

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The Problem of Non-Theistic Evolution	6
Special Topic—The Concrete and the Abstract	20
Special Topic—The Dichotomy of Belief	25
Special Topic—Rearrangement (Poem by VL Vawter).....	37
Special Topic—Presuppositions and Blind Faith	42
SPECIFIC REPLIES TO COMMENTS IN YOUR EMAIL.....	46
Why You Could Believe in a Deistic God	46
It Is Circular Reasoning to Believe the Christian God Exists Because of the Bible.....	47
Suffering Proves the Non-Existence of God.....	49
How Do You Know the Bible Is the Word of God.....	52
Christian Are Enablers If They Do Not Stand in the Defense of Evolution.....	54
Jesus Was Not Born of a Virgin	58
Miracles Did Not Really Occurs.....	60
There Was No Sacrifice When Jesus Died on the Cross.....	61
The “Sacrifice” of Jesus Is Exaggerated.....	64
There Is No Corroboration for the Crucifixion	64
The Resurrection Has No Evidence	65
Fundamentalists Have Failed to Think the Resurrection Through.....	67
The 2 nd Coming of Christ Is Riddle with Confusion and Relies Upon <i>Revelation</i> , a Disputed Book in the Canon of Scripture	68
We Live in an Indeterminate Universe	70
Fundamentalist Refuse to Understand Evolution.....	71
Natural Selection Is Not a Random Process But a Mechanism.....	72
Omniscience and Omnipotence Have Been Redefined to Create an Argument	73
God Has a Plan for Everyone; Thus God Has Ordained Heaven or Hell.....	74
A Supernatural Entity Is Not Needed to Explain Natural Phenomena.....	76
How Does Any Christian Know Anything About God.....	78

How Can an Intelligent Person Believe that God Exists	79
Why Is God Even Needed If Nature Explains All Processes	80
God Was Only Needed to “Explain” Until Science Reached Maturity	80
Gaps in Knowledge Are So Trivial; So, Why God?	81
God Precludes the Search for Knowledge	82
Religion Preempts the Need for Science	83
Religion Precludes the Need for Critical Thinking Skills.....	83
Religion Reinforces Anti-Social Behavior	85

Introduction

First and foremost, I do not expect you to respond to this essay. I had no idea it would be this long. If you tell me later that you did not have time to read it, I will neither be surprised nor disappointed. I received benefit in writing it; so, I have no expectation for your reading this and responding to it. Also, I want you to know that I did not copy-and-paste into this essay. Everything was originally written in response to your email.

You will find a lot of footnotes and Special Topics in this essay. I did this purposely. I wanted to keep the main argument clean and unobstructed. So when I thought other info was needed for more details but could muddy the argument, I put that in a footnote. If the footnote became lengthy, I put that into a Special Topic.

In regard to Special Topics, there is one which you must read before continuing with the main argument of this essay. My position will not be understood whatsoever if it has not been read and understood. Of course, understanding does not require agreement. The Special Topic is [The Concrete and the Abstract](#). If, after reading this, you realize that the argument is flawed, then put your focus there. The framework of my entire argument rises and falls on this topic.

My first reply to you was up to 34 pages when I stopped. Having responded to all your comments (hopefully in a thoughtful and reasonable way) and having added new questions and reflections for you, I simply hit the brakes. There is a benefit in discussing particulars; that goes without question for me; however, it seemed to me that addressing the key difference between us would be more important. In a way it appeared that I had become more concerned about the hair loss from chemo than the real problem. So, I'll use the main part of this essay to discuss what I believe is the primary difference between us. I have categorized many of your comments from your previous email in sections after the Special Topics that may be accessed via the table of contents. I thought this would be an easier way to separate the main issue from subordinate ones. Also, if you do read this, you can easily find your way back to an argument. Simply Ctl-Click on an entry in the TOC to go to it.

I took about 30 mins reviewing statistics online that distinguished creationists from theistic evolutionists from non-theistic evolutionists. Though the numbers varied, it appeared to collectively

and respectively be 35%, 50%, 15%.¹ Furthermore, I tried to find stats for the number of physical scientists² who believed in God or did not believe. I found it to be 5% or less.³ I did this for I wanted to get a feel for the division of beliefs. All surveys I checked consistently illustrated that theistic evolutionists outnumber creationists.

I do not have a fixed position on creationism or theistic evolution though I do lean towards theistic evolution; yet, I am not committed to either. From the comments you have made, I think you find theistic evolution of such a compromise⁴ as to be meaningless. Though you and Dawkins would be willing to leave the explanatory world open to a deistic god, this god, at least theoretically, would not be personal and would not have mind.⁵ This god is more of a force, an emergent energy of some sort. I have tried and tried to think of a compelling reason why an atheist and a true advocate of Natural

¹ The problem of course for polls differing by as much as 10% is the wording of the question. One professional polling on the issue worded the question, "Do you believe Darwin's theory of the origin of life is true?" I would have answered No to that because Darwin did not discuss the process by which life appeared. His concern was for what happened after life started. Technical the origin of life is a physics question, not a biological one. Some poll questions had "more probable" instead of "is" for propositional statements. Since the polls varied so greatly due to the wording, I tried to combine four or five polls to come up with my averages.

² Though it appears that the more education correlates with a higher percentage of atheism, that group per se is skewed. There are far more Ph.D.'s in humanities, philosophy, literature, business, education who believe there is a God rather than Ph.D.'s in the physical sciences. So, if the population for the polls were physical scientists, then the percentage of unbelievers will be much higher than a population of scientists or a population of Ph.D.'s.

³ Of course, if a question for the physical scientists merely states, "Do you believe in a God," then any definition of God will do, and a larger number with "Yes" is inevitable. I believe a larger number would have answered "No" if the question read, "Do you believe there is a personal God who existed before matter/energy and who created matter/energy out of nothing?" Without doubt Christians have gleefully (but incorrectly) claimed Einstein, Hawking, and others as one of theirs because they have used the word God. I tend to think 5% is very generous and high for the number of physical scientists who believe there is a God.

⁴ I based this on your repeated insistence (as well as many others) that natural phenomenon will have a natural cause, a natural explanation. Obviously that belief necessarily removes God from the equation; so, theistic evolution, in that sense, becomes meaningless because the search for a natural cause has stopped. Until every possible natural cause in the universe has been exhausted can God be allowed; however, that will never happen.

⁵ I do not understand the claim that a creator god not be personal. The reason is because I cannot conceive how a god could create but not have a mind since "create" is a mind word. How is it possible for an entity to have mind but not be a personal entity? It is precisely the mind that creates personality or enables us to recognize and discuss personality. A god, deistic or otherwise, would certainly have to have a mind; the very word god implies an independent being with mind. It seems that your insistence that god not be personal is difficult to understand. If this god did start creation (say by creating matter/energy with the theory of everything inherently build in) and then move on, a horrible problem has been created. A deist god posits that mind existed before matter. Once the allowance that something could be created out of nothing by a mind, then there is no way to ignore religion as a valid and substantive truth, i.e., God is real knowledge. Unless a deistic god is somehow matter/energy and not mind can it be allowed. If that is so, then god seems an odd nominalization. However, granting such an odd entity, then all that is being said is that matter has always existed. A deistic god is a more elaborate tautology (seemingly an Occam violation), or it is really a personality and a mind? If mind exists before matter/energy, then there is a real problem for advocates of the eternity of matter. If this deistic god existed prior to matter/energy and is NOT matter/energy, then what in understandable language and conception could it possibly be if it is not mind?

Selection and the laws of physics would need or even care if there were a deistic god. In this regard Dawkins is more consistent, for he recognizes that the imprecise use of the word “god” by scientists has created confusion. A deist god certainly seems to be an Occam violation.

The primary problem that I see between us is theistic evolution versus atheistic evolution. Atheistic evolution appears to have one insurmountable problem that I cannot reconcile. I will discuss this issue in the main part of this essay which follows.

The Problem of Non-Theistic Evolution

I'd like to move the discussion to the problem of evolution without God. Of course, a response from you could well be, "What problem? God simply isn't needed. Everything can be explained by natural processes. What we don't know we eventually will. We may not know fully with 100% certainty the physical processes for everything, but we will know enough that all that will be left for God to do will be so miniscule or trivial that his so-called omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence would be a bit of overkill. Most certainly he would be over-qualified for the job. There really is no need to solve the problem of one pesky mosquito with an atom bomb."⁶

Nevertheless, with the gaps of unexplained phenomena still shrinking and shrinking, there is one problem that troubles me in which God most certainly seems necessary as an explanation. Before I discuss it I have two issues as a sort of prolegomenon before I lift my skirt, revealing my difficulties with atheistic evolution.

The first pre-topic is a phenomenon of language. A particular phenomenon was brought to my attention about 40 years ago. Since that time I have made a point of listening for it. It does occur regularly; I cannot conceive of a conversation where it does not. Our emails have been filled with it. So, what is this phenomenon?

It is the manner in which we discuss the concrete and the abstract.⁷ This issue is so important, but rarely identified. You may disagree with the distinction between the two, and I trust you will provide your reasons and illustrations as to why. So much of what I will discuss and the reasons for it will depend upon this distinction. My position will completely collapse if this distinction is false.

The second pre-topic is why do I believe certain passages/doctrines/incidents of the Bible that are statistically improbable but which I do not believe in books or testimony elsewhere?⁸ The above two issues are foundational for what I say from this point.

⁶ This is not a caricature of the *solus materia* position. If I were a materialist only, I would argue this way.

⁷ There is a framework for these definitions that take more than a couple of sentences. So, please see my [Special Topic—The Concrete and the Abstract](#), which is an appendix in this essay.

⁸ Again, I invite the reader to go to the separate section of this essay, [Special Topic—The Dichotomy of Belief](#).

Now I return to the problem that I have with atheistic evolution. Just what is the problem, and where does it lie? It is the problem of the mind.

There are synonyms for mind: consciousness (not merely conscious), self-consciousness, soul, spirit. Any of them work fine for me since their commonality is immaterial entities in which properties⁹ of the mind are ascribed. Mind with its immense scope is what separate human from non-human, particularly non-human animals. Though we may disagree with the properties and scope of the mind, we are in agreement, I think, that the spectacular nature and range of the mind give it a sense of awe and wonder.

A common remark by assertive atheists is that the so-called wonders of the Bible cannot touch the wonders of science. In Dawkins' *Unweaving the Rainbow* he laments the failure of art to recognize the awe and wonder that science provides. Dawkins explains that the arts do attempt to lead readers to experience the awe and wonder of the natural world, but at the neglect of science itself which makes it possible. Though Dawkins gives little doubt as to his love and appreciation of art, particularly poetry, he is disappointed at this failure of art. I believe the problem is not a failure of art, but a misunderstanding of the nature of awe and wonder.

Science is rightly to be praised, but it tells me what and not why¹⁰. Size and power and complexity do bring wonder and awe ... for a bit. I've been to Niagara and have been overwhelmed by its majesty. Then I went to Zimbabwe and saw Victoria Falls. When I subsequently returned to Niagara, the wonder was gone; it seemed little more than a large water facet. The first time I saw the *Pillars of Creation* or *The Eye of God* as photographed by Hubble, my senses were numbed. They aren't anymore. When I look at the pixs now I think a lot of what-questions: how large are they, what are they made of, how powerful are they. The awe is simply gone or terribly diminished.

⁹ Since mind is an abstract, the properties of the mind will vary with whatever definition an individual favors. I would certainly include within the properties thinking, reasoning, intellect, will, and imagination. What is common with all of these properties is that a person will say, "I think ... I reason ... **My** intellect, etc." The "person" inside is doing these things, deciding them, owning them, etc. Even if dualism is false and the brain is producing these impressions, then the impressions have a common referencing. (I am aware that dualism is not limited to two distinct and independent entities, the brain and the mind. However, my contention is that "dualistic language" does not imply dualistic entities. There are strict materialists and physicalists who will use "dualism," but they believe the mind is subordinate to the brain and the method of connection between them is unknown. Once one entity is subordinate to another, for whatever reason, then "independent" disappears. When I say "dualism," I am using it in the Descartes sense of a distinct and independent body and mind, though a relationship exists between them.)

¹⁰ See footnote 15 for the distinction between what and why.

There is a difference of the awe of nature (particulars) and the awe of the transcendental (the universal, the infinite). If Dawkins recognizes this difference, he never mentioned it. Complexity and size create a sense of awe because the mind cannot grasp them¹¹; there is nothing to match it up with in the memory or experience. But it doesn't last. Why? Bottom line, it's just a great big thing or something with a lot of parts and working relationships. A child is overwhelmed by a big dog, then a bigger car, then a bigger plane, and on and on. Familiarity takes that away.¹² Whether the child or adult recognizes it, the size and complexity are merely relative. The awe for something bigger and more complex will replace a previous awe.

The transcendent is precisely NOT that; it is something that transcends understanding and that will always be a mystery. Poets seek words and phrases and metaphors that alert our sense of the transcendental, something that we cannot define, something that will not come to an end. The very essence of abstract art is precisely this. Abstract artists realized that in their search to awaken the awe of a universal, particulars were worthless. Form, proportion, and imposed meaning were tossed aside.

¹¹ The why is illusive of science. A what can be beyond a computer's scope to figure out with the mind boggling complexity of structure and processes within one object and the interplay of processes between it and other processes, such as the weather. In other words, the complexity of science is more moving parts, more stuff. Edgar Allan Poe recognized that the whats of science were "dull realities." Poe understood that the whats of science were real, but a lot of whats will not keep the imagination and emotions in a transcendental awe. This is what he meant in his *Sonnet to Science*—

Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car?
And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
To seek a shelter in some happier star?
Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?

¹² The familiarity is the familiarity of exposure, not comprehension. The transcendental nature of π staggered my imagination when I first learned this. There is no way I can ever understand how a theoretically infinitely large number can have no repeating patterns. But having been exposed to it so often, it has been a long time since my imagination has wrestled with π 's size. In sharp contrast to that, the mystery of a sunset quite often will provoke my imagination and sense of wonder. Why one and not the other? That question itself is the heart of mystery. It is not predictable, nor can it be computerized. I've seen thousands of calendars with sunrises and sunsets; I've yet to see one that has mathematical formulas or explanations to head each month. (I'm sure there are such purchased within the academic community as a gag gift.)

The artists wanted to see beyond the “things” to reality itself. To them, anyone can reproduce an object on canvas. Frankly, why paint like William Harnett when a photograph could do just as well?¹³

Dawkins recognizes the mind’s pleasure in encountering awe. But the awe of the complexity of things will diminish. The body has to deal with the concrete, but the mind seeks the abstract¹⁴. Humans are not merely interested in the physical act of mating, but also love. They want to stay alive, but they also want to know the meaning of life. They see social order and regulation of behavior, but they want justice. The interesting quality of any abstract is that we are never quite sure if we really know what it is and if we’re doing it. The search for an abstract (the non-concrete) is infinite.¹⁵

I tend to agree with the mindset of science that the gap of understand will close, but the gap that is closing is the gap of particular details. Let’s assume science finally triumphs, and all what-questions are finally answered. Now what? The mind will not be satisfied. Meaning is not in particulars, regardless how complex they are. All the answered what-questions will not answer for me, “Why should I love my neighbor as myself?” A million “is’s” will not give me one “should” or one “ought” or one “why.”¹⁶

In your discussion of morality, you stated that,

So, although there is much variation in what a behavior can be and still present a good face to society, the traits that generally make an individual better suited to fit in will be passed on. That doesn’t precisely determine behavior, but it sets a broad standard for the type of behavior that is acceptable.

¹³ Personally, I love Harnett’s work. The trick is not to simply paint what one sees, but can one paint familiar objects and awake a sense of awe, a sense, not of complexity and size, but of mystery.

¹⁴ Science would disappear without the hunger to know why, to know meaning. Those are abstract. That is, abstracts are the catalyst to search into the depths of the whats.

¹⁵ It is imperative that I repeat that abstract has nothing to do with real or unreal. I have carefully defined the abstract, that which is perceived only within the mind, as the opposite of concrete, which is perceived by the senses or tools that magnify our senses.

¹⁶ There are two different types of why-questions. One does fit within the realm of science; it is the “why” of interconnectibility, of relationship between objects and processes, in other words, the why of whats: “Why do the ocean tides change with the moon ... Why are my eyes brown ... Why does the tiger eat people?” The whys of the concrete certainly fall under science. That is not the why that is being discussed in this paper. The mystery is the why of abstracts: “Why is the truth important ... Why isn’t there life after death ... Why am I even here?” Again, science is concerned with the whys of the concrete, but the poet is concerned with the whys of the abstract (though the poet might, instead of abstract, prefer mystery, transcendental, universals, indefinable, God, etc).

You use the illustration of the traits that are passed on (presumably by genes¹⁷) so an individual entity can fit in. My question is why doesn't it determine behavior? You have forgotten more about biology than I will ever know; so please correct me. But I am under the impression that the social order of animals is highly defined and regulated. The behavior of an animal societal group seems to be as instinctive as individual animals are instinctive. If you wish, since I am an amateur in science, toss out instinctive and used "behaviorally predictive."¹⁸ Once I've seen one honey bee colony, then I've seen them all. The odds of my finding another one in which four queen bees managed one hive, one standing by to create another queen when needed, one to produce drones, one to create workers, and one to standby in case a queen were suddenly killed for some reason are surely way beyond the statistical 6σ . It's more farfetched that Boeing's 9σ requirements.¹⁹

¹⁷ Perhaps Dawkins' Theory of Memes is something that you subscribe to. Without doubt Susan Blackmore is an enthusiastic evangelist of memes. I've watched interviews with Blackmore, and the listener almost wants to cheer while she goes on and on with the many exciting and insightful illustrations. Of course, what is terribly ironic, to the point of actual humor, is that memes is an abstract, and Blackmore has merely personified her illustrations as if some league of invisible "little critters" were truly busy hurrying about causing the cultural changes as DNA causes physical changes. Memes is an explosion of mind-attributes given to anything that might have any explanation beyond a physical, Darwinian one. Dawkins says it best in *The God Delusion*, "My original purpose in advocating memes, indeed, was to counter the impression that the gene was the only Darwinian game in town." That is the power of an abstract. It can only exist by definition; so, define whatever is wished, add a dash of mind, and, lo and behold, insight into life occurs. Memes are no more special than any other abstract in existence: 1) they are defined and 2) illustrations are listed to "prove" it. In other words, memes is an assertion; all abstracts are an assertion; and the "proofs" typically rise and fall on one's presuppositions ... since the proofs are always arbitrary and not necessary. Dawkins is horrified that theists personify God, but he has no problem personifying memes. (I won't be hard on his doing that, for it is really hard to use non-personified language in reference to abstracts. It merely seems that turnabout is fair play. If memes can be personified, why can't God?)

¹⁸ Instinct appears to be a hardwiring of behavior in the brain that produces the same results. Presumably as the brain enlarged, at some point, the explosion of axonic permutations "created" the mind thus reducing the rigidity of instinct. I'm out of my area of experience here; a biologist is better suited to give the theories as to what created the mind, assuming, of course, that the mind is created only by natural causes. If Natural Selection improves species, then why would the predictability and survivability of a social species be markedly decreased by this phenomenon of morality? [Improvement is discussed in footnote 20.]

¹⁹ Impossible can never be used regardless of the sigma range. Science only allows probability because the only way to say 100% is to have studied all honey bee colonies, not only now and in the future, but also in the past. How can one say for sure that multiple queens have not existed? That is, instead of the queens killing other queens until only one existed, four of them "decided" to work things out and create a more efficient colony. Perhaps that hive or hives existed in eons past and simply has passed out of data existence. But 100% is not needed in science. Gould stated it so well, "In science, fact can only mean confirmed to such a degree that it would be perverse to withhold provisional assent. I suppose that apples might start to rise tomorrow, but the possibility does not merit equal time in physics classrooms."

If one feature seems certain, it is the societal behavior of animals. If that is so, why hasn't this "morality trait" been **more** perfected²⁰ as it has gone up the evolutionary chain? If I look at a drone honey bee, a societal animal, its future can be predicted. Why can't morality be predicted?

The problem is the mind. Physically we have so much in common with animals; we have nothing in common with animals in regard to the mind.^{21 22} Let's assume that a billion new fossils will be found that will link precisely from chimps to humans, traceable back to however many millions of years are needed. That's fine. We'll assume that will happen. We still return to the problem of the mind. Even though the human and proto-human (Neanderthal and whatever else) had large brains, does that create mind?

This is precisely where the problem of the mind occurs for me. Either it is an extension or function of the brain, or mind is distinct from the brain. If the mind is fully explainable by evolution, then there appears to be insurmountable difficulties. From this point until stated otherwise, all my comments will be referencing the mind as if it were an extension/function of the brain.

The significant of being a human collapses. When a dog attacks a child and kills him, no one accuses the dog of murder or manslaughter. There are no lawyers rushing out to protect the rights of

²⁰ The question of improvement may simply be absurd. The results of evolution simply are the results. Only a mind can produce "improvements." Evolution and Natural Selection, regardless of the enthusiasm of its adherents, do not have minds. Evolution and Natural Selection fall within the physical laws of the universe. Dawkins insightfully illustrates the total absence of any mind: "The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference." This would, of course, include Evolution and Natural Selection, which are likewise amoral and blindly and pitilessly indifferent.

