. Dawkins does not merely disagree with religious myths. He disagrees with tolerating them, with cooperating in their colonization of the brains of innocent tykes. "How much do we regard children as being the property of their parents?" Dawkins asks. "It's one thing to say people should be free to believe whatever they like, but should they be free to impose their

beliefs on their children? Is there something to be said for society stepping in? What about bringing up children to believe manifest falsehoods?"

2. Dawkins made his goal quite clear in his 2006 book *The God Delusion*. He wrote (p. 5), "If this book works as intended, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down." Dawkins asked in his interview of Hitchens that was published in December 2011, "Do you ever worry that if we win and, so to speak, destroy Christianity, that vacuum would be filled by Islam?"

3. In the 2006 in *Wired* article, Harris prophesied, "At some point, there is going to be enough pressure that it is just going to be too embarrassing to believe in God." And these people are doing all they can to make that so.

4. Jerry Coyne wrote in a paper published in *Evolution* in April 2012:

After having taught evolution for years, we've [Coyne and his Darwinist colleagues] finally recognized where our real opposition lies: creationism is simply one of many symptoms of religion. It follows that naturalistic evolution won't attract a majority of Americans until our nation becomes less religious. That, of course, is contrary to accommodationism [the idea that Darwinism and Christianity should peacefully coexist], which takes religion as a given. But one suspects that we could best promote evolution . . . by concentrating on bringing Catholics and mainline Protestants into the "no religion" category!

5. This exchange between Stephen Sackur and Daniel Dennett took place in an interview that aired on BBC World News in April 2013:

Sackur: Richard Dawkins talks of religion in a way—to think of it almost like a virus.

Dennett: That's why I used that example. There are lots of symbiotes, lots of parasites and viruses and bacteria that thrive on us and other species, and some of them are very useful to us. . . . Some are just along for the ride; they don't hurt. And a few of them—a small minority—are really harmful. They're bad for us.

Sackur: And in that sense, in the intellectual sense, in the idea sense, religion is bad for us, and therefore we need a cure. Is that what you're saying?

Dennett: A cure . . . yes, yes indeed, I think a lot of people are really afflicted by their religion, and I would love to see them cured.

6. In 2009 Dawkins launched an atheist summer camp in England designed to teach children rationalism and skepticism. Similar camps are now offered in Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Ontario, Ireland, and Norway.

7. In 2011 Dawkins published a children's book titled *The Magic of Reality: How we know what's really true*. Neville Hawcock said of that book in London's *Financial Times*: "Give me the child', the Jesuit maxim is supposed to have run, 'and I will give you the man'. But not if Richard Dawkins gets there first. The arch-atheist's new book, *The Magic of Reality*, is designed to inoculate tender minds once and for all against the supernatural and its apologists."

8. The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation commissioned Laurence Pringle, a well known writer of children's books, to write a book about evolution for children under the guidance of the rabid atheist Jerry Coyne. That book, *Billions of Years, Amazing Changes: The Story of Evolution*, was published in the fall of 2011. A number of other atheist books for children have followed.

9. Atheist groups are engaged in a media blitz that includes billboards declaring "You don't need God—to hope, to care, to love, to live;" "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy life;" and "We are all atheists about most gods. Some of us just go one god further," which I might add, is one God too many. That's like saying, "We are all unbelievers about advanced life on most planets. Some of us just go one planet further in denying there is advanced life on earth."

F. It is no coincidence that disrespect of and hostility toward religion are increasing in the culture.

1. For example, in April 2012 the homosexual activist Dan Savage, who has given presentations at President Obama's White House, launched an obscenity-laced tirade against the Bible while speaking to 3,000 high school students attending a journalism conference. That would have been unthinkable not many years ago.

2. And do not think the government is immune. Nothing happens in a vacuum. More and more we see the faith concerns of people in the realm of public policy being steamrolled. Christian individuals and groups are being required by the government either to cease operating or to violate their consciences regarding things like abortion and homosexual conduct.

a. 1. According to the Pew Research Institute's January 2014 [report](#), using a variety of different measures, the U.S. Government restrictions on religion rose from 1.6 in June 2007, on a 1-to-10 scale, to 3.7 in December 2012. We have gone from the low-level restriction group to the moderate-level restriction group and are just 0.8 of a point from crossing into the high-level restriction group.

b. According to the 2013 edition of Liberty Institute's survey of hostility to religion in America, there were almost 1,200 incidents of legal actions in America that were hostile to religion, approximately double the number of incidents from the prior year. So it is not surprising the subject of the Becket Fund's 2012 National Religious Freedom Conference was "Rising Threats to Religious Freedom."

c. In March 2014 the Pope and Vatican officials expressed to President Obama their concern over threats to religious freedom in the United States. And things have gotten so bad in the U.S. military that a coalition has been formed, The Restoring Military Religious Freedom Coalition, to defend the religious freedoms of members of the Armed Forces.

G. In this class I plan to explore certain arguments put forth by these atheists, especially as they relate to Christianity. Their arguments may sound disturbing when you first hear them – and that's part of why I wanted to expose you to them – but when you really engage the arguments you find they are much bluster and little substance. To show you I'm not alone in that assessment, that it's not just biased preacher talk, let me give you a few quotes from some respected thinkers.

1. Alvin Plantinga is a world class Christian philosopher who retired in 2010 from the University of Notre Dame. He is recognized as one of the most important and influential philosophers of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. After noting in his review of Dawkins's book *The God Delusion* that "the proportion of insult, ridicule, mockery, spleen, and vitriol is astounding," he states:

Now despite the fact that this book is mainly philosophy, Dawkins is not a philosopher (he's a biologist). Even taking this into account, however, much of the philosophy he purveys is at best jejune. You might say that some of his forays into philosophy are at best sophomoric, but that would be unfair to sophomores; the fact is (grade inflation aside) many of his arguments would receive a failing grade in a sophomore philosophy class. This, combined with the arrogant, smarter-than-thou ('thou' being believers in God) tone of the book can be annoying. . . .

The God Delusion is full of bluster and bombast, but it really doesn't give even the slightest reason for thinking belief in God is mistaken, let alone a "delusion."

2. David Bentley Hart, a noted theologian and philosopher, writes in *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 3-4:

The God Delusion, an energetic attack on all religious belief, has just been released by Richard Dawkins, the zoologist and tireless tractarian, who -- despite his embarrassing incapacity for philosophical reasoning -- never fails to entrance his eager readers with his rhetorical recklessness. The journalist Christopher Hitchens, whose talent for intellectual caricature somewhat exceeds his mastery of consecutive logic, has issued *God Is Not Great*, a book that raises the wild non sequitur almost to the level of a dialectical method.

3. Even fellow atheists are put off by Dawkins's effort. Philosopher Michael Ruse said the book "makes me embarrassed to be an atheist," and wrote in an online article in August 2009:

Let me say that I believe the new atheists do the side of science a grave disservice. I will defend to the death the right of them to say what they do . . . But I think first that these people do a disservice to scholarship. Their treatment of the religious viewpoint is pathetic to the point of non-being. Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* would fail any introductory philosophy or religion course. Proudly he criticizes that whereof he knows nothing.

4. Atheist geneticist H. Allen Orr stated in his review published on January 11, 2007 in *The New York Review of Books*:

The God Delusion seems to me badly flawed. Though I once labeled Dawkins a professional atheist, I'm forced, after reading his new book, to conclude he's actually more an amateur. . . . The most disappointing feature of *The God Delusion* is Dawkins's failure to engage religious thought in any serious way. This is, obviously, an odd thing to say about a book-length investigation of God.

II. The Charge That Christian Beliefs Lack Any Supporting Evidence

A. A major theme of the New Atheists is that Christianity, like all religions, promotes beliefs that are irrational in the sense there is no evidence to support them. Christianity is accused of getting people to believe fantasies, things they have absolutely no reason to believe are true.

1. Sam Harris says (*End of Faith*, p. 17) that religion is the one area of life in which we have convinced ourselves that "our beliefs about the world can float entirely free of reason and evidence." Later in that same book he writes (p. 72), "We have names for people who have many beliefs for which there is no rational justification. When their beliefs are extremely common we call them 'religious'; otherwise they are likely to be called 'mad,' 'psychotic,' or 'delusional.' . . . To be ruled by ideas for which you have no evidence . . . is generally a sign that something is seriously wrong with your mind." In 2008 he wrote, "Faith is generally nothing more than the permission religious people give one another to believe things without evidence" (*Letter to a Christian Nation*, p. 110).

2. In his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* (p. 198), Dawkins defined faith as "blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence." He said in 1989 (see *God's Undertaker*, p. 15) that, whereas "scientific belief is based upon publicly checkable evidence, religious faith not only lacks evidence; its independence from evidence is its joy, shouted from the rooftops." In 1997 Dawkins wrote in *Humanist*

magazine (Jan./Feb., p. 26): "Faith, being belief that isn't based on evidence, is the principal vice of any religion." And in 2006 (*The God Delusion*, p. 5) he defined faith as a "persistent false belief held in the face of strong contradictory evidence."

3. British philosopher A. C. Grayling, who has been called the "Fifth Horseman of New Atheism," wrote in his 2007 book *Against All Gods* (p. 15), "Faith is a commitment to belief contrary to evidence and reason."

4. Stenger wrote in March 2014, in the article I previously noted, "The new atheists question whether faith, *which is belief despite the absence of evidence or even in the presence of contrary evidence*, has any moral or intellectual authority" (emphasis supplied).

B. The fact of the matter is that Christian beliefs *do not* float entirely free of reason and evidence. Philosopher Paul Chamberlain says in his 2011 book *Why People Don't Believe* (p. 74):

The most important thing we can say to the assertion that Christian truth claims "float entirely free of reason and evidence" is that it is simply false. In fact, it is so flagrantly false that one wonders what the critics are reading or researching when they make such an assertion. As many of them know, Christian philosophers and theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas, Blaise Pascal, C. S. Lewis, Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga, William Lane Craig, James P. Moreland, and a host of others throughout the history of Christianity have piled up thousands of pages of evidence for the truth claims Christianity presents to the world.

C. The New Testament itself points to the importance of providing evidence for beliefs. Acts 1:3 says Jesus presented himself alive *by many proofs*. Luke tells Theophilus in Lk. 1:3-4 that he was providing his researched, orderly account to him so that he might know the certainty of the things he had been taught. In 1 Pet. 3:15 Peter tells his readers to always be ready to *give a reason* for the hope they have, and he tells them in 2 Pet. 1:16 that he and others did not follow *cleverly devised myths* when they made known to them the power and coming of the Lord Jesus but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. In 1 Cor. 15:3-7 Paul identifies people to whom Christ appeared after his resurrection, many of whom were still alive and thus could be asked about the matter, and then he declares in 1 Cor. 15:17-19 that if Christ did not actually rise from the dead Christianity is a sham and should be rejected.

D. Contrary to the New Atheists' claims, faith and evidence are not mutually exclusive; it's not *either* faith *or* evidence. Faith is not some unjustified, groundless fantasy like Harris's illustration of believing that Nicole Kidman was in love with him despite his never having met her. Evidence can help to lead us to faith in God and trust in his word. Christianity is not opposed to reason and evidence; they are allies of Christian faith and always have been.

III. Evidence for the Existence of God

A. It is more reasonable to believe that a timeless, immaterial, spaceless, and immensely powerful personal being caused the universe to come into existence than to believe it came into existence uncaused from nothing.

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause for its existence; it is brought into existence by something.

a. As expressed in the ancient Latin adage *ex nihilo nihil fit*, out of nothing nothing comes. That should be obvious. If you start with nothing you'll never get anything. The reason you'll never get anything is that something can only come into existence if there is something to cause it to do so. Nothing, being the absence of anything, has no properties and thus has no causal capacity, no potential to bring anything into being. As put by the noted 17th-century British philosopher John Locke, "Man knows by intuitive certainty, that bare nothing can no more produce any real being, than it can be equal to two right angles" (quoted in Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 215).

b. If things can just pop into existence from nothing, there is no reason that would not happen all the time. If things don't need a cause for coming into existence, what's to stop anything and everything from popping into existence? But the uniform experience of humanity is that this does not happen. None of us fear a tiger will appear out of nothing in the chair next to us.

c. The claim that on the subatomic level quantum physics shows that so-called "virtual particles" blink into being spontaneously, in a way not determined or necessitated by a prior state, does not prove that something can come into existence out of nothing, without something causing it to do so.

(1) First, it is far from certain that virtual particles really exist. They are undetectable and are argued by many to be only theoretical constructs, "instruments to give an intuition of mathematical rules." See, e.g., Robert Weingard, "Do Virtual Particles Exist?" *Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association* (1982), 235-242; Tobias Fox, "Haunted by the Spectre of Virtual Particles: A Philosophical Reconsideration," *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* (2008) 39:35-51. The renowned physicist and philosopher of science, Mario Bunge, himself an atheist, wrote in his 2012 book *Evaluating Philosophies* (New York: Springer, 2012), 154:

What is the status of the virtual particles occurring in theoretical particle physics: are they real or fictitious? This is the reply of the Stanford Linear Accelerator people (SLA 2001): "Virtual particles are a language invented by physicists in order to talk about processes in terms of the Feynman

diagrams. These diagrams are a shorthand for a calculation that gives the probability of a process." Shorter: Virtual particles are only computational devices. . . .

To repeat, the virtual particles are fictitious and therefore unobservable. They are but artifacts invented to use Feynman diagrams.

(2) Second, even if they do really exist, there are deterministic interpretations of quantum physics, such as that of physicist David Bohm, under which their appearance is not random or spontaneous but only seems that way, being in fact determined or necessitated by prior conditions. See, e.g., Hrvoje Nikolic, "Quantum Mechanics: Myths and Facts," *Foundations of Physics* (Nov. 1, 2007) 37: 1563-1611.

(a) William Lane Craig writes in "The Kalam Cosmological Argument" in William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 183:

In the first place, wholly apart from the disputed question of whether virtual particles really exist at all, not all physicists agree that subatomic events are uncaused. A great many physicists today are quite dissatisfied with the traditional Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics and are exploring deterministic theories like that of David Bohm. Indeed, most of the available interpretations of the mathematical formalism of QM are fully deterministic.

(b) Emanuel Rutten writes in his 2012 doctoral thesis on contemporary cosmological arguments (*A Critical Assessment of Contemporary Cosmological Arguments: Towards a Renewed Case for Theism* [Amsterdam: VU University, 2012], 144-145):

[T]he claim that virtual particles can pop into existence spontaneously, apparently without any originating cause whatsoever, would be only defensible if we accept up front an *indeterministic* interpretation of quantum mechanics, such as the Copenhagen version. For, if we would accept one of the deterministic interpretations of quantum mechanics, for example the interpretation of David Bohm (Bohm 1952) or of Heinz Dieter Zeh (Zeh 1970), it does not follow at all that virtual particles can come into existence without any cause. And in fact, as I have argued for in the chapter on the cosmological argument of Gale and Pruss, there are good philosophical reasons to *prima facie* favor deterministic interpretations of quantum mechanics over indeterministic ones.

(3) And finally, even if virtual particles really exist and their appearance is random or spontaneous, the particles do not come into being out of nothing. Their appearance requires, is conditioned on, the prior existence of an energy-laden subatomic "vacuum," a quantum field, which is not nothing. As Craig states, "They

arise as spontaneous fluctuations of the energy contained in the subatomic vacuum, which constitutes an indeterministic cause of their origination" (*The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, p. 183). They are not uncaused phenomena. Rutten likewise states (p. 145):

Besides, one could argue that *even in the case of the Copenhagen interpretation* virtual particles do not pop into existence wholly uncaused. For, they originate *from the quantum vacuum*, which is an object itself, so that, on a non-Aristotelean view of causation, one could adequately hold that these particles, although not having an efficient cause (*causa efficiens*), have a proper material cause (*causa materialis*) and are therefore not uncaused.

2. Without regard to the testimony of Scripture, there are good philosophical and scientific reasons for thinking the universe began to exist.

a. The philosophical argument for the universe having a beginning involves the strangeness of infinity and the nature of an actual infinite. The idea is that past time cannot be infinite because an infinite amount of time cannot already have been exhausted so as to arrive at the present; the inexhaustible cannot have been exhausted. One could never traverse an infinite sequence of time units or events to arrive at now. Past history cannot have counted down from minus infinity to the present. You could never say that an *infinite* amount of time has already passed. An infinite amount of time can never pass because it is limitless; it can only be in process, never complete.

(1) The famous German mathematician David Hilbert claimed "the infinite is nowhere to be found in reality. It neither exists in nature nor provides a legitimate basis for rational thought. . . . The role that remains for the infinite to play is solely that of an idea" (Groothuis, 218).

(2) A potential infinite, an infinite *future* time, is infinity in progress. So it poses no problem like the idea of an actual infinite, like the claim of having already traversed an infinite amount of time.

(3) This would not mean, by the way, that God has not always existed. There are ways of dealing with God's relationship to time so that he does not exist in a sequence of individuated moments, which avoids this problem of an actual infinite.

(4) This makes sense to me and to many philosophers, but there are philosophers who are not persuaded. This philosophical reason for thinking the universe began to exist dovetails nicely, however, with the scientific acceptance of the universe having a beginning, the subject to which I now turn.

b. The scientific arguments for the universe having a beginning often involve the second law of thermodynamics which establishes without exception that

processes taking place in a closed physical system, which for the atheist the universe is, always tend toward a state of equilibrium. In other words, every such system eventually will run down and cease having energy available for work. That is why there can be no perpetual motion machines.

(1) Theoretical physicist Paul Davies put it this way in an interview in 1995 online [here](#):

There are many physical processes occurring in the universe that proceed at a finite rate, and are irreversible. For example, the formation and death of stars, and the emission of starlight into space. You can't run these processes backwards. But if the universe is infinitely old, then these irreversible processes would have all run their course by now, and the entire universe would have reached its final state. But that hasn't happened yet, so the universe can't have existed for ever. We know there must have been an absolute beginning a finite time ago.

(2) The attempts to get around this conclusion of an absolute beginning have not been persuasive. On January 8, 2012 there was a meeting of world class cosmologists at Cambridge University in honor of physicist Stephen Hawking's 70th birthday. It was called "The State of the Universe." The report of the event in *New Scientist* by Lisa Grossman on January 11, 2012 was titled "Why physicists can't avoid a creation event." Ms. Grossman reported:

While many of us may be OK with the idea of the big bang simply starting everything, physicists, including Hawking, tend to shy away from cosmic genesis. "A point of creation would be a place where science broke down. One would have to appeal to religion and the hand of God," Hawking told the meeting, at the University of Cambridge, in a pre-recorded speech.

For a while it looked like it might be possible to dodge this problem, by relying on models such as an eternally inflating or cyclic universe, both of which seemed to continue infinitely in the past as well as the future. . . . However, as cosmologist Alexander Vilenkin of Tufts University in Boston explained last week, that hope has been gradually fading and may now be dead. **He showed that all these theories still demand a beginning.** [Note: Vilenkin is a theoretical physicist, cosmologist, and professor of Physics and Director of the Institute of Cosmology at Tufts University; he is not a theist.]

(3) The editorial in *New Scientist* was titled "The Genesis problem." It included:

The big bang is now part of the furniture of modern cosmology, but Hoyle's unease has not gone away. Many physicists have been fighting a rearguard action against it for decades, largely because of its theological

overtones. If you have an instant of creation, don't you need a creator? Cosmologists thought they had a workaround. Over the years, they have tried on several different models of the universe that dodge the need for a beginning while still requiring a big bang. **But recent research has shot them full of holes. It now seems certain that the universe did have a beginning.**

(4) In April 2012 Vilenkin and his co-author Audrey Mithani published a paper titled "Did the Universe Have a Beginning?" Consistent with the remarks in *New Scientist*, the abstract states:

We discuss three candidate scenarios which seem to allow the possibility that the universe could have existed forever with no initial singularity: eternal inflation, cyclic evolution, and the emergent universe. The **first two** of these scenarios are geodesically incomplete to the past, and thus **cannot describe a universe without a beginning. The third**, although it is stable with respect to classical perturbations, can collapse quantum mechanically, and therefore **cannot have an eternal past.**

(5) That same month, Leonard Susskind, a heavyweight cosmologist from Stanford University who is the founder of string theory, published a response to Mithani and Vilenkin wherein he concluded, "there is a beginning, but in any kind of inflating cosmology the odds strongly (infinitely) favor the beginning to be so far in the past that it is effectively at minus infinity." As explained in the April 27, 2012 issue of MIT Technology Review, "[Susskind's] argument is equivalent to saying that the cosmos must have had a beginning even if it looks eternal in the past, which is rather similar to Mithani and Vilenkin's view."

(6) The September 2013 issue of *Discover* magazine had an article about Vilenkin titled "What Came Before the Big Bang?" It ended with "Indeed, says Vilenkin, among all the ideas we've thought of so far for a universe without a beginning, none of them seem to work. 'So the answer to the question of whether the universe had a beginning is yes, it probably did.'" The "probably" is designed simply to leave room for some new idea or argument.

(7) Now it remains possible to construct completely speculative mathematical models of an eternal universe. However, those models depend on unverifiable assumptions (as they all do), wind up with mysteries of their own, have what Vilenkin and others say amount to a kind of beginning, and are contrary to what the current evidence suggests.

(a) For example, atheist cosmologist Lawrence Krauss said the following in an exchange with William Lane Craig in August 2013:

Krauss: I would agree that all the evidence shows—let's look—let's accept that fact.

Craig: All right.

Krauss: All the evidence suggests our universe had a beginning.

Craig: Oh, OK—

Krauss: But we don't KNOW! That's what I keep telling you! Knowing and suspecting are two VASTLY different things!

(b) So he acknowledges it is in keeping with the best current evidence to conclude the universe had a beginning. He just maintains it is not absolutely certain that the universe had a beginning; there is some theoretical wiggle room. Of course, he is ignoring the philosophical argument about the impossibility of an actual infinite, but even with that, if the premises of a logically valid argument are more likely true than not, the conclusion of the argument is more likely true than not. In which case, it certainly is *not irrational* to accept the argument's conclusion; on the contrary, that is the reasonable and rational thing to do. And as you will see in a minute, if it is reasonable to think the universe had a cause, it is reasonable to think that cause has a number of attributes associated with God.

(8) After a lengthy discussion of the issues and claims, here is how Robert J. Spitzer summarized the current state of scientific evidence on whether the universe had a beginning in his 2010 book *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy* (p. 43-44):

The discussions in the foregoing sections show that the preponderance of the cosmological evidence favors a beginning of the universe (prior to which there was no physical reality whatsoever). The beginning of physical reality marks the point at which our universe came into existence. There are currently no truly satisfactory alternatives to this beginning of physical reality. . . .

In view of the extensive applicability and preponderance of evidence for a beginning of the universe (and the narrow and tenuous path which must be taken to get around it), it can be concluded that the evidence currently supports a *reasonable likelihood* of a beginning – a point at which the universe came into existence.

(9) Now I don't believe the Standard Big Bang model or any of the proposed eternal models are true because I'm convinced they all are inconsistent with Scripture. *The point, however, is that there is broad agreement even in the secular scientific world that the universe had a beginning.* That belief does not depend on any religious convictions or on believing the Bible. Theoretical physicist Paul Davies stated in a paper presented in March 2002, "Today, few cosmologists doubt that the universe, at least as we know it, did have an origin at a finite moment in the past" (Groothuis, 227). The Oxford mathematician John Lennox wrote in 2007 (*God's Undertaker*, p. 68), "There is, therefore, a remarkable consensus of opinion nowadays, that the universe had a beginning." And Alister McGrath, a professor of Science and Religion at the University of Oxford, stated in his 2009 book *Science and Religion: A New Introduction* (p. 152), "It is now widely agreed that the universe had a beginning."

3. So even if one rejects the philosophical argument that the universe *necessarily* had a beginning based on the impossibility of an actual infinite, there is still a broad scientific consensus that the universe did in fact have a beginning. And given the strong, rational, and reasonable conclusion that the universe had a beginning, there necessarily is a cause for its existence and that cause necessarily is outside of the universe. It could not be part of the universe because it caused the universe. It is *independent* of the universe.

4. A cause that is outside of the universe and which brings the universe into existence is a cause that is nonphysical (i.e., immaterial and spaceless), powerful, and in some sense timeless. It is nonphysical because matter/energy and space are part of the created universe and thus did not exist prior to its creation. It is powerful because it created the entire universe from nothing. And it is beyond or outside of time because time, as we know and experience it, is itself a property of the created universe. That is why the universe is often called "the space-time universe."

5. Moreover, this nonphysical, timeless, and amazingly powerful cause is most reasonably understood to be personal rather than some kind of impersonal force or conditions.

a. If the cause of the origin of the universe were an impersonal force or set of conditions, it would be impossible for that cause to exist without its effect, the universe, also existing. Whenever you had that cause the universe would come into existence. Since the cause of the universe is timeless (whether relatively per Alan Padgett or absolutely per William Lane Craig), is permanent, then the universe would also be permanent; it could not have come into being a finite time ago. Craig states the problem this way:

If the cause is sufficient to produce its effect, then if the cause is there, the effect must be there, too. For example, water freezes when the temperature is below 0 degrees centigrade; the cause of the freezing is the temperature's falling to 0 degrees. If the temperature has always been below 0 degrees, then any water around would be frozen from eternity. It would be impossible for the water to *begin* to freeze just a finite time ago. Now the cause of the universe is permanently there since it is timeless. So why isn't the universe permanently there as well? Why did the universe come into being only 13.7 billion years ago? Why isn't it as permanent as its cause?

b. But if the cause is a personal being rather than a mindless state, an impersonal set of conditions, that being could *choose* not to create the universe until a finite time ago. All of this fits squarely with traditional concepts of God as an eternal, nonphysical, and powerful personal being.

6. In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins does not dispute either of the premises of the argument: (1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause for its existence, and (2) The universe began to exist.

a. Rather, he says (p. 77) that even if we allow for the existence of a first cause that requires no explanation for its existence (which he labels a "dubious luxury" but does not explain why), "there is absolutely no reason to endow that [first cause] with any of the properties normally ascribed to God: omnipotence, omniscience, goodness, creativity of design, to say nothing of such human attributes as listening to prayers, forgiving sins and reading innermost thoughts."

b. But as William Lane Craig, whom Dawkins refuses to debate, points out (*God Is Great; God Is Good*, p. 18), "this is an amazingly concessionary statement." Dawkins doesn't dispute that the argument proves the existence of an uncaused, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and unimaginably powerful personal Creator of the universe. He simply complains that it does not prove this Creator has the other properties normally ascribed to God. So what? The argument does not seek to prove that the cause of the universe has *every* aspect of God's being. But in proving or making likely that there is an uncaused, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and powerful personal Creator of the universe who may, for all we know, also possess the additional properties normally ascribed to God, we have reduced the atheist to saying that this being need not be God. That is a bizarre form of atheism indeed.

7. Note that it is only that *which begins to exist* that must have a cause for coming into existence. That which has no beginning, which has always existed, like the God envisioned by the great religions, requires no cause for being. (God's eternity does not conflict with the second law of thermodynamics because that law applies to the behavior of matter and energy within the universe not to a nonphysical being that transcends the universe.)

a. So the assertion that God has no cause of existence (is self-existent) does not justify the assertion that the universe has no cause of existence. There is a crucial distinction between the two. The universe *must* have a cause of existence because it had a beginning. To ask "What caused God?" is to commit the category fallacy in that one is incorrectly assigning God to the category of things requiring a cause. It is to ask what caused the uncaused, which is nonsensical. It is like asking what time tastes like or how tall Tuesday is.

b. So Dawkins's reluctance to concede that God would not require a cause for his existence (his labeling the claim "a dubious luxury") is baseless. Atheist philosopher Michael Ruse wrote in *The Guardian* on November 2, 2009:

I have written that *The God Delusion* made me ashamed to be an atheist and I meant it. Trying to understand how God could need no cause, Christians claim that God exists necessarily. I have taken the effort to try to understand what that means. Dawkins and company are ignorant of

such claims and positively contemptuous of those who even try to understand them, let alone believe them. Thus, like a first-year undergraduate, he can happily go around asking loudly, "What caused God?" as though he had made some momentous philosophical discovery.

B. It is more reasonable to believe there is an objective moral standard than to believe there is not, and it is more reasonable to believe that an objective moral standard cannot exist without God than to believe that it can.

1. Are moral standards objective or subjective? When you say it is wrong to rape someone or to slit a baby's throat for fun do you mean it is really and truly wrong, wrong no matter who says otherwise (objectively wrong), or do you mean it is merely contrary to some current human opinion, a social convention, that is subject to change like clothing styles (subjectively wrong)? If the Nazis had succeeded in conquering the world and convincing the masses that slaughtering Jewish children was the moral equivalent of exterminating cockroaches, would killing them still be wrong? Is right and wrong whatever people say it is, or does it exist independently of what people think?

2. The question is not whether atheists can be good people, whether they can know moral standards and seek to live by them. Certainly they can; after all, they have been made in God's image and have a certain moral awareness or sensitivity as a result (this is the law of the heart to which Paul refers in Rom. 2:14-15). The question is whether atheists can have a *rational basis* for claiming that any conduct is objectively wrong, wrong in a sense independent of human opinion. They cannot. After all, in their view all of existence is necessarily the product of blind, purposeless, natural forces. How could such forces generate moral obligation?

3. If blind, purposeless forces, such as wind or dripping water, carved marks in sandstone in the shape "Do not eat grapes," that would not create a moral obligation not to eat grapes. Anyone who appealed to those marks to condemn those eating grapes would be ridiculed and taught that mankind is not obligated to obey the fortuities of nature. Mindless phenomena like wind and rain cannot create moral obligation. If the prohibition against slitting a baby's throat is the product of the same mindless forces as "Do not eat grapes," it could be no more binding. Any contrary sense would be an illusion, a fact many atheist philosophers admit.

a. The renowned 20th-century atheist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre wrote in *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), 22 (cited in Groothuis, 349):

It [is] very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him; there can no longer be an *a priori* Good, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. Nowhere is it written that the Good exists, that we

must be honest, that we must not lie; because the fact is we are on a plane where there are only men. As Dostoevsky said, "If God didn't exist, everything would be possible."

b. Atheist philosopher Richard Taylor, who taught at Brown, Columbia, and the University of Rochester, wrote in 1985, "The concept of moral obligation [is] unintelligible apart from the idea of God. The words remain but their meaning is gone."

c. Though Dawkins, like other atheists, often appeals to moral absolutes, in November 1995 he wrote in *Scientific American*: "The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, *no evil, no good*, nothing but pitiless indifference." He said the following in his interview with Justin Brierley on October 21, 2008:

Brierley: "But if we had evolved into a society in which rape was considered fine, would that mean that rape is fine?"

Dawkins: "I don't want to answer that question...it's enough for me to say that we live in a society where it's not considered fine. We live in a society where selfishness, where failure to pay your debts, failure to reciprocate favors is regarded askance. Ah, that is the society in which we live. I'm very glad...that's a value judgment, I'm very glad that I live in such a society."

Brierley: "It is a value judgment. But when you make a value judgment you need to set yourself outside of this evolutionary process to say the reason this is good is because it's good and you don't have any way to stand on that statement."

Dawkins: "The value judgment itself could come from my evolutionary past."

Brierley: "So, it's therefore just as random as any product of evolution."

Dawkins: "Well, you could say that...uh, but it doesn't in any case...nothing about it makes it more probable that there is anything supernatural."

Brierley: "OK, but ultimately, your belief that rape is wrong is as arbitrary as the fact that we evolved five fingers rather than six."

Dawkins: "You could say that, yes."

d. Christian philosopher of religion Gary Habermas wrote in 2008 (*JETS*, "The Plight of the New Atheism: A Critique"):

In discussions of ethical theory, one will almost never find philosophical atheists who argue for absolute ethical standards. The chief reason they deny intrinsically grounded, absolute ethical standards seems to be rather obvious: objective moral standards cannot be expected to result from an atheistic, evolutionary system grounded in the impersonal principles of the improbable but chance development of life.

e. Atheist philosopher Michael Ruse wrote in an online article in the *UK Guardian* in March 2010:

God is dead, so why should I be good? The answer is that there are no grounds whatsoever for being good. There is no celestial headmaster who is going to give you six (or six billion, billion, billion) of the best if you are bad. Morality is flimflam. . . .

Now you know that morality is an illusion put in place by your genes to make you a social cooperator, what's to stop you behaving like an ancient Roman [grabbing Sabine women]? Well, nothing in an objective sense.

f. This point was not lost on the infamous serial killer and cannibal Jeffrey Dahmer. He said in an interview with Stone Phillips on *Dateline* in November 2004 (quote in *Nonsense of a High Order*, p. 196): "I always believed the theory of evolution as truth that we all just came from slime. . . . [I]f a person doesn't think there is a God to be accountable to then what's the point of trying to modify your behavior to keep it within acceptable ranges?"

g. Atheist Joel Marks, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of New Haven, put it this way in his 2010 article in *Philosophy Now*:

I have given up morality altogether! . . . [T]his philosopher has long been laboring under an unexamined assumption, namely, that there is such a thing as right and wrong. I now believe there isn't.

How I arrived at this conclusion is the subject of a book I have written . . . The long and the short of it is that I became convinced that atheism implies amorality; and since I am an atheist, I must therefore embrace amorality. . . . I experienced my shocking epiphany that the religious fundamentalists are correct: without God, there is no morality. But they are incorrect, I still believe, about there being a God. Hence, I believe, there is no morality. . . .

Even though words like 'sinful' and 'evil' come naturally to the tongue as a description of, say, child-molesting, they do not describe any actual properties of anything. There are no literal sins in the world because there is no literal God and hence the whole religious superstructure that would include such categories as sin and evil. Just so, I now maintain, nothing is literally right or wrong because there is no Morality.

h. Notice how even here the atheist cannot live consistently with the demands of his philosophy. Dr. Marks states, "since I am an atheist, I *must* therefore embrace amorality." Must? As in "I am *ethically obligated* to live consistently with my philosophy?" But if there is no morality, if it is all an illusion, whence the obligation to live consistently with one's philosophy?

i. In his April 2013 debate with Frank Turek, David Silverman, who is president of American Atheists, made the following statements (Turek, *Stealing*

from *God*, 93-95): "there is no such thing as objective morality," "all morality is relative," and "There is no objective moral standard." He also said that his preferring a culture that *cares for* babies over one that *eats them* and his condemnation of Nazi atrocities was just "an opinion," and he agreed that people "have every right to do" what in his opinion is wrong. And yet, he still insisted on labeling what they did as "immoral." Moral relativism and confused thinking is where his atheist philosophy has driven him.

j. British atheist philosopher John Gray wrote in an article ("What scares the new atheists?") in *The Guardian* on March 3, 2015:

To be sure, evangelical unbelievers adamantly deny that liberalism needs any support from theism. . . . [A] liberal morality that applies to all human beings can be formulated without any mention of religion. Or so we are continually being told. The trouble is that it's hard to make any sense of the idea of a universal morality without invoking an understanding of what it is to be human that has been borrowed from theism. . . .

Well, anyone who wants their values secured by something beyond the capricious human world had better join an old-fashioned religion. If you set aside any view of humankind that is borrowed from monotheism, you have to deal with human beings as you find them, with their perpetually warring values.

4. We know intuitively that there is an objective morality, that there are moral *facts*, not just moral opinions.

a. We know, for example, that it is not a matter of personal opinion whether raping someone or slitting a baby's throat for fun is wrong – it's wrong, and if someone doesn't recognize that it means they are not functioning properly; that person is a sociopath not a philosopher. As even Michael Ruse acknowledged in *Darwinism Defended* (London: Addison-Wesley, 1982), p. 275, "The man who says it is morally acceptable to rape little children is just as mistaken as the man who says $2+2=5$."

b. It is the objective nature of morality that explains the outrage we feel over something like child molestation. If I can't stand the taste of sushi and someone else eats it, I don't get outraged or indignant toward them because it is a subjective matter, a matter of opinion. It is completely different if they rape a child.

c. Indeed, it is the objectiveness of morality, the fact morality is not made up by humans, not determined by human vote, that allows us to judge some human laws as unjust or immoral. As Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," "A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law" (Groothuis, 377).

5. Because atheism is incompatible with the existence of objective morality, our moral sense bears witness to the falsity of atheism. It is telling us that atheism is not true. You can see this tension in someone like Bertrand Russell, perhaps the most renowned atheist philosopher of the twentieth century. He wrote: "I cannot see how to refute the arguments for the subjectivity of ethical values, but I find myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that I don't like it" (*Nonsense of a High Order*, p. 172).

6. It is almost funny watching atheists express moral indignation and outrage over certain conduct, especially when they think they can blame it on religion.

a. In his May 2007 debate with Christopher Hitchens in *Christianity Today*, the Christian theist Douglas Wilson kept pressing Hitchens to provide a rational basis for labeling any conduct good or bad. If existence consists solely of matter acting according to various laws of nature, it is meaningless to speak of conduct as either good or bad. It simply is. We might as well say it is good for a flower to be yellow but bad for it to be red.

b. The best Hitchens could muster in answer to Wilson's persistent inquiry was to say that "our morality evolved." That is a fairly common line taken by atheists who want to keep their atheism and also feel justified in their moral condemnation of others. I think Wilson did a beautiful job of exposing the fatal defect of that claim. He said:

On the question of morality, you again attempt an answer: "My answer is the same as it was all along: Our morality evolved." There are two points to be made about this reply. The first concerns evolved morality and the *future*, and is a variation on my previous questions. If our morality evolved, then that means our morality *changes*. If evolution isn't done yet (and why should it be?), then that means our morality is involved in this on-going flux as well. And that means that everything we consider to be "moral" is really up for grabs. Our "vague yet grand conception of human rights" might flat disappear just like our gills did.