²¹ Language teaching and acquisition by certain primates has been a key element to illustrate the gradualism of the brain, obviously extending to the mind. Language has always been a subject of interest to me; yet, I have not read nor watched a documentary on animal language that remotely established a parallel between animal language and human language. The distinction between percepts and concepts are so qualitatively distinct that the failure to distinguish these is baffling to me. I recall a scene from a documentary of a researcher with an ape. The researcher was explaining the phenomenal success of an ape even learning what the concept of zero was! Needless to say, my immediate reaction was that she did not have the slightest idea herself what the concept of zero was. How did she "prove" the ape had a concept of zero? A large keypad was in the ape's cage. Pieces of food were put within sight of the ape. If the ape pushed the right button that represented the number of food items, it was given the food. When no food was present and the researcher asked, "How many are there," the ape pushed the 0 button ... and then received food! Ahhh, because it repeats it understands the concept of the value of zero? A 3 year old says, "One, two, three." Yes, it understands the concept of numbers (mathematics)? If the parent wishes to believe such with the child or the researcher with the ape, then so be it. Did this researcher really believe that positive reinforcement (food or praise) had nothing to do with behavior repetition? And she's the scientist???

²² If animals have mind (intellect, conceptual as well as perceptual thinking, abstract as well as concrete thinking, connotative as well as denotative thinking, moral thinking), there is no evidence for it. Every animal I have ever seen, read about, or watched in a documentary seem quite locked into its particulars of life as much as its ancestors have been over the centuries. Only humans appear to be "mentally discontent," i.e., the mind is always seeking.

the dog. In no way is the dog considered to have done anything morally wrong. In harsh contrast, if a child without provocation kills all the dogs in the neighborhood with a knife and cooks every cat alive he can find in the microwave, even though legal actions may not occur, most would consider the child as having done wrong, many would say morally wrong.²³

If a dog mates with every female in the neighborhood, creating a terrible parcel of puppies, no one is going to demand that the dog provide puppy support. The neighbors may complain about the four-legged Lothario, but they will not demand supplemental pet-food subsidies from the male's owner. (They may kill the mutt, but the owner is probably safe.) Again, in contrast, "dead-beat dads" receive little sympathy from the courts.

The mind is concerned about right and wrong, or, if you please, abstracts. It is one thing for the brain in humans to develop to create greater physical skills for hunting, farming, fishing, etc, but what is the advantage of abstracts ... especially when rarely if ever do 100% agree to what any particular abstract means or how it is applied.

Nature is comprised of what is concrete. Only mind can conceive abstracts ... and to what purpose? If physical necessity were the issue only, all the brain was needed for was how to maintain enough control of particulars to maximize the lifespan. Art is not needed to live longer. Staring or thinking about art will not fill a single physical need. Musing about the meaning of life does not fill an empty stomach or create shelter.

From an evolutionary perspective the only reason I can see for the mind delving into abstracts is for Natural Selection to create the illusion²⁴ that these abstracts are important which then affects behavior for survival. In the same way that chimps will attack neighboring troops and cannibalize their young, so humans will become convinced that a different group of people is a threat and must be put into slavery, sent to prison camps, slaughtered, or whatever is needed to control the perceived threat, even if the threat is unclear.

I am well aware of the moral repugnance of what I just wrote, but moral repugnance is an abstract. Even you admitted that I have my morality and you have yours. There is no absolute morality; so, what is done? Do we do a headcount? Or do as the animal world: let the strongest of a species

²³ Such behavior toward animals (is it safe to say "cruelty") is a trait found in many serial killers. The trait is prominent in them. In a way killing animals is practicing killing without remorse. Such behavior certainly seems to be properly alarming for others.

²⁴ I cannot discuss Evolution or Natural Selection without personifying. It's nigh impossible. Obviously, only a mind can create.

within a species-local dominate? If that is so, since morals are relative, then the Nazis were right while they were in power; the Communists were right when they were in power, etc. Moreover, the Inquisition was right. Radical Muslims are right. Atheists are right. The word right is not used in a moral sense of “ought or should,” since that will lead to immediate contradiction. Morals is being used in the sense that a behavior is **the correct behavior situationally** for specie survival, much like the right answer to a math problem is not an “ought” or moral issue. Relative morals are right because they give a rational justification that motivates the species for doing what is needed to survive longer.

When you gave your guideline for morality it was 1) be of age, 2) the parties be consensual, and 3) do not hurt others. Yet, if a species feels threatened, then doesn't it have the “right”²⁵ to fight back? If the morality of the Muslims is framed within religion (an abstract just like morality), then what difference does it make? It's their morality, and they have excellent reason to feel threatened. Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens have spoken out strongly against militant Islam²⁶. In other words it's ok for Muslims to be contained^{27 28}. Nature is producing the morality, not the individuals. Whatever

²⁵ Obviously the term right here is not a legal right; it is a survival right. That is, the correct behavior, the right behavior is to survive. Natural Selection gives the “right” (the genes, the ability, the adaptability) to some animals to disguise themselves from certain predators. In the same way all science is ultimate reducible to laws of physics (assuming natural processes are foundational), so all the “tips and tricks” of Natural Selection for every species is reducible to survival. I have read many personal accounts of the Jewish Shoah. The endurance of the suffering expressed again and again was, “We must survive.” The Nazis wanted to work the Jews and Slavs to death or simply kill them because these weaker races would increase by breeding and weaken the Aryan race. If all is from natural processes and nothing is “beyond” natural processes, then all morality is reducible to survival and the elimination or containment of perceived threats to survival.

²⁶ The arguments used against radical Islam are survival arguments. “If the Western powers do nothing against radical Islam, then we will not survive.” There is no inherent right or wrong; there is survival and the threat to survival. If there is an absolute in Evolution's development of the mind's conception of morals, it is the absolute of survival. All the hoopla about the dignity of the person or the value of humanity is merely a ruse by Evolution to motivate a relatively weak species to survive, no more, no less.

²⁷ The Islamic reaction to the poison of the Western mindset is a survival issue. If Muslims idly stand by and do nothing, the material abundance of the West will win over Muslim followers. In order for Islam to survive then it must do what is necessary to survive. The only argument against Islam is not some humanistic argument of equal rights and the brotherhood of man; it is survival. Again, the only absolute in the morals of Natural Selection is survival. All else is illusion of ends that are no more than means used by Natural Selection to create the will and determination to survive at all costs. The irony, of course, is that ultimately matter/energy does survive. Evolution and Natural Selection create the illusion that a particular group of similar matter/energies entities must “survive.” Yet, the atoms that make up any particular human do survive either as atoms or energy. All that is really being fussed over concerning survival is the maintaining of certain arrangements of matter and energy.

²⁸ Of all of Dawkins arguments against religion, the “misfiring byproduct” of genes being the cause of religion is the most absurd argument. Even Dawkins will admit that the majority of the world is and has been religion and theistic of some sort. I admit I'm an outsider to biology; yet, if the majority of genetic behavior has brought about religious consciousness, then how can the minority be considered normal? Isn't the statistical bell curve “normal” and the rest of the data “statistical deviations”? Then there is the problem of memes, “the other Darwinian game.” If the theory of memes is correct, then it has clearly produced religion. From Natural Selection, genes and memes have created religion, not man's mind. Man's mind only reacts to the brain's impulses of religion in order

produces the abstract of morality in their minds is not from them; it is from evolution, and it is rooted in survival.

If survival is the key to understanding what Evolution is doing and why Natural Selection selects this or weeds out that, then the “reasons” for Muslims to kill and protect themselves seem no different than the urge for chimps to cannibalize the neighboring troops. It is merely survival. Militant Muslims are doing no more than responding to the morality that has been revealed in their minds by natural processes.

Lastly, if it truly is proved that the mind is an extension/function of the brain (natural processes), then abstracts have no meaning or purpose in and of themselves. They are merely ideas and images triggered by the brain to bring about some reaction or response needed for survival. All abstracts merely become a means, a tool for survival. The abstracts of love, truth, honor, courage, virtue, sacrifice, good are actually meaningless. They are triggered as needed to cause human to react, much like worms on a hook trigger fish to bite or the warmth of the spring sun triggers trees to sprout buds. It is cause-and-effect.²⁹

From this point I return to my belief that mind is an entity separate and distinct from the body.

Try as I may, I cannot conceive of “I” not existing. Critics will say, “That’s easy. Where were you in the days of Caesar or Napoleon?” That is an odd criticism. Even evolutionists admit there is a beginning to the mind; it is the end of it that is the question. I’m at a loss as to how this helps anything or is some sort of fatal criticism.

If the mind is not from matter/energy, then it is from another mind. Like begets like. What can be more foundational than that?³⁰ Regardless of all the details, the origins of the universe come down

to survive. From a statistical perspective, Natural Selection has deemed religion necessary. Also, from an evolutionary perspective, perhaps religion has had its contribution to survival, and the atheistic increase in minds is actually an evolutionary change occurring right before our eyes. In the world to come, perhaps an atheistic mind will be needed to survive. The point is this: if religion is genetically or memetically produced, it makes no sense “to get angry” about it. It is a natural process created by blind, pitiless matter/energy. Religion was evolutionally necessary and is normal (statistically). From an evolutionary perspective it makes no more sense for theists to rail at atheists or vice-versa anymore than it would have made sense for a fish with normal fins to fuss at an intermediary with “finny fingers.” If evolution is true, the process of change will occur very slowly and gradually over centuries and centuries; thus more time is needed for atheism to supplant theism, assuming the species will survive better as atheists.

²⁹ If abstracts truly are illusions produced by Evolution for survival, then the phrase, “Enjoy art for art’s sake” really is meaningless.

³⁰ The infinite regression argument of where did the God come from who originally created matter has never been convincing to me. Even evolutionists believe something has always existed as an axiom. They simply believe that

to one of two issues: 1) either matter/energy has always existed, or 2) Mind has always existed. It is far easier for me to believe that mind has always existed. The immediate rejoinder is, "How do you know that? What is the proof?" Being an abstract, just as the theory of any origin of the universe is, I know it for the same reason that atheists know there has always been matter/energy ... I believe it as they believe theirs. I am using the identical methodology of scientists who believe in the eternity of matter ... blind faith.

Oh yes, evidence is brought forth. But the evidence is interpreted, not absolute, not objective, not universally accepted. Any "proof" will use the coherence theory of truth. Atheists believe there has always been matter/energy for the same reason that theists believe that mind (God) has always existed ... it just makes sense with everything else.

So, I return to what I wrote a few paragraphs back: I cannot conceive of "I" not existing. Also, I cannot conceive of "I" as part of the body. Obviously "I" is contained within the body, but it is not the body. I cannot disbelieve that if you sever my arm, you have severed my mind. Cut off all my limbs, and "I" is fully intact. Even should I incur Alzheimer's (very rife) in my family, "I" is still there.

I have always found it interesting that if given a choice, people will choose anything before losing their mind. Lose my sight, not my mind. Lost my arms or legs, but not my mind. I have visited a lot of Alzheimer's patients (as a ministry for others and later with my mother). The comments that I heard from others I also found myself saying, "Where is she? The body is there, but Mom isn't."³¹

Once a mind understands a fact; it is ready to move on. Once I learned the presidents of the US, I have never gone back musing over it, reflecting on it, or being intrigued by it. But abstracts ... a whole new arena. What truth is, can be defined with a large consensus behind it; yet, even though I'm convinced what the philosophical term truth is as a definition, am I sure, really sure if this or that is really true? Is the mind true or an illusion? Does it really make a difference if I stay true to my wife?

it has been matter/energy. I believe, along with billions of others, that it was God from the beginning. When the question is asked, "Ok, if God created matter, what created him?" In the same manner that matter has always existed, so mind has always existed. The chief criticism directed against God having always existing has been, "How can complexity exist before simplicity?" What simplicity existed to start with? How is it that matter/energy has always existed and contains within it the theory of everything? What is so simple about a singularity or a single hydrogen atom? Why is there no mental stumbling that the theory of everything had to be contained within matter/energy from the very beginning, but the idea of mind existing from the beginning and creating the theory of everything is horribly impossible and absurd? Something has always existed. The question is whether it is matter/energy that has created mind or whether it is Mind that has created matter/energy.

³¹ What I have heard on many occasions is, "I'd rather be dead than lose my mind."

Does it really matter if I'm good to others to simply help them or whether I use them and manipulate them to advance my standard of living?

Though the questions of the last paragraph may not continually be before a mind, they will be asked periodically. Certainty seems so close, but always a touch out of reach. If it is true what is said about science and Evolution, all questions of fact should eventually be answered. The gap of the unexplainable will shrink as a puddle of water before the sun. If that day happens, then I predict the follow: to satisfy the hunger of the mind, scientists will ask themselves, "Hmm, I wonder if this is really right. It seems to be, but I wonder." The mind, whether created by God or evolved by Evolution, is inherently discontent with the concrete.

It can be posited that this insatiable hunger to know is a survival instinct created by Natural Selection. Because of it we will learn new means of surviving. The only problem with that is that it is only a reflex, a response to some stimulus. What we think of as the awe and wonder of the mind is an illusion. Instinct appears to be no more than unexplainable, programmed behavior. There is no awe or wonder. The behavior is inevitable and determined. "I" has no more to do with my thinking than "I" does with my heartbeat and the millions of other events and processes occurring within my body.

Atheists and theists have praised the mind (or the spirit of man). This is what makes humans to be humans as opposed to brute animals. It is the mind that gives humans, apparently, limitless potential and possibilities. I truly believe that. When a child dies, there is sadness because of what that child could have experienced and shared and become.

Yet, if mind is only a result of natural processes, then nothing more is lost when a child dies than a leaf falling off a tree or an ant being stepped upon. There is nothing any more special about one collection of matter/energy (the rings of Saturn) than another collection of matter/energy (a new born infant). Only a mind sees significance, but the mind is no more than an extension of mind/energy to allow survival of a particular collection of matter/energy called a species.

Either there is a real "I" who says, "That child is special" or there is an illusion that an "I" is saying it for the sake of survival. "I" was prompted or led or determined to say it because survival is the goal, not meaning. Meaning is only a tool and no more.

The problem then reduces itself to what is so important about survival. Even if the universe ends in fire or ice, there is still matter/energy. What is "surviving"? What is so special about "life"? From a scientific perspective, everything is reducible to physics, everything. How is life greater than its

source? Though we speak of something being greater than the sum of its parts, that is merely the mind. Now we're right back where we started. Everything is reducible to natural processes for ... what reason? Reason is abstract and merely exists in the mind. We keep ending up in a blind alley.

If mind is an illusion and no more than an extension of natural processes, like a body with a hand is more useful than a body without a hand, then all that is really occurring in the universe is a rearrangement of atoms.³² Candidly, like a thumb is to the hand which increases functionality and survival, so is the mind to the body.

Try as I can, I am unable to reduce the mind to such a miserable position. The moment I do that then I have lost more than my mind, for I have lost my humanity. If atheistic evolution is true, then there is no more reason to be concerned about a child's head being smashed with a rock than Jupiter being smashed with an asteroid.³³ In the beginning was matter/energy, at the end will be matter/energy, and in between is matter/energy.

I do not disbelieve in atheistic evolution because of Genesis 1-2. I disbelieve in it because I am unable to relegate the mind to the source and scope that atheistic evolution inevitably leads and demands. The question that is unanswerable is this: if the mind is an extension of the brain and its processes, then how is it any less under the determination of the laws of physics and, if solved, under the determination of the theory of everything?

The best that Hawking could do was to answer it this way:

However, provided the universe has evolved in a regular way, we might expect that the reasoning abilities that natural selection has given us would be valid also in our search for a complete unified theory, and so would not lead us to the wrong conclusions.

³² Several years ago I wrote a poem, [Rearrangement](#). I showed it to about four people. Only one understood it without explanation. After explanation the typical response was, "How depressing."

³³ The only issue that is pressing for a child's skull being smashed is survival. Survival qua survival is an odd concept. Survival of what? Life? There is biological confusion about what the definition of life is. Certainly it appears that the consensus of how life is defined is basically agreed upon, but there are "outliers" that are confusing to non-biologists like myself. I have read disagreements on whether viruses are alive. Overwhelmingly the consensus appears to be that they are not. The reason for the disagreement, even to a minor degree, is "life" is an abstract; so, it has to be defined, and the evidences that are listed to prove life are subjective ... that is, in the mind's interpretation. Even if the definition of life had zero distracters, there is another problem. Why does Evolution or Natural Selection "care" if one group of a collection of atoms were maintained. If it is true that biology (as well as all physical sciences) is reducible to the laws of physics, then what is being maintained is not "life," but matter/energy. All that occurs, even with Evolution, is rearrangement. Worst case scenario for life, the ultimate end of the universe in fire or ice, the conservation of matter has been maintained. Perhaps the atoms are creeping along due to absolute zero, but they are still atoms. "Life" is only a difference arrangement of atoms. Evolution and survival add nothing beyond the conservation of matter. Only the mind makes life "important and significant."

The reply is reasonable, but notice three words/phrases: “provided,” “might expect,” “would not lead.” This is Hawking’s more sophisticated way of saying, “I believe it’s true, but I have no proof, only if’s.”³⁴ Outside of merely believing it, what possible reasons could possibly be given that our reasoning ability is real? Nobody can use reason to prove reason.³⁵

In summary and conclusion, why is it I do not believe that atheistic evolution is true?

	Atheistic Evolution	Other
Personhood	Illusory Enables and enhances physical survival	All of these are extensions of the mind which exists apart from physical origin and physical processes.
Meaning		
Significance		
Morality		
Art		

Mind is an abstract and cannot be observed. The “proof” that a mind exist apart from physical processes has been the impossibility conceiving that the mind does not exist and the relegation of the items in the left-hand column to illusion.

The insistence that mind is an extension of the brain and its processes is understandable if the “significance” of the left-hand column is reduced merely to thoughts that the brain produces in order to enhance survival. Any “importance” beyond that is merely further illusion to reinforce the need to follow the ideas produced by the brain.

My explanation for these positions is throughout the pages of this essay. Ironically, either “I” has truly produced this essay for the purpose of understanding, growth, meaning, et al ... or atheistic Evolution has enabled the production of the behavior that produced this paper for the purpose of survival because in some way our discussing it aids in our respective survival.

I am unable to accept the inevitable conclusion of atheistic evolution that the mind is a controlled illusion produced by Natural Selection for the purpose of survival only. I am unable to adopt

³⁴ Theists are strongly criticized, to the point of ridicule, for “blind faith.” Of course, what is omitted is the “blind faith” that Hawking just stated. Of course he gave reasons, but so do the theists. His reason was one if, one maybe, and one subjunctive (would). If someone wishes to call those “facts,” then of course they may do so. Why? Fact is an abstract that must be defined. Simply define fact as one pleases and anything will fit. The word fact may be fussed about, but there is no way that Hawking’s reply is objective; his reasons are 100% abstract. They can never be perceived by the senses, only conceived in the mind.

³⁵ See Special Topic—Presupposition and Blind Faith.

the inevitable conclusion of atheistic evolution that truth, good, and beauty are merely tools for survival. I am unable to accept that "I" is an illusion that Natural Selection has created merely for survival.

For significance and meaning to be genuine and not an illusion or merely a means, then the properties of the mind and the mind itself have to be distinct and real apart from natural processes. Because I can only conceive a mind producing a mind, I believe atheistic evolution is flawed. The tools of Evolution I can accept is a Mind existing prior to matter/energy and this Mind at some point infusing soul into man, i.e., theistic evolution.

Special Topic—The Concrete and the Abstract

The concrete is that which is perceived by the senses or by instruments that magnify our senses. The concrete may be an object (a pan of water) and/or a process (a pan of water that is boiling). The abstract is that which cannot be perceived by the senses or instruments. An abstract may sound like a concrete object (say, a unicorn), but, until perceived by the senses it will be treated as discussed below.

The concrete may readily be defined and described. Additionally, when objects are brought before a subject, the subject can typically categorize them immediately, assuming the object is not unknown. A very, very young child can with little repetition distinguish a toy puppy from a toy kitty. Moreover, the child can very quickly distinguish all live cats from live dogs. Even if a 3 year old is asked to describe a kitty, he will give some sort of consistent description.

Moving from the child to an adult then the descriptions can become very precise because there are agreed upon objective standards for the description and properties of an object. For instance, think of a pair of pants; both of us will have similar ideas in mind. The pants don't have to be a particular color, just have the property of a color. If the two of us look at the pants of a passerby, I daresay that most of the time we will have nearly identical descriptions of it.

If we differ on the description we have means that are universally agreed upon to determine our differences. If I say the color was a gray or a shade of tan, you might respond, "No way. Those pants were green." Perhaps the pants were neither of our colors because of the lighting and shading. (By the way, I am red-green color deficient.) But, we do have the means to precisely determine the color of the pants. We could use a chromoscope to settle the matter. If the two of us differed how far away Chicago was via Interstate 65 (the weakness of memory), there are means by which we could determine the distance that would be agreed upon.

When we ask for "proof" concerning any of these objects/processes of the concrete, we are referring to universal, objective standards. Though I may have an opinion how heavy you are, my opinion disappears before the evidence of a scales.

The abstract is totally different. An abstract can only be defined and described as to what it is like.

Consider an abstract like “love.” Without question this abstract resonates for theists and atheists alike; yet, it cannot be directly perceived. Take a group of people. Make the group to be comprised of uneducated, highly educated, or a mix. Ask this group to define love. Do you think the definition will differ ... and some radically, almost contradictorily? Absolutely. Look up definitions of abstracts, such as love, in any dictionary and see how the word is widely used.

Take this same group of people to a movie. Their task during the movie is to write down incidents that illustrate love and incidents that are the opposite of love. I cannot prove how the results of this thought experiment would turn out, but based on 35+ years in teaching in a world of abstracts (God, morality, love, justice, hate, forgiveness, bitterness, truth, mercy, etc) I’ve learned this: there is no agreed upon standard by which to measure an abstract object/process.

I have been to a restaurant several times over the years with someone else who has remarked, “That waitress is so rude.” She didn’t strike me as rude in the least. I couldn’t figure out where that even came from. The reason for the statement is that there are no agreed upon standards of determining (interpreting) if an event truly is cruel, kind, loving, rude, etc, etc. There is absolutely none.

I would like to suggest the reason for this lack of agreed upon proof.

When truth statements are made, they are usually determined to be true or false by one of two tests of truth.³⁶ There is the correspondence test (or theory) of truth, and there is the coherence test. They are quite different, though the common feature between them is comparison.

First and foremost is that the tests of truth are applicable to statements, not questions, not commands, and certainly not things. An object (a cat, a person, a tree) is simply there to be observed. If I say, “That cat is black,” what makes the statement true or false is whether the cat is, indeed, black. If the cat were dark gray, then my statement would be false. If we disagree, we have a means to measure. So, when I say “is” and whatever actually exists or when I say “is not” and whatever actually is not, then the statement is true. As Josiah Royce humorously put it, “A liar is a person who has willfully misplaced his ontological predicates.”

The coherence test is quite different. Essentially a statement is true if it matches a “body” of truth. For instance, parents leave a 10 year old at home for an hour. When they return, there is milk on the floor. It wasn’t there when they left. When they ask the boy if he did it or if someone had some

³⁶ There are others, e.g., pragmatic test of truth. But pragmatic is a sub-type of one of two that will be explained. The other “tests” will easily fit within the same two.

over, his reply is “No.” So, since spilt milk requires an agent, the options now are poltergeists or an intruder into the house. It doesn’t cohere. It doesn’t make sense. Most children are caught in lies because of the lack of coherence.

Correspondence works marvelously with the concrete. Coherency is called into play for the concrete when uncertainty in correspondence occurs. Coherency is not needed to determine if an object is 218 cm from top to bottom. Coherency would come into play if **different** results were recorded. Let’s say I measure 218 cm, and you measure 371 cm. There’s no way one tool of measurement could have such a difference. It does not cohere. If it is an electronic instrument, perhaps it needs to be calibrated. Perhaps one of us read it incorrectly. Perhaps, with the way I was always a rascal in school, I folded the dead frog into a ball and pretended to throw it at a girl, and it was still contracted when I measured it.

With the abstract, the only test that works is coherence. There is nothing objectively to measure the abstract against. All that can be done is to define the abstract, illustrate it, and go to it ... with the guarantee there will be differences as to what incidents fit and those that don’t. “Was the waitress truly rude or not?”

Quite often a challenge is made, “Where’s the proof? Show me the proof!” If a concrete is being discussed, then concrete proof may be given. If an abstract is being discussed, there is NEVER concrete proof, only illustrations and “evidences” than seem to fit the definition of the abstract (assuming the people having the discussion have agreed upon a definition, which is rare). I’ll leave this to the reader to illustrate or demonstrate otherwise. Give an illustration of any abstract that can be unequivocally proven by universally, agreed upon data.³⁷

³⁷ Mathematics is an exception ... in a way. Every expression in mathematics is abstract; so abstract proves abstract. However, mathematics is an imposed language determined solely by definition and is, frankly, a system of logic using tautologies. Obvious all tautologies are “true.” To prove a person is a bachelor is no more than to illustrate that the person does not meet the definitional criteria. Yet, even in proving such, what if the person is secretly married? Believing the evidence becomes the issue. President Obama still cannot appease the birthers. A “citizen of a country” is not concrete. We have to find illustrations (birth certificate, newspaper birth announcements) and then we have to believe those illustrations. Going back to our bachelor, what if he produced a marriage certificate and introduced his wife. Does that 100% prove he is not a bachelor married? There is no objective test to prove bachelorhood as there is to prove that a man is 5’9” tall. Objective proof cannot be fooled or disguised. (Of course, someone could cheat.) A bachelor is a simple either-or with no gradation in it, and we cannot know for certain. Consider many other abstracts: love, truth, beauty, justice. The gradations can be incalculable especially when determining if this or that particular meets the definition.

Besides the lack of a common objective test for abstracts, there is the language problem. Because abstracts cannot be perceived, invariably, the language used will use words as if the abstract could be perceived or use words that give the abstract the properties of mind.

Theists are commonly criticized for anthropomorphing God by ascribing to him attributes of which they have no proof. "Prove to me that God is omniscient. Show me the proof that God is loving." The problem with this, of course, is that it is nearly impossible to discuss any abstract without personifying it. The only time personification or attributes are not ascribed is when other abstracts are used. I'll use an abstract that scientists are quite familiar with, evolution.

It is very common to read comments like this: "Evolution decides ... selects ... chooses ... guides." Perhaps the reader of this truly believes there is some sort of entity, called Evolution, that has the properties of a conscious mind; but I doubt it. These are metaphors, ways of expressing the process. Evolution, frankly, has been personified. A personified shape has not been given to Evolution, but the process has been given, figuratively, a personality, a mind.

Getting down to the dust and bones of the issue, Evolution is no more than a description of what has happened. Mutations simply occurred. They were not "chosen" or "selected." Some entity called Evolution or Natural Selection did not willfully, purposely, and deliberately "weed out" certain ones. This process of genetic mutation and genetic drift and environmental change simply happened. There was no personality with a mind pushing and prodding the genes so they would change.

This personification does not make Evolution or Natural Selection true or false. It is no more than a juiced up way of making listening and reading more interesting. There is no relationship to real or unreal, true or false, or significant or insignificant because of ascribing properties of the mind (personification) to Evolution or Natural Selection. When someone asks, "How does Evolution work," the response that "Natural Selection does it" is no more than using personification to make a chemical, uncaring, cold process come "alive" in the imagination of the reader or listener.

Personifying the process is not an attempt to be disingenuous. It is not an attempt to mislead. It is just about the only way to discuss an abstract. Consider these: "Justice brings meaning and hope ... Love unites a couple ... Joy is a thing of beauty forever." I like all these statements, but let's not kid ourselves. None of these statements are literal, not any of them. They are abstracts that occur in the mind.

A slave owner could easily have said, “Finally, those runaways are back on the farm. Justice brings meaning and hope.” A Nazi could easily have said, “Getting those parasitic Jews out of our town was the right thing to do. It really is true. Justice brings meaning and hope.” I suspect most readers of this will be horrified by the two examples; yet, what is our objective standard for the abstract of justice? Justice is only determined in the mind.

To recap, the concrete is determined objectively and has agreed upon methods of measuring and identifying. Proof for the concrete is by the correspondence theory of truth. The abstract is conceived only by the mind, and there is no agreed upon method of identifying or measuring when an abstract “occurs.” The language for the abstract is heavily interlaced with metaphor and personification (ascribing properties of the mind). A modified coherence theory of truth is used to determine the truth of an abstract; however, the “body of truth” to which the statement is being compared ... has no universally agreed upon standard.

Frankly, when someone says, “You have your truth, and I have mine,” what they are referring to is the coherence theory of truth when used with abstracts, for the body of truth for coherence exists in each person’s mind, with no two bodies of truth the same. For someone to say “You have your truth, and I have mine” in referencing objective science, then they are simply nuts. Truth may be subjective with abstracts, but truth is 100% objective with the concrete.³⁸

³⁸ Obvious error can occur. If I suddenly look up and see someone being mugged, I might get a detail wrong. The issue here is surprise and the increase in emotions. Five people will, no doubt, give different details ... though none of them will say, “There was no mugging.” In contrast, take those five same people and say, “That person walking toward us will be mugged in five seconds. They are actors. Watch carefully. When it is over, write down what happened.” I daresay the reports will be nearly identical (allowing for poor eyesight, color blindness in males, lighting, angle of view, etc). Dawkins in *Unweaving the Rainbow* spent a lot of time discrediting eyewitnesses. There is nothing wrong with eyewitness per se. Surprise and emotion are the problem. The more time to think about an event before it occurs, the more likely details will be amazingly accurate. It’s quite common for couples to remember all kinds of details of their wedding fifty and more years afterwards. If a mugger would tell the truth, the details would be 100% correct.

Special Topic—The Dichotomy of Belief

When I first became a Christian I simply believed what I was told. The Bible was accepted authoritatively without questions, but I did distinguish literal language from figurative to the degree that I understood it at the time. In regard to Genesis 1-2 I accepted those as literal passages, that is, literal in the sense I could have witnessed them as described if I had been there. This route is not particularly unique for any novitiate of any new belief or discipline. A “new guy” believes the “old guys.”

Gradually and slowly a time came in which questions arose. These questions occurred through study and experience. I’ve been a student of the Bible since I first became a Christian. For a number of years I read the Bible through at least 4x/yr. Additionally I have read the works of conservative Bible scholars as well as liberal Bible scholars. The point of this is that I am not dependent any longer upon the conclusions of other as to what the Bible is saying or what passages mean. I enjoy and seek to hear what others have to say, but the commentaries from others are no longer a touchstone or a litmus for me.

In regard to the resurrection account in the four gospels I have no problem with the harmony of the four accounts. Though it is true that several incidents are difficult to place chronologically, the overall consistency has confirmed to me the coherency of the event.³⁹ The problem now is this. Even though textual criticism guarantees me the accuracy of the text of the New Testament beyond any pre-printed book in history, though my personal study of the documents assures me of the coherency of the event, how do I know, know with certainty, that what I am reading is historical as opposed to very, very good historical fiction?

³⁹ Of course I am familiar firsthand with the various criticisms of the chronology of the events surrounding and following the resurrection, but such criticisms seem far more than revealing discrepancies. Conservative Bible scholars maintain that the gospels were written by eyewitnesses or those who knew eyewitnesses. From an atheistic perspective, there is a problem if the stories harmonize or if they do not. If the stories harmonize, then, supposedly, the writers corroborated, which is the contention of the Q document per liberal scholarship (which is discussed elsewhere in this essay). If the accounts differ, as they do, then the eyewitnesses are, supposedly, unreliable, which is also discussed elsewhere. I will add only one additional thought here. There is a difference in details that do not cohere and those that contradict. There are no conflicting statements such as Jesus rose, Jesus did not rise, Peter was at the tomb, Peter was not at the tomb, Mary went early to the tomb, Mary did not go to the tomb early. For some reason, this distinction of coherence of statements and contradiction of statements is not distinguished or discerned and is considered, for some inscrutable reason, to be indubitable proof of the inaccuracy of the resurrection accounts.

This last question I carried over to other passages of Scripture. Probably the key motivator for these questions is the doubting of evidence that occurs as one matures and the apparent facts of science versus the statements of Scripture. For instance, at few times in the past I'd stop while surfing the channels and watch a few minutes of a religious network. A few times I distinctly remember a miracle worker witnessing about what had happened: "The blind could see; the crippled could walk. We even raised people from the dead." When I heard those remarks, I simply did not believe them, and I know the key reason I did not (and do not) believe them is science. A careful investigation would debunk the claims.

Obviously the question immediate charges forward, like a prosecutor who has heard a slip from the accused, "What did I just hear??? You believe science will debunk claims of rising from the dead. Then why do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead? Why doesn't science debunk that as well?" That is the question of the day. Essentially it is reducible to "Why do I believe the claims of the Bible though I do not believe similar claims from other sources?"

My response to that question will not be a defense of the Bible by the traditional means.⁴⁰ For right now we need to dismiss the Bible for testifying for itself. The four separate gospel accounts have seemed sufficient for me.⁴¹

What is it about the Biblical resurrection of Jesus that enables me to believe it? There are, at least, four reasons that I am not able to discount, particularly when taken as a whole. They are 1) the answer to the two most complex philosophical questions that can be asked; 2) the confirmation of the strongest insistence of the mind; 3) the unexplainable phenomenon that followed the resurrection of

⁴⁰ Very elaborate arguments are available for the unity of the Bible, the prophecies in it, higher and lower criticism, etc., etc. There was a time those worked for me; they no longer do. I cannot remember the last time I referred to them or used them in a class or conversation. I am not opposed to them, nor do I believe they are flawed. I am not convinced they are useful in general discussion.

⁴¹ The documentation of the resurrection has been severely criticized. Essentially the argument is, "If the event were that important, then why aren't there manuscripts all over the place with other people testifying of this event. Except for the four gospels writers, there's nothing. The silence doesn't make sense." There are reasonable explanations for the silence even as there are reasonable explanations for so much being missing in the fossil records. An argument from silence is worthless logically; it is an appeal solely to imagination and interpretation. If silence is an argument, then there is another silence which has been dutifully overlooked and needs to be included with the same emphasis and importance as the silence of extra corroborating texts for the resurrection. What is that? Where is the evidence for the contradictory view as well? Where are the contemporary manuscripts debunking Jesus as a delusional prophet, exposing the lies of the resurrection, pooh-poohing the absurdity of the miracles? In the same way that all kinds of corroboration should have existed for the resurrection per the critics, then surely there would be an equal or greater amount of manuscript evidence for the contrarian view. There are four accounts of Jesus' resurrection, written while eyewitnesses would have been alive. That is at least something. Where are the opposing accounts written within the lifespan of eyewitnesses? Why isn't this silence a problem?

Jesus that is historically substantiated; and 4) the only answer that is available for the universal ache of the arts. I'll briefly comment on each of these.

The two most complex philosophical questions are 1) what is the relationship between the mind and the body and 2) are there universals and particulars, or are there only particulars (the one and the many problem)? If the resurrection of Jesus is, indeed, true, then these questions are answered.⁴²

What exactly is the relationship between the mind and the body? Is the mind merely an extension of the functions and processes of the brain (monism), or is the mind a separate and distinct entity from the body (dualism⁴³)?

What happened from the time that Jesus died and His resurrection? Did he sleep (without dreams or with dreams)? Did His mind cease to be "alive" just as His body was no longer alive? For anyone familiar with the Apostles Creed, they will recall the following statements about Christ,

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell.
The third day He arose again from the dead;

The Apostles Creed is considered the oldest confession of faith in Christendom. The particular phrase of interest is "He descended into hell," sandwiched between His burial and resurrection. This descent is only mentioned in one text in the New Testament, 1 Peter 3:18-19,

He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison.

This verse indicates mind activity after physical death. If the Scriptures are true concerning the resurrection of Jesus' body as well as the activity of His mind while the body was dead, then the mind is distinct from the body. Furthermore, after His resurrection the properties of His mind appear to be identical with the properties of His mind prior to the crucifixion. After the resurrection and encountering the disciples, they were not scratching their heads, asking, "Who is this guy?"

⁴² I am well aware that the resurrection of Jesus, if true, is an event in the past. Though an event in the past is considered a concrete, the proof for a historical statement is the correspondence theory of truth. There is no way the past can be revisited. (Video might be an exception if there is certainty that the scenes have not been contrived or edited.) Any historical proof is "what someone else said." Of course, any interpretation of an event, past or present, is abstract.

⁴³ See footnote 9 for my definition of dualism.

There is more than one verse that supports the distinction of the mind and the body, but the one in 1 Peter is the only one that clearly shows activity of an identifiable mind during death and afterwards in a body.

The second problem is the issue of the one and the many. Essentially this is the question that is asked, "With all the stuff that there is, does unity actually exist?" From a theoretical physics perspective, the search for a unifying theory, the theory of everything, is precisely an effort to reconcile and reduce all the formulas in physics to one theory, one formula. From a common viewpoint, a simple illustration is a mystery movie. Various clues are provided, others hinted at, and ... we still have trouble figuring out "Who dunit?" When all comes together at the end of the story, we see the unity.

The actual issue with the one and the many isn't the unity of a story, but the unity of a being versus the becoming of that being (changes). I call myself a single person (unity); yet, I am comprised of many elements, and those are in constant change. It seems I have read that every seven years or so I have, essentially, a new body. If that is so, in what sense am I possibly one? None of the stuff that makes me to be me stays the same.

Another illustration is a cloud. We look up and say, "There is a cloud." But in what sense is there a cloud, for they are comprised of millions of water droplets. If I get high enough in a plane, I can nearly discern an edge where the cloud begins and ends. Yet, if I isolated two of these droplets, would that be a cloud? In what way are particulars unified?

If the mind's properties and processes are truly an extension of the brain's properties and events, then the strong sense of "I" is illusory. There is no entity within the body of atoms labeled as VL Vawter that is separate and distinct from natural processes. "I" is no more special than any other natural process. A process is a process is a process.

If there is a unity from a naturalistic viewpoint it has to be found in the reduction of all process to physics. That does give a common unity to all sciences. If the arguments of physics were removed from Dawkins' *The God Delusion* or *Unweaving the Rainbow*, the two books would be much, much smaller, and key arguments that he relies upon would be removed from his arsenal.

The problem with physics and the unifying factor is simply there is no life, no substance. Every explanation is reduced to a formula that describes matter/energy. There is no beauty, no meaning, no morals, no love in any formula. Reducing all of the universe to a theory of everything will be the final

proof that only WHAT exists; there never was nor will there ever be a WHY. A what, a billion whats cannot create a single why.

It is one thing for the mind to seek why, but it is another to rebel to its illusory nature. I understand from an evolutionary perspective why the brain produces the thoughts of beauty and love and morals. It enables a weaker physical species to survive amongst critters of which most seem to be much stronger. I understand the illusion of free will. I understand the illusion of “independent thinking.” Everything is gear toward survival in Evolution. What I do not understand in spite of years pondering this is why has Evolution programmed me to become upset, angry, even resistant to the idea that all is illusion. Why is the sense of “I” so strong when the idea of illusion is even considered?

Why not be **designed** to continue day to day in contentment regardless of other ideas **as if** I thought everything was real, that “I” was real? Perhaps this is merely an issue with me and no more. Perhaps I am the only one who violently rejects the idea that “I” is not real. Do I have to believe my mind is real to prevent disillusionment that could lead to a premature death? But, if that is so, then why are these thoughts so variable among humans?

I’ve read many who believe they have no free will and are not bothered at all. I’ve also read many who believe all of life is an illusion, but they are not bothered in the least. Many don’t care one way or the other. Why all this variance? I am a total loss why Natural Selection would have created nearly incalculable (certainly unpredictable) behavior in the same species. Why this vast difference in behavior patterns and predictability within a species? Why do so many differences aid to survival ... unless the killing off within a species is the means to control population and manage resources, chimps killing chimps.

The above questions are the primary reason I believe the mind is distinct and independent in being from natural processes. If that is true, then how is there unity? If my mind is distinct from my body, then the concept of one becomes even more elusive ... except for the resurrection.

How does the resurrection answer this quandary? Again, if the Scriptural statements are true, the Godhead saw it fit that the mind of Christ and the body of Jesus be joined together forever following the resurrection. If the Godhead is the unifying factor of being, then Jesus is one because He has the mind of God; yet, He is many because He still has a body. Believers are promised the same body as Jesus (one that will not age or die). Once our minds, which are made in the image of God, co-join with resurrected bodies, then we too will understand the mystery of the one and the many.

Ultimately there seem to be only two possible reconciliations of the one and the many: 1) the theory of everything or 2) an everlasting mind in an everlasting body. The resurrection supports the second option.

Leaving the philosophical questions of mind-body and one-many, there is an insistence in the mind that makes no sense unless it is true—the unceasing illusion of the mind not dying, the mind ceasing to be. This persistent belief is not an exception. The idea of life after death, of mind continuing after physical death, is rife throughout the world and throughout history (i.e., written records). Even the reincarnation of Buddhism and Hinduism illustrates the relativity of the body but the permanence of the mind (some sort of essence).

The pyramids of ancient Egypt are a constant reminder of the illusion of life after death. The odd stories of contact with those who died fuel the illusion.⁴⁴ Hollywood, which could never be accused of being “religious,” turns out movies that touch on this theme, encouraging this so-called psychological illusion.⁴⁵ I have talked with agnostics who believe their consciousness will continue after death.

My mind is the only one in which I have intimate awareness, and I am unable to conceive of self as non-existence. None of this is proof, but the distraction it causes is unanswerable. Any abstract can have an answer or reason given to it; the problem is the resonance within one’s self. If the mind doesn’t continue, then this life is all we have.