Our current "morals" are therefore just a way station on the road. No sense getting really attached to them, right? When I am traveling, I don't get attached to motel rooms. I don't weep when I have to part from them. So, in the future, after every ferocious moral denunciation you choose to offer your reading public, you really need to add something like, "But this is just a provisional judgment. Our perspective may evolve to an entirely different one some years hence," or "Provisional opinions only. Morality changes over time"—POOMCOT for short. It would look like this: "The Rev. Snoutworthy is an odious little toad, not to mention a waste of skin, and his proposal that we prosecute the brassiere editors of the Sears catalog on pornography and racketeering charges is an outrage against civilized humanity. But ... POOMCOT."

This relates to the second point, which concerns evolved morality and the *past*. When dealing with people whose moral judgments have differed from yours, do you regard them as "immoral" or as "less evolved?" The rhetoric of your book, your tone in these exchanges, and your recent dancing on the grave of the late Jerry Falwell would all seem to indicate the former. In your choice of words, the people you denounce are to be *blamed*. The word *fulminations* comes to mind. You write like a witty but acerbic tenth-century archbishop with a bad case of the gout. But this is truly an odd thing to do if "morality" is a simple derivative of evolution. Are you filled with fierce indignation that the koala bear hasn't evolved ears that stick flat to the side of his head like they are supposed to? Are you wroth over the fact that clams don't have legs yet? When you notice that the bears at the zoo continue to suck on their paws, do you stop to remonstrate with them?

7. Atheists, including some of the new breed, sometimes try to undermine the claim that God is the necessary foundation of morality by raising what is known as the Euthyphro Dilemma. For example, Sam Harris raised this argument in his April 7, 2011 debate with William Lane Craig and Jerry Coyne raised it in an online article on August 1, 2011.

a. That name comes from a question asked by Socrates in Plato's early fourth-century BC work titled *Euthyphro*, the essence of which was: Do the gods will something because it is good, or is something good *because* the gods will it? (Euthyphro was a polytheist, and their gods were merely somewhat more powerful and knowledgeable than humans, but were still flawed.)

b. It is seen as a dilemma because if the gods will something because it is good then the good is independent of the gods; it is something that exists outside or above them. If, on the other hand, the good is *whatever* the gods will, that seems to be an example of might makes right. They could have declared something totally different to be good, so it makes good and evil arbitrary, which seems wrong.

c. The classic response when this is pressed upon Christians (or others who believe in the God of Scripture) is that it is a false dilemma; there is a third alternative. It is not the case that God wills something because it is good nor is it the case that something is good just because God wills it; rather, God wills something because *He* is good. In other words, it is God's own nature that determines what is the good – he is by nature compassionate, just, fair, kind, loving, etc. Because he is good, his commandments to us reflect necessarily his nature. His commandments and our moral duties are rooted in his essence; they are not arbitrary and are not grounded in anything external to God.

d. Being made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-28) and having an innate moral sense (Rom. 2:14-15), we are to some extent tuned to what is moral and right. But

being fallen creatures, our sense in that regard is fallible (e.g., our consciences can be 'seared' – Tit. 2:4). We must inform our conscience by studying God's revelation.

C. It is more reasonable to believe that free will exists than to believe it does not, and it is more reasonable to believe that free will cannot exist without God than to believe it can.

1. Humans are able to think and act in a genuinely nondetermined manner. We can choose to write a letter, eat an apple, or sing a song, and we can choose not to do those things. If there is no God, then the universe and everything in it is the result of physical laws (gravitational, electromagnetic, chemical, mechanical, thermodynamic, and radiation) acting on matter/energy over time, which is an exclusively deterministic process. In other words, things occur solely because the laws of nature dictate that they occur. The question is how this strictly deterministic process could give rise to beings that act in a nondetermined manner. What evidence is there that physical laws can create free will, can create a state in which beings act in a way not determined by those laws?

2. Recognizing the problem, many atheists argue that free will is an illusion, that human choices and conduct are in fact determined by physical laws the effects of which are just too complex to be traced with any certainty.

a. In the words of the prominent atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell, Man's "hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations [arrangements] of atoms."

b. In his 1994 book *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 3, Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of DNA proclaimed, "The Astonishing Hypothesis is that 'You,' your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules."

c. Dawkins wrote in his 1995 book *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (p. 133), "DNA neither cares nor knows. DNA just is. *And we dance to its music*" (emphasis supplied).

d. Will Provine is an atheist historian of science at Cornell University. The abstract of his comments at the Second Annual Darwin Day Celebration at the University of Tennessee on February 12, 1998 begins with: "Naturalistic evolution has clear consequences that Charles Darwin understood perfectly. 1) No gods worth having exist; 2) no life after death exists; 3) no ultimate foundation for ethics exists; 4) no ultimate meaning in life exists; and 5) human free will is nonexistent."

e. Jerry Coyne wrote in an online article in January 2012:

Perhaps you've chosen to read this essay after scanning other articles on this website. Or, if you're in a hotel, maybe you've decided what to order for breakfast, or what clothes you'll wear today.

You haven't. You may *feel* like you've made choices, but in reality your decision to read this piece, and whether to have eggs or pancakes, was determined long before you were aware of it — perhaps even before you woke up today. And your "will" had no part in that decision. So it is with all of our other choices: not one of them results from a free and conscious decision on our part. There is no freedom of choice, no free will. And those New Year's resolutions you made? You had no choice about making them, and you'll have no choice about whether you keep them. . . .

True "free will," then, would require us to somehow step outside of our brain's structure and modify how it works. Science hasn't shown any way we can do this because "we" are simply constructs of our brain. We can't impose a nebulous "will" on the inputs to our brain that can affect its output of decisions and actions, any more than a programmed computer can somehow reach inside itself and change its program. . . .

The ineluctable scientific conclusion is that although we *feel* that we're characters in the play of our lives, rewriting our parts as we go along, in reality we're puppets performing scripted parts written by the laws of physics.

f. Sam Harris states in his 2012 book *Free Will* (p. 5): "Free will is an illusion. Our wills are simply not of our own making. Thoughts and intentions emerge from background causes of which we are unaware and over which we have no conscious control. We do not have the freedom we think we have." He says later (p. 44), "You will do whatever it is you do, and it is meaningless to assert that you could have done otherwise." No wonder he has described human beings as "biochemical puppets."

g. Referring to Harris's book, Victor Stenger wrote on June 1, 2012 on the Huffington Post science blog, "We don't exist as immaterial conscious controllers, but are instead entirely physical beings whose decisions and behaviors are the fully caused products of the brain and body."

3. This leads naturally to the claim that humans are not responsible for their actions, being in essence sophisticated robots.

a. For example, in 2006 Dawkins wrote in *Edge* magazine:

But doesn't a truly scientific, mechanistic view of the nervous system make nonsense of the very idea of responsibility, whether diminished or not? Any crime, however heinous, is in principle to be blamed on antecedent conditions acting through the accused's physiology, heredity

and environment. Don't judicial hearings to decide questions of blame or diminished responsibility make as little sense for a faulty man as for a Faulty car? ["Fawlty car" refers to a skit on the British show *Fawlty Towers* in which a man beats his car for not working properly.]

Why is it that we humans find it almost impossible to accept such conclusions? Why do we vent such visceral hatred on child murderers, or on thuggish vandals, when we should simply regard them as faulty units that need fixing or replacing? Presumably because mental constructs like blame and responsibility, indeed evil and good, are built into our brains by millennia of Darwinian evolution. Assigning blame and responsibility is an aspect of the useful fiction of intentional agents that we construct in our brains as a means of short-cutting a truer analysis of what is going on in the world in which we have to live. My dangerous idea is that we shall eventually grow out of all this and even learn to laugh at it, just as we laugh at Basil Fawlty when he beats his car. But I fear it is unlikely that I shall ever reach that level of enlightenment.

b. Harris wrote in *Free Will* (p. 17) that in light of the fact our decisions are dictated by impersonal background causes, "we can no longer locate a plausible hook upon which to hang our conventional notions of personal responsibility."

c. Similarly, Stenger wrote in 2012 in the Huffington Post article I just mentioned,

Obviously, we cannot have a functioning society if we do not protect ourselves from people who are dangerous to others because of whatever it is inside their brains and nervous systems that makes them dangerous. Still, given that we don't have libertarian free will that sets us above causal laws, it would seem that our largely retributive moral and justice systems need to be re-evaluated, and maybe even drastically revamped.

4. In the last sentence of the Dawkins quote (But I fear it is unlikely that I shall ever reach that level of enlightenment), he acknowledges that he cannot live consistently with the logical consequence of his position. He knows that he holds people responsible for their actions despite the fact his atheism gives him no basis for doing so. Nancy Pearcey reported in her 2010 book, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, & Meaning*, that Dawkins was pressed on this inconsistency during a book signing event. A young man asked Dawkins, "If humans are machines and it is inappropriate to blame or praise them for their actions, then should we be giving you credit for the book you are promoting?" Dawkins responded, "I can't bring myself to *do* that. I actually do respond in an emotional way and I blame people, I give people credit." The man said, "But don't you see that as an inconsistency in your views?" Dawkins replied, "I sort of do, yes. But it is an inconsistency that we sort of have to live with -- *otherwise life would be intolerable.*"

5. The fact one cannot live consistently with the implications of atheism, just like Russell admitted regarding objective morality, is an indication that atheism is false. It clashes with reality.

6. In an interview posted online [here](#), Rupert Sheldrake, Cambridge-trained biochemist and plant physiologist, explains:

But materialists cannot possibly be consistent. They believe that minds are nothing but the activity of brains and the activity of brains can ultimately be completely explained in terms of physical and chemical causation, together with blind chance. In other words, free will is an illusion.

This must mean that the materialist belief-system is self-refuting. If a materialist were consistent, he or she would have to believe that his or her own beliefs were caused by brain activity alone. Materialists' brains make them believe in materialism. But, then, how can they try to persuade others to adopt this belief on the basis of science, reason, and evidence, if no one has free choice?

By their own account, materialists cannot have adopted their materialist belief system by rational choice—their brains make them believe it. And they cannot persuade others to believe it by science and reason—they can only pass on an infection.

D. It is more reasonable to believe that the origin of life requires intelligent design than to believe it does not.

1. The simplest imaginable single-cell organism would require such an astonishing level of integrated complexity that it is absurd to think it could have arisen by blind, purposeless processes. A cell is not some bag of goo that can be whipped up from a mud pool; it is an amazingly sophisticated robot factory with a host of nanomachines performing an orchestrated ballet. It truly is amazing. Let me drive this home with some quotes from scientists.

a. William Thorpe, zoologist, "Reductionism in Biology," in Francisco Ayala and Theodosius Dobzhansky, eds., *Studies in the Philosophy of Biology: Reduction and Related Problems* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 117: "The most elementary type of cell constitutes a 'mechanism' unimaginably more complex than any machine yet thought up, let alone constructed, by man."

b. Carl Sagan, astronomer, "Life," in 10 *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1974), 893-894:

A living cell is a marvel of detailed and complex architecture. Seen through a microscope there is an appearance of almost frenetic activity.

On a deeper level it is known that molecules are being synthesized at an enormous rate. . . . The information content of a simple cell has been estimated as around 10^{12} bits, comparable to about a hundred million pages of the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

c. Michael Denton, developmental biologist and genetics researcher, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1986), 250, 328, 342:

Molecular biology has shown that even the simplest of all living systems on the earth today, bacterial cells, are exceedingly complex objects. Although the tiniest bacterial cells are incredibly small, weighing less than 10^{-12} gms, each is in effect a veritable micro-miniaturized factory containing thousands of exquisitely designed pieces of intricate molecular machinery, made up altogether of one hundred thousand million atoms, far more complicated than any machine built by man and absolutely without parallel in the nonliving world. . . .

To grasp the reality of life as it has been revealed by molecular biology, we must magnify a cell a thousand million times until it is twenty kilometers in diameter and resembles a giant airship large enough to cover a great city like London or New York. What we would then see would be an object of unparalleled complexity and adaptive design. On the surface of the cell, we would see millions of openings, like the portholes of a vast space ship, opening and closing to allow a continual stream of materials to flow in and out. If we were to enter one of these openings, we would find ourselves in a world of supreme technology and bewildering complexity. We would see endless highly organized corridors and conduits branching in every direction away from the perimeter of the cell, some leading to the central memory bank in the nucleus and others to assembly plants and processing units. The nucleus itself would be a vast spherical chamber more than a kilometer in diameter, resembling a geodesic dome inside of which we could see, all neatly stacked together in ordered arrays, the miles of coiled chains of the DNA molecules. A huge range of products and raw materials would shuttle along all the manifold conduits in a highly ordered fashion to and from various assembly plants in the outer regions of the cell. . . .

It would be an illusion to think that what we are aware of at present is any more than a fraction of the full extent of biological design. In practically every field of fundamental biological research ever-increasing levels of design and complexity are being revealed at an ever-accelerating rate.

d. Richard Strohman, microbiologist, in David Suzuki and Holly Dressel, rev. ed., *From Naked Ape to Superspecies* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2004),

172: "Molecular biologists and cell biologists are revealing to us a complexity of life that we never dreamt was there. We're seeing connections and interconnections and complexity that is mind-boggling. It's stupendous. It's transcalsculational. It means that the whole science is going to have to change."

e. David Berlinski, philosopher and mathematician, interviewed by Ben Stein in the 2008 documentary *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*:

Stein: Darwin . . . had an idea of the cell as being quite simple, correct?

Berlinski: Yes, everybody did.

Stein: If he thought of the cell as being a Buick, what is the cell now in terms of its complexity by comparison?

Berlinski: A galaxy.

f. Richard Sternberg, evolutionary biologist, interviewed by Ben Stein in the 2008 documentary *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*:

Stein: If Darwin thought a cell was, say, a mud hut, what do we now know that a cell is?

Sternberg: More complicated than a Saturn V.

g. Alonso Ricardo, biochemist, and Jack W. Szostak, geneticist, "The Origin of Life on Earth," *Scientific American* (August 19, 2009), 54:

Every living cell, even the simplest bacterium, teems with molecular contraptions that would be the envy of any nanotechnologist. As they incessantly shake or spin or crawl around the cell, these machines cut, paste and copy genetic molecules, shuttle nutrients around or turn them into energy, build and repair cellular membranes, relay mechanical, chemical or electrical messages—the list goes on and on, and new discoveries add to it all the time.

2. The last sixty years of intense research has brought the quest for a naturalistic explanation of the origin of life no closer to an answer. Scientists have been knocking themselves out trying to establish a plausible scenario by which life could arise without being created by God, and though the propaganda is that they've pretty much got it figured out, the truth is that they're mystified. I must back that up with some quotes.

a. Harold C. Urey, Nobel Prize-winning chemist and famous origin-of-life researcher, *Christian Science Monitor* (Jan. 4, 1962), 4: "[A]ll of us who study the origin of life find that the more we look into it, the more we feel it is too complex to have evolved anywhere. We all believe as an article of faith that life evolved from dead matter on this planet. It is just that its complexity is so great, it is hard for us to imagine that it did."

b. Francis Crick, Nobel Prize-winning biochemist, *Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 88: "An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going."

c. Harold Klein, chairman of the National Academy of Sciences committee that reviewed origin-of-life research, in John Horgan, "In the Beginning," *Scientific American* (February 1991), 120: "The simplest bacterium is so [darn] complicated from the point of a chemist that it is almost impossible to imagine how it happened."

d. Franklin M. Harold, biochemist, *The Way of the Cell: Molecules, Organisms and the Order of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 251: "It would be agreeable to conclude this book with a cheery fanfare about science closing in, slowly but surely, on the ultimate mystery; but the time for rosy rhetoric is not yet at hand. The origin of life appears to me as incomprehensible as ever, a matter for wonder but not for explication."

e. Richard Dawkins, zoologist, interviewed by Ben Stein in the 2008 documentary *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*:

Stein: Well how did it start?

Dawkins: Nobody knows how it got started. We know the kind of event that it must have been, we know the sort of event that must have happened for the origin of life.

Stein: And what was that?

Dawkins: It was the origin of the first self-replicating molecule.

Stein: Right. And how did that happen?

Dawkins: I've told you, we don't know.

Stein: So you have no idea how it started?

Dawkins: No no. Nor has anybody.

f. Freeman J. Dyson, a celebrated physicist and mathematician, *A Many-Colored Glass: Reflections on the Place of Life in the Universe* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 104:

The origin of life is the deepest mystery in the whole of science. Many books and learned papers have been written about it, but it remains a mystery. There is an enormous gap between the simplest living cell and the most complicated naturally occurring mixture of nonliving chemicals. We have no idea when and how and where this gap was crossed.

g. Milton Wainwright, molecular biologist, "Musings on the Origin of Life and Panspermia," *Journal of Cosmology*, Vol. 5 (Jan. 30, 2010), online at <http://journalofcosmology.com/SearchForLife126.html>:

Are we then getting any closer to an understanding the origin of life (assuming it had one)? As ever there is much optimism that indeed we are making progress. On the other hand, it often appears as if the origin of life question has become bogged down in ever increasingly sophisticated organic chemistry. The reality is that, despite the egos of some, the existence of life remains a mystery. It is not merely that biology is scratching the surface of this enigma; the reality is that we have yet to *see* the surface!

h. Kepa Ruiz-Mirazo, an origin-of-life researcher, "Open questions on the origin of life: introduction to the special issue," *Origins of Life and Evolution of Biospheres* 40 (No. 4-5, 2010), 353:

Our ignorance about the origin of life is profound—not just some simple missing mechanistic detail. We do not know how the genetic code came about, we do not understand yet how the specific sequences of proteins or nucleic acids came about in multiple identical copies, we do not have a precise idea about the structure and functioning of the first proto-cells. This ignorance stems not only from our experimental difficulties with prebiotic chemistry, but is also conceptual, as we are not yet able to conceive on paper how all these things came about.

i. John Horgan, science writer, titled his February 28, 2011 article in *Scientific American* on a recent top-level origin-of-life conference "Pssst! Don't tell the creationists, but science doesn't have a clue how life began." Here are the opening paragraphs:

Exactly 20 years ago, I wrote an article for *Scientific American* that, in draft form, had the headline above. My editor nixed it, so we went with something less dramatic: "In the Beginning...: Scientists are having a hard time agreeing on when, where and—most important—how life first emerged on the earth." That editor is gone now, so I get to use my old headline, which is even more apt today.