Atheists argue forcibly and cogently that this life is all we have; therefore, since we know it is short, then we need to do all we can to make it worthwhile and meaningful and good. This argument has inherent problems as well. This inherent problem was the motivation for Dawkins’ *Unweaving the Rainbow* as explained in his preface.⁴⁶ The problem, of course, is that eventually the clock will be seen

⁴⁴ Houdini spent years debunking the scams of spiritualists who preyed upon this illusion. Though he discredited “professional spiritualists,” he is reputed to have sought them after his mother’s death and was a friend with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, with whom he frequently discussed the topic. He and his wife, Beatrice, devised a code which was kept secret between them and was to be used when one predeceased the other. After Houdini’s death in 1926, Beatrice signed a witnessed letter in 1929 that a medium had used the code to pass a message onto her. I mention the above because of its well-known status. I used it because this illusion persists even with die-hard crusaders (not scientists) who debunked it. Of course there is the work of Dr. Gary Schwartz and Dr. Raymond Moody. The criticism directed toward Dr. Schwartz is legion; yet, why such a struggle over an “obvious” illusion?

⁴⁵ In the top ten domestic movies per box office receipts, four of them had significant scenes of life after death or consciousness after death: *Avatar*, *Titanic*, and two *Star Wars*. In the top ten adjusted for inflation, out of the top ten there are five: *Star Wars*, *The Ten Commandments*, *Titanic*, *The Exorcist*, and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Hollywood is geared for profit, not philosophy; so, most likely this motif is included because it is known that so many people have this illusion.

⁴⁶ Dawkins’ purpose in writing the book was to counter the strong negative response to *The God Delusion*. He claims that the accusation directed toward him were “barren desolation, of promoting an arid and joyless

as running out, and there is no answer for that. Regardless how cheery anyone tries to make things sound when the ship is sinking, there will be wholesale despair and panic. Somehow the crew assuring the passengers “to be all they can be with the time they have” seems comical with the ship listing downward at 20° and dead people floating in the water.

It is true that while a person is younger, their whole life is before them, and 60 years might as well be eternity. But that sensation is such only because it is not reflected upon. I have no idea where I got that mindset, but I have always believed, “Do not wish time away.” As a senior in high school I recall conversations of those who wished they were already graduated. I could never figure out why because the 18 years of life needed to get through high school, before it was realized, would be 18 years in the past. For me, it is nearly 50 years ago that I graduated.

When I was transferred to Berlin, German in Military Intelligence I remember vividly the day I checked in seeing a pair of boots hanging in the branches of a tree. I asked someone what that meant. He told me that when a person receives orders to leave Berlin, that person, after partying, would throw his boots in a tree. Even now I recall thinking at that time, “Before I know it, four years will pass for me, and I’ll have my orders.” When I did receive my orders, I thought back to the tree (but I kept my boots). That four years flashed by. Now as I reflect I count that 35 years have passed since I received those orders.

A line from Andrew Marvell’s *To His Coy Mistress* was burned into my mind many years ago:

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near.

Regardless of the concept of time that we have, the one certainly we have is that it will run out for us. This certainly is merely ignored, not understood and most certainly not accepted. The stoic mindset that is encouraged by atheists may work for a few, but it will never be the majority mindset. It never has been, and it never will be. Though the movie *Titanic*⁴⁷ showed Captain Smith calmly accepting his death (well, it appeared calm; perhaps a storm was raging in his mind), most people were in sheer,

message.” He expressed his disappointment further by writing, “I am almost driven to the despair of which I am wrongly suspected.” The proper reaction, in Dawkins’ judgment, is to seize the time we have: “It is truly one of the things that makes life worth living and it does so, if anything, more effectively if it convinces us that the time we have for living it is finite.”

⁴⁷ Years ago I read Walter Lord’s *A Night to Remember*, and I have been fascinated by the *Titanic* ever since. My favor poem is Thomas Hardy’s *The Convergence of the Twain*. I reference the movie because so many have seen it. By the way, there is no certainty what Captain Smith did at the end.

stark terror. When Death comes as it will for all as brilliant portrayed in the medieval play, *Everyman*, the common reaction is more likely that of Dylan Thomas' *Do Not Go Gently Into That Good Night*:

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rage at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

The idea of "I" ceasing to be seems so contradictory, so wrong, so absurdly wasteful. Camus was 100% correct when he said, "There is but one truly philosophical problem and that is suicide." The issue is relative. If someone told me I had 10 years left to leave (within my probability table), then I could think, "I've got time to do this or that." Now, it's 10 months. Now 10 days. Now 10 minutes.

Dawkins dismisses this personally felt inevitability with "Presumably there is indeed no purpose in the ultimate fate of the cosmos, but do any of us really tie our life's hopes to the ultimate fate of the cosmos anyway? ... Our lives are ruled by all sorts of closer, warmer, human ambitions and perceptions." Even he says we are ruled by what is close. Precisely. And when death approaches closer the inevitable is before us. Then Death is close. Though the universe might continue billions of more years before freezing or melting, "I" am ending.

I have tried every approach that I can, but I am unable to reason out or read insights from others that give a reason why Natural Selection allows us to even think about such questions. How is my survival benefited by thinking about the certainty of death and the concomitant depression that comes with it? Many good thinkers have pooh-poohed the fear of death as being the source of religion. That puzzles me to no end. The fear, anger, frustration, or whatever toward death is understandable. Though Philip Pullman might write about the child Roger laughing as he disintegrates into nothing in the 3rd book of *The Dark Materials* series, *The Amber Spyglass*, I have been with children who have died. I have witnessed emotions ranging from fear to calm acceptance. I've yet to experience hilarious laughter. But then, *The Dark Materials* is fiction, perhaps deep fiction.

How does an anxiety about death aid survival? We do not choose our emotions; they are responses to thoughts or sensory impulses. Thoughts are produced by brain; there is no "I" controlling anything. "I" is an illusion to enhance survival for a very weak, physical species. Why such a quirk in Evolution? Of course, ultimate the answer is "That is just the way it is."

Perhaps there is another reply that is just as sound. Either that is the way "it is," or ... it is the way "it shouldn't be." The quirk may simply be another illusion, or it may be the insistence that there is

life after death because ... there is life after death. The resurrection of Jesus, if true, firmly proved physically that life occurs after death. It proves that “I” will exist after death, which resonates completely with an undying “I.”

It is very easy to go online and read “other resurrection accounts.” My background is filled with history, literature, and philosophy. I have read these other accounts. Amazement overcomes me at the blurring of distinctions required for the conclusion that the accounts are the same. The only similarity is something coming back to life. Not for a second am I suggesting that the Biblical account is true because it is in the Bible. The issue is that the account in the Bible reads like history versus the other resurrection accounts. There are a number of details that are historically falsifiable (that is, the details are coherent with the times): Pilate, Roman soldiers, being wrapped in cloth, spices and fragrance being brought to the tomb, the tomb itself, the despair of the followers.

There are volumes of arguments defending the resurrection of Jesus historically. There are none for the other accounts. There are no records of any sort defending Osiris as historical, that is, using historical arguments. No one tried to prove Osiris was really murdered by appealing to the historicity of the account. The Greeks recounted all sorts of afterlife stories, but there are no treatises arguing from history. The stories were myths and treated as myths, i.e., the corroboration and defending of statements from other sources or within the accepted sources are never made. The characteristic of myth is that it truly is a story that is asserted. No one tries to prove it true. In my reading of Herodotus and Plutarch, these authors distinguished myth from historical, the key being corroboration, situational falsifiability, and, in a number of instances, common sense.

I understand fully a person doubting the historicity of Jesus bases on their conviction that science has never substantiated a resurrection. I understand fully the doubt about miracles because they too have not been substantiated. I do not understand and am at total loss how the gospel accounts are read and are equated with myth. There is no similarity. The writers clearly attempted to cast the resurrection of Jesus as historical, physical, and real (that is, it was witnessed). Of course, they may be accused of lying for whatever reasons or science used to state, “Such things do not occur,” but the equating of a historical genre with a mythological genre is patently absurd. Equating the two is as solid and insightful as equating lightning and lightning-bug ... after all, both have the root “light.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The gospel accounts of the resurrection provide falsifiable data, such as soldiers guarding the tomb, a dead body being buried the same day, mourners coming later with spices, etc. The gospels, when written, could have been raked over the coals by all kinds of contemporary evidence ... if it existed. It would have been so easy for the

If true, the resurrection of Jesus proves that the “I” does continue after death. The post-resurrection accounts do not have the disciples wondering, “This guys looks like Jesus, but something is wrong.” The disciples had no presentiment as displayed in *The Body Snatchers* because something wasn’t quite right. The resurrected Jesus looked like, acted like, and talked like the pre-crucified Jesus.⁴⁹ The haunting question, “Is there life after death,” is answered in the gospels in an historical methodology. The gospels are the only substantive historical records that do.

The third reason I believe the resurrection is historical as opposed to excellent historical fiction were the results that followed afterwards. There are two results I have in mind: 1) the story itself and 2) the commitment to the story.

There are other accounts of physical resurrections similar to Jesus, particularly afterwards. Why a myth, a lie, an imaginary plot should create commitment after 2,000 years is a real mystery. Jesus’ resurrection story has survived redactors, enhancers, and creative imagination. Why didn’t this story change like all stories do? The very fact that the resurrection of Jesus has relegated all the other resurrection stories to insignificance (how many can name more than one or two?) is ultimately a mystery. If anything, new stories should have arisen and replaced the original. Or, dozens or hundreds of other stories should be on equal footing. It is a mystery why so many cultures, so many languages, so many places over so many years should believe the SAME story. Who believes anything about Osiris except for ancient Egyptians?

Jewish leaders (or Romans) to have documented details that were false. The point is that falsifiable data is in the resurrection story. I encourage the reader to go online and read other resurrection stories. He will immediately note the lack of details for a contemporary to have disproved what happened. The “resurrection” of Osiris is hailed by critics of Jesus’ resurrection as being “the same thing.” A body rose from the dead in this story. A body rose from the dead in that story. That’s the end of the similarity. There is zero falsifiable data in other resurrection stories of the ancient world. The gospels ooze with data that could have been falsified then as well as some that could be falsified now ... but hasn’t been. The difference between Jesus’ resurrection story and all the others of the ancient world is the difference of history versus myth. History is falsifiable and is loaded with data that can be tested. Myth is not. The account of Jesus’ resurrection reads like history because it was history as opposed to myth. There are simply too many data that can be falsified to be a myth account. The writers believed they were writing history. Either they told the truth, were deceived, or deliberately lied, but they did not consciously and deliberately write myth.

⁴⁹ I repeat that it is fine to disbelieve the writers, but it is ludicrous to say the accounts are myth. At worse, they are manipulative, historical fiction (very good fiction). At best ... they are true. As an example, Tolkien wanted *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy to read like history. Depending on a person’s backgrounds, the trilogy could be read and believed to be history. Typically the historicity of a book is tested by factual corroboration; yet, there is another means: situational falsifiability. Are general details of the story falsifiable? This is where the trilogy collapses. NOTHING can be verified in clothing, maps, language, personages, etc. Everything is falsified. Ultimately in the resurrection story of Jesus the real issue is that science has not verified a resurrection.

This story of Jesus has not only maintained its original historical content; it has transmigrated cultures and transcended centuries without change. Why hasn't Jesus' resurrection story mutated? The nature of stories (as opposed to history) is to change to accommodate the various cultures, assuming the story does transmigrate culturally. If it is true that the original was myth or good historical fiction, then there should be other stories, a lot of them, and widely received.⁵⁰

This acceptance of the original story is the difference between history and myth. Myth is art and may roam as it pleases. History has a fence about it. Whether it truly occurred or not, the phenomenon that so many believed and still believe the story was true, real, and historical is unexplainable.

Anyone can say such-and-such story is a myth or a legend. That is easy. The problem is why doesn't the "resurrection myth" follow the same pattern as all other myths—which is change ... substantive change! The reason is that the story is believed to be and is treated as history, not myth.

The fourth reason I believe Jesus' resurrection to be true is the transcendental effect of the story. What I mean by this is that there is a "power" in this story that transcends mere history. Whether atheists like the fact or not, they will agree with the fact that billions of people, educated and living in a scientific world, are still captivated by the resurrection story.

How can it be that after 2,000 years of no verification of a resurrection that billions of people believe Jesus rose from the dead? From an evolutionary perspective, somehow and in some way this story aids to survival of the species. I am at a loss to a theory what would explain this. Dawkins' gene "misfiring" is inapplicable here (as it was in his book). A majority behavior for centuries is the statistical norm. It is rather obvious that this behavior, if genetic, is the correct one, i.e., correct for survival since that is the goal of Natural Selection. Natural Selection does not make a genetic mistake of such a proportion for so many centuries ... does it? Of course, I do not believe that belief in God is genetically based. The reason has been stated many times in this essay, the primary one being the inexplicability of the mind's properties and scope.

⁵⁰ Art, which is not history, certainly changes. I have viewed artist's pictures of Jesus from a number of cultures, and the depiction reflects the respective culture. Though this has happen, the story has not changed. Though Jesus may look Chinese in China art or black in African art, He is still born of Jewish parents in Bethlehem. Plays, another art form, will take great liberties with stories in the Bible; yet, their Scriptures are not reedited to accommodate these artistic expressions. Art has changed, but the story has remained the same. Why? Myth changes; history does not.

The story of Jesus transcends mere historical narrative. The story has a nagging persistence that bespeaks what artists search for, the universal, the lasting, the real.

Special Topic—Rearrangement (Poem by VL Vawter)

His waxed hair, powdered forehead, sleeping eyes,
Brushed coat, shoeless feet, formaldehyded veins
Bring tears to the eyes of those who say good-byes,
"Such a good man. We lose, but Heaven gains."

While eyes are wiped dry, Nature is busy
Letting atoms spin crazily away.
Bonds are broken; order's in a tizzy.
"This atom to Pisces, this to Bombay."

All rush at light speed with orders to fill:
"Three neutrons needed for a leaf of bamboo!"
"Where are those quarks to fill up that ant hill?"
Nothing is missed, not even diaper's pooh.

Use a million millionth part of Caesar
Rend Jesus, Hitler, and Lennon apart,
Mix in garbage gas. (This isn't a teaser.)
We have come up with a new Descartes!

Though the Laws of Physics approve and agree
All seems such a mess, such a gooey batter.

Oh no! All is followed per the recipe
Found in the Conservation of Matter.

Like an ever turning kaleidoscope
The number of designs must be all spent!
Phooey, let's be cheerful and not mope
In this business of Rearrangement!

Let me sing praise in the atheistic dream
"I" never existed but from matter.
(Shhh, I was once drips of melted ice cream.)
Oh rejoice, ye Parts of Cosmic Splatter!

That girl I foolishly thought that I loved
(Silly, silly me, there never was I)
Was but a fragment of a discarded glove.
All is equationable, who can deny?

Personable? Personable? Such heresy!
An endless chain of action and reaction
Is all there is. On this we must agree:
Only in Physics is satisfaction.

Let's steel our nerves to false mirages.
For the loss of Seem do not weep or cry.

If you ask the need of such collages,
My oh my, I have no good answer why.

Of course, of course I have the answer now
There is no Purpose (please, let's not lament).
We must remember and n'er disavow
We live in continual Rearrangement.

Oh dear, there I go again, foolish words;
I use such sounds as I, we, me, and us.
Wait! It matters not what words Law prefers;
So it's no good for us to fuss and cuss.

Every action could be predicted, but
Our computers and programs are too small;
There is no Why, only a massive What.
All is form and Rearrangement; that's all.

Speeding photons trigger my nerves of sight,
Captured atoms set axioms on fire,
And supposed shapes and forms appear bright.
Ahhhh, such Purposelessness has transpired!

Happy thought, Good and Bad do not exist;
We needn't fret over guilt and malcontent.

Sins and Wrongs are only unpleasant mists.

For this I give thanks to Rearrangement.

When I lustily ravish this beauty,

What is blame but false laws of the bourgeoisie!

Atoms of this body follow duty,

Unalterable as any galaxy's.

When CERN discovers unknown particles,

And this is praised and given worldly lauds,

Why am I given unkind articles

When my atoms smashed atoms of those bawds?

Why pretend and ask, "Where is our free will?"

Our choices, determined at the Big Bang,

Are free as fire to burn or ice to chill.

It does no good to angrily harangue.

Choice is calculable cause-and-effect.

The brains in those craniums send fixed ideas:

We are only cards stacked in a trick deck;

Ev'n feelings are atomized diarrheas.

Truly, it matters not; do as you please.

All is illusion; hush, Disagreement.

Let's all come together, hold hands, and agree
All is busy work of Rearrangement.

Whoa, whooooo! whence comes these stupid judges,
These pawns of a so unfair government?
They close their eyes and hold foolish grudges
Against the real culprit, Rearrangement.

A supposed rope around my supposed neck!!!
This is so unfair; I've been shortchanged.
No, no, what are these ugly thoughts? Oh heck,
I'm coming back, but I'll be REARRANGED.

-by V. L. Vawter-

Special Topic—Presuppositions and Blind Faith

A presupposition may be believed or not believed. For instance, I may presuppose for argument sake that God exists, that God does not exist, that evolution is true, that evolution is false. My actual beliefs do not enter into the argument.

There are other presuppositions that must be believed, that are considered innate, intuitive, necessary. There are three presuppositions, the primary presuppositions, from which all knowledge is built.

1. I exist.
2. Contradiction cannot exist.
3. The mind is able to apprehend and understand truth.

A reader might glance over those and say, “That is so obvious. Is that all philosophical discussion is—talking about the obvious.” Yes, they do seem obvious, but why? Can I really prove that I exist? How do I know my memories have not been created by God or some sort of sinister computer gone wild, as in the goofy movie *The Matrix*? None of the three can be proved, only discussed, only presumed, only believed.

They seem so blatantly obvious for one of two reasons. Each reason finds its source in the belief that matter/energy has always existed or mind has always existed. 1) If matter/energy is all that there is and Evolution’s goal is survival, then the brain has been hardwired to make a person truly believe he is real in order to survive. Actually the person does not “choose” to believe it any more than he chooses his heart to beat or his eyes to see or his ears to hear. It is simply the natural process. 2) If God, who is unextended mind, imparts mind to others (like begetting like), then mind is not a natural process; and the conviction that “I” exists is from God Himself.

Regardless of the source, consider the necessity of the primary presuppositions.

It is impossible to shake the notion of “I” and that “I” exists. Supposedly a philosophy student asked his professor, “How do I know I exist?” And the reply was, “Whom shall I assume is asking the

question?” Even if a clever argument is given for the non-existence of objects, “I” still has to give the argument.

Science would disappear overnight if the first principle of presuppositions is ignored: contradiction does not exist. $A' \neq \text{non-}A'$ at the same time, in the same way, and in the same place. I believe this to the core of my being; yet, there is no way to prove it. Logic cannot prove it.

Observation cannot prove it because it is not possible to observe everything in the universe. (Then quantum mechanics are certainly no help. The double-slit experiment is as counter-intuitive as can be, i.e., contradictory to reason and experience and common sense.) To believe contradiction does not exist is a step of faith. Pointing to a million particulars will not create a universal. If we believe non-contradiction as a law because of observations on nature (i.e., can't find an exception), it is merely based on headcount. It is illogical to appeal to the majority as a test of truth.

A large portion of the world (Eastern) has no problem with certain contradictions. In many instances their writings clearly reveal that contradiction is all that can truly exist. Yet, this contradiction and non-contradiction conflict does make sense if Natural Selection is only concerned with the survival of the species and is no more than an illusion in the mind. *The Bhagavad Gita* is a brilliant work of the Eastern mind. It is highly prized by the Hindus. The story (a subset of the oldest known written epic, *The Mahabharata*) reconciles determinism and free will by fully arguing for both and providing arguments for both! This mindset of “we can do it” in the Western mind has given us a standard of living that is higher than most Eastern mindsets of “fatalism.” Yet, which culture has survived the best? If we do headcount, the Eastern mindset wins. Contradiction is a better survival technique than non-contradiction. Perhaps in the harshness of mountains and deserts (so much of China, Mongolia, and the Indian subcontinent), a fatalistic-mindset enables one to survive better.

Who doesn't believe he can't know truth? Even he who argues against any objective reality, who believes contradiction may exist wherever and whenever, and who believes there is no such thing as truth ... believes he is telling the truth, that his mind know the truth!!! It's similar to the logical conundrum—

A person walks up to you at a party and says, “You can't believe anybody in this room. Everyone is lying.” Is that person lying?

All three of the primary presuppositions seem impossible to disbelieve because they seem so inherently obvious, but the point is that there is no way to prove them logically or empirically. In fact,

we have to believe the primary beliefs before we can prove anything logically or empirically. All other presuppositions and “facts” build on these three presuppositions.

What is particularly interesting about this issue of the three primary presuppositions is that they are based on blind faith. Frankly the three presuppositions seem so obvious that they have to be true. It is difficult to believe otherwise. If pressed a person will simply have to say, “I believe it because I believe it.” Everyone who believes in the three primary presuppositions, whether atheist or theist, is practicing blind faith.

Blind faith is treated like a contaminant to all clear thinking, whereas all clear thinking is, ironically, rooted in blind faith. Blind faith is sneered at for being contrary to fact, whereas all fact is believed by the mind which in turn is exercised by a mind that does not believe in contradiction. Blind faith has been laughed at as the emperor without any clothes, whereas those who laughing are wearing imaginary underwear just as much as the king.