Dennis Overbye just wrote a status report for the *New York Times* on research into life's origin, based on a conference on the topic at Arizona State University. **Geologists, chemists, astronomers and biologists are as stumped as ever by the riddle of life.**

j. Eugene V. Koonin, molecular biologist, *The Logic of Chance: The Nature and Origin of Biological Evolution* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Press, 2011), 391:

The origin of life is one of the hardest problems in all of science, but it is also one of the most important. Origin-of-life research has evolved into a lively, interdisciplinary field, but other scientists often view it with

skepticism and even derision. This attitude is understandable and, in a sense, perhaps justified, given the "dirty" rarely mentioned secret: Despite many interesting results to its credit, when judged by the straightforward criterion of reaching (or even approaching) the ultimate goal, the origin of life field is a failure – we still do not have even a plausible coherent model, let alone a validated scenario, for the emergence of life on Earth. Certainly, this is due not to a lack of experimental and theoretical effort, but to the extraordinary intrinsic difficulty and complexity of the problem. A succession of exceedingly unlikely steps is essential for the origin of life, from the synthesis and accumulation of nucleotides to the origin of translation; through the multiplication of probabilities, these make the final outcome seem almost like a miracle.

k. Addy Pross, Professor Emeritus of Chemistry at Ben-Gurion University in Israel, *What Is Life? How Chemistry Becomes Biology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), ix-x:

[D]espite the profound advances in molecular biology over the last half-century, we still do not understand what life is, how it relates to the inanimate world, and how it emerged. True, over the past half-century considerable effort has been directed into attempts to resolve these fundamental issues, but the gates to the Promise Land seem as distant as ever. Like a mirage in the desert, just as the palm trees signaling the oasis seemingly materialize, shimmering on the horizon, they fade away yet again, leaving our thirst to understand unquenched, our drive to comprehend unsatisfied.

l. Franklin M. Harold, a previously quoted biochemist, *In Search of Cell History: The Evolution of Life's Building Blocks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 164:

Over the past sixty years, dedicated and skillful scientists have devoted much effort and ink to the origin of life, with remarkably little to show for it. Judging by the volume of literature, both experimental and theoretical, the inquiry has thrived prodigiously. But unlike more conventional fields of biological research, the study of life's origins has failed to generate a coherent and persuasive framework that gives meaning to the growing heap of data and speculation; and this suggests that we may still be missing some essential insight.

3. A major difficulty for all naturalistic origin-of-life scenarios is that the simplest imaginable cell would need to be able to manufacture hundreds of different kinds of proteins to accomplish the tasks necessary for life.

a. Theoretical estimates for the minimum number of genes (and thus proteins) for a living organism range from 200-300 (see *The Cell's Design*, p. 54-

60). The fewest genes of any organism we know of that is able to perform the standard functions of life on its own are 525 in the parasite *Mycoplasma genitalium*. (Though it is a parasite, it only uses other organisms for food and housing. Some cells that live in the gut of certain insects have smaller genomes – e.g., *Nasuia deltocephalinicola* has only 137 protein-coding genes – but they absolutely depend on their hosts to provide certain functions essential for life. In other words, they are not considered autonomously alive; they are something like organelles.) Studies indicate that 382 of its 525 genes are essential to its survival, but it is speculated that the number could be reduced further in a hypothetical organism. The fewest genes of any known organism that lives independently of any other organism, i.e., is not a parasite, is 1,354 in *Pelagibacter ubique*.

b. Proteins are the workhorse molecules of life and take part in virtually every cell structure and activity. They are the building material of the cell and do all sorts of work within the cell. As zoologist Ann Gauger explained [here](#) in 2012: "Proteins are the building blocks of life. They are the structural parts that give cells shape, the enzymes that build or break down the molecules of life, the motors that transport things, the agents that send signals and regulate the activity of other proteins and genes, and the morphogens that help determine the development of the organism."

c. Proteins are made up of small molecules called amino acids that are linked together like beads on a long necklace. I say a long necklace because a protein can have anywhere from fifty to thousands of beads, most having several hundred.

d. There are twenty different kinds of amino acids used by living things, and the specific arrangement of these different kinds of amino acids on the necklace determines the kind of protein you have. So it's like there is an alphabet of twenty letters, the twenty different kinds of amino acids, and those twenty letters can "spell out" different kinds of proteins depending on their sequence on the necklace. If the letters, the different kinds of amino acids, are not arranged to "spell" a protein correctly, you don't get a functioning protein. And remember we're talking about spelling correctly something that is fifty to thousands of characters long.

e. Well if the twenty different kinds of amino acids have to be arranged in different precise ways to spell out the hundreds of different proteins necessary for the simplest life, how does that happen? Put differently, how do the beads get strung in the right order on the hundreds of different protein necklaces?

f. The ordering of the amino acids into the right sequences to make functional proteins is determined by the cell's genetic material called deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA for short. DNA is made up of molecules called nucleotides (not amino acids as in the case of proteins) that are linked together like beads on a *super-long* necklace. There are actually two parallel necklaces that connect to form the rungs of a ladder-like structure that is twisted – the famous double helix structure – but for this purpose just think of it as a single beaded necklace. There are four different kinds of nucleotides used in DNA (adenine, guanine, cytosine, and thymine [uracil in RNA]), and

the specific sequence of these different kinds of nucleotides on the DNA necklace determines the sequences of the amino acids on the various protein necklaces.

(1) Well, how do you get from the sequence of the nucleotides on the DNA necklace to the sequences of the amino acids on the various protein necklaces? Think of each of the nucleotides as being a bead with a number that identifies its kind. Since there are four kinds of nucleotides, the nucleotide beads are all numbered with a 1, a 2, a 3, or a 4. And think of these beads being arranged on the DNA necklace in triplets, groups of three, like area codes: 114, 131, 212, etc.

(2) To construct a particular protein, the order of numbered beads on a certain stretch of the DNA necklace gets copied by a nanomachine and transported by other nanomachines to yet another nanomachine that builds the needed protein necklace based on the order of the numbered beads in the groups of three. For example, triplet 111 tells the machine to add amino acid "t" to the protein necklace it is building; the triplet 112 tells it to add amino acid "h" to the protein necklace; the triplet 113 tells it to add amino acid "i" and so on. Each triplet of nucleotides codes for a specific amino acid depending on the sequence of the nucleotides in that triplet (ignoring the three that code for "stops"). Just like a three-digit area code corresponds to a specific geographical area, so nucleotide "area codes" correspond to one of the twenty amino acids.

Protein illustration: string of 48 amino acids
 thisisveryshortforaproteinbutitisjustanexampleok

DNA nucleotide codes for amino acids
 133=a 142=b 122=e 132=f 112=h 113=i 144=j
 214=k 213=l 212=m 141=n 131=o 134=p 123=r
 114=s 111=t 143=u 121=v 211=x 124=y

111112113114113114121122123124114112131123
11113213112313313412313111122113141142143
111113111113114144143114111133141122211133
213134213122131214

4. Now, since the amino acids on the protein necklace have to be in a precise sequence for the protein to function, and since the order of those amino acids is determined by the order of the nucleotides on the DNA necklace, you see that the nucleotides on the DNA necklace have to be in a very specific order. If they are not, then the DNA will be unable to serve as a template for the manufacture of proteins. It's like each of the many proteins has a gigantic PIN number and can only be manufactured if the nucleotides on the DNA necklace are arranged in the order of that PIN number.

5. How could the nucleotides of the DNA in the first cell have been properly arranged so as to be able to serve as a template for the manufacture of the hundreds of necessary proteins? The nucleotides in the DNA would have to be in the right sequence for all those proteins. How did they happen to be arranged in the sequence of all those gigantic PIN numbers?

a. In answering that, it is crucial to note that the sequence, the order, of nucleotides on the DNA necklace is not determined by chemistry. As far as chemistry goes, the number on the nucleotide bead is not relevant. There is no chemical reason why they would be in the proper order to enable a protein to be constructed from them.

b. Chance certainly cannot explain the order, and no one thinks it can.

(1) The Cambridge educated philosopher of science Stephen Meyer states (*Signature in the Cell*, p. 203):

[T]he probability that a particular gene would arise by chance is roughly the same as the probability that its corresponding gene product (the protein that the gene encodes) would do so.

For that reason, the relevant probability calculation can be made either by analyzing the odds of arranging amino acids into a functional protein or by analyzing the odds of arranging nucleotide bases into a gene that encodes that protein. Because it turns out to be simpler to make the calculation using proteins, that's what most origin-of-life scientists have done.

(2) The odds of randomly assembling a particular protein of only 100 specific amino acids are approximately one in 10^{130} ($20^{100} = 1.267 \times 10^{130}$). Since in some slots more than one amino acid would work, these odds can be reduced but still remain absurdly high. Based on the work of MIT biochemist Robert Sauer and Douglas Axe, who has a Ph.D. in chemical engineering from Cal. Tech., when one takes into account the possible variation in amino acid order the odds of randomly assembling a single functional protein of 100 amino acids remains considerably smaller than 1 in 10^{65} (*How To Be An Intellectually Fulfilled Atheist [Or Not]*, p. 47-48). This estimate of improbability is extremely conservative because it excludes amino acids other than the twenty used in proteins and ignores the fact amino acids come in left-handed and right-handed versions (isomers) and only the left-handed version is used in proteins.

(3) To give you an idea of how large 10^{65} is, it is estimated there are only 10^{65} atoms in our galaxy (*How To Be An Intellectually Fulfilled Atheist [Or Not]*, p. 48) and 10^{80} atoms in the observable universe (*Signature in the Cell*, p. 212).

And this is just one small protein, whereas hundreds of specific kinds of proteins are needed for a living cell.

(4) And just in case you're wondering, it is a super rare for a sequence of amino acids to produce *any kind* of functional protein, just like there are countless ways you can string letters together but very few make an English sentence. Douglas Axe has determined that for a modest protein of 150 amino acids, only one in every 10^{74} sequences of amino acids would be able to fold into stable "function-ready" structures and thus have the possibility of functioning as a protein (*Signature in the Cell*, p. 210).

(5) Meyer wrote in 2011 (*The Nature of Nature*, p. 309), "When one considers the full complement of functional biomolecules required to maintain minimal cell function and vitality, one can see why chance-based theories of origin of life have been abandoned." All attempts to find some sort of naturalistic mechanism that can raise these probabilities beyond what they are from mere chance have failed, which is why the experts I quoted at the beginning of this section say what they do.

6. You can see that the coding regions of DNA, the nucleotide sequences, function much the same way as a computer program. They direct operations within a complex material system through long and specific sequences of characters that give precise instructions. As Dawkins noted in 1995, "The machine code of the gene is uncannily computer-like." Similarly the famous software developer Bill Gates wrote in 1995, "Human DNA is like a computer program, but far, far more advanced than any software ever created." Hubert Yockey, a physicist and information theorist, wrote in 2000, "It is highly relevant to the origin of life that the genetic code is constructed to confront and solve the problems of communication and recording by the same principles found both in the genetic information system and in modern computer and communication codes."

7. In every case where the cause of this kind of specified complexity is known, it is an intelligent agent. Computer programs like Windows and Word cannot assemble on their own; they require an intelligent determination of the coding sequences to achieve their intended function. That is the entire premise of the SETI program (Search for ExtraTerrestrial Intelligence). It takes for granted that an intelligence must be behind any radio signal that exhibits specified complexity. That's why in the movie *Contact* they freaked out when they received radio signals that were a long sequence of prime numbers (a whole number greater than 1 that can be divided evenly only by itself and by 1).

8. Since the only cause that is known to be able to produce specified complexity is intelligence, the most reasonable inference is that an intelligence was involved in producing the specified complexity that is found in DNA. As the renowned philosopher Anthony Flew acknowledged in 2004, after having spent a career arguing for atheism, "the findings of more than fifty years of DNA research have provided materials for a new and enormously powerful argument to design."

9. Before leaving the atheist's origin-of-life problem, let me point out the mother of all vicious circles. Proteins are essential for a living cell and proteins are produced within the cell from the DNA template. The kicker, however, is that many proteins are necessary to produce proteins from the DNA template! If DNA is necessary to make proteins but there have to be proteins for DNA to be able to make proteins, how could the process ever get started? It's like you have to have steel before you can make steel. How would you ever get steel in the first place?

a. In the 1970s the famous philosopher of science Karl Popper wrote, "What makes the origin of life and the genetic code a disturbing riddle is this: the code cannot be translated except by using certain products of its translation. This constitutes a really baffling circle: a vicious circle, it seems for any attempt to form a model, or a theory, of the genesis of the genetic code" (*Signature in the Cell*, 134).

b. Biochemist David Goodsell wrote in 1998, this "is one of the unanswered riddles of biochemistry: which came first, proteins or protein synthesis? If proteins are needed to make proteins, how did the whole thing get started?"

c. Robert Shapiro, who was professor emeritus of chemistry at NYU (died 2011), wrote in *Scientific American* in 2007 ("A Simpler Origin of Life"):

DNA replication cannot proceed without the assistance of a number of proteins--members of a family of large molecules that are chemically very different from DNA. . . .

The above account brings to mind the old riddle: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? DNA holds the recipe for protein construction. Yet that information cannot be retrieved or copied without the assistance of proteins. Which large molecule, then, appeared first in getting life started--proteins (the chicken) or DNA (the egg)?

E. It is more reasonable to believe that purposeless natural processes are not sufficient to explain the diversity of life on earth than to believe they are.

1. According to the atheistic scenario, after the first cell arose through purely natural processes, all forms of life on the planet descended from that first cell through purely natural processes, more specifically, by means of the blind, purposeless processes of random mutation and natural selection. This claim likewise has insurmountable problems. There simply is not enough time under any atheistic scenario for the vast array of proteins (and other essential biological products) present in those countless life forms to have been generated, let alone integrated into new functioning systems, without some kind of intelligent input or programming.

2. This subject is too broad and complex to be pursued right now, but if you are interested I can direct you to the works of some highly trained scientists who develop the point. Certainly the vast majority of the scientific establishment accepts the naturalistic story, but let me just give you few broadsides from some scientists to help keep you from being intimidated by that fact:

a. In 1977 that renowned French zoologist Pierre-Paul Grasse, whose knowledge of the living world was said to be "encyclopedic," wrote:

What gambler would be crazy enough to play roulette with random evolution? The probability of dust carried by the wind reproducing Durer's "Melancholia" is less infinitesimal than the probability of copy errors in the DNA molecule leading to the formation of the eye; besides, these errors had no relationship whatsoever with the function that the eye would have to perform or was starting to perform. There is no law against daydreaming, but science must not indulge in it. (Grasse, 104.)

b. The late, renowned mathematician and astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle and his colleague Chandra Wickramasinghe concurred in Grasse's assessment. Summarizing his and Hoyle's analysis of the alleged mechanisms of evolution, Wickramasinghe said in 1984:

We found that there's just no way it could happen. If you start with a simple micro-organism, no matter how it arose on earth, primordial soup or otherwise, then if you just have that single organizational, informational unit and you said that you copied this sequentially time and again, the question is does that accumulate enough copying errors, enough mistakes in copying, and do these accumulations of copying errors lead to the diversity of living forms that one sees on earth. That's the general, usual formulation of the theory of evolution. . . . We looked at this quite systematically, quite carefully, in numerical terms. Checking all the numbers, rates of mutation and so on, we decided that there is no way in which that could even marginally approach the truth. (Varghese, 28.)

c. In 1999 biologist E. G. Leigh wrote (14 *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, 495-498):

"The 'modern evolutionary synthesis' convinced most biologists that natural selection was the only directive influence on adaptive evolution. Today, however, dissatisfaction with the synthesis is widespread, and creationists and antidarwinians are multiplying. The central problem with the synthesis is its failure to show (or to provide distinct signs) that natural selection of random mutations could account for observed levels of adaptation."

d. Berkeley trained cell biologist Jonathan Wells and mathematician and philosopher William Dembski wrote in 2008 (*Design of Life*, p. 47):

The difficulty here goes beyond merely evolving some new biological structure. The degree of complexity in biological organisms is stunning – far greater than the complexity of gene clusters and the structures they induce. Organisms are organized into a hierarchy of nested systems each composed of multiple interdependent structures. For an organism to function properly, its structures must fit together or integrate within systems that are themselves structural components of higher-level systems. The DNA coding for such systems of structures would require hundreds, if not thousands, of genes. Biological structures never sit in isolation but always need to be coordinated, working together within larger systems that assist the organism in making a living. The Darwinian mechanism shows no ability to effect such coordination.

e. Biochemist Michael Behe wrote in 2011 (*Nature of Nature*, p. 440): "Recent evolutionary data at the genetic level on astronomical numbers of organisms in species from widely varying branches of life have shown that any process based on randomness cannot explain the complex, coherent, integrated functions of the cell, such as molecular machinery. Therefore, the evolution of life was not a random process."

f. As Paul Nelson, who has a Ph.D. in the philosophy of biology from the University of Chicago, has pointed out, animal body plans unfold in a sequence of steps from the fertilized egg to the many cells of the adult form.

(1) The earliest steps of that unfolding determine the form that ultimately results, like the laying of a foundation profoundly shapes the building that is constructed. So to change the body plan of an organism, to evolve a new body plan, there must be mutations that are expressed early in development, mutations that alter the foundation so to speak. Once development starts down one path, once the foundation is laid, you can only tweak the form not fundamentally alter it. And, of course, these early-acting mutations must be viable, meaning they cannot kill or damage the organism so that it cannot pass on the mutation to the next generation.

(2) The conundrum from an evolutionary perspective is that a century of mutation studies with fruit flies has shown that these kinds of mutations, those that act early in the developmental process, are the least likely to be tolerated by the embryo; they almost always are lethal or harmful to the organism. The only exception to this rule is mutations that cause the *loss* of a structure which in some cases can be advantageous (e.g., loss of wings on an island beetle or eyes in cave fish). But obviously the evolution story requires the *gaining* not the *losing* structures.

g. If you will go [here](#) you can download a list of over 900 scientists who signed the statement: "We are skeptical of claims for the ability of random mutation

and natural selection to account for the complexity of life. Careful examination of the evidence for Darwinian theory should be encouraged." All of these individuals have either a Ph.D. in a scientific field or have an M.D. and also serve as a professor of medicine. You also should check my list of over 1300 categorized online articles of interest to creationists that is online at <http://trueorigin.org/camplist.asp>.

h. Now compare this with Dawkins's statement in a 1989 book review in the *New York Times*: "It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid or insane (or wicked, but I'd rather not consider that)."

i. It is not that people like Dawkins do not see the evidence of design in living organisms. They just insist that the appearance of design is an illusion.

(1) Dawkins wrote in 1986 in *The Blind Watchmaker*, "Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose." The accent is on "appearance"; they really have not been designed for a purpose.

(2) Similarly, the atheist Nobel prize-winning biochemist Francis Crick wrote in 1990, "Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed but rather evolved."

(3) Dawkins stated in his 2004 book *A Devil's Chaplain* (p. 79), "The feature of living matter that most demands explanation is that it is almost unimaginably complicated in directions that convey a powerful illusion of deliberate design."

(4) Atheist Michael Shermer wrote in his 2006 book *Why Darwin Matters* (p. 65): "The design inference comes naturally. The reason people think that a Designer created the world is because it *looks* designed."

(5) Jerry Coyne stated in his 2009 book *Why Evolution is True* (p. 1): "If anything is true about nature, it is that plants and animals seem intricately and almost perfectly designed for living their lives."

j. Why do biologists have to keep reminding themselves that what appears to be design is really the product of purposeless, unintelligent forces? It is because they are committed to a materialist philosophy. It is a non-negotiable for them that matter is all there is.

(1) Listen to what Harvard biologist Richard Lewontin wrote in a book review in *The New York Review of Books* on January 9, 1997:

Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the

supernatural. We take the side of science *in spite* of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, *in spite* of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, *in spite* of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.

(2) The National Academy of Sciences declared in its 1998 publication *Teaching About Evolution and the Nature of Science* (p. 42), "The statements of science must invoke only natural things and processes. . . . The theory of evolution is one of these explanations."

(3) The notion was expressed starkly and succinctly by a scientist named Scott Todd in a letter published in the September 30, 1999 issue of *Nature* (p. 423): "Even if all the data point to an intelligent designer, such an hypothesis is excluded from science because it is not naturalistic."

3. Related to this is the New Atheists' attempt to demonize Christians by charging them with being "anti-science," which is considered a mortal sin in our culture.

a. Christians are happy to investigate nature as deeply and as vigorously as anyone, and they do not deny any *facts* discovered in that investigation. Where they part company with the atheist is that Christians limit the *inferences* they draw from those facts to things that are compatible with what God has revealed in Scripture. In other words, they believe the Bible is the word of God and that what it reveals is therefore true. So rather than draw a conclusion from circumstantial evidence that contradicts what God has revealed in Scripture, they look for interpretations of that evidence, the data of nature, that are consistent with Scripture.

b. Now this brings howls of derision from atheist scientists who insist that it is inherently unscientific, a debauching of the scientific enterprise in Dawkins's words, to allow the supposed divine revelations in a holy book to limit the inferences one is willing to draw from the facts found in nature.

c. Let me illustrate the two approaches.

(1) Imagine a "John Doe" corpse is brought into a morgue in which two medical examiners work. An angel appears to one of the examiners, tells him "this John Doe is twelve years old," and then vanishes. As the two begin their examination of the body, they see the person is almost entirely bald, with some grey hair

on the sides, and has wrinkled, baggy, and spotted skin. They run a test and determine that he has hardening of the arteries. The one examiner infers from these facts that the deceased was approximately eighty years old, but the examiner who was told by the angel that the deceased was twelve years old is unwilling to sign off on that inference. He tells the other examiner, "You are mistaken about the age. An angel told me this fellow is only twelve years old." The other examiner laughs and says "We must base our conclusions on science, not on superstition. The facts prove this 'John Doe' is around eighty and you are rejecting science by rejecting that conclusion."

(2) The first examiner says, "There could be another explanation for the facts we discovered in our examination, one that is consistent with the fact an angel told me the deceased was only twelve. Because I trust the angel, I want to keep searching for an explanation that answers how the 'John Doe' could be twelve years old *and* be bald, except for a bit of grey hair, and have wrinkled, baggy, and spotted skin and hardening of the arteries. Just because you don't believe angels exist is no reason for me to conduct my investigation according to your prejudices." And with that, the other examiner says, "Away from me you non-scientist."

(3) Further examination by the first examiner reveals certain anomalies, things that don't fit with the conclusion that the deceased was advanced in age. Maybe his eyes are too clear for an elderly person or his joints or teeth aren't worn enough. Because he was unwilling to accept the inference that ignored the angel's revelation, the first examiner discovers that "John Doe" suffered from a medical disorder, like Progeria, that produces these symptoms in children. Was that science?

d. Notice that the atheists likewise have limits on the kinds of inferences they will allow to be drawn from the facts of nature. They limit the conclusions they are willing to draw to those that do not contradict their philosophical belief that there is no God or anything supernatural. So when the evidence for God is staring them in the face, they say there must be another explanation that does not involve God. And yet, they come off as though they are willing to accept any conclusion and that Christians are enemies of knowledge for having their own higher commitments.

F. It is more reasonable to believe that Christ was raised from the dead than to believe he was not, and the resurrection of Christ supports the existence of the God of Scripture.

1. No known natural process can restore life to a person who has been dead for days, so if Jesus was raised from the dead he necessarily was the object of a supernatural power. Given that Jesus claimed a unique relationship with the God revealed in the Old Testament, that God is the most likely power to have raised him, a claim made repeatedly by the New Testament writers.

2. Whether Jesus was in fact raised from the dead can be investigated *historically*. By that I mean it can be investigated without assuming or relying on the

inspiration of the Bible. Even if one treats the New Testament documents as one would treat any other ancient documents, there are powerful reasons for believing that Jesus rose from the grave.

3. This does not mean the resurrection can be proven through historical inquiry with absolute certainty. Historical inquiry is detective work in which one infers the most likely explanation of various bits of data; absolute certainty is beyond its grasp. The question is whether the historian can ascertain with a reasonable amount of certainty that an event occurred. As Gary Habermas and Michael Licona explain:

[V]irtually nothing can be established with 100 percent certainty. Can we know with 100 percent certainty that George Washington was the first President of the United States of America rather than a mythical figure? Perhaps documents were forged and stories invented in a conspiracy to encourage the citizens of a new country. We can know that this was not the case with a high degree of certainty.

4. The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that Boston College philosophers Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli assert that "Christ's resurrection can be proved with at least as much certainty as any universally believed and well-documented event in ancient history." I can here only summarize the highlights of my online paper "The Historical Case for the Resurrection of Christ." I encourage you to read that paper to assess how well I support the various points of the argument. It is available at <http://theoutlet.us>. Here is the case in a nutshell.

a. The disciples sincerely believed Jesus had been resurrected; they were certain of it. (I am aware that sincerely believing something is true does not mean it *is* true, but follow me and you will see why this is so significant.) We know this because we have multiple early and independent sources that make clear the disciples believed Jesus had been resurrected and because numerous facts and circumstances corroborate what these sources tell us about the disciples' belief. It is like having testimony from multiple moviegoers that they believed there was a fire in the theater *and* having evidence that they broke through doors and fled the theater in a panic. The testimony about what they believed is confirmed by other facts consistent with that belief. Virtually all scholars accept as a fact that the earliest Christians at least believed that they had encountered the resurrected Jesus.

(1) In "Resurrection Research from 1975 to the Present: What Are Critical Scholars Saying?" *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 3.2 (2005), 135-153, Habermas writes: "As we have mentioned throughout, there are certainly disagreements about the nature of the experiences. But it is still crucial that the nearly unanimous consent of critical scholars is that, in some sense, the early followers of Jesus thought that they had seen the risen Jesus." In support of that assertion, he cites his book *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003) where he provides a list (p. 50-51, endnote 165) of more than fifty recent critical scholars who affirm these resurrection experiences as historical events.

(2) In 2000 Paula Fredriksen, a Boston University historian, remarked (quoted in Habermas and Licona, 60):

I know in their own terms what they saw was the raised Jesus. That's what they say and then all the historic evidence we have afterward attests to their conviction that that's what they saw. I'm not saying that they really did see the raised Jesus. I wasn't there. I don't know what they saw. But I do know that as a historian that they must have seen something.

b. The deep conviction of the early Christians that Jesus was raised from the dead could have come about only if they were convinced (a) that Jesus' tomb was empty *and* (b) that they had encountered him as a resurrected person and not simply as a ghost or hallucination. Either alone would not have been sufficient. If they believed they had encountered the risen Jesus but his body was still in the tomb, they would have been as quick as anyone to explain the appearances as some kind of ghostly visitation or hallucination. On the other hand, if the tomb was empty but the disciples were not convinced they had encountered the risen Jesus, they would have assumed his body had been taken, whether by grave robbers or enemies. In neither case would they have concluded that Jesus was raised from the dead.

c. To illustrate the point in a modern context, when the grieving widow in a mystery story is convinced that she glimpsed her dead husband walking down a street, they dig up the coffin to see if his corpse is still in there. If it is, then there is another explanation for the evidence that he is alive. On the other hand, if it is learned by accident that a coffin is empty, no one concludes from that fact alone that the person who died has returned to life. Without good evidence of the person being alive, one assumes the body was sold on the black market by an unscrupulous funeral home, cremated by mistake, or stolen by someone.

d. Since the early disciples believed Jesus had been resurrected they clearly believed his tomb was empty and that he had appeared to them bodily. All the available historical evidence indicates the disciples became convinced the tomb was empty because they saw with their own eyes that it was empty and indicates they became convinced Jesus appeared to them bodily because he gave every indication of being present in body.

e. No theory other than Jesus' resurrection can plausibly explain how from the earliest days the disciples were convinced Jesus' tomb was empty and that they had encountered him in bodily form after his death. Many alternative theories have been proposed, but for anyone whose mind is open to the possibility of God's existence (and thus to the possibility of Jesus' resurrection), they must be judged abject failures. They simply do not explain the facts that must be explained.

5. Michael Licona writes in the conclusion of his massive study, 700+ pages, titled *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (p. 620) that was published in 2010:

I strictly adhered to a controlled historical method throughout this investigation, surveying and assessing the relevant sources for a collection of strongly evidenced facts that are agreed on by virtually all scholars studying the subject and then weighing a number of hypotheses representative of what is being proposed at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the end, the resurrection hypothesis came out on top and meets the standards discussed herein for being historical.

6. The renowned scholar and theologian, N. T. Wright, who wrote an 800-page tome on Jesus' resurrection, stated in his 2008 book *Surprised by Hope* (pp. 63-64):

All this brings us face-to-face with the ultimate question. The empty tomb and the meetings with Jesus are as well established, by the arguments I have advanced, as any historical data could expect to be. They are, in combination, the only possible explanation for the stories and beliefs that grew up so quickly among Jesus's followers. How, in turn, do we explain *them*?

In any other historical inquiry, the answer would be so obvious that it would hardly need saying. Here, of course, this obvious answer ("well, it actually happened") is so shocking, so earth-shattering, that we rightly pause before leaping into the unknown. And here indeed, as some skeptical friends have cheerfully pointed out to me, it is always possible for anyone to follow the argument so far and to say simply, "I don't have a good explanation for what happened to cause the empty tomb and the appearances, but I choose to maintain my belief that dead people don't rise and therefore conclude that something else must have happened, even though we can't tell what it was." That is fine; I respect that position; but I simply note that it is indeed then a matter of choice, not a matter of saying that something called scientific historiography forces us to take that route.

But at this moment in the argument all the signposts are pointing in one direction. I and others have studied quite extensively all the alternative explanations, ancient and modern, for the rise of the early church and the shape of its belief. Far and away the best historical explanation is that Jesus of Nazareth, having been thoroughly dead and buried, really was raised to life on the third day with a renewed body (not a mere "resuscitated corpse," as people sometimes dismissively say), a new *kind* of physical body, which left an empty tomb behind it because it had used up the material of Jesus's original body and which possessed new properties that nobody expected or imagined but that generated significant mutations in the thinking of those who encountered it. If something like this happened, it would perfectly explain why Christianity began and why it took the shape it did.

G. The insufficient-miracles objection.

Regarding evidence for God's existence, people like Dawkins sometimes declare, "If God existed and wanted to convince us of it, he could 'fill the world with super-miracles'" (*The God Delusion*, p. 65). The implication is that God must not exist because if he did he would do so much more to make his existence obvious.

1. But as the Oxford philosopher and theologian Richard Swinburne has stated, "there is quite a lot of evidence for God's existence, *and too much might not be good for us*" (see Chamberlain, p. 88). This last clause sent Dawkins into a tizzy claiming it was absurd and revealed a hostile attitude toward evidence itself.

2. Swinburne's point is that if God made his existence absolutely certain throughout our lives that certainty may make it more difficult to develop a "pure compassion" for others by clouding our motivation. As he explains in a paper on his website:

The basic point is that a good God (like a good parent) would surely want humans (by their own free choice) to form a naturally good character, and so – for example – to become naturally inclined to help the poor and starving out of love for them because they are poor and starving. But if God made it totally certain that he exists and will give a wonderful everlasting life to those who have formed a naturally good character, then inevitably humans will find themselves strongly inclined to try to form such a character and so to help the poor and starving, not out of love for the poor and starving but in order to please God and to gain everlasting life. This latter is a good motive for any action, but not always the best motive. It will be easier for humans to form a natural inclination to help the poor and starving out of love, if the existence of God and the prospect of everlasting life are not (at least for a considerable period of our earthly lives) totally certain.

3. In addition, God may well have a reason for setting the evidence at the exact level that will allow those who want to believe in him to do so but also will allow those who *do not* want to believe in him *not* to do so. In other words, it is possible that God does not want to force someone to come to him who really does not want to come to him – he doesn't want to make them an offer they can't refuse by removing any intellectual space for the exercise of their desire to reject him. As the expression goes, "A person convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." He wants to move the will, the desire to believe, and he has set the evidentiary environment as he wants for that purpose. He is wooing us rather than forcing himself on us.

4. And as I point out in the following discussion, even if one does not find a compelling explanation for why God has not given more evidence for his existence,

God may have a reason that we do not perceive. That certainly is possible given that we are finite creatures and he is the all-knowing and eternal creator of all things.

IV. The Problem of Evil

A. A longstanding challenge to belief that the God of the Bible exists is the existence of evil in the world. Some of the New Atheists also appeal to it. For example, Harris points to the huge death toll in the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004, and Dennett asserted in the *Washington Post* on January 24, 2010 that theists have no real solution to the problem of evil.

B. Stated informally, the argument is that an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God would not allow evil to exist in his creation. Because he is all-good, he would want to prevent evil from occurring in his creation; because he is all-knowing he would be aware of evil about to occur in his creation; and because he is all-powerful he would be able to prevent that evil from occurring. Since evil does in fact occur in the world, an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God cannot exist.

C. There is no doubt that evil exists in this world. There is both moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil is the evil perpetrated by human beings, and it can be breathtaking. Just look at what was done to human beings in the concentration camps and gas chambers of Nazi Germany. Natural evil includes the death, pain, and suffering inflicted by storms, volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, diseases, and deformities. These have claimed the lives of millions, destroyed families, and caused untold physical and emotional pain and suffering.

D. What can a Christian say when the atheist throws this in his face and demands to know how one can logically continue to believe in the God of the Bible given the existence of all this evil? Does this prove God does not exist? As you might imagine, it does not.

E. First let me point out that in order to insist that certain occurrences in this world are evil the atheist must assume that God exists. As we saw earlier, if there is no God then there is no objective evil, only matters of personal likes and dislikes. So from an atheistic perspective, the death and suffering of human beings is no different than the melting of snow or the drying of grass – an atheist may not like it personally, but it's neither good nor bad; it just is.

F. But the atheist's argument can properly be addressed to us from within our own worldview. He can say, "Given that *you* believe evil things occur in this world, how can you logically believe in the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God?" In other words, the atheist can insist that our worldview is logically incoherent; it contains two things that cannot logically coexist: God and evil. Therefore, intellectual integrity demands that we abandon our belief in God and join the atheist in believing that evil is an illusion.

G. The atheist is mistaken in thinking the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of God. Even if the Christian cannot explain *why* God permits evil in the world, there is no contradiction between that evil and the existence of God because God *may have* a morally sufficient reason for permitting it that we do not know.

1. That answer is not emotionally satisfying, and I have no problem with speculating about possible reasons God may have, but it shows there is no logical inconsistency in the Christian worldview. The existence of evil does not logically negate the existence of the Christian God. Here is how philosopher Alvin Plantinga explained it in his book *God, Freedom, and Evil*:

Or suppose that the theist admits that he just doesn't know why God permits evil. What follows from that? Very little of interest. Why suppose that if God *does* have a good reason for permitting evil, the theist would be the first to know? Perhaps God has a good reason, but that reason is too complicated for us to understand. Or perhaps He has not revealed it for some other reason. The fact that the theist doesn't know why God permits evil is, perhaps, an interesting fact about the theist, but by itself it shows little or nothing relevant to the rationality of belief in God. Much more is needed for the atheological argument even to get off the ground.

The theist believes that God has a reason for permitting evil; he doesn't know what that reason is. But why should that mean that his belief is improper or irrational? . . . To make out his case, therefore, the atheologian cannot rest content with asking embarrassing questions to which the theist does not know the answer. He must do more -- he might try, for example, to show that it is *impossible* or anyhow unlikely that God should have a reason for permitting evil.

2. You think of an infant whose parents must perform open heart surgery on him to keep him alive. That baby does not know and is incapable of understanding the things that justify and make right and loving the pain and suffering to which his parents are subjecting him. Is it too much to believe that the infinite God may know things we do not know, and perhaps are incapable of knowing, and that if we knew those things we would understand how the suffering we see is justified and right and loving?

3. We get a glimpse of the principle in the Lord's horrific suffering on Golgotha. God lifts the veil in that one instance to show us a case of his bringing ultimate blessing out of savage cruelty. He did something through the evil he allowed to be perpetrated on his Son that we never would have imagined if he had not told us.

4. When Job sought to know why he was suffering so horribly when he was no greater of a sinner than the next man, God did not tell him the reason why. Rather, he spoke to Job in the whirlwind and set before him the greatness of his being,

the fact he created the universe and knows all things. The point was that Job needed to trust God's nature without having the explanation why. That is a very difficult thing to do, but it is the way of faith.

5. Here is a little poem I wrote that tries to express this idea for children.

JULIUS BINGS

By Ashby L. Camp

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The garden teemed with living things,
none so content as Julius Bings.

He'd sing atop the willow tree
that no bird was as blessed as he.

My nest is fine, I've much to eat,
my wife and kids are safe and sweet.

Each day I wake without a care
because I'm good and life is fair.

From time to time the owl would say
that things don't always work that way.

But Julius Bings would never hear,
convinced that harm could not come near.

He thought bad things could only be
for those who were much worse than he.

One summer day a storm moved in;
thick darkness fell upon the glen.

So great the wind that blew that day
nary a tree stood in its way.

And when the storm at last did part,
none was left of Julius's heart.
For in the rubble he could see
the nest that housed his family.

"Oh why, oh why?" he said with tears,
"I have done right for all these years."

He asked the owl how this could be,
who said it was a mystery.

"The hand that gave the tree and nest,
life and family and the rest,

he who is the Ancient of Days,
is far too great to know his ways.

A piece is all that we can see;
he knows the final tapestry.