Blind faith has never been the enemy of knowledge. I am well aware that people will announce with the might and majesty of *Aida's Triumphal March* in the background, “I believe in the facts ... not faith and most certainly not blind faith.” It does sound so grand that it must be obvious ... but it isn't obvious in the least. At the root of all claims of knowledge is belief: belief that the senses are right, that the instruments are right, that the books are, that the statistical tests are correct, and on and on and on.

Due to sheer volume it is impossible to rework all previous experiments. There are only a handful of people who have actually measured the speed of light or calculated the value of π to some 15 or 20 places. Think of all the students in high school and college who say, “I know.” What they mean to say is, “I believe my teacher or some book when the speed of light is stated to be such-and-such.” The word “know” is loosely used.

The enemy of knowledge is unjustified belief or false belief. We praise logic and reason; yet, there is no way to prove logic or reason by logic or reason. We simply have to accept it because it seems so obvious. But to pretend a statement that is “knowledge” and not “belief” is a slight of hand.

So when a person says, “I believe in the facts,” he is stating the underlying foundation to knowledge ... belief. If he says, “I know the facts,” just a little quizzing will soon display that much of what he “know” is what he has believed from others. If people make themselves feel good because they have facts and not faith, then hurrah for the feeling; but, if they examine themselves, they will readily

realize that all knowledge is based on, at the very least, three beliefs rooted solely in blind faith: I exist, there is no contradiction, the mind can recognize the true from the false.

The issue will always reduce itself to justified-true-belief versus non-justified-true-belief, always. Say what we please, but belief is always mixed in any foundation of knowledge.

SPECIFIC REPLIES TO COMMENTS IN YOUR EMAIL

Why You Could Believe in a Deistic God

Your comment—

With regard to why I'm 100% certain that the god of the bible is not possible whereas a more general creator god might be, it shouldn't be that hard to figure out. A general, deistic, creator god has no specific attributes other than he must be somehow more complex than his creation. There is no personality ascribed to him/her/it. There is no gender. There are no emotions. There are not even any reasons for his actions. People are willing to say that they know nothing at all about this creator, other than that he created.

My reply—

That you favor these reasons is fine, but those reasons do not support the proof of a universal negative, your "100% certain." A million particulars will not prove a positive or a negative universal. A universal negative, from a scientific view, would require a total exhaustion of the universe's evidence, which is simply impossible. (Not just God, any universal negative. That is why a universal negative is reserved for deductive arguments, not inductive.)

There is one problem with a deistic God that simply makes no sense. If Jefferson had had the benefit of reading Darwin, he probably wouldn't have wasted time advocating an absent landlord. The moment the word God or god is used it is difficult not to think of a being of some sort. Then it is hard to think of a being without a mind. It can be done; for instance, an ape is a being with a brain, but not a mind.

Either God is an impersonal force or a personal being who has a will (possibly an omnipotent will). The moment we use personal we are sneaking in the concept of mind. Once mind is brought in, there are personal attributes. I can conceive of power without personal attributes, but I cannot conceive of mind without personal attributes.

I've read where Dawkins might be persuaded of a deistic God, but he essentially comes down to, "What for?" He's right on the money. A deistic god (an impersonal force) contributes nothing. Just what did it create? Matter? If this god is a force, then it is energy ... and energy and matter are interchangeable. So, what is new that is being brought to the table of cosmology?

I'm puzzled why a deistic god is of any interest to you. No one would claim revelation from it; so, what does it add that you don't already believe?

It Is Circular Reasoning to Believe the Christian God Exists Because of the Bible

Your quote--

But the Christian god has been given lots of characteristics by Christians and Jews. And, by the way, all the description don't always agree. But, in general, a Christian believes that God is omnipotent, omniscient, all-loving, and omni-present. He is also infinitely just, is infinite in time and space, and is basically a really good guy. While I don't have any hard evidence against a creator god other than Occam's razor, I could write you a book about how the Christian god cannot possibly have all those characteristics, not to mention the fact that even if he did, how would we know it? Every reason anyone has of believing in the Christian god comes from the Christian bible. That's it. That's all you have. You have no more corroborating sources – zilch! And how do you know the bible is correct? Because it says it is. Come on! Do I really need to explain infinite circular reasoning to a smart man like you?

My reply—

Your comments are formidable and require time for me to reply.

First, I come again to proof for the concrete versus proof for the abstract. The concrete uses the correspondent theory of truth, whereas the abstract uses the coherent theory of truth.⁵¹

Consider the theory of evolution. It is an abstract. It is defined, and then evidences are listed to support the definition. I know so little about the history of evolution, but I have little doubt that some evidences used at one time are no longer used. I would also assume the definition has been modified over the years. Then I have little doubt that there may be “fringe” evolutionists who hold some extreme views that are not accepted by the main body. This does not mean evolution is true or false; it simply means that the abstract idea of evolution follows the same path as all abstracts.

If my above statements are correct, then the accusation that all theists do not agree on the characteristics of God, which is, supposedly, a fatal weakness, is an arbitrary argument. In other words, this argument may be used against theist explanation of God, but the identical may not be used against scientists' explanation of the evolution of the species.

Of course, you may counter what I have said by easily documenting that the definition of evolution has never changed, that the evidences used for it have not changed, and that the current scientific body who believe in evolution are in total agreement as to what it means, how it is applied, how evidence is included or excluded, and the interpretation of this evidenced is fully agreed to.

⁵¹ See [Special Topic—The Concrete and the Abstract](#) for more detailed explanation.

As stated, my knowledge of the history of evolution is abysmal; but my understanding of the abstract is quite solid. I know the nature of abstracts. More on this will be discussed in later paragraphs in this section.

Evolution is an abstract and will follow the course of all abstracts. For instance, the Evolution does not escape the use of language. I've read evolution "guides ... directs ... chooses ... determines ..." and so forth. Both of us know no such processes of the mind occur. But abstracts require us to talk like this ... as if the object could be observed or could act as if it had a mind. Even you stated in your argument for a deistic god, "There are not even any reasons for his actions." You are insistent that a deistic god would not have a mind. If you will look for this phenomenon of attributing the characteristics of mind (personifying), you will notice that the abstract is routinely personified, that is, given attributes of the mind.

In your first email you mentioned that evolution had as much proof as gravity. I find that unfathomable. The reason is that evolution is a theory, an interpretation which can only exist in the mind and is an abstract whereas the effects of gravity are observable and objectively measurable. Newton first described the properties of gravity in the 17th century. Einstein was able to describe what gravity itself was.

In contrast there is disagreement on interpretation within evolution. "Punctuated evolution" has different advocates for or against it. There is no way to prove using an agreed upon objective means (there never is for an abstract); so, the various sides will give their explanations and evidences as they fit within the total scheme of evolution and, in turn, as evolution fits into the body of truth for science as they understand it (the coherence theory of truth).

I am not saying or advocating that the evidence used is not concrete; obviously there must be thousands and thousands of fossils and whatever else is used to support evolution. What that evidence actually **means** only exists in the mind and has no universal objective method of proof; no abstract does. You will know better than I do how the definition and evidences of evolution have been adjusted and modified over the years. I've read that there are statements of Darwin no longer accepted as valid. I've read the same about Huxley. Dawkins disagreed with Gould on punctuated evolution.

I'm not concerned about the details on this because every abstract has this issue. When you asked earlier, what other corroborating evidence is there for the properties of God, my first thought was, "What kind could there possibly be that would convince you?" There isn't any. Because you do not believe God exists, then there is no illustration anywhere that will fit within your body of truth and cohere. It is impossible. Think about it. As long as you believe all the stuff within your body of truth is, indeed, true, then, obviously, that which does not cohere can never be proved.

If God spoke tomorrow, there would be no way to prove He spoke. If all disease disappeared tomorrow, I see three headlines: 1) God Exists, 2) Aliens Visit Earth, and 3) Secret Government Experiment Works. Who knows, there could be others. The point is this: any conceivable physical manifestation does not prove the existence of a non-material entity. You know and I know that if a "supernatural" voice spoke at the Super Bowl and was documented, a large number of people would be

saying, “A physical event requires a physical [matter/energy] source. Give us time, and we’ll find it. There is no need for a God of a gap here.” Even if all suffering ended by next year, a logical explanation would simply be, “Evolution has continued its progress in moral and personal health for survival of the species.”

There is never a proof for an abstract, only evidence that fits a definition. And the evidence is determined by one’s presuppositions. Darwin examined specimens, saw an amazing commonality, and came to believe, “There has to be a common ancestor.” Once he accepted that truth as an axiom, his evidence continued to build. All this is logical and makes sense. What doesn’t make sense is that evolution somehow proves there is no personal God.

When I hear there has to be a common ancestor, then I immediately think, “Then there has to be a common creator.” Of course, others will immediately say, “Oh no, it’s only because you believe that; therefore you say it.” I see, but that isn’t true for these others? Because they don’t believe whatever; therefore they deny it?” I see no way out of this. There is no criticism about the abstract of others than does not become a self-criticism of one’s own abstracts.

It has been a mainstay of philosophy for centuries that you have to believe something before you can know something (referred to as Justified True Belief, JTB). Once a person believes something and it is a presupposition on which he bases other beliefs and knowledge, then “evidence” will always fit the presuppositions. This is particularly true for abstracts. The evidence for abstracts MUST cohere to be true.

If you do not believe a personal God exists (and you have said such), then there is no evidence anywhere that can overturn that. It will always be insufficient. The same is true for me. Both of us (and those who think like us in regard to God) use the coherence theory of truth. For you, God does not make sense as a whole when these factors are considered. For me, in return, God must exist in order to make sense of the whole. The only people our arguments will affect and truly be considered impartially are those who have not made up their minds.

There is no corroborating evidence that you would accept. In fact, tell me what it would be. Tell me what evidence would prove conclusively to you that God existed. Any that you will suggest will be open to interpretation. Why? It is abstract, and there are no agreed upon standards of measurements of evidence for abstracts.

Suffering Proves the Non-Existence of God

Your quote--

Now, add all those reasons in to a major one – suffering. You know the arguments against the coexistence of an all-loving god and suffering I assume. Theodicy exists to try to reconcile God with an

evil world, and no one has been able to successfully do it yet. It's the ultimate irony. I've heard almost every argument put out to explain it but they all fall short.

My reply—

From a logical perspective only, Alvin Plantinga has established an argument that has largely stopped the logical argument that God and evil cannot co-exist. He has developed a logical argument that is not contradictory that God and evil can co-exist. The primary criticism against it is that Plantinga has to assume an incompatibilist view of free will. I do not know your background on the philosophical views of free will, but compatibilism simply makes no sense.⁵²

Much greater than the logical problem of suffering is the existential problem.⁵³ Suffering is the only issue that makes sense to me as an objection to God. You even called it a major one. This one IS the biggie. My understanding is that Darwin walked away from the church after the death of a young daughter. I was in the car with my mother and grandparents that was directly behind the one that hit and killed my brother right in front of our house, just a short ways west of Hopewell. My mother was a bitter disbeliever concerning God for years.

I think the arguments of Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* about the suffering of children is still heart wrenching and overcoming. When I watch the famine currently in the Horn of Africa on the news, I think of Ivan's arguments. The logical arguments for and against God crumble before an empty stomach and an empty plate.

So, how do I "answer" this; better, how do I "live" with it? I only can identify two alternatives to this problem.

This first one is the one I have accepted. Over the centuries suffering has had hundreds of suggestions, clues, hints as to why it exists as well as God. These hints and clues will not identify any particular act of suffering, but, if there is an acceptable, though hard, suggestion as to why others suffer, then, perhaps, maybe probably, there is a reason that I do or my loves ones or others suffer.

⁵² Obviously, my comment that compatibilism makes no sense will raise ire; yet, the key problem with it is the same problem with Anselm's ontological argument. "Something just ain't right!" An online search for "Plantinga problem of evil" will provide several sources. Be sure to put on your thinking cap. Plantinga is a professional philosopher. His argument is for rigorous debate, not popular teaching. Again, his arguments won't "prove" that God and evil can co-exist. He provides a consistent model in which they can.

⁵³ This also is an argument against Plantinga. The online Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/>) states this criticism: "*Plantinga's view here, however, is very implausible. For not only can the argument from evil be formulated in terms of specific evils, but that is the natural way to do so, given that it is only certain types of evils that are generally viewed as raising a serious problem with respect to the rationality of belief in God. To concentrate exclusively on abstract versions of the argument from evil is therefore to ignore the most plausible and challenging versions of the argument.*" The difficulty with the criticism is that we again return to the problem of the concrete and the abstract. Obviously concrete illustrations are used to "prove" or "disprove" whatever, but we still have no means to objectively agree that that a particular act is "evil." I may call it evil, but you may not; so, particulars only support abstract arguments. Concrete cannot conclusively prove or disprove because evil has to be interpreted each and every time and will vary per person.

For myself, hints go back to the brilliant Greek tragedies. The Greek tragic motifs of time, place, and action in the book of Job along with its insightful metaphors give hints and suggestions also. Though I could give other examples that have helped me (*Crime and Punishment*, *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, *Cry the Beloved Country*, *Paradise Lost*, *King Lear*, and more), I have slowly and recently come to this: there is no current “answer,” only an undefined reconciliation, a type of comfort (a mystery). Using the Scripture there is this statement about the hereafter and suffering: Romans 8:18, *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glories that will be revealed in us*. If the Bible is true, then there will be resolution. Even if I can’t know why, I can be comforted.

The second alternative is materialistic. There is no God. There is no hereafter. Everyone will die, consciousness and mind forever gone, and everything material of the body will eventually disintegrate, its atoms busily joining other atoms. Eventually all matter will end either in fire or in ice. Any comfort is momentary. Any meaning is momentary. The universe has no meaning, no purpose, no goal ... and as an extension of it, neither do carbon units.

What has puzzled me is the criticism that theists direct toward a false understanding and a false comfort for suffering. Let’s assume that is true. What is the alternative? No comfort, no meaning, no nothing. I recall Dawkins writing something to the effect, “A friend who gives false comfort is no friend.” That sounds ok ... until a loved one is horribly suffering. I’ve heard a dying child ask, “Am I going to die?” So, the parent is no friend who simply holds the child and says, “Here, here, all will be ok”? Instead, that child needs the truth. Yes, indeed. “No, son, you will die. The doctor estimates you have about 12 hours left to live.” “Will I see you and Mom again?” “Absolutely not. You will die, and in time your body will rot away to nothing. You will no longer exist but will disappear into nothing.”

Somehow I have trouble envisioning any atheist telling such truth to his child. He might tell it to another child, but not to his. Of course, a disclaimer will arise, “Don’t use a child; use an adult!” Why? Truth is truth. If what is being said is true, then it is true in any situation. We don’t want to hear it said to a child because the pain is so great. That is precisely why Ivan used the suffering of children instead of the suffering of adults.

Of course one could choose Buddhism or Hinduism and continue to die via the process of *samsara* until he gets it right. The grand and glorious end is practically the same: 1) I become one with the universe and lose my consciousness, my mind or 2) I become one with Brahman and lose my consciousness, my mind. If these beliefs are right, then suffering could continue for eons before I lose all awareness. If I had to choose, the atheists have a better deal. I only need to suffer through one lifetime before losing consciousness.

Many will say I believe the first alternative because it makes me feel good. I guess that is possible, but I don’t think that’s the reason. It probably was at first, but it isn’t now. It is because I believe I have a mind that is distinct and separate from the body. This belief is ultimately based on my inability to disbelieve that “I” is not real. I believe I exist. That is considered the first fact of presuppositions. When I say “I” exist, I have never meant my body. I have always believed that if you cut off my arm, “I” am still intact. If all my limbs are cut off, “I” am still intact. If I incur Alzheimer’s (very

rife in my family), my brain will be shot, but I believe “I” would still be intact. Can I “prove” this? Not like a concrete issue, of course not. No abstract can be. All I can do is give evidences that seem to fit the whole, and such evidence is always subject to variant interpretations.

If it truly is ever proved objectively that self-consciousness (or the soul) is no more than a function of the brain, then we truly are automata, freewill is an illusory, and everything truly is reducible to physics, its laws and processes. I cannot “unbelieve” that I have freewill. It may be limited, but it is still an exertion of the real me. Even if I am put on life support and unable to speak to others, “I” still exists. Try as I might, I am unable to believe otherwise.

Christianity does not explain why there is suffering; neither do the non-Christians or the atheists or any points in between. Christianity does give comfort; the pure, logical extension of science does not ... because there is none. Christianity’s giving comfort is not proof of anything. If, on the other hand, if Christianity is true, then the comfort is real and true and can give meaning to suffering.

How Do You Know the Bible Is the Word of God

Your quote—

First of all, how do you know this? You stated it as a fact. You believe it, sure, but what informs your belief? The truth is, you MUST believe it in order to believe in God, because the bible is all the evidence you have.

My reply—

Long before I remember my first Bible story (I did not grow up in a Christian home), I remember being awed by the stars and simply saying, “There has to be something that did this.” Somewhere I heard that God created the heavens and the earth. It simply made sense at the time. When the Bible did enter my life, it confirmed and gave other statements that I could never have discerned in nature. As stated several times, God and the Bible resonate and cohere with the body of truth that define reality.

The wonder of creation is not limited to Christians in regard to God. I have made a point of reading the scriptures of other faiths and mythologies. Awe is not limited to religion or theists or atheists.

No doubt many would respond (possibly you), “That is misplaced awe and wonder. Evolution has created us. This sense of awe is created by the sheer size and complexity; it is merely how the body reacts to incomprehensibility.” Then details of Nature are given, perhaps something like Dawkins’ *Unweaving the Rainbow*. Let’s pile on one particular after another. Of course, when the phrase “This has been accomplished by evolution” or “Evolution explains everything” or whatever ... mind sneaks into the conversation.

You know as well as I do that evolution did not “accomplish” anything or that it “explains” anything. Those are metaphors. Evolution, if true, is only an explanation by minds of an unknowing, uncaring, indifferent, totally lucky process (the finely tuned issue, the anthropic issue) that requires a mind to state it and a mind to understand it. If true, once started then evolution develops like any physical process, but the fact that it started is astronomically miniscule ... or lucky.

Evolution, if true, only describes what happened; it is physics wrapped in a biological robe. Perhaps it is 100% true. I still know no more about the most important question of life: Why? Evolution gives me a WHAT on steroids. (Here I go again with evolution and metaphors, “evolution gives” and “steroids.”)

I believe there is other evidence beside the Bible for the existence of God: the existence of mind, which has been discussed throughout this essay.

Your quote—

Again, you can't say the bible says so because of the fallacy of begging the question. And is it infallible in everything, or just in spiritual matters?

My reply—

You may have notice that I only stated infallible, not inerrant. There is an important difference. Inerrant means discrepancies in the factual elements, that is, do the objective data correspond to reality.⁵⁴ Infallible means that the teaching will not lead astray; the teaching may be trusted to be helpful. Many Christians confuse these two terms and treat them as synonymous, but I'm not concerned with the confusion of others. I'm concerned about this conversation and that I use the terms precisely.

Logically it is possible for statements to have discrepancies but be accurate in teaching quality. In contrast, it is also possible for statements to be factually correct but lead the adherent into error.

Consider this: *President Obama, the 42nd President of the US, believes that modifying ideological extremes will enable legislation to advance. The House and the Senate need to follow that advice.* This seems to be excellent political advice, and, if leaders adopted it, they would not be led astray. However, there is an error, a factual error, in the first sentence. Obama is not the 42nd President.

Let's try this one: *President Herbert Hoover, the 31st President of the US, believed that an unregulated Wall Street would lead to great economic growth. The House and Senate need to support*

⁵⁴ There is no need to get absorbed into a debate about “reality.” A true statement is no more than the “is” that is asserted actually is, and the “is not” that is denied actually is not. If I am asked for my name and I say VL Vawter, then the statement is true if my name is, indeed, VL Vawter. That is the sense in which I mean the statement matches reality. Josiah Royce humorous stated it this way (possibly paraphrased), “A liar is a man who willfully misplaces his ontological predicates.”

an unregulated Wall Street to rekindle the growth of the 1920s. This seems to be horrible advice, though all the facts are correct.⁵⁵

Yes, I do believe Scripture is infallible, and, if the Lord's intent in the NT is the summary of Jesus (love God and love your neighbor), then the emphasis is spiritual, that is, advice for the mind. As illustrated, advice may be errant in fact, but infallible in acceptance.

Christian Are Enablers If They Do Not Stand in the Defense of Evolution

Your quote—

Most fundamentalists I know deny the fact of evolution and cosmology because of Genesis. And even if you don't, those other Christians, whether fundamentalist or mainline, are enablers. You may accept the scientific facts when they disagree with the bible, but most fundamentalists don't, and Christians like yourself let them get away with it. The church Rick goes to (and you, I was told) has a doctrine that accepts young-earth creationism, at least that's what Rick said. So if that's true, why don't some of the more moderate, or at least thoughtful, members of the congregation take a stand on that issue? I don't mean be belligerent about it, but in your weekly dialogue with the pastors and congregants, let them know that there is a saner alternative to the non-scientific baloney they espouse.