For now he lets creation bring
much heartache through this kind of
thing.

And suffers with us as we cry
and hear no answer as to why.

But all is headed for a goal
where suffering will have no role.

On that day we'll finally know
the reason why so much was so.
We trust his love through all the loss
for only love would bear a cross."

Julius cried for many a day
but held to what the owl did say.

After a time he sang anew
but did so with a deeper view.

In pain he learned a lesson dear,
that through it all the Lord was near.

H. This problem cannot be viewed in isolation from the other evidence in favor of God's existence. In other words, the fact one must play defense in this case and say it's possible God has a reason for allowing evil that I do not know, is not all there is to say on the matter. We have good reasons for believing in God that far outweigh our inability to explain all of his ways.

V. God Is Not a Moral Monster

(See Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*)

A. New Atheists are fond of the claim.

The New Atheists are fond of claiming God is a moral monster. You get a flavor of their anger toward God from Dawkins's oft quoted statement in *The God Delusion* (p. 31): "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully." According to Hitchens, the Old Testament contains "a warrant for trafficking of humans, for ethnic cleansing, for slavery, for bride-price, and for indiscriminate massacre" (*God Is Not Great*, p. 102).

B. Claim assumes there is an objective morality.

Notice again that in order to charge God with being evil the atheist must assume that objective evil exists, which requires the existence of God. And it almost gets surreal because from their standpoint they are complaining about the bad things done by a nonexistent being. But let's just focus on these challenges from within a Christian worldview. The real claim seems to be that if the God of Scripture exists he is not worthy of being worshiped.

C. God is not prideful, narcissistic, and vain.

1. Pride is having a false and inflated view of oneself. Someone who cannot play basketball very well but who thinks he is the next Michael Jordan is prideful. If LeBron James said he could not play basketball very well that would be a *false* humility because that is not true, but if he refused to acknowledge God as the source of his gifts, he would be prideful for taking credit for God's work. God has an accurate view of himself. The truth is that he is the greatest conceivable being, and for that reason is worthy of worship.

2. The fact God made humans in his image is not an act of vanity. It is an expression of his kindness. He shared some of his characteristics with us and thereby gave us the privilege of being able to relate to him to serve as his representatives over creation.

3. God insists that we worship him not only because it is right and proper to do so, as is a child's respect for a parent, but also because he wants us to stay attached to him for our own good. He is the ultimate reality, and if we lose sight of that truth and begin to construct a fantasy world that denies it, we will suffer harm. Worship, as we might say, helps to keep our mind right, which results in our blessing.

4. The relationship of the members of the Godhead – Father, Son, and Spirit – is one of ego-free, self-giving love, and God's humility and self-giving is put beyond question in God the Son becoming a human to serve mankind and to give his life a ransom for many.

D. God's jealousy and his anger at spiritual infidelity are not immoral.

1. People like Dawkins (and Oprah Winfrey and Bill Maher) condemn God for his being jealous toward his people claiming it makes him petty and insecure. That is not the case.

2. God's jealousy is not rooted in self-centeredness; it springs from his concern for the covenant and for the welfare of his covenant partners. There is a sinful kind of jealousy that is condemned in Scripture (Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Jas. 3:14, 16; see also, Acts 5:17, 13:45), but as Paul makes clear in 2 Cor. 11:2, "godly jealousy," a jealousy motivated by concern for others, is a virtue. God is jealous for us because he despises the idea of us, the objects of his love, being lured away from him who is life and satisfaction, the fountain of living waters, to worthless and destructive substitutes. He cares enough about his covenant with his people to get angry when they break it.

3. Philosopher Paul Copan comments (*Is God a Moral Monster?*, p. 35):

A marriage without the potential for jealousy when an intruder threatens isn't much of a marriage. Outrage, pain, anguish – these are appropriate responses to such a deep violation. God isn't some abstract entity or impersonal principle, as Dawkins seems to think he should be. He is an engaging, relational God who attaches himself to humans. He desires to be their loving Father and the wise ruler of their lives. In Israel's case, God's love is that of a passionate husband. We should be amazed that the Creator of the universe would so deeply connect himself to human beings that he would open himself to sorrow and anguish in the face of human betrayal and rejection.

E. God is not a child abuser.

1. When God tested Abraham by telling him in Gen. 22:2 to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering, he intended all along to stop him before he actually killed Isaac. But was he still commanding Abraham to do something immoral? After all, God says clearly elsewhere that child sacrifice is an abomination (e.g., Deut. 12:31, 18:10; 2 Ki. 16:3).

a. Well in this case it was understood by Abraham, based on God's repeated promise and assurances, that Isaac would grow to adulthood so as to be the one through whom God's promise to bring a great nation from Abraham would be fulfilled. So he knew that even if the Lord allowed him to kill Isaac he would bring him back to life. Remember how Abraham in Gen. 22:5 told his servants before he headed to Mt. Moriah with Isaac, "We will worship and then *we* will come back to you." Hebrews 11:19 says flatly that Abraham in that situation considered that God was able even to raise the dead.

b. So is it immoral for God to command Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice when he was going to stop him before he did it, when Abraham knew that even if God didn't stop him he promptly would bring Isaac back to life, and when Abraham's trust in God through this test of faith would be used to bless countless people through history as an example of faith? It is not.

2. The crucifixion of Christ was not "divine child abuse," as Dawkins calls it, something forced on the one and only Son. Christ willingly laid down his life and then took it up again (Jn. 10:15, 17-18). As Copan notes (p. 52), "We have no passive victim here. Jesus's death on the cross was part of the predetermined plan of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Spirit. Each one suffered in this reconciling work. In *weakness*, Jesus actually *conquered* sin and the powers of darkness (John 12:31; Col. 2:15)."

F. The death penalty in the Old Testament for certain sins is not immoral.

1. New Atheists often condemn God for prescribing in the Mosaic law the death penalty for certain offenses. They claim this shows God to be cruel and unjust. Their favorites include the death penalty for sexual immorality (Deut. 22:21), adultery (Lev. 20:10), blasphemy (Lev. 24:10-14), cursing father and mother (Lev. 20:9), being an incorrigibly rebellious son (Deut. 21:18-21), and working on the Sabbath (Ex. 35:2).

2. Putting aside the fact the Mosaic law was far more lenient than other ancient Near Eastern laws, how do these atheists *know* that it was cruel and unjust for God to prescribe such penalties? How can they judge whether it is wrong for God to prescribe a certain penalty for acts of disobedience in the theocracy of Israel, the nation

he was using as a special vehicle to bring his blessings to the world? Only God is in a position to know all the factors, implications, and consequences that need to be taken into account in the context of ancient Israel in setting the penalty for particular acts of defiance against him. As philosopher Paul Chamberlain remarks (p. 111):

The serious question, then, is whether God might have known that on certain occasions harsh actions – the kind we all puzzle over – were necessary in order for Israel to remain an effective vehicle for expressing and living out this message of Good News to the world. For example, could God have known that unless certain penalties were enacted – penalties Dawkins finds so unreasonable – the people of Israel would have been drawn into practices that would have made them ineffective as communicators of God's message of love and forgiveness to the world? After all, they certainly showed tendencies to wander.

3. And even if we could not see any justification of a particular penalty that satisfies us, that would not prove there was no such justification. It could be that our limited knowledge and perspective is keeping us from seeing the morally sufficient reason we would see if we were all-knowing like God. Chamberlain states (p. 114):

We read of certain puzzling things God did, and we sometimes wonder what good reasons he could possibly have for doing them. Again, our lack of knowledge on this point in no way proves he had no good purpose for these actions, especially given the fact that he is a God who acts with good purposes throughout the Old Testament.

Nor is this simply a convenient way out of a difficult problem. It is, in fact, a requirement for anyone wishing to prove God acted unjustly. When it comes to judging the morality of particular actions, it is one thing for us to know God carried out a particular action but an entirely different matter to know that this action, however puzzling or even troubling, is immoral or unjust. To know that, one would need to know that he carried it out without a good, morally sufficient reason.

4. As Chamberlain suggests, the possibility that God had a morally sufficient reason for the penalties he imposed within Israel becomes highly plausible when we see the love, compassion, mercy, and benevolence of God that runs through the entire Old Testament, not to mention the ultimate embodiment of those qualities in the Lord Jesus Christ. The morality of God's actions that strike us as puzzling cannot be judged in a vacuum.

5. In addition, it is quite possible that, with the exception of premeditated murder (Num. 35:30-32), perpetrators of capital crimes under the Mosaic law could have their death sentences commuted by offering a "ransom" or "substitute." Copan writes (p. 95-96):

Walter Kaiser points out the general observation of Old Testament scholars: There were some sixteen crimes that called for the death penalty in the Old Testament. Only in the case of premeditated murder did the text say that the officials in Israel were forbidden to take a "ransom" or "substitute." This has widely been interpreted to imply that in all other fifteen cases the judges could commute the crimes deserving capital punishment by designating a "ransom" or "substitute." In that case, the death penalty served to mark the seriousness of the crime. One could cite other scholars such as Raymond Westbrook, Jacob Finkelstein, and Joseph Sprinkle, who readily concur with this assessment.

So if we take the severe Old Testament punishments literally, we observe that the Mosaic law is far *less* strict than other ancient Near Eastern law codes. If, on the other hand, we follow these scholars who take the Old Testament's capital punishment laws as allowing for a "ransom" payment instead (with the exception of premeditated murder), then this opens up a dramatically new perspective on these apparently severe punishments.

6. Though not involving the death penalty, Deut. 25:11-12 is sometimes seen as prescribing a penalty of mutilation out of all proportion to the offense.

a. If the text does indeed prescribe the cutting off of the woman's hand, the offense probably would be damaging the man's testicles so severely as to destroy his ability to procreate, a very serious offense.

b. But it is very possible, even likely, that the penalty refers to the public shaving of the woman's pubic hair, a way of humiliating her that is commensurate with the humiliation of her publicly grabbing a man's private parts (see Copan, p. 121-122). The particular form of the verb used here normally means to clip, cut, or shave, and the common word for hand (*yad*) is not used. Instead the word *kaph* is used which can refer to a concave object like a woman's groin area. Christopher Wright states in his commentary on Deuteronomy (NIBC, p. 269), "The phrase, you shall cut off her hand, may not be meant literally, but may be a euphemism for the female genital region (as, cf. 'feet' for male genitals, above)."

G. The command to kill the Canaanites was not immoral.

1. New Atheists accuse God of indiscriminate killing and genocide in commanding Israel to destroy the Canaanites (Deut. 20:16-18). This is no doubt behind Dawkins's description of God as a "bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser" and a "racist, infanticidal, genocidal . . . capriciously malevolent bully."

2. In the first place, it should be noted that God's command to Israel to "utterly destroy" the Canaanites exists among a greater number of commands or

descriptions that Israel is to drive out, dispossess, or expel the Canaanites from the land rather than annihilate or exterminate all of them (e.g. Ex. 23:27-31; Num. 21:32, 33:51-56; Deut. 7:17-23). There was no command to pursue and hunt down the Canaanites, so if they had fled, as many no doubt did, or joined the people of Israel, as Rahab did, they would not have been killed. Those who refused to abandon the land God had given Israel as part of his unfolding work to redeem his creation were to be exterminated.

3. Though Joshua 6-12 says that absolutely every human in certain cities – young, old, male, and female – was destroyed, it is possible those descriptions are hyperbolic. In other words, this may be standard, stylized "war language" that would not be taken literally by the first readers but would be understood to mean that Israel utterly and resoundingly defeated those cities. Paul Copan and Matthew Flanagan argue at length for this possibility in their 2014 book *Did God Really Command Genocide?* (Grand Rapids: Baker).

4. But even if one ignores the possibility that Joshua employed a hyperbolic stylized war language, these atheists simply assume in their criticism that if they cannot see a morally sufficient reason for God's conduct then no such reason exists. But why think an all-knowing God could not have a good reason for doing something that you cannot perceive? It's like an infant insisting that his parents cannot have a good reason for sticking him with a needle because he is aware of no such reason. Given the nature of God revealed in Scripture, most clearly in the sacrificial love shown in Christ, smart money is on his having a good and loving reason for everything he does.

5. I cannot help but note that many of the atheists denying that God could have a morally sufficient reason for killing innocent children are pro-abortion. So they claim, falsely I might add, that it is morally justified to kill babies in the womb for the convenience of the mother, and then turn around and insist it is impossible for the omniscient Creator to have a morally sufficient reason for killing innocent children.

6. We are not left totally in the dark in this case regarding God's motivations. We are told that the Canaanites were grossly immoral, engaging in all kinds of sexual immorality and child sacrifices (Lev. 18:20-30), and that God waited for centuries before their sin reached the limit where it could no longer be tolerated (Gen. 15:16 – Amorite being a Canaanite people group).

7. God chose to use the Israelites as the instruments of his judgment – unlike Sodom and Gomorrah which he judged directly – and in conjunction with their execution of that judgment to establish them as a special religious nation in that central geographical location, a nation through which he would bring the Messiah to bless all the nations of the world. God is not a human being; he is the giver of life and has the right to take it in judgment and in fulfillment of his good purposes.

8. Though the Canaanite children were not guilty, only God is in a position to know how allowing them to live would have played out in history. Chamberlain asks (p. 111-112), "might God have known that unless a particularly violent

and unjust civilization was destroyed, those remaining would simply grow up and reinstate the same practices that would again entice Israel away?" Of course, the innocent children who were killed would go to a blessed state (Paradise) and be delivered from their culture's moral and religious corruption.

H. God's regulations regarding slavery were not immoral.

1. New Atheists charge that the Bible condones slavery and therefore is immoral. For example, Sam Harris wrote in the L.A. Times on December 24, 2006, "Both books [the Bible and the Koran] condone the practice of slavery — and yet every civilized human being now recognizes that slavery is an abomination." As I mentioned previously, Hitchens insisted the Old Testament contains "a warrant for trafficking of humans . . . [and] for slavery."

2. The so-called slavery that God permitted *among fellow Israelites* in the Old Testament was not slavery in the sense we think of it. It was a voluntary form of debt servitude, a way of paying off a debt or a way to attach oneself to someone else's household to survive poverty and destitution.

a. Kidnapping, forcibly abducting someone, meant the death penalty not only for the kidnapper but for anyone found in possession of the stolen person (Ex. 21:16). That obviously eliminates the kind of slavery that existed in early America, where Africans were abducted and sold. Deuteronomy 24:7 applies this principle and penalty specifically to slave trading of fellow Israelites.

b. Because God had delivered the Israelites (Hebrews) from Egyptian slavery (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6, 8:14), they are not to be made to serve as slaves but as a "hired servant" or "bound laborer" (Lev. 25:39-40). The Hebrew words translated "slave" (male – *'ebed*; female – *'āmā*) are broad enough to cover both slaves and hired servants, so when applied to Israelites (Ex. 21:2, 21:7) are better translated servants.

c. Guenther Haas says of Israelites who sold themselves into bondservice (*Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 781):

They may not be sold as chattel slaves to other masters. Their time of service to fellow Israelites is limited to six years, and to resident aliens it is limited to the Jubilee Year. In the latter case, they may be redeemed by a relative at any time during their servitude. Israelites may enter into a condition of permanent servitude only if they choose so because of love for the master or for a slave wife and children.

d. They could not be treated harshly (Lev. 25:43, 46, 53), and as Deut. 15:16 makes clear, the arrangement could be so beneficial that the servant may choose to stay permanently.

e. The release after six years had to be accompanied by the provision of sufficient assets to make a new start (Ex. 21:2; Deut. 15:12-18). In the year of Jubilee the released servant would receive back the inheritance that previously had been transferred out of economic necessity (Lev. 25:28).

f. There were various requirements in the Old Testament intended to help keep people from destitution and thus to keep them from any kind of debt servitude. The poor could glean the edge of fields and pick fruit remaining on trees after harvest (Lev. 19:9-10, 23:22; Deut. 24:20-21). Israelites were commanded to lend freely to the poor (Deut. 15:7-8), who were not to be charged interest (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36-37). The poor could substitute less expensive animals for sacrifices (Lev. 5:7, 11), and their debts were to be canceled every seven years (Deut. 15:9-10). The intention was that there be no poor among them (Deut. 15:4).

g. The option of this debt servitude served a humanitarian function in ancient Israel.

(1) In our society, we mortgage our homes, meaning we borrow money that we need and agree with the lender that if we don't pay it back he can sell our home to get his money. This is considered socially beneficial because it encourages the lender to provide money we need by giving him some security that he will not be throwing his money away. In that world, Israelites did the same with their labor. When a poor man borrowed money, his or a family member's labor was either the agreed form of repayment or was the security for repayment by some other means. In other words, the borrower said either "I will become your bondservant in exchange for this loan" or "I will become your bondservant if I fail to pay it back by a certain date." This facilitated the lending of money to those who needed it.

(2) Allowing the destitute to become bondservants in exchange for shelter and provision functioned as a safety net. It was a way for the destitute to survive in a harsh economic environment. Think of someone today who enlists in the military out of economic distress. He or she voluntarily relinquishes a large part of control over their life for a set number of years in exchange for what the military provides them in return.

h. Some texts often misapplied by critics

(1) Exodus 21:3-4 address the case of a debt servant who during the time of his debt servitude married another of the master's debt servants and had children with her (there is good reason to think the case given was not to be limited to males). When his service period was up, he was free to go but he could not walk out with his wife and children who were still under a service obligation. This does not mean the wife and children remained servants the rest of their lives. It means the husband could (a) work somewhere else while he waited for his wife to complete her service obligation, (b) make enough money to buy out the remainder of his wife's contract, or (c) agree to continue working permanently for the master.

(2) Exodus 21:7-11 involves a situation where a woman's family makes a contract for her to become a servant and a wife. So the payment to her family would include both the contract labor payment and the marriage gift ("bride price"). (All marriages were arranged by families, and the marriage gift compensated the family for the loss of her services and probably ultimately belonged to the wife as security in the case of divorce or her husband's death. See Copan, p. 117.)

(a) A man would take a woman as both a servant and a wife perhaps to prevent her status as wife from threatening the status of his estate (e.g., did not want children from the new marriage to claim an inheritance with his children from a prior marriage – see Stuart, 482-483). Or perhaps, as the *Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 153 indicates, the man would take a minor daughter into his household as a servant with the commitment to marry her when she reached the age of marriage. That is why v. 7 says she shall not go out from her servitude as the male servants do. Male and female servant both are free to leave when their period of service has ended (Deut. 15:12), but unlike service, marriage is a lifelong commitment. So the wife could not leave the household like a mere servant.

(b) According to v. 8, if for some reason the man chooses not to marry her ("broke faith"), he must allow her to be redeemed, meaning freed from her obligations by a payment. Since he has paid the contract labor payment and the marriage gift, he is entitled to some kind of compensation for losing her even though it was his own choice to do so.

(c) According to v. 10, if the man who chose not to marry her marries someone else, he must not deprive the woman he failed to marry of food, clothing, and shelter ("shelter" better than "marital rights" – see Davidson, 192-193). Presumably this refers to the case where the woman has not (yet) been redeemed and thus remains in the man's household as a servant. If he does, she goes free without a payment.

3. In considering the case of non-Israelites, it is important to recognize that slavery was a post-Fall *human institution* not something ordained by God. Nothing in Scripture approves of it as a moral good. Rather, Scripture reveals that God *tolerated a regulated form of Old World slavery*. It is true that Israelites in the Old Testament were permitted to have *non-Israelites* as permanent slaves who could be transferred to others (Lev. 25:44-46), but these slaves had some protections that were unique in the ancient world.

a. They were required to be given rest on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10; Deut. 5:14), were to be avenged if the master killed them (Ex. 21:20; probably meaning the master was to be killed), were to be released if they were permanently injured, such as the loss of a tooth, through the master's overzealous discipline (Ex. 21:26-27), and apparently were to be avenged in some way if they were disciplined so hard as to take longer than a day or two to recover (Ex. 21:21; "he *gets up after* a day or two" [NIV '84] or "he *recovers after* a day or two" [TNIV and NIV '11] rather than "he *survives for* a day or two"), perhaps by

paying for the servant's healing in a way analogous to 21:18-19. Nothing is required of the master if the servant recovers in a day or two, presumably because the loss the master sustains by virtue of losing the servant's services for those days is sufficient punishment in that case (see Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC). Note that punishing or disciplining someone physically for misbehavior is not inherently immoral.

b. God's concern for the welfare of aliens and sojourners within Israel is expressed in a number of places. In Lev. 19:33-34 Israelites are commanded to love and do no wrong to the stranger in their land (see also Deut. 10:19). You get an indication of how God desires all servants and slaves to be treated from Job's declaration of his righteousness in Job 31:13-15: (ESV) ¹³ "If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant [NAS and NRSV – my male or female slaves], when they brought a complaint against me, ¹⁴ what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? ¹⁵ Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?"

c. And it is noteworthy in terms of God's attitude toward slavery that Deut. 23:15-16 required Israel to offer safe harbor to runaway foreign slaves, presumably those who fled to Israel from other nations. The slave was not to be returned and was permitted to live in any of the towns of Israel.

4. Is it possible that an infinite, all-knowing God could have a good reason for allowing Israelites to acquire foreigners as permanent workers, especially given his humanitarian regulation of the relationship? Is it possible that maintaining a distinction in this regard between covenant people and those outside the covenant served a higher purpose, perhaps by emphasizing the link between divine blessing and covenant membership? Recall that foreigners could convert to Judaism (e.g., Ex. 12:48-49) and thus share in all the blessings of God. It strikes me as arrogant to claim that no such purpose possibly could exist.

5. As for the New Testament, slavery was a basic social institution of the first-century Greco-Roman world. S. Scott Bartchy writes in "Slave, Slavery" in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 1098: "As many as one-third of the population of the empire were enslaved, and an additional large percentage had been slaves earlier in their lives."

a. It too was a very different institution from early American slavery. S. Scott Bartchy states in "Slavery (Greco-Roman)" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:66-70 (paragraphs are not continuous in original):

Central features that distinguish 1st century slavery from that later practiced in the New World are the following: racial factors played no role; education was greatly encouraged (some slaves were better educated than their owners) and enhanced a slave's value; many slaves carried out sensitive and highly

responsible social functions; slaves could own property (including other slaves!); their religious and cultural traditions were the same as those of the freeborn; no laws prohibited public assembly of slaves; and (perhaps above all) the majority of urban and domestic slaves could legitimately anticipate being emancipated by the age of 30.

It must also be stressed that, despite the neat legal separation between owners and slaves, in none of the relevant cultures did persons in slavery constitute a social or economic class. Slaves' individual honor, social status, and economic opportunities were entirely dependent on the status of their respective owners, and they developed no recognizable consciousness of being a group or of suffering a common plight. For this reason, any such call as "slaves of the world unite!" would have fallen on completely deaf ears. (From p. 69: "The great slave rebellions, all of which were led primarily by prisoners of war between 140-70 B.C.E., never sought to abrogate slavery. Rather, these rebels sought either escape or to turn the tables by enslaving the owners.")

Furthermore, by no means were those in slavery regularly to be found at the bottom of the social-economic pyramid. Rather, in that place were those free and impoverished persons who had to look for work each day without any certainty of finding it (day laborers), some of whom eventually sold themselves into slavery to gain some job security.

Large numbers of people sold themselves into slavery for various reasons, e.g., to pay debts, to climb socially (Roman citizenship was conventionally bestowed on a slave released by a Roman owner), to obtain special jobs, and above all to enter a life that was more secure and less strenuous than existence as a poor, freeborn person.

Slaves were used for "an enormous variety of functions in enormously different circumstances," some of which when compared to New World slavery seem astonishingly responsible: "doctors, teachers, writers, accountants, agents, bailiffs, overseers, secretaries, and sea-captains."

Since slaves represented a substantial investment by their owners . . . , they could at least expect to receive enough food to keep them alive and working. Manumission could mean the end of that security. Epictetus [a first-century philosopher], himself an ex-slave, took pleasure in pointing out that the slave who thinks only of gaining his freedom may be reduced, when he is manumitted, to "slavery much more severe than before."

For many, self-sale into slavery with anticipation of manumission was regarded as the most direct means to be integrated into Greek and Roman society. For many this was the quickest way to climb socially and financially. As such, in stark contrast to New World slavery, Greco-Roman

slavery functioned as a process rather than a permanent condition, as a temporary phase of life by means of which an outsider obtained "a place within a society that has no natural obligations of kinship or guest-friendship towards him."

b. The seeds for the dissolution of all slavery were sown in Old Testament texts like Ex. 21:16 and Lev. 25:39 and in New Testament texts like Philemon 16 ("no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother"), Eph. 6:9 ("Masters . . . do not threaten [your slaves]"), Col. 4:1 ("Masters, provide your slaves what is right and fair"), and 1 Tim. 6:1-2 (masters are "brothers"). Note also that Jesus' teaching about mercy and forgiving debts (e.g., Mat. 6:12, 18:23-34) implies the inappropriateness of debt-slavery. As has been said, where these seeds of equality came to full flower, the very institution of slavery would no longer be slavery.

c. Early Christians understood this. They not only demonstrated a radically different attitude toward slaves, dealing with them as they did freemen, but began the practice of freeing slaves one by one as they had opportunity. There are reports of early Christians releasing huge numbers of slaves, regarding which Philip Schaff comments in his *History of the Christian Church Vol. II*, 5th rev. ed. (p. 353):

These legendary traditions may indeed be doubted as to the exact facts of the case, and probably are greatly exaggerated; but they are nevertheless conclusive as the exponents of the spirit which animated the church at that time concerning the duty of Christian masters. It was felt that in a thoroughly Christianized society there can be no room for despotism on the one hand and slavery on the other.

d. Chamberlain writes (p. 141):

In AD 315, only two years after the Edict of Milan the Christian emperor Constantine took the small step of criminalizing the act of stealing children for the purpose of bringing them up as slaves. Over the next few centuries, Christian bishops and councils called for the redemption and freeing of slaves, and Christian monks freed many themselves. The effects were stunning. By the twelfth century slaves in Europe were rare, and by the fourteenth century they were almost unknown on that continent, including in England.

e. European slavery was revived by the British in the seventeenth century, followed by the Spanish and the Portuguese. The abolitionist movement of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was led by Christians, people like William Wilberforce, Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Finney, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. This movement was driven by the understood implications of certain of the above biblical texts and the outright condemnation of kidnapping and slave trading in Ex. 21:16 and 1 Tim. 1:10, activities that characterized Colonial slavery.

f. The fact God did not forbid Christians in the first century from owning slaves but rather tolerated a regulated form of first-century slavery does not mean that was his ideal for mankind. His ideal is brotherhood and equality, but it is possible that the world had gotten so twisted that he was willing to tolerate less than his ideal as a concession to the hardness of men's hearts, similar to what he did, through Moses, in permitting divorce (see Mat. 19:3-9).

g. Or maybe he tolerated it because mandating the release of slaves in that social context would have caused anarchy and consequent suffering as the gospel exploded across the Roman world. In other words, perhaps the thorn of slavery needed to be removed slowly; perhaps society first needed to be altered under Christianity's influence to be able to handle such a change without overwhelming adverse side effects. James D. G. Dunn states (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 699):

[S]lavery was an established fact of life in the ancient world. As many as one-third of the inhabitants of most large urban centres were slaves. The economies of the ancient world could not have functioned without slavery. Consequently, a responsible challenge to the practice of slavery would have required a complete reworking of the economic system and a complete rethinking of social structures, which was scarcely thinkable at the time, except in idealistic or anarchic terms.

h. In the context of this regulated form of first-century slavery that God tolerated, if release was desired it needed to be worked out on an individual basis consistent with the principle of brotherhood. But as long as the relationship remained, the slave could not take advantage of having a brother for a master, and the master could not mistreat the slave.

i. That God tolerated a regulated form of first-century slavery does not mean he would tolerate that same form of slavery in a different historical situation or circumstance or that he would tolerate other forms of slavery, such as the slavery that existed in early America. So the attempts by some in early America to support slavery from the Bible were misguided.

I. The Old Testament does not endorse bigamy or polygamy.

1. Some critics charge God with immorality by claiming that in the Old Testament he endorsed or approved of polygamous marriages, including concubines who were second-class wives but wives nonetheless (e.g., Bilhah is called both a concubine and one of Jacob's wives – Gen. 35:22; 37:2). Again, the atheist has no basis for holding to an objective morality from which he can criticize God, and this criticism is surreal given how many atheists deny that marriage should be between only one man and one woman. But let's address the charge from within the Christian worldview. Is God culpable, morally blameworthy, for allegedly endorsing or approving of polygamous marriages in the Old Testament?

2. Well, a good case can be made that God actually *prohibited* polygamy in the Old Testament and, though it occurred among his people, those occurrences were in fact contrary to his will. I'll say more about this in a moment. But even if God did not prohibit polygamy in the Mosaic law, the most one could say is that he tolerated it temporarily as a departure from his ideal presumably because of the hardness of men's hearts, as he did with divorce in the Mosaic law (Mat. 19:8). God never commands or explicitly approves of polygamy, so it is presumptuous to tie him to it.

3. The creation design is for human sexuality to be expressed in a heterosexual monogamous marriage – one man, one woman. This norm is summarized in Gen. 2:24 and is assumed throughout the Old Testament. Jesus cites the one-flesh union of a man and a woman as God's ideal (Mat. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:6-9). Indeed, Paul indicates in Eph. 5:30-32, citing Gen. 2:24, that it was God's intention from the beginning for marriage to picture the relationship between Christ and the church, a relationship that is by its nature exclusive.

4. The best presentation I know of the argument that God *prohibited* polygamy is Old Testament scholar Richard Davidson's monumental tome *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*. It would take too long, and I fear would become tedious, for me to address all the texts that need to be addressed to make this case.

a. Let me just say that, in addition to the creation design for human sexuality summarized in Gen. 2:24, there are good reasons for understanding Lev. 18:18 as prohibiting polygamy generally rather than as prohibiting the more specific incestuous case of a man marrying his wife's sister. Indeed, this is how Qumran community interpreted it.

(1) There are clear indications of a literary break at v. 18 where the subject shifts from laws forbidding sexual relationships on the basis of bonds of kinship (vv. 6-17) to laws covering a broad range of forbidden sexual relationships not based on bonds of kinship (vv. 18-23). Verse 6 announces the subject of incest and then vv. 7-17 each specifies a close relationship with whom sex is forbidden with the opening formula: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of . . ." Verse 18 breaks that pattern.

(2) The phrase that is commonly translated "wife's sister" is literally "a woman to her sister," as it's translated in the English Revised Version, which in its eight other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible is used idiomatically in the sense of "one in addition to another." The masculine equivalent of the phrase, "a man to his brother," is used twelve times in the Hebrew Bible in the same idiomatic manner meaning "one to another" or "to one another." In Lev. 18:18 the phrase it simply means taking another wife. Davidson concludes (p. 197): "This law, then, prohibits a man from taking another woman in addition to his first wife, to be a rival wife (*lišōr*, lit. "vexer") as long as the first wife is alive. By implication, this law allows for remarriage after the death of the first wife. Thus the monogamous norm of Genesis is upheld in this Mosaic legislation."

b. There also are reasonable alternative interpretations of the various texts often cited as indicating divine approval of polygamy. For example,

(1) The command in Deut. 17:17 is literally that the king shall not *increase* or *add* wives for himself, which can mean that he shall not engage in polygamy at all, not that he shall not engage in an *excessive level* of polygamy. The Qumran community interpreted the passage as prohibiting the king from polygamy.

(2) When God called David "a man after his own heart" in 1 Sam. 13:14, David was not yet a polygamist. Indeed, he probably was not yet married.

(3) After David's adultery with Bathsheba and his killing of Uriah, God tells him in 2 Sam. 12:8, through the prophet Nathan (NAS): "*I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!*" God's giving to David Saul's house and wives is a way of referring to the fact he had given David all that Saul had when he brought David to the throne. David took over Saul's estate, which was a sign of his succession as king. It does not mean that David married Saul's wives, as that would have him marrying his wife Michal's mother (Saul's wife Ahinoam – 1 Sam. 14:50), a form of incest condemned in Lev. 18:17 and punishable by death.

(4) The eulogizing statements about David in 1 Ki. 14:8 and 15:5 do not rule out that David did wrong in taking multiple wives. They should be seen in context as referring to David's remaining loyal to God and keeping his commandments *relating to idolatry* not as a general statement that he did no wrong.

(a) 1 Kings 14:7-9 states (ESV) – ⁷ *Go, tell Jeroboam, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Because I exalted you from among the people and made you leader over my people Israel ⁸ and tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, and yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes, ⁹ but you have done evil above all who were before you and have gone and made for yourself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back.'"* Certainly David's conduct regarding Bathsheba and Uriah is not being blessed by God here. That is not under consideration. Rather, the inspired writer's focus is on the contrast between David and Jeroboam in terms of idolatry. Jeroboam was a rank idolater, whereas David followed God completely *in that regard*.

(b) 1 Kings 15:3-5 states (ESV) – ³ *And he walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father. ⁴ Nevertheless, for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem, ⁵ because David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD*

and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, [except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite].

[1] Verse 3 refers to Abijam walking in all the sins of his father Rehoboam. 1 Kings 14:22-23 reports the rampant idolatry that took place in Judah during Rehoboam's rule. So again, the reference to David's obedience seems to be focused on his complete obedience to the commands relating to idolatry.

[2] The last clause of v. 5, which I have put in brackets, goes against this idea. It suggests that v. 5 is *not* contextually limited, not limited to commands relating to idolatry, but refers to commands in other ethical areas such as adultery and murder. Otherwise there would be no need to except the matter of Uriah from its scope. It is probable, however, that this last clause is not part of the original text. It is not present in the LXX, the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew text. It seems likely it was added by a scribe who did not appreciate the contextual restriction to matters of idolatry (as was more obvious in 14:8).

[a] John Gray says in his commentary, "G [LXX] omits this clause, which, indeed, has all the appearance of a later gloss," and Simon DeVries omits the clause from the translation of the verse in his commentary.

[b] Mordechai Cogan states in his commentary (Anchor Bible, p. 393) that "because [the phrase] is lacking in the LXX, it is universally taken to be a post-Dtr expansion."

[c] Benjamin D. Sommer writes in "Inner-biblical Interpretation" in the *Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1831:

1 Kings 15.5 originally limited itself to a comment praising King David, and one important manuscript of the ancient Greek translation of Kings [Vaticanus] preserves that original text. A later scribe found the fulsome praise of David inconsistent with the story in 2 Sam. ch. 11. That story is exceedingly critical of David for committing adultery with the wife of Uriah the Hittite (one of his own soldiers) and for having Uriah murdered to ensure that the adultery was not discovered. Therefore, the scribe added a qualification in 1 Kings 15.5: "except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." These words became part of the Masoretic Text.

[3] Of course, if one understands v. 5 to be referring to David not doing wrong *in any sphere of God's will*, his sins could not be limited to those involving Bathsheba and Uriah. He also sinned in taking the census of Israel as noted in 2 Sam. 24:10 and 1 Chron. 21:1-8. That reinforces for me that this clause is a later addition by a scribe who noted only the notorious episode with Bathsheba.

c. A good case can be made that David, as part of his attitude of repentance toward God during Absalom's rebellion (see 2 Sam. 15:30), returned to a monogamous state with Bathsheba (Solomon's mother) for the rest of his life. That helps to understand why the narrator emphasizes that David did not have sexual relations with Abishag the Shunammite, who took care of him in his old age (1 Ki. 1:1-4).

d. Davidson says in the summary of his study of the polygamy question (pp. 210-211):

In the OT there are thirty-three reasonably clear historical cases of polygamy out of approximately three thousand men mentioned in the scriptural record. Most of these examples were the wealthy patriarchs or Israel's monarchs (the only clear case of a commoner having more than one wife in Elkanah, this likely from the motive of Hannah's infertility). In the narratives containing the practice of polygamy or concubinage, invariably the divinely inspired narrators include their tacit condemnation of these practices. Contrary to other ANE legislation, Mosaic legislation condemns all polygamy, both for the people and (at least implicitly) for the king. Unlike in the other ANE law codes and practice, there is no exception for cases of infertility or illness of the wife or for royal diplomatic alliances. None of the pentateuchal legislation concerning marital forms commands or condones polygamous relationships, although remarriage after a man's first wife died is allowed.

5. But as I said, even if God did not affirmatively prohibit polygamy in the Mosaic law, the most one could say is that he tolerated it temporarily as a departure from his ideal presumably because of the hardness of men's hearts, as he did with divorce in the Mosaic law (Mat. 19:8). He never commands it or explicitly approves of it. A variation on this is that God tolerated the drift from the Edenic ideal during the patriarchal era because of the hardness of people's hearts and then asserted the ideal of monogamy the Mosaic law, and even then people disobeyed. In any case, I think it is a mistake to tie God to polygamy.

VI. Old Testament Laws That Seem Weird to Us Serve God's Purpose.

A. Atheist critics mock the Old Testament for having regulations that seem to make no sense. They do make sense, however, when one understands the culture into which the laws were given and understands that Israel, the people to whom the laws were given, was a theocracy, a God-governed nation, created to be God's special instrument for blessing all the nations. Israel's unique role in God's unfolding plan made it the object of some unique requirements.