My reply—

What you're suggesting for me is nigh impossible and highly improbable for others. Let me explain.

In regard to me, I do not have a stand on evolution. Here is why.

There are two key reasons that evolution seems probable to me, and two key reasons it does not seem probable. First, why evolution seems probable to me.

1. The preponderance of authority. Frankly, how can so many people be wrong? Of course I know this sort of argument is a fallacy or is illogical. An appeal to the majority view or an appeal to authority is a common error. Even though it is illogical, it certainly bears strong emotional force on me.

I do not have the wherewithal to judge the evidence. I am not trained in this field, nor do I have an aptitude for it. I have to believe what others tell me. I have made a point of listening to documentaries supporting evolution. These viewings were done with an open mind as far as I know. The evidence seems solid, but it is only because I'm taking someone else's word for it.

⁵⁵ Advice is abstract because something is being discussed potentially. The future cannot be perceived by our sense prior to its occurrence. So, the advice is carefully defined, evidence listed to support it, and people believe it and accept or disbelieve it and ignore it. As we know, the actual turnout is never guaranteed.

Let me illustrate this way. I have a formal philosophy and literature background, and I'm reading several works of both right now. When someone makes a comment, I'm able to judge it based on my training and experience. For instance, several years ago there was a guest speaker at the church I was attending. His topic was something like the negative effect of philosophy upon Christianity. When the talk was over I still remember so many people just dazzled by what was said; they were awe-struck by the presentation. The speaker was superb in technique; however, his factual statements on philosophy were terrible. He had totally reversed the definitions and key figures of Continental rationalism and idealism. No doubt he had read some synopsis somewhere and had mixed up his notes.

The point is that everyone else in the church (so it seemed) accepted what the speaker said. The argument sounded so good. I had the wherewithal to actually judge the evidence presented. When it comes to evolution, I am in the same fix as the rest of the church who heard the speaker. My option is simply to believe or disbelieve, for I do not have the ability to judge what is being said. Even though I cannot judge it and even though it is a logical facility to appeal to the majority or to appeal to authority or the preponderance of authority, this preponderance still weights heavily for me.

2. There does appear to be a common ancestor or a common origin.

Immediately I'm shuffling my feet, looking down bashfully, and hoping the teacher doesn't call on me. The various videos I have watched included illustrations of anatomical similarities. What I have read about DNA seems to support common ancestry. Why am I hesitant to simply hope onto the bandwagon? This is really an extension of the first reason, but a particular, the one that impressed me the most. I have no means to judge the evidence.

Some years ago I went to a chiropractor for the worse pain I've ever experienced in my neck. Literally, it could not be touched without excruciating pain. He x-rayed it. During his consultation he remarked something to the effect about some sort of misalignment. He then said, "Look at the x-ray yourself. Can't you see it?" When that occurred, I lost all confidence in him. I have talked with radiologists; it can take years to read x-rays properly. What a ridiculous statement on this chiropractor's part.

Yes I can look at these diagrams and see this or that similarity, or can I? Is anatomy that simple? I tend to think my looking at selected pictures by editors of a film may not be the best way to simply say yes. My personal knowledge of genes is non-existent. All I know about them I have believed what another person said. I can't even remember the four chemicals (A,C,G, T?) that are arranged in the helix.

Next, why does evolution seem improbable to me.

1. The mind. As I have stated, if the mind is merely an extension of the brain, then the mind seems no more **substantively** impressive than a leaf growing out of branch or the mixing of gasoline and a flame. These things simply occur. They are simply there. One atom is not more “significant” than another. One process is simply another process out of thousands. Nothing is “special.”

Yet, this simply does not ring true with “me.” The “I” inside my head seems so real and distinct that any suggestion that it is not real but only a by-product of another process seems absurd. I know my feelings are not proof, but why have I used “I” or a form of it four times in this sentence alone? There is no way to escape the omnipresence in my life of an “I.” If the mind is not needed or is not a distinct entity, why am I wired to believe it is distinct?

Why is this metaphor or illusion even needed for survival? Why do we screw around with art and beauty? Why are you and I spending hours of our personal time discussing issues and searching for meaning as if they are really important, when the mind doesn’t even exist independently of natural processes?

2. This is related to #1. It is impossible for me to believe my mind is not an entity apart from natural processes. Many evolutionists believe this will be solved someday. There is no need to bring God into this; given time, we will understand how the brain and its processes have created this illusion of an “I.”

Let’s assume that the day comes when evolutionists believe the evidence is clear how the brain produces the illusion of “I.” Monism, without question, is true. The day that occurs then determinism will truly have won the day, and freewill, individuality, humanity become meaningless. They are simply abstract words created by some process. Perhaps if our diet had been different, “we” (that is, the collection of atoms with a brain that produces the idea of “we”) would have used different words or acted differently.

Science describes what. Minds are needed to determine meaning, interpretation, the methodologies of application, the desire to touch the transcendent by music, art, poetry, drama. Once “we” prove that our minds are merely an extension of physical processes, then why have you and I acted as if it were important what we thought about evolution or God? “I” cannot help what I thought, for any thinking that “I” do can be backtracked with enough science and computer power to determine eventually what physical process “caused” me, in a line of cause and effects, to think and believe what this collection of atoms designated by VL Vawter does.

The mind would merely become a mirror, a reflection of processes rather than an author of ideas. As I reflect on this I’m forced to one of two conclusions: 1) the mind truly exists distinct of natural processes and “I” does exist or 2) the mind is a result of physical processes and there was never a choice to think or do anything independently of said processes.

If #2 is true, then the brain in this body designated as VL had no choice but to seem to think and believe that the mind was real. This body called VL is not deciding anything if #2 is correct. And, if #2 is correct, this body called VL will eventually cease, thus producing no more illusions. If #2 is correct, why fuss about anything? Oh, “we” aren’t fussing about anything. The bodily units designated by this nominal term “we” are determined “to fuss.”

I see no way out of this #1 and #2. I see no excluded middle. Either “I” is real and distinct from bodily processes, or “I” is not. I have no sense of being determined within my inner self. I know circumstances have forced my body, and my mind has gone along for the ride because it is resident within my body (such as sleeping, eating, finding shelter, whatever). I cannot conceive my mind being parceled like my body could be (arm severed, leg severed, etc). I am 65, and my body feels the age, but my mind does not at all. My mind still feels the same as ever.

Because of these conflicts with evolution appearing true and appearing false, I cannot make a final decision. Another factor that makes it harder (perhaps impossible) to accept is the (seeming) requirement that God is not personal or not needed (frankly, not needed for anything). I’ve read that the number of physical scientists who are atheist or agnostic is 95+%.

I have no problem with the Roman Catholic view of religion and evolution. I have no problem with a time gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, allowing the time needed for evolution. I have no problem with God implementing a universe with a single law behind it, the undefined one called The Theory of Everything. I have no problem with God causing the initial spark of life. Yet, I suspect you would say such thoughts are medieval and would hinder proper science. God cannot, must not be included or involved in any way whatsoever.

Regardless how we deal with particulars, we have to start with something. Either matter/energy have always existed (or something impersonal existed to create matter/energy), or mind has always existed. The universe cannot be discussed meaningfully without something of some sort having always existed. As King Lear said, “Nothing will come out of nothing.”

Scientists as whole have zero problem positing that matter/energy (or something that produced them) have always existed. I simply do not see the problem with Mind having always existed. If Mind (God) has always existed, then the Biblical statement “being made in His image” makes sense. The design issue makes sense, even if brought about by The Theory of Everything which Mind could have invoked.

Of course, when challenged, “How do you know that,” my response is simple, “The same way and with the same methodology that you know that matter/energy has always existed—you simply believe it.” Also, for both of us, we believe that our respective eternal entity fits the coherence theory of truth, for there is no other way to “prove” the presuppositions.

If matter/energy has always existed, then most certainly the day will come that it will be proved that the mind is an extension of natural processes, at which time “we” will be proven to be illusory. The universe is deterministic, and freewill is false.

The above is why I cannot take a position unless it is a position that includes God, but I believe the orthodox test for a true evolutionist is the dismissal of a personal God. Hence I cannot take a side (evolution without religion or religion without evolution) since I believe that evolution would require God, minimalistically to start matter/energy with the TOE and to give the original spark of life and to infuse the soul into the individual.

A second reason I could not go to the leadership (and which would probably exempt a genuine evolutionist like yourself) is that 1) there is no “weekly dialogue” and 2) the leadership is fixed in religion without evolution. No one chit-chats anyone out of a core belief. (Also if #2 is true above, they are not “choosing” to disbelieve evolution anymore than evolution “chooses” my eyes to be brown or blue. It simply happened.)

Jesus Was Not Born of a Virgin

Your quote—

Most biblical scholars ... know that Jesus was not born of a virgin.

My reply—

This comment took me back a bit. I think you have read some hyperbole. As I have stated, I have studied Scriptures for a little over 40 years. My study has included liberal as well as conservative scholars. You stated “most Biblical scholars.” Really? Having actually read many of the scholars from both sides, I see more of a 50-50. The only way to narrow it more precisely is to conduct a proper statistical study. I’m aware of none on this issue. Are you?

You assert that “most Bible scholars ...” and then say “probably all of them” know that Jesus was not born of a virgin. Are you aware of the large number of conservative Bible colleges and seminaries in America and their enrollment? Of all things, there is a conservative Bible college in Hopewell!

Let’s assume that 100% of Bible scholars “know” that Jesus was not born of a virgin. Are you sure about the word “know”? Unless the body of Jesus could be found, verified, and His DNA checked along with Mary’s and Joseph’s ... how could they know? They might believe it, and they might believe it with high probability. But probability does not prove knowledge; it does not prove anything. Probability is a mathematical tool for describing a comparison, a ratio that compares a subgroup out of a total group. It does not prove real or unreal, true or false.

Consider evolution. You are aware of people who will argue against evolution because of all the factors that make its existence so infinitesimally small: the finely-tuned factors in which everything had to be unbelievably precise for life to even occur. I suspect your response to this is similar to Dawkins, “So what? We’re here regardless of what the odds say.” Probability is our friend and is “proof” if it

agrees with our presuppositions; it is “theoretical” and “hypothetical” if it disagrees with our presuppositions. Actually, it is neither. Probability is no more than a ratio, period.

The argument that an argument is true or false because of a fantastically high percentage or low percentage is ultimately an illogical argument and a fallacious one. I admitted such in my first comment about why I favored evolution. Truth is not determined by head count or appeal to authority. Statistics is a sophisticated headcount. The use of stats is for emotional reasons, not rational ones.

In other words, if it were true that most believe this or believe that ... so what? The majority of Germans under Hitler’s rule believe Jews should be disenfranchised. And that percentage is proof of what?

Your quote—

The Hebrew word for virgin and the Hebrew word for young woman is the same word. There are better words in Hebrew that could have been used if they really meant a virgin.

My reply—

My Hebrew is so-so; though I am still comfortable with my Greek. I can no longer sight read the NT, but I do well enough. Obviously I’m well aware of this objection, and it puzzles me why it is considered insuperable in contesting. I have the impression from reading atheists who wish to use the Bible as a weapon that this argument is a poison without an antidote.

There are two words that are used for maiden and virgin in the OT. (A third one is merely a different form of one of the other two, translated as virginity.) There is no single word that exclusively means virgin. Certainly there are no “better words” if virgin had been meant. I would be interested in your source that illustrates “better words.” I do think you have been misled on that point.

There are three other issues that proponents of this argument do not use; so, I will.

1. In a great many cultures of the world, particularly among the orthodox Jews of the Old Testament (and afterwards), a maiden (unmarried woman) IS a virgin. In Western culture with the changes since the 1960’s and on, a person needs to flip a coin and guess if a maiden is a virgin or not. Even in the early 20th century an unmarried woman implied a virgin. Even I can recall my grandparents and mother talking about the “shame” of girls who lost their virginity prior to marriage. Even in the OT a marriage could be annulled if the maiden could be demonstrated to not be a virgin, i.e., no blood on the bedding on the night of the consummation. If we wish to think of maiden in our 50-50 mentality, we may; but the Jews of the OT did not. A maiden who was not a virgin could exist, but she existed as a scandal.
2. The Jewish scholars of the diaspora had their opportunity to make this issue crystal clear. For nearly 200 year from 300-100BC, the OT was translated from the Hebrew into Greek by Jewish scholars. It is called the Septuagint and is referred to as LXX. These men could easily have

translated the word or used phrases so there would be no question as to its meaning. How did they translate Isaiah 7:14? What word did they use: Παρθένο, parthenos. In earlier Greek it meant either maiden (unmarried) or virgin. Eventually it predominately meant virgin. Παρθένο is the same word used by Matthew in reference to Mary, by which time it meant virgin.

3. In the Hebrew and the Greek (both the LXX and the NT), the definite article is used. “The virgin” is going to have this child, not “a virgin.” From a grammatical distinctive, this is very important and affects the interpretation. Not just any maiden (unmarried, in OT culture presumed to be a virgin), but “the maiden.” It emphasizes her status. As a sleep around? That’s 20th century talk.

Does my additional info “prove” Mary was a virgin? No, of course not. But most certainly yours does not conclusively and definitely disprove it. It seems a better argument would simply be to say, “There is no way for a woman to become pregnant without insemination” or something like that. The linguistic thrust is not a knockout punch as it is believed to be. I don’t even get the supposed significance of it. It certainly is not a poison. I’ve heard it given in debates with the solemnity of a Papal encyclical. I get the impression from the critic, “I really don’t want to burst your bubble, but you need to know the truth. Mary was really a maiden, not a virgin.” If someone wishes to believe this is a killer argument, then believe away; but let’s not use 20th-century social standards as the measure of interpretation.

Miracles Did Not Really Occurs

Your quote—

The miracles that Jesus supposedly performed are unsubstantiated. There were no witnesses to any of Jesus’ miracles who took the time to record them for history. Plus, if you read the NT in the order it was written, you will see that his Miracles became more miraculous as time went on, the same way any other legend develops.

My reply—

I am not troubled or bothered in the least if you simply disbelieve in miracles. The use of the text as you state is puzzling. The miracles of Jesus are in the gospels except for one, Jesus encountering Paul on the road to Damascus. I’m not sure how the reading of the NT in chronological order gives a particular insight. I have read and taught a Harmony of the Gospels (chronological order with the four gospels in a parallel format) at least three times. I’ve lost count how many times I’ve read the Bible (for some years I read the entire Bible four times each year).

I guess what is not clear to me is “his Miracles became more miraculous.” I have tried to understand the meaning and significance of this statement, and it eludes me. There are Greek words in the NT translated (not interchangeably) as power, wonder, sign, which are used with an incident of a

miracle. The words respectively mean something unusual and unexplainable (power), something that astounds (wonder), and something that teaches or points to God (sign).

For instance, the Gospel of John only uses the word sign for miracle, that gospel only having six miracles in it. Obviously John was more concerned with what the incidents taught as opposed to their inexplicability or emotional excitement. How is inexplicable “more” inexplicable? How is astounded “more” astounded? How is a sign “more” of a sign? I cannot make sense of miracles becoming more miraculous.

Then, how does this tie into the genre of legends? Or the genre of epics? I understand how people will look backwards and “explain” how such-and-such **really** happened. Of course, this effort too is abstract and will be treated like other abstracts. Also, the problem when it comes to art is that there are no rules. I have a decent background in Western literature. I have read legends and epics. I’m curious as to the pattern of the origin of legends being miracles becoming more miraculous. I’m not concerned with your explaining that position or defending it, but do you recall the source? I would like to have it. I have no doubt there are several out there, and I’m willing to wager a dinner for the two of us at your restaurant of choice that I’ll find discrepancies in the examples used for this “proof” of legends. I am confident in my background on this. I already know the author has picked and chosen evidence; even the opus, *The Golden Bough*, has discrepancies and assumptions in its assertions.

The argument for you should not be literature or some theory that changes from generation to generation. You’re a biologist. Stay with your strength. Simply say there are no miracles that have been substantiated by science ... or whatever you are allowed to say within your framework.

Assuming the gospels were written up to 60 years after the death of Jesus (though there are plenty of scholars who will argue for earlier date of 30 years after his death), the oral tradition was alive and well. The fact that oral tradition was used and was “standardized” is attested in the overlap of so many passages in the gospels.⁵⁶ If oral tradition is standardized, which is probable, then the gospel writers transcribed eyewitness material, this being based on dozens and dozens of details that would be eyewitness details.

There Was No Sacrifice When Jesus Died on the Cross

Your quote—

So what was the big point there? There was absolutely no sacrifice, even if he did die on the cross.

⁵⁶ Liberal scholars, for some reason, insist that a document called Q preceded the other gospels, and the writers copied from it. I am puzzled by this since oral tradition of cultures have been documented as being uncannily standard, literally word for word. There is no reason aside from some presupposition that Q was used by the gospel writers instead of oral tradition. It does sound odd, doesn’t it? Oral tradition had to be transcribed as oral tradition before the gospel writers could have “massaged” it. If oral tradition was standardized, why wouldn’t the gospel writers simply have “massaged” it.

My reply—

As I stated several times, it was and is irrelevant to me what you believe about this. My point in listing the fundamentals of the faith was to provide a definition of a fundamentalist that is based upon the origin of the term in the early 20th century. I still don't know your definition. As I have said, I **may** not agree with your definition, but at least I'll know what you mean when you use the word.

I didn't use the word sacrifice precisely because of its broader meanings as you have used. If the gospel accounts are true as well as the further comments by Paul, then Jesus did not merely sacrifice Himself on the cross. That's why I didn't use the word. I'm not sure why you changed my wording.

A "substitutionary, vicarious death for the sins of the world" is rather unique. Of course, you can just say it's false; that's fine. But to say it is the same as a soldier dying for the buddy next to him or a Muslim terrorist flying in the Twin Towers has no similarity other than dead bodies when it's all over. In fact, to even suggest that Jesus died for the wrongs of the world is rather presumptuous. Denying and pooh-poohing is fine; saying it was same ole, same ole makes no sense.

Your quote—

After all, Jesus was supposedly God. Jesus, according to John, was with God or was God or whatever from the very beginning. So we have God deciding to come down to earth as his own son, just so he could annoy a bunch of Jews so that they would have him killed so that he could then return to heaven where he came from. Nothing lost, nothing gained.

My reply—

The only reason I think there is such confusion on the Trinity⁵⁷ is the total loss of philosophical basics. There is a difference between disbelief and confusion. The "three in one and one in three" blindly stated without explanation does lead to out and out goofiness. I totally agree with you, that the Trinity as popularly explained, leads to the conundrums you stated. Without question it is absolutely absurd as popularly explained or stated.

I will only give a recap here, but a fuller explanation may be found at <http://www.victoriesandvumblings.org/doctrine1.html>. That article is long; so, I don't expect you to read it; furthermore, I don't expect you to believe it or accept it. If you do read it, all I am asking is for

⁵⁷ You don't mention the word, of course, but the comments about Jesus being God and coming as his own son are the comments that come out of the doctrine of the Trinity. Though you did not mention the word per se, I will answer as though you did because your objection is a typical objection to the Trinity. Then again, your clear statements that you absolute do not believe in the Christian God would presumably include the rejection of the Trinity.

you to understand what is being stated. It is irrelevant to me if you believe it. If you must reject Christianity, at least reject a meaningful explanation.

“God” is not a name; it is a category of being. It would be similar to the word “man” or “dog” or “cat.” There are times in Scripture where “God” is used as a vocative, but typically is a compound: LORD God, the God who sees (El Elroi), the God who provides (God Almighty), the God of Abraham, the God of their fathers, etc. God was often used as an unnamed being, “I was afraid of God,” similar to “I was afraid of the man.”

The name of God in the Old Testament was Jehovah or, more currently, Yaweh. This is designated in the OT as LORD (all caps to distinguish it from Lord, a different Hebrew word). So LORD God could be construed as “The God whose name is Jehovah” or anything like that. We might use a similar construction such as “Frank that man over there” or “Judy that woman over there.”

As you probably know the doctrine of the Trinity did not arise formally until @325AD. Why such a delay? The documents seem to illustrate that as time went on the statements of Jesus were considered more seriously, perhaps, more technically. When Jesus said, “I and my Father are one,” it was simply accepted. As time went on after His death and resurrection, more and more writers began to state there was something different here. There were too many unusual and unique references to his relationship to the Father. The comments were too distinct and different.

Eventually God, the category, the definition that had for centuries listed characteristics, now was understood to include more than one personality that entailed all the identical properties of God. The immediate response is “Ahh, polytheism.” Not quite. In polytheism the characteristics and inherent abilities differed from god to god. There always is one who is toughest of all. The early church fathers, who had a majority consensus on the subject, believed that all the definitions of God were contained with one personality, called Father, and all the same definitions of God were also contained in another personality in the Son. As the role of the Son was recognized, so was the role of the Spirit. The Spirit was considered to be more than a general feeling or the felt presence; the Spirit was recognized as a personality that had the identical nature as the other two. One was not stronger or smarter or faster than another. Their nature was identical, but their personalities were distinct.

The closest illustration we would have to this nature would be identical triplets. Essentially they have the same DNA. They are three persons, but the same “stuff.” The Father, Son, and Spirit are three entities, three personalities, but the same “stuff.”

It is not an issue to me whether you disbelieve this, but it does change the wording of your sentence. Jesus was God (the nature that makes God, God). Jesus, the personality, was not the same as Jehovah, the personality. You may choose to say, “You’re just changing words to make them what you want.” No, I’m using the words with the intent and meaning as stating in the Nicene Creed. Even Biblical liberals will say that is what the Church Fathers meant ... but they simply don’t believe it.

The “Sacrifice” of Jesus Is Exaggerated

Your quote—

Soldiers at war make greater sacrifices all the time. The Muslim terrorists who flew airplanes into our buildings were sacrificing as much for their beliefs. But Jesus got to walk out of the grave three days later. Who else who has sacrificed their lives for others, and there have been many, got to do that? So, not much of a sacrifice from that perspective, is it? And that’s only if you believe he actually was crucified.

My reply—

I purposely did not use the word sacrifice because of this ambiguity as stated earlier. In the three examples, Jesus, soldiers, terrorist, the net result is dead bodies. Even if I had used or meant the word sacrifice, how is one death a greater sacrifice? It is impossible to give any more than one’s life. Yet, we come to the real distinction. The Biblical writers state that Jesus died for the sins of the world so forgiveness could be granted and the gift of everlasting life be granted.

A person is free to slap his knee and concentrate not to break into hilarious laughter because it is so absurd. Disbelief is allowed, but to say what the death entailed and what the promised results were no more than a soldier in battle or a Muslim terrorist is ludicrous. If it is indeed a fairy tale and sloppy mythology, how can such a thing be accepted as true so many centuries later?

Grandiose statements, such as, Jesus died for all the sins of the world so forgiveness could be granted, may be dismissed as absurd and unbelievable; but why in the world would anyone try to explain away such a statement by making it commonplace? If anything, the death, as explained in the NT, is not commonplace.

Minimizing or generalizing the statements in the New Testament will not work. They are too provocative; the claims, too outlandish. The propositional statements by Jesus and about Jesus by the other Biblical writers are not common, routine, or expected.

There Is No Corroboration for the Crucifixion

Your quote—

The Romans kept decent records back in those days, and there are no records of his crucifixion, no records of the events that supposedly took place during the crucifixion, such as a major earthquake or the sun being darkened, and no record of his supposed resurrection, either. Even the bible doesn’t supply eyewitnesses to that event.

My reply—

Who knows why there are no records? Reasonable explanations can be provided. For instance, the execution of common criminals was common. There is no reason to believe there were stored in a super, segregated vault. The record was made, then stored. One more dead body, big deal. After 40 years who knows what kind of storage there was? When the Romans escaped the city when the Jews took over in their rebellion in the 60's, why would a fleeing government be sure to take 40 year old records of the deaths of common criminals? And when the city was complete razed by the Romans in 70AD, why couldn't the records have been destroyed then? Why couldn't the Jews have destroyed them out of spite while they had control of the city? Even in our sophisticated computers, data can get lost or entered incorrectly. The ancients were magically exempt from this? The destruction of Jerusalem was so devastating there is a vast hole in historical data; there is more than a gap with corroborating the Bible; there is a lack corroborating all kinds of beliefs and events at that time.

The absence of quantities of **corroboratory** text is not particularly astounding after 2,000 years. What would be much more critical would be **contradictory** text. The explosion of Christianity in Jerusalem and Judea after the resurrection was significant. Why aren't there contemporary testimonies **denying** the Christian ones? Why aren't there dozens of documents compiling and denying the rumors of a false prophet Jesus, the lie of the resurrection, the silly rumor of the feeding of the 5,000, et al? Critics are so bothered about the silence of additional evidence that the silence of contradictory evidence, particularly in a cauldron as Jerusalem, isn't brought up or even suggested. Why does one silence of evidence bother atheists, but the other doesn't?

Logically nothing can be determined from silence. There are four documents that state that Jesus died and rose again supposedly by eyewitnesses or people who knew the eyewitnesses. You say that is not enough. Ok, what's the number? There is no number. The real argument is that science cannot verify a resurrection. That's the argument, not the lack of corroboration or lack of denial.

The Resurrection Has No Evidence

Your quote—

Like I said, show me the evidence.

My reply—

There is no evidence that would ever be acceptable. What evidence would prove to you beyond a doubt that Jesus rose from the dead? There is none. Whatever evidence is submitted will be subject to a different interpretation. You're asking for proof like the natural sciences that have universally accepted methodologies. No abstract has that. None.

The issue is not evidence. It never has been. For a list of reasons, I believe Jesus rose from the dead. Because I believe that, the evidence is sufficient. For a list of reasons, you do not believe Jesus rose from the dead. Because you believe that, no evidence is sufficient.

There are four accounts that record the resurrection. The four accounts do not harmonized precisely; there are a couple of uncertain chronologies. If the accounts matched perfectly, the writers would have been criticized for having corroborated. Since the account slightly differed, a key identifier of genuine eyewitnesses, then critics claim they can't be true because of the differences.⁵⁸

We know very little about the Peloponnesian War except from Thucydides. Are you troubled that there is only one source? Caesar's *Gaullic Wars* is nearly alone in detailing what happened in Gaul. Is that troublesome? The number of sources is not the issue. Because Jesus is not believed to have been crucified and resurrection, then 50 accounts would not be enough.

The real issue is the body of evidence that our presuppositions have posited as reality. I doubt seriously that history is any factor in your not believing the resurrection occurred; most likely it is the lack of scientific evidence. It is so improbable that it is impossible. Once impossible is believed, then "evidence" to the contrary will prove nothing. Since the evidence is contrary to coherence, then it must be tainted, whether there are four sources or forty sources.

Your quote—

And I would like more evidence than a few buffoons whom Jesus himself became annoyed with on more than one occasion for their lack of understanding.

My reply—

What does buffoon have to do with true or false? Though a buffoon might be more likely to make a false statement, there is no inherent necessity that he will. Such a demand is a request for a fallacious argument.

Though that may make the argument more probable, certainly it does emotionally, it is illogical.

Children might be questioned as to the truth of what they are saying because of their confusion of reality with imagination. Yet, when several children give the same story about seeing a man outside the window, then coherence occurs.

Critics insist that the gospel were written 60 years later. Let's assume that. So, haven't the buffoons had plenty of time to get their story straight? The intriguing issue about the resurrection

⁵⁸ There seems to be a failure to distinguish between contradictory statements and unreconciled statements. To say there were angels at the tomb and to say there were no angels at the tomb is contradictory ... and is a real problem. For one writer to say an angel was there and another to say there were two angels is unreconciled, but not necessarily contradictory. There are reasonable explanations for the mention of an angel versus two angels. It is difficult to reasonably explain angels and no angels.

accounts is the numerous details that can be falsified. There are slight differences and uncertainty about the order of events, a common feature of eyewitnesses. Yet, this is to no avail. Why?

Buffoons are not a real objection. True and false are not determined by buffoonery but by correspondence or coherency. This objection seemed to be the most trivial of all that you stated. It seemed that your intense dislike and rejection of Scripture overflowed unnecessarily. I took the time to respond, but it seemed to me that your anger blurred your thinking horribly at this point. Doesn't it seem odd that you request a fallacious argument?

Fundamentalists Have Failed to Think the Resurrection Through

Your quotes—

Oh, and how does that bodily resurrection thing work in heaven, anyway? Is God permanently attached at the hip with his corporeal alter-ego? And what about the rest of humanity, the good ones who are going to be resurrected to join Jesus, will they have their old bodies? What if I don't like my body, will I get a new one? And will my heart still beat? What if it stops, will I die again? Will I still have to take a crap? Will I fart in heaven? Sometimes fundamentalists just don't think things through.

My reply—

Your dislike of fundamentalists is so great that you mention them specifically, but the resurrection was believed for nearly 2,000 years before the first fundamentalist showed up. A fundamentalist and fundamentalism are 20th century terms.

As far as the "attached to the hip," if you wish to combine nature and personality, then the absurd image is correct. If you wish to distinguish nature and personality as they have been for centuries, then the image falls apart.

Will they have their old bodies? There are a number of NT passages that discuss this. I'm puzzled by your question. If you wish to say, "I do not believe what the NT says about the new body for the believer," that's fine. Rejection of the NT teaching on the resurrected body is ok, but to ask questions that have been addressed as if they haven't been addressed simply puzzles me. 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5 are filled with comments about the new body and the old body. Again, feel free to disbelieve, but I'm at a loss why you suggest such questions have not been addressed. If ridicule is a weapon in your arsenal (and you do tend to favor it), then ridicule what is there, not what is not there.

You asked about digestion and complications with digestion. More than likely you used "crap" and "fart" because adults laugh even now (well, the guys do) when they pass gas at a table. The laughter, I assume, heightens an assumed absurdity. Ridicule is an effective weapon, but it is also unkind. I avoid it. No information is being provided. That's why I won't waste a minute with Jon Stewart or Steve Colbert. All they do is ridicule.

Digestion for the resurrected body per se is not discussed in the NT; however, Jesus, in his resurrected body, did specifically eat some fish with His disciples. Either he ate it and the new body digested it as we understand it now or digested it in a different way. Let's assume digestion works the same way. There would be discarded substance that the body cannot use or is discarding. Some of the fish that Jesus ate would presumably not be digested. I have no reason that Adam and Eve did not urinate or defecate prior to their sin.

How does this prove there is no resurrected body? What's the connection here? Jesus in a resurrected body ate food. And??? Is this absurd? Does a resurrected body inherently require no food? What if it doesn't require food? What if eating in a resurrected body is simply for the pleasure of taste and visiting with others? I have no idea. All I know (or believe) for certain is this: *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."* The properties and scope of my resurrected body is unknowable except by a few analogies with the resurrected body of Jesus. All I can possibly "think through" is how it might have been with His body.

Again, that's not the issue. If you don't believe it for whatever reasons, then no argument is sufficient. Facts are not the issue in any of this; it never has been, and it never will be.

The 2nd Coming of Christ Is Riddle with Confusion and Relies Upon *Revelation*, a Disputed Book in the Canon of Scripture

Your quote—

Not even all fundamentalists agree on this one. Some believe he will come before the tribulation, some think it will be during, some think afterward, and some think it is only figurative. The view comes from Revelation, which is a book that is so off the charts that it almost wasn't even adopted as part of the official canon. There was a lot of debate over its inclusion. And the vast majority of bible scholars knows that it has nothing at all to do with Jesus, the Rapture or the future, but was actually a veiled, metaphor-rich lament of the current (eg. Roman) times.

My reply—

End times is not a uniquely fundamentalist issue, nor is it limited to the 20th century and afterwards. It is true that the doctrine of the Rapture was not developed until the 19th century in England. The early church's prophetic view seemed to be no more than what is called "chiliasm." There has been movement all over the place since 100AD. By the way, what discipline hasn't? Is science untrue today because of difference in the past? Differences within propositional statements do not imply false for all of the statements. They may be all false, but not necessarily.

Without question there are different views, but what is agreed, especially among fundamentalists, is that Jesus will physically return, which was what I stated. Amillennial views, premillennial, postmillennial, and whatever else advocate that eventually Jesus will physically return and rule. The charts and graphs differ, but those were not part of the foundation of fundamentalism.

You give the impression that the 2nd coming of Christ is limited to *Revelation*. Actually, if *Revelation* were not accepted into the canon of Scripture, the only 2nd-coming issue that would be left out would be the Millennium. The 2nd coming is mentioned in plenty of other places in Scripture. For instance, every chapter of 1 Thessalonians refers to and/or gives some information about the 2nd coming.

Once again you made a statistical comment: “the vast majority of bible scholars knows that it has nothing at all to do with Jesus, the Rapture or the future.” Just what is this being based on again? I am not aware of a single Bible scholar who would say that *Revelation* has nothing at all to do with Jesus, not one. Give me liberal scholars as far left as Rudolph Bultmann or Paul Tillich, and they will not take that position. I agree that they will not consider Jesus in the same light as fundamentalists, but even they will say that the 15 times (per the Greek) that Jesus or Christ is mentioned in *Revelation* that it is the Jesus or the Christ mentioned in the other places in the New Testament, not a different Jesus or a different Christ. They may not believe what it says, but they do not deny that the comments about Jesus are indeed about Jesus.

I am so puzzled at your strong statistical statements and inferences concerning the Bible. I may be wrong, but it appears you are reading anything that is opposed to fundamentalism and accepting it as unequivocally true. As I have said multiple times in this essay, disbelieve as you please; but your arguments about the Bible to discredit the fundamentalist hermeneutic of the Bible are so forced and unsubstantiated.

I have read so much online and in other books by critics of the Bible. They attempt to use arguments in the Bible to weaken the Bible’s argument. That’s fine; anyone may critique. What are puzzling are the arguments that are used: the insistence upon certain definitions, the use of arguments from silence, the questioning of credentials or authority, statistical inferences, the quoting of texts without regard to contextual data, and on and on.

I have carefully read Dawkins’, Harris’, and Hitchens’ critique of the Bible. They need to remain with their strength. For instance, if I hate Shakespeare, then I’ll find a list very easily of what is wrong with him. The problem, of course, is that my intense dislike will lead me to exaggerate what is wrong. Have you never heard an arch political conservative or liberal criticize his opposite? **Everything** is wrong with the other guy, everything. When Bush was President, Keith Obermann, a former TV political critic, found nothing but fault in anything Bush said. Since Obama, Fox critics have found nothing but fault. Intense dislike will find errors even where error is non-existent.

It would be better if the three would simply say, “We do not believe the Bible is the word of God because we do not believe there is a God.” Honestly, even if the Bible had no conflicting passages, would you still believe? Of course not. Your presuppositions and experiences have created your body

of truth (and it has for me), and, when a propositional statement does not cohere with that body of truth, then it is false.

The Bible was not written to convince people there is a God; it was written for those who do believe in God. From the first verse, “In the beginning God,” God is assumed.

As a side note on my definition of fundamentalism, it means nothing to me if you believed any of it. I wanted you to know that if I say, “So-and-so is a fundamentalist,” then you would know exactly what I meant. Whether you would go on to think that so-and-so is demented and mad for believing such nonsense is irrelevant to the definition. The definition is precise, historically rooted, and can be determined by inquiry.

So, when you say fundamentalist ... what do you mean? What is your definition? I still can't tell except that whatever it is, it is very bad indeed.

We Live in an Indeterminate Universe

Your quote—

Our universe could have been created by a quantum fluctuation. Thus, we are probably living in just one of many universes, maybe an infinite number. My point? These quantum fluctuations are unpredictable, at least on a case-by-case basis. Thus we live in a totally indeterminate universe.

My reply—

These sentences are an excellent illustration about the concrete and the abstract. I am not agreeing or disagreeing with what you asserted, i.e., we live in an indeterminate universe. The point I wish to emphasize is how proof is used against Christian statements, but it is not with scientific ones, at least not this one.

Your proof for your assertion is one “could have been,” one “probably,” one “maybe”, and one “at least.” In other words, it is loaded with “I don't know.” Yet, an assertion is made.

The creation of the universe is an abstract; it cannot be perceived by our senses or by instruments. We have to use logic, analogy, and language and simply press on. What bothers me is that if I do this with God, I am immediately charged with lack of proof. If you use abstracts with science, such as your theory on the creation, it is considered careful and thoughtful work. But there is no difference.

You do not **know** if creation is really that way anymore than I **know** whatever about God. We simply believe our positions and line up the illustrations to prove it. We feel strongly about our positions because of the coherence. I guess I'm weary of the unfairness of it all.

I know that if I made a similar series of statements about God, I would be laughed at by scientists; but, if a scientist makes the statement you did at a symposium on cosmology, it would be thoughtfully considered, but there is zero difference in the nature and scope of the propositional statement or the “proof” offered.⁵⁹

Fundamentalist Refuse to Understand Evolution

Your quote—

Most fundamentalists misunderstand evolution because they don't want to understand it. If they truly understood it, very few of them would have a problem accepting it.

My quote—

I'm not convinced that they misunderstand evolution because they want to. Perhaps you're correct; I'm not sure.

On my part I think I understand the broad issues in regard to evolution. I feel a little self-conscious saying that to you, for I strongly suspect your breathe of knowledge on evolution compared to mine is that of a mountain range looking down on a child's sandcastle. Believe me, I reflect very, very carefully around you and other experts in Biology before stating any particular about evolution.

I do have trouble with a certain point, which has been mentioned several times in this essay. My difficulty has nothing to do with Genesis; it has to do with mind and the extinction of “I.” Evolution without a God will inherently and necessarily subordinate mind to natural processes eventually. An adherent of evolution will necessarily have to take that position unless he believes the mind (the soul) is separate and distinct from natural processes. This position cannot be taken unless the person is a theistic evolutionist (a dualistic position).

If evolution allowed an open tent for Gould's NOMA and the Roman Catholic encyclicals on evolution, then some fundamentalists could accept natural evolution **with** God. I could, for instance. But I know I would not be welcomed. Dawkins clearly detests Gould's comments and considers it unreasonable and an unnecessary concession to be a nice guy. To Dawkins, Gould lacked the guts to stand up for what evolution means, and it means God is not needed. If God is not needed for nature, then what is He needed for at all? Just cross one more name off of the god list.

⁵⁹ Let's consider “indeterminate” for a moment; that is a very serious statement, and you may be claiming too much. I am assuming you mean that indeterminate means that some features of the universe and its behavior cannot be determined. A natural or physical cause-effect will not be determined for some properties or methods of the universe because there are none. Is this what you mean? If so, you have opened the door for a spiritual world, and I'm sure you don't want to do that. Perhaps you need to define indeterminate. Einstein was correct in his resistance of the implications of quantum mechanics. If quantum mechanics is true in the extension that you have suggested, then God can play dice with the universe.

You have to believe me when I say I have not been personally offended by anything you have said about fundamentalists, though I am one and what you have said about them applies to me. I do not believe you would welcome my kind of thinking. Your venom and dislike oozed out in so many places in both of your emails. I could not believe that you'd ever be comfortable. "That fundamentalist, Vawter. Somehow he wants to drag God into it: the first spark of life, 'infusing' the soul (whatever that means), the 'mind.' Good grief, he even believes miracles happened."

I know there are fundamentalists who describe and talk about evolutionists with the same harshness that you do about them. For those who agree with you, they love what you say and will applaud, even as the congregation will the forceful preacher. Those who disagree with you will boo you, even as will happen with the preacher. The problem is the one in either camp who begins to question. He will be seen as a Quisling.

I never felt this myself until your emails. It never crossed by my mind until I read your intense dislike of fundamentalists. When I've read the new atheists, only with Dawkins could I detect a seething hatred. Hitchens just wishes the religious crowd would leave him alone. Harris can tolerate that as long as they aren't dangerous. If the religious crowd wishes to be unreasonable, so be it. You're the first angry atheists whom I have exchanged emails with, and your anger against fundamentalists is so pronounced and vehement. That's my crowd. That's my wife you're talking about. My closest friends are such. I have no confidence whatsoever that my viewpoint would remotely be accepted, only tolerated with the hopes that I'd simply keep quiet.

The door has pretty well been shut against me. The only way I'd be welcomed (or those who think similarly) is that God must be denied, or any personality be removed, something like Brahman of the Hindus or the deist god of the 18th century.

That is the problem with anger. You reinforce your supporters, you might influence the neutral (whether your arguments are right or wrong), but you shut down those who might be in the other camp who is seeking some sort of reconciliation of views. Passion is helpful; I'm not convinced anger is. One thing about your anger; I have no doubt how I am viewed. In your eyes, I am the enemy.

Natural Selection Is Not a Random Process But a Mechanism

Your quote—

If I set a trained monkey down before a word processor, and if I programmed that word processor properly, the monkey could type out *Gone with the Wind* in a few days, by random chance. For example, I could program the word processor to save all letters that matched the next letter in the novel and disregard all wrong letters. Natural selection works the same way (by analogy, of course, not exactly the same). It weeds out all traits that are not helpful, but selects for those that cause the individual to be better suited to its environment, giving it a greater chance of passing that trait on to its offspring.

My reply—

Of course natural selection doesn't work exactly that way; you are using analogy. There is no other way to describe an abstract. What interest me in this explanation are the "mind" characteristics: "weeds out," "works," "giving," and "selects." You're personifying Natural Selection without giving it a shape or form but simply using the verbs of a personality, the processes of a mind. Your language makes Natural Selection sound reflective, purposeful, deliberate. We know it's not that at all. Scientists have observed data for different time periods. In the data in this study, genes have changed over the time period. Certain data with certain gene traits outnumber others. This is what happened. It is documented.

But isn't it dry and boring? So, an invisible entity is created called Natural Selection. This entity "drives" the process and "weeds out" bad genes and "selects" good genes. I have no problem with Natural Selection, but it is only a concept. It is abstract to the core. There is not a real thing out there doing this or directing it. It is a metaphor to describe a process, to simply describe phenomena that occurred.