B. The food laws and the regulations against mixing different kinds of animals, crops, and fibers carried symbolic messages in daily life about the boundaries God's people were to maintain with people of other nations. They were not to mix with the unclean beliefs and practices of the surrounding nations. The food laws also may reinforce that they are to respect life, not be predators, and are to avoid conduct that reduces them to a state of helplessness (see Copan, p. 82-84).

C. The various regulations of ritual uncleanness or impurity, which is different from moral impurity, reinforce elements of God's holiness, his otherness.

1. Bodily discharges related to sexual intercourse or to the cycle of birth and death temporarily keep one from worship for a number of possible reasons. It seems God is radically separating sexuality from religious rites to distance himself and his worshipers from pagan cults that used sex as part of their worship. It also may be that things related to the cycle of birth and death defile one for worship because, unlike some pagan gods, Yahweh is not subject to the cycle of birth and death.

2. These laws of temporary uncleanness are connected with divine prohibitions to enter the sanctuary until the uncleanness is removed. The fact these laws prevent participation in the rituals of the sanctuary services implies that they would be inapplicable when sanctuary worship became inapplicable, i.e., in the new covenant.

VII. Christians Are Not Hypocritical in Not Applying Some of the Mosaic Laws.

A. Atheist critics accuse Christians of hypocrisy in claiming that certain regulations in the Old Testament do not apply today while insisting that others do. But this is simply a failure to understand the nature of the Mosaic covenant.

B. The Mosaic covenant, the old covenant, was a temporary pact or covenant that was entered into by God and the people of Israel at Sinai (Ex. 20:1 - 24:8). The term "law" can be used to refer to the entire O.T., to the Pentateuch, to the Mosaic covenant (as represented by the covenant law), and occasionally to a principle or rule, but it most often refers to the set or package of commands that were part of the Mosaic covenant. It was part of the covenant, embedded in it, and specified the way in which the faith of God's people was to be expressed until Christ came.

C. Some of the commands in the law of the Mosaic covenant were not universal moral desires of God. They erected civil and ceremonial or ritualistic ("amoral") distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, at least in part to keep the people of God untainted by pagan practices in order to help them serve as a witness to their Gentile neighbors of the blessed life that exists under God (Deut. 4:6-8; Ezek. 5:5; Isa. 42:6, 49:6). A distinction between the commandments of the law is evident in 1 Cor. 7:19 (TNIV): Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.

D. A new covenant was instituted between God and mankind through the sacrifice of Christ, the effect of which was to render the old covenant, the Mosaic covenant, obsolete or no longer operative (2 Cor. 3:4-18; Gal. 3:15 – 4:7, 4:21-31; Heb. 7:11-22, 8:6-13). And with the fulfillment in Christ of the planned obsolescence of the Mosaic covenant, the *set of commands* that were part of that covenant, the Mosaic law, ceased to be binding. That the Mosaic law ceased to be binding is clear from texts like Rom. 10:1-4, Gal. 3:23-25, and Heb. 7:11-14 and also from the fact specific regulations that were part of the Mosaic law — such as Sabbath regulations (Col. 2:16-17; Rom. 14:5-6), food laws (Rom. 14:1 – 15:13; 1 Cor. 10:23 – 11:1), and circumcision (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 2:3-5, 5:2-6, 11-12, 6:12-13; Phil. 3:2) — are said to be no longer binding. That is why Paul, a Jew, could declare that he was not under the Mosaic law (1 Cor. 9:20).

E. Though the *set of commands* that constitute the Mosaic law ceased to be binding, many of the individual commands that were part of that set have an ongoing or renewed applicability, and indeed find their full expression, in the new covenant.

1. For example, Paul in Eph. 6:2 commands children to "honor your father and mother," quoting from the Ten Commandments in Ex. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16. The Ten Commandments also are reflected in N.T. commands and prohibitions against murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting. Indeed, there are literally hundreds of commands in the N.T. – dos and don'ts – issued by Spirit-inspired writers.

2. You see, the inapplicability of the Mosaic law that occurred in conjunction with the obsolescence of the Mosaic covenant does not mean that none of the commands that were part of that set of laws has any applicability in the new covenant. The concept is something like moving from one state to another. I'm no longer under "Florida law," but the "Arizona law" that I *am* under includes many of the same requirements.

F. The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Mat. 7:12, 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14), but some specific conduct is loving and other conduct is not. Love is the center, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself. As Paul indicates in Rom. 13:9, the command to love your neighbor as yourself encompasses the commands of the law not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, and not to covet (and other commands he does not specify). Thus, the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, the set of commands that are part of Mosaic covenant, upholds the transcendent moral requirements that are included in that law (e.g., Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 10:14; Eph. 6:2). This ongoing moral law, centered in love, is the "law of Christ" (see 1 Cor. 9:21 and Gal. 6:2 with 5:14).

G. So there is a clear biblical rationale for not binding commands from the Mosaic law relating to food, circumcision, ritual impurity, and other amoral elements related specifically to Israel's role as a theocracy in preparing the way for the Christ. It is not an arbitrary picking and choosing, as New Atheists charge, but a theological recognition of the impact of Christ's coming.

H. And since the church, the people of God, are no longer a nation-state like Israel but are scattered among many nations throughout the world, the obligation imposed by God on Israel to mete out certain penalties for various sins does not apply to the church. That obligation was tied to Israel's identity as a nation, a civil government. As Tim Keller has noted: "The church is not a civil government, and so sins are dealt with by exhortation and, at worst, exclusion from membership. This is how Paul deals with a case of incest in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5:1ff. and 2 Cor. 2:7-11). Why this change? Under Christ, the gospel is not confined to a single nation---it has been released to go into all cultures and peoples."

VIII. The Trinity and the Incarnation Are Not Logically Impossible.

A. People like Dawkins ridicule the Trinity as an incoherent concept, something that is logically contradictory. The fact countless philosophers and theologians through the millennia disagree with him ought to give him pause, but since Dawkins is convinced he's a genius and anyone of faith is a moron, it does not. Critics also argue that the claim of divine incarnation in the person of Jesus is impossible.

B. The doctrine of the Trinity follows from the revelation in Scripture that there is only one God and that the Father, Son, and Spirit are all divine persons. As classically expressed in the Athanasian Creed (fourth or fifth century):

Now this is the true Christian faith: We worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, without mixing the persons or dividing the divine being. For each person—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is distinct, but the deity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory and coeternal in majesty.

C. Certainly a three-person being is outside of our experience, as every being with which we have personal knowledge is a one-person being, but that is no reason to insist such a being could not exist. As I sometimes tell people, if they had such a being on some planet in Star Trek everybody would think it was a cool idea. As C. S. Lewis noted in *Mere Christianity*, a person living in a two-dimensional world would know lines and figures but would have no idea of a cube. He goes on (quoted in Chamberlain, p. 87):

Now the Christian account of God involves just the same principle. The human level is a simple and rather empty level. On the human level one person is one being, and any two persons are two separate beings - just as, in two dimensions (say on a flat sheet of paper) one square is one figure, and any two squares are two separate figures. On the Divine level you still find personalities; but up there you find them combined in new ways which we, who do not live on that level, cannot imagine. In God's dimension, so to speak, you find a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one

cube. Of course we cannot fully conceive a Being like that; just as, if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions in space we could never properly imagine a cube. But we can get a sort of faint notion of it. . . . It is something we could never have guessed.

D. The fact this revelation of God's nature is so unexpected, so outside our experience, says it is not the kind of thing someone would have made up. So it really reinforces rather than challenges one's faith.

E. The incarnation, the fact God the Son became the God-man Jesus, is indeed a mind blower, but that is different from being logically incoherent. Rather than venture into the metaphysics of the incarnation, let me just give you the conclusion of philosopher Douglas Groothuis in his 2011 book *Christian Apologetics* (p. 526): "The debate over the coherence of Christ's identity as divine and human has generated some very sophisticated philosophical and theological perspectives. But for our purposes it is sufficient to note that there is nothing necessarily contradictory in the idea of the incarnation; that is, there are plausible ways of resolving the paradox."

IX. Christianity Does Not Lead to Violence.

A. A major theme of the New Atheists is that religious faith causes conflict between people of differing beliefs and that this conflict leads to violence. Thus, in their view, the key to bettering our world is to stamp out religion.

B. In terms of Christianity, they point to the Inquisition, a campaign of the Roman Catholic Church against heretics that began in the twelfth century and went on for centuries in various countries. They employed horrible tortures to root out heresy and enforce orthodoxy. They also point to the Crusades, a series of military campaigns beginning at the end of the eleventh century that were waged by Catholics over the course of hundreds of years in reaction to Muslim aggression against Christianity and conquest of Christian territory. More recently, they are reduced to pointing to fringe characters like those who on rare occasion kill people at abortion clinics.

C. Sinful humanity can, of course, abuse and stain anything, even Christianity. Pointing that out is not an indictment of Christianity; it is a testament to the depth and power of sin. The suggestion that eliminating religion would somehow eliminate or reduce violence in the world is laughable in light of history (see Chamberlain, p. 54ff.).

1. In pursuit of its atheist agenda, the Russian communist party slaughtered Orthodox priests, monks, and nuns by the hundreds of thousands and put another half million in prison or in Siberia. They also burned and dynamited the vast majority of church buildings in the region.

2. In China the record of violence in pursuit of an atheist agenda was even worse. In the 1950s Mao Zedong sought to control religion through the total suppression

of uncooperative religious leaders. They were thrown into labor camps, sent into exile, or murdered. In the 1960s and 70s he closed all places of worship. Paul Marshall writes:

In the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, probably tens of millions of people were killed and tens of millions more disgraced. In this period, Red Guards were particularly brutal with China's believers, whether Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist. It was perhaps the largest intense persecution of Christians in history. The level of atrocity that took place during that epoch is beyond comprehension.

3. Similar documented acts of violence were done against people of faith in Vietnam, North Korea, and Romania. The motivation for this violence was not religion; it was atheism and the desire to remove all threats to atheistic communism. Gary Habermas writes (*JETS*, "The Plight of the New Atheism: A Critique," 2008):

The New Atheists seem eager to charge that many have died in the name of religion. But there is absolutely no comparison here: atheist and secular regimes in the twentieth century alone have killed well over 100 million people, more than one hundred times the total deaths caused by Christians from the Crusades until the present. Still, this is far from excusing ourselves; we have said that Christians should be embarrassed over even these significantly lower figures.

4. Dawkins claims these acts of violence had nothing to do with Stalin's or Mao's atheism – they just happened to be atheists – but it was their atheism that caused them to view religion as a threat to atheistic communism. And in any event, by conceding this horrific violence that was not motivated by religious belief Dawkins admits that something other than religion can generate violence in the world.

5. Often actions that appear to be instances of religious violence are entwined with deeper political or cultural motivations. Religion gets used in the process. And there are many sociological causes of divisions that have nothing to do with religion. For example, it was *tribal* divisions that led to the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

6. Paul Chamberlain summarizes his analysis of the New Atheists' charge that religion is to blame for violence with the following points (p. 69-70):

1. Both religious and irreligious people commit acts of violence.
2. When they occur, the vast majority of religious people around the world are outraged by them regardless of whether they are committed in the name of religion.
3. These acts often are driven by deep political and cultural motivations that would remain regardless of whether religion played a part.
4. Religion is sometimes turned into a tool to help recruit soldiers to fight these political and cultural battles.

5. While this is a horrific abuse of religion, virtually any ideal can be abused, including secular ones such as liberty and equality.
6. Humans will always divide into communities, resulting in divisions and binary oppositions that lie at the heart of human conflict. Some of these divisions are religious in nature, but most are not.

D. What the New Atheists conveniently forget is that Christianity has given many gifts to the world in addition to the abolition of slavery.

1. They were behind the Roman Empire's outlawing of infanticide and the abandonment of infants.

2. They changed the world's attitude toward orphans and were the force behind the development of orphanages.

3. Believers in Christ and the charitable organizations they created have fed, clothed, and sheltered the poor and needy throughout the world, have cared for the wounded in battles, and have built countless hospitals to care for the sick and suffering. And it was Christian teaching institutions, catechetical schools and then monasteries, institutions committed to the development of the God-given gift of reason, that gave rise to universities in the middle of the twelfth century. Most of the well-known universities in North America began as Christian schools (e.g., Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Princeton). In 1932 Donald Tewksbury calculated that 92% of the 182 colleges and universities then in existence in America were founded by Christian denominations.

E. Yale-trained historian Borden W. Painter's scathing critique of the New Atheists' misuse of history, titled *The New Atheist Denial of History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), was published in 2014. In the preface he says of the popular books by Harris, Dawkins, and Hitchens:

These books shocked me not for the strident atheism that I anticipated but for their appalling misuse and distortion of history. The authors all appealed to history for evidence to demonstrate how evil and misguided religion in general was, using European and American history to discredit Christianity in particular. Their version of history managed to get the history wrong and to push interpretations of the past out of step with mainstream historical research and writing. I knew from decades of teaching, writing, and thinking about the past how to recognize bad history when I read it.

X. A Word About Bart Ehrman

(See Dan Wallace's chapel talk at Dallas Theological Seminary on May 1, 2012.)

A. Bart Ehrman is a scholar at the University of North Carolina whose specialty is the text of the New Testament. He was raised in a conservative Christian home but is now an agnostic who spends much of his time trying to persuade people that the Bible is textually unreliable, meaning it has been changed so much during copying that we can have no confidence in what the original text said. The Baptist scholar Dan Wallace estimates that tens of thousands of young people have abandoned the Christian faith because of Ehrman's writings.

B. Though not himself one of the New Atheists, his books attacking the Bible are recommended or considered essential reading by the New Atheists. These books include *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, *Jesus Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible*, and *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*.

C. We no longer have any of the original documents of the New Testament. They all disintegrated by the end of the second century because of use and being repeatedly copied. But we have a great many manuscripts that bear witness to these original documents.

D. A manuscript is a handwritten copy of a biblical text prior to the development of the printing press (around 1440).

1. We have around 5,800 manuscripts of the Greek NT, and the number continues to grow. The *average* size of a Greek NT manuscript is 450 pages long.

2. In addition the NT was translated into other languages very early. In the second century it was translated into Latin, which language came to dominate the ancient western world. So it is not surprising that we have more manuscripts in Latin than in Greek. We have over 10,000 such manuscripts. It was translated into other ancient languages such as Coptic, Syriac, Georgian, Gothic, Armenian, Arabic, and Old Church Slavonic. The best very conservative guess as to the number of these manuscripts is between 5,000 and 10,000.

3. Beyond all these, we have quotations of the NT from church fathers, scholars, and leaders of the church who wrote commentaries and homilies on the NT. More than one million quotations of the NT by the church fathers have been catalogued so far. Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman stated in their book *Text of the New Testament* that just on the basis of the quotations of the church fathers we could reproduce virtually the entirety of the NT multiple times over.

4. The average classical Greek author has fewer, probably much fewer, than twenty copies of his work still in existence. Using the high figure of twenty copies, the average classical author has a stack of manuscripts around four feet high. The NT manuscripts go over one mile high!

5. And the oldest NT manuscripts are much closer to the date of the originals than is the case for ancient Greek and Roman writers.

a. For the Greco-Roman historians and biographers, major writers of the ancient world, the oldest copies of their works are long after the original was written. Pliny the Elder – 700 years; Plutarch – 800 years; Josephus (Antiquities) – 800 years; Polybius – 1200 years; Pausanias (geography of Greece) – 1400 years; Herodotus – 1500 years (3 fragments of single pages 500-600 years); Xenophon – 1400 years. (See http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/manuscripts/greek_classics.htm#Herodotus)

b. We have as many as eighteen manuscripts of the NT from the second century and probably one from the first century. A papyrus fragment discovered in the 1930s, known as P⁵², dates no later than A.D. 150 and probably closer to A.D. 100 and contains Jn. 18:31-33 on one side and Jn. 18:37-38 on the back side. A fragment of Luke discovered in 2012 may be just as early, and a fragment of Mark discovered in 2012 is probably from the first century, but as far as I know, these recent discoveries have not yet been published.

E. A textual variant is any place in any of the manuscripts where there is any kind of variation, whether the omission, addition or substitution of words, a difference in the order of words, or a difference in the spelling of words.

1. So for any given verse of the NT, one consults all the manuscripts that contain that verse and determines if any one of them has any kind of variation. For the non-Greek manuscripts, called versions, one first has to determine if the translation reflects a difference in the underlying Greek. Every difference of any kind in any of the manuscripts counts as a variant.

2. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, Paul describes how he and Silas acted among the new converts. Some manuscripts say "We were gentle among you." Others say, "We were little children among you." The difference is one single letter in the Greek: *nēpioi* versus *ēpioi*. Each counts as a variant. In addition, one lone medieval scribe wrote *hippoi*, which means "We were horses among you." That too counts as a variant.

F. Given that we have so many manuscripts, it should not come as a surprise that we have a lot of variants. If we had only one manuscript of the NT there would be zero variants. The more copies one has the more potential there is for differences to appear because human copyists are fallible. In fact, there are approximately 400,000 variant readings throughout the entire NT.

G. That sounds impressive, but the fact is that over 99% of these variants make no difference in the meaning of the text.

1. The great majority of variants are spelling differences that have no effect on the meaning of the text. The most common of all textual variants involves the use of what is called a moveable *nu*. It's similar to the "n" added to "a" in English when

the next word begins with a vowel ("a book" or "an apple"). It has no effect on the meaning.

2. The next largest category of variants are those involving the use of synonyms and variants that do not affect the translation. The former includes substitutions like "Jesus" for "the Lord" and vice versa. The latter includes the common use of "the" with proper names, as in "the Mary" or "the Joseph" in Lk. 2:16, which does not get translated into English so its presence or absence in any given case does not affect the meaning. Also the order of words in a sentence does not change the meaning because Greek is an inflected language. In other words, in Greek "Jesus loves John" could be said by putting the words in any order because their function does not depend on their order. But each variation in order would count as a textual variation.

H. The smallest group of textual variants is those that are both meaningful and viable, meaning they have a good chance of being authentic. This is approximately 1/4 of 1% of all variants.

1. This is still hundreds of variants, but the important thing is that no essential Christian beliefs depend on any of these uncertain passages. Ehrman was asked in an interview appended to the paperback version of his *Misquoting Jesus*, "Why do you believe these core tenets of Christianity to be in jeopardy based on the scribal errors you discovered in the biblical manuscripts?" Ehrman answered, "Essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament."

2. An example is Rev. 13:18 in which the currently accepted reading says the number of the beast is 666. In 1844 an important manuscript was discovered that reads 616, and in 1998 the oldest manuscript of Rev. 13:18 was discovered which also reads 616. Though most scholars still think 666 is original, it may not be. But the number of the beast is not relevant to any central or fundamental Christian teaching.

I. So yes there are some places where it is difficult to decide whether the original text said "X" or "Y" or "Z," but even in those rare instances we can be sure it said one or the other, and none of the possibilities jeopardizes any essential Christian belief.