Don't get me wrong. There's no choice. But if I ask you, "Show me the proof that Natural Selection really exists, that it is an entity with mind as your words indicate," there is none for there is no such "thing, no such being." It is an arbitrary chosen word that illustrates (rather forcefully) what happens in succeeding generations. Natural Selection is a metaphor that states, "Nature appears to be selecting, but it doesn't, of course."

Perhaps you do need to correct me. Are you saying there is really an objective entity that has conscious processes that produces the results called Evolution? I don't think so. It's a language convention to describe something that cannot be perceived by the senses. This same process occurs whenever any abstract is discussed.

Frankly, the criticism directed toward theists for falsely personifying God is not directed toward the personification attributed to natural processes that are cold, indifferent, blind, and pitiless. Why is it wrong for theist to personify, but not scientists?

Omniscience and Omnipotence Have Been Redefined to Create an Argument

Your quote—

You seem to be redefining omniscience and omnipotence. I'm using them in the context that almost all fundamentalists I've ever talked to use them.

My reply—

I'm not redefining omniscience or omnipotence at all. Omniscience is the capacity to know all things, and omnipotence is power to do all possible things. (Omnipotence does not mean the ability to do the impossible. Nonsense is nonsense with or without the prefix omni-.)

What we are differing on is how are the omni's practically experienced; in other words, what are the existential extensions of omniscience and omnipotence. My original comments do you were not it HAD to be this way, but whether such scenario could exist and still maintain the definitions. I agree that most define the practical extension of omniscience to mean that God foreordained all the details of what would happen. If that is true, then we run into all the goofiness that you illustrated in your first email. Obviously the application or the definitions are wrong ... IF contradiction cannot exist. I chose to keep the definitions and rework the applications. The applications that I used were not merely hypothetical (imaginary) but were based on micro-illustrations that we recognize, perhaps have used. IF mind is from Mind, if I could think of this, then Mind could think of it. If Mind (or God) has the time, smarts, and ability, then He could do on a genuine, grand scale as to what I poorly illustrated with my wife. That's all.

I have struggle with this myself for years. How could God, omniscient and omnipotent, have a plan for my life and allow free will? I provided a simple example on a human scale how this sort of thing could occur. If God is eternal (so He has the time), if He is omniscient (so He would know me intimately and could successfully predict all my responses), if He is omnipotent (so He can figure out with His omniscience to put into play, His power, what He needs in order to respond to any potential act), and my will would still be intact because the Lord could keep Himself from knowing what I would do (in the same way that Jesus contained Himself and said He did not know when the end would come).

The definitions have not changed; what has changed is the practical scenario in which it is played out. Since contradiction cannot exist (the first principle of presuppositions), I believe your scenario cannot be true (precisely because it contradicts) whereas mine could be true because it does not contradict. (I say "could be" because there may be an excluded middle that I simply cannot reason out nor heard from anyone else.)

God Has a Plan for Everyone; Thus God Has Ordained Heaven or Hell

Your quote—

However, whether God knows every little detail of my future actions or just the main plan of my existence, the fact is, most Christians, fundamentalist or not, believe that God does have a plan for me. And if he knows my plan, then he knows whether or not I will ultimately end up in heaven or in hell.

My reply—

Once again, why is headcount the issue in determining what is true or false? I don't care if EVERY Christian believed a definition that could cause a contradiction when applied. I do not believe contradiction can exist.

When definitions are provided (as all abstracts require) and scenarios are played out (as they have to be), then when conflicts arise, then there is 1) a flaw in the definition or 2) the scenario is wrong. I am unable to reason out a third alternative. I can adjust the definition, I can adjust the scenario, or I can adjust both. I chose to adjust the scenario. Further explanation is in the previous section.

I do have some comments to make on hell. Hell is the one area that I believe Christianity has maintained silly images. Let me make a few comments here.

Jesus introduced the term hell. As you probably know, Jesus took the term for the Jerusalem dump and applied it spiritually. We cannot perceive hell with our senses; so, Jesus has to use an analogy. The moment He (or anyone) uses an analogy, then only part of the analogy is being used. If hell is like the dump, then it is not the dump. If something is like a dog, then it is not a dog. All this is Analogies 101.

Jesus mentions smoke and the fire that doesn't end and the worm that doesn't die. Please dismiss Dante's *Inferno* and medieval art and movies like *Constantine*, *What Dreams May Come*, *The Prophet 2*, or any movie that displays hell. Let's try to get into the minds of the original listeners.

When Jesus first said "trash dump," (I do mean the first time) they thought of the trash dump. I doubt seriously that the Jerusalem trash dump would be that much different from the many that I've seen. A fire or smoldering might be here or there, for spontaneous combustion can occur. Perhaps a live match (or torch for the Jerusalem one) might be tossed in. Have you ever seen or considered a trash dump that was in continual flame? Why would we remotely think the Jerusalem one was that way? Moreover, does anyone think of a trash dump as a place of torture or punishment? It is simply a nasty, horrible place to be.

Also, garbage would be there for sure as well as human waste and who knows what else. I can see maggots all over the place ("the worm that dieth not"). When Jesus said it was better to have a hand cut off or an eye plucked out than to be cast into the dump, that would make a lot of sense. The word "cast into" is the idea of being cast into prison. Think of being sentenced to living in a dump. Tell me truthfully, what crosses your mind as you think of being cast into a trash dump: 1) being horribly tortured or 2) being sickeningly repulsed?

Is there anything in the metaphor of the trash dump, as originally heard by the first listeners, that would remotely provoke torture and torment? I have asked many Christians about the imagery of heaven. None I have talked with are locked into the notion of "streets of gold." It means a really nice place. Yet, the imagery of hell ... oh no ... let's keep those flames burning and torture those sinners

good. “Oh yeah, burn, baby, burn.” Why are the literal properties of one abstract (heaven) considered figuratively, but the literal properties of another (hell) are literal only?

Please note, I am not denying the existence of hell; I am denying the imagery of hell. There are Christians who believe that non-believers are preordained to hell. That belief is, ironically, determined by the definition and applications of that definition. In the scenario that I suggested in my previous email, then God could ordain hell without intruding upon a person’s will. Hell would simply be planning in a series of potential decisions.

I need to introduce a new topic here, but a relevant one. The typical explanation for someone going to hell is that God is punishing them for their sins. There is another way to understand that statement, and I’ll illustrate that shortly.

First, I want to think about punishment. The Bible does teach that Jesus died for our sins.⁶⁰ Jesus died for the punishment of my sins. I have yet to find a committed Christian who does not believe that Jesus died for all his sins on the cross, past, present, and future. Without question I believe that. If that is so, then why would I, or anyone, be sent to hell for punishment of sin? If Jesus died for the punishment of sin, then why would I be punished again? It makes no sense at all. It is a clear contradiction. Either definitions have to change or scenarios have to. Something is amiss.

I tend to think from your many comments that a detailed explanation of why people are in hell vis-à-vis heaven will bore you. You have made it fairly clear that all this is nonsense anyway. So, I’ll simply summarize without explanation.

Unbelievers are not “sent” to hell, nor are they “punished” for their sins. They will reside in hell for eternity, but not for the reasons typically explained. Why do I say this? It’s the contradiction. Either the definition has to change, or the scenario has to change.

A Supernatural Entity Is Not Needed to Explain Natural Phenomena

Your quote—

You’ve made some valid points, but in my view, none of them are compelling enough to warrant a belief in a supernatural entity to explain natural phenomena.

My reply—

There are two issues here.

⁶⁰ My concern is what the text says and means, not what the reader believes. If a person reads the New Testament and concludes that Jesus did not die for sins because that is what the text says, then there is no hope for that person in understanding plain text.

1. Before the theory of evolution, people literally believed God made the leaves change color each fall, caused birds to sing each note, and on and on. I've tried to seriously and reflectively think back in time, and I can never remember believing that. What I probably believed (until later) is that God created the first bird with the capability to sing, and they have continued on just like all other animals with their instincts and capabilities and distinctions.
2. My major issue, as you know by now, is the mind. If it is an extension of natural processes, then "I" is an illusion. If a god did create it, then he had to be at least as great as we understand the mind ourselves. The lesser cannot create the greater. It creates at least what it is or less. We see this in nature all around us. Nothing is greater than the matter/energy that comprises it. All "things" are reducible to matter/energy. In the same way, all minds are reducible to Mind.

This is where you and I differ and can never reconcile. For a god to create mind, then he has to be something like it. When I think of me, my mind ... mercy, how great it is. I don't mean academics; phooey on that. I mean the ability to think, to feel, to interpret, to love, to rejoice, to understand, to wonder, to imagine, to dream, to hope, and on and on and on. All that happens with and within the mind. IF IF IF a god created my mind so that it is above and beyond nature, though framed within nature, his mind has to be something like it. It has to be. In your definition of a deistic god, that god had to be at least as complex as what he creates.

I do not "presume" to anthropomorphize (shapes like arm, eyes are but metaphors), but I attribute to God the same sort of mind activities that I, frankly, attribute to you. My mind interprets the sensory inputs, and we (and all humans with minds) see, hear, feel, taste, and smell the same way. Details may differ slightly, but we match consensus. If out-of-body experiences are real in the sense of being objective, then the key issue they teach is this—the mind can perceive without the body. And this matches the belief that the mind is not divisible like the body is.

When Scriptures states that we are made in God's image, that can't mean shape. The only thing it can mean is mind. Of course I realize the assertion or narrative in the OT doesn't make it true, but it rings true, it is coherent with my mind as I understand it and as I understand you ... or any mind, even God.

In conclusion to your actual comment, if mind is subordinate to nature since it is created by nature, then the scope and properties that we sense and are convinced of are false. The brain causes this illusion for survival, nothing else. A purposeless world cannot create true purpose, but it can create the illusion of purpose, meaning, hope, love, justice, etc. This is the step that I cannot make because it denies the three primary presuppositions:

1. I exist. No, "I" really does not exist. The brain merely causes the illusion that an "I" exist.
2. Contradiction cannot exist. Sure it can. "I" believe that "I" exist, but "I" doesn't exist.

3. The mind is able to discern true and false. No, it cannot. It discerns only what natural processes present to it, and whatever the “I” believes is actually Natural Selection’s urge to survive. There are no abstracts; truth, morality, and beauty are merely tools to motivate the species to survive.

How Does Any Christian Know Anything About God

Your quote—

Even if everything you say about God’s omniscience and omnipotence is true, that still leaves me with the all-important question: How do you know?

My reply—

My answer to your all-important question is the same answer you gave for the universe being indeterminate; you believe it to be so.

The only way an abstract (and mind is certainly that for mind cannot be perceived by the senses) is believed to be true is if it is coherent with the body of reality, the body of truth. We cannot prove and know in the same sense as an objective test that has agreed upon standards of measurement.

Of course I cannot prove objectively that God or mind exists. It’s impossible. I can only point to what coheres to reality as a whole as I understand it. That is true for any abstract. The failure to understand this distinction leads to unending and fruitless battles of proof and no proof. There is no correspondent theory of truth here, only the coherence theory of truth.

This demand for “How do you know” is only a one-way street. It is a demand only for theists. Atheists are allowed the same methodology used by theist, but without challenge.

I ask you the same: how do you **know**, really know, the universe is indeterminate? Do you remember your maybe, might be, etc? It was no more than an assertion preceded by three or four unknowable statements.

The difference between us is that I am not bothered by this, for there is other way to discuss abstracts. It is simply impossible. For some reason I cannot figure out, atheistic scientists are given a waiver for abstracts. Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens (as well as you) were so troubled that theists personify God. How terrible. How do theists know this? Yet, Natural Selection is as endowed as God with properties of the mind and personality. In other words, atheists may personify, but theists may not. Candidly, it’s cheating.

I repeat my answer. I know the same way you do.

How Can an Intelligent Person Believe that God Exists

Your quote—

In other words, what makes you, a very intelligent individual, believe what you believe about God, even if you can tweak your definitions to fit him?

My reply—

Your insistence that I tweaked the definition of omnipotence and omniscience simply does not make sense. I have defined them for you. Omniscience is the property to know all things, and omniscience is the property to do all things that are possible.⁶¹ You tell me how I tweaked the definitions. I could use this before any theologians, and there would be no heartburn on their part.

I think you're unfair in saying I tweak definitions. My definitions have not changed from those who believe God has ordained every action. What has changed is how the definitions are practically manifested. Tweaking give a sense of self-adjustment for personal satisfaction ... or ... creating God in my image. Not even a little.

Revealed data cannot harbor contradiction. All of your objections against fundamentalists have use contradiction, implied contradiction, or denial (ignoring contradiction); therefore, I seek to reconcile the contradiction. When a scientist sees a contradiction, I would presume he goes after it, to reconcile it. Is he tweaking to make himself feel better, or is he searching in order to restore harmony, to remove contradiction because contradiction is simply unacceptable? Why can't I have precisely the same motives for issues of the abstract as scientists do for their issues of the concrete?

In regard to your question per se. The reason that God and the Bible make sense to me and cohere and resonate is that they make coincide with my mind. I don't mean reason here; I mean the total scope and properties of the mind as we internally sense them to be. What I sense in my mind I attribute that you have one as well as does God.

Natural process creates more problems for me than an eternal Mind. I agree that natural processes could create the illusion that I perceive in my mind. But if that is true, then all abstracts are meaningless except as tools to survive. Additionally, if mind is created by natural processes, then the three foundational presuppositions of all knowledge ... is false.

⁶¹ I do add "all things possible" as part of the definition of omnipotence. This is because God cannot do the inherently impossible. $2 + 2 = 4$. God does not have the power to make it equal to 5. Matter and anti-matter cannot co-exist (much like an irresistible force and an immovable object); God cannot do the inherent impossible. That is nonsense. Making God the subject of a nonsense proposition does not magically create sense. God cannot count to infinity, for there is no such number.

Why Is God Even Needed If Nature Explains All Processes

Your quote—

If everything can be explained without the need for a god (which it can), then why introduce one?

My reply—

It all comes back to mind. Either nature has evolved the brain to give the semblance of an “I,” or a Mind created mind, even as matter has created matter. I am paralleling the process of nature with the process of mind. Nature determines nature; mind determines mind.

If I’m wrong, then “I” am not wrong at all. Nature has evolved to create the illusion that an “I” is wrong. Once nature can explain the mind, then, frankly, it will have explained too much. Either mind is an extension of the nature and properties of Nature, or it is an extension of the nature and properties of Mind (God).

It is certainly one or the other. If the mind is from Nature, then “I” is caused and totally determined. I am aware that there will be fussing over this, but there is no other option. Purposeless Nature cannot cause purposeful mind, because Nature does not have purpose in its nature or its properties. Gradually, since the introduction of Evolution, purpose and meaning have been removed from the universe. At times this removal almost seems gleeful.

The problem, of course, is that Nature cannot give what it does not have. So, any notion that I have of independence, will, imagination, etc ... are illusory. Again, Natural Selection can create the illusion of an independent “I,” but that is for survival.

God is not introduced out of convenience. He is the only way to insure the objectivity of “I” along with its nature and properties. Mind can create mind. That is not contradictory. Purposeless Nature creating purposeful mind is contradictory.

God Was Only Needed to “Explain” Until Science Reached Maturity

Your quote—

God is an anachronistic concept. We needed him at one time to explain the things we didn’t understand.

My reply—

It depends what you mean. There is so little “science” in the Bible, if any. There are merely observations of nature. As I said earlier, what child doesn’t believe the evidence of his eyes that the sun

goes around the earth??? I do not have the slightest idea how to prove the earth is going around the sun; I believe what I have been told ... but I do so against my senses even to this day.

If God had revealed in the Bible, prior to confirmation with the combination of Copernicus and Galileo, that the earth revolves around the sun, who would have believed something so contradictory to the senses? I don't know what age group you teach in school, but I assume you teach different levels of science. There are certain things you cannot teach until your students have progressed. They simply won't get it. They won't have the background, framework, and mental training.

Yet, when it is assumed, and rightly so, that the ancient world could not have understood certain scientific processes because of their lack of development in scientific methodology even if God had revealed, the Bible is condemned for not having taught it anyway. It's a no win. What is allowed as a proper tutorial methodology is questioned or ridiculed if God does the same thing. What humans have figured out to be proper data acquisition is criticized because God did the same thing. So, humans can do, but God can't?

The Bible is not concerned with economics or plant reproduction or viruses except as incidentals. If God is mind, if that is really true, then He has to be primarily interested in our minds. Nothing else makes sense if God exists.

The concept of an objective God still explains the existence of mind and takes abstracts such as truth, morality, beauty, love, justice, etc and makes them ends instead of means as Natural Selection does. That does not strike me as anachronistic.

Gaps in Knowledge Are So Trivial; So, Why God?

Your quote—

Today, we understand far more and the gaps in our knowledge are far less; there are fewer gaps, yet God is still there to fill them.

My reply—

If God exists and He is mind (the Bible uses the word spirit; Descartes preferred unextended; I like mind), then He would know the Theory of Everything. That is omniscience. So He creates matter/energy with TOE as the inherent energy behavior and can set back and watch. Everything is in place. Somewhere, somehow He would have to infuse mind, assuming nature would not be able to evolve a mind independent of nature. When we get to the bottom line, God only had to do two things. All of this is consistent with nature and mind.

If God did create with TOE, then He is filling every gap ... though is He utterly unobserved. Science has detailed thousands and thousands of particulars. Many theorists are still working on the theory of everything. Yet, even if and when TOE is discovered, it is still a WHAT. There is no WHY.

The finely tuned universe along with the anthropic principle (adjusted, of course) moves from a WHAT to a WHY if mind is distinct from nature. A why will make sense if man has been created in the image of the eternal Mind. An eternal Mind answers a why. "We are" because "He is."

God Precludes the Search for Knowledge

Your quote—

Science doesn't know it all, and may never know it all, but at least it's searching for answers, and has found many, many more than any religion has, since religion starts out already knowing. And that is my basic problem with religion, and my particular problem with fundamentalism. Why should we search for the answers when they have been provided for us?

My reply—

If depends on what you mean by answers and answers to what. If you mean how nature works, then the Bible is practically silent. Go to it. Use the mind and do the things that mind does best. Study nature and teach it.

If you mean why, we are now in the world of the mind. The senses can detect the particulars of nature. Only the mind can interpret and discover the universals, the meanings, etc. Far more important is the question: why do I have a mind? Why do others? We are now entering the arena of relationships, values, morals, cooperation, etc. Nature is of no help here except for illustrations.

I've heard this criticism of fundamentalists being satisfied with no new searching, no new answers. I've been a Christian for 40+ years, and I've never stopped searching. I'm not the only one. I have talked with others who think the same way. I have a Sunday school class in which the people in it are considering thoughts and ideas they have never considered before. That doesn't make me or Christianity "special," but it does mean that if in Nowhere, Indiana there are some fundamentalists who have not stopped seeking, then there must be others.

The meaning of Nature (that is, its nature and properties) is quite distinct from the meaning of mind. The Bible (and other religions) are far more concerned with the mind (soul, spirit) than it is with nature (matter/energy). By definition the study of Nature will only reveal the natural, never the Supernatural.

I am well aware there is resistance by Christians (and other religions) against Evolution. I have never spoken to a Christian (even Ken Ham) who does not believe in some elements of evolution,

typically what is call micro-evolution, or evolution below species level. Certainly you are opposed to that because Evolution demands a common ancestor. Yet, the notion that Christians know it all and are opposed to science simply is false. I'm well aware that interviewers have a knack for finding goofballs, but goofballs are everywhere. That is a human trait, not a theistic one or an atheistic one.

There are elements of science that are opposed with the scientific world. Doesn't the ethics of science have strongly differing views? Euthanasia? Gas warfare? Atmospheric emissions? If scientists cannot agree on what should or should not be done or pursued, why is it, suddenly, so awful if non-scientists agree or disagree? Aren't there differing views in cosmology? Punctuated evolution? I honestly don't get it. If there is not agreement within your ranks, why is it such a big deal if there is disagreement outside your ranks? There is nothing special going on here than in any other discipline.

I have known thousands of Christians over my four decades of involvement. I have never known a single one who believed that religion provides all answers and searching is unnecessary. Not one.

Religion Preempts the Need for Science

Your quote—

If all our answers can be found in a centuries-old set of manuscripts written down by Bronze Age nomads in an attempt to explain things they did not know, then why do we need science?

My reply—

This is a near repeat of your previous critique. We need science to help with new medicines (those viruses and bacteria conform faster than cockroaches), increase food supply for bulging populations but less tillable land, cure cancer, etc, etc. I could say this in any fundamentalist church I know, and it would be applauded.

There is a bit of a paper tiger that equates fundamentalists and Neanderthals. The problem is that specific behavior is generalized to include all behavior. Because fundamentalist (your particular dislike) are opposed as a group to certain premises of Evolution, then they are oppose to all science. That is simply a false conclusion.

The real issue for Christians is not Evolution per se, but the insistence that God does not exist.

Religion Precludes the Need for Critical Thinking Skills

Your quote—

Why do our kids even need to develop critical thinking skills?

My reply—

I recall how you have blamed fundamentalism as the leading agent; I'm not remotely convinced of that. I have much more fear of Twitter, Facebook, and forums. I had a job for a few years that had me in schools to take pictures for school newsletters. I was in Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. I made a point of asking teachers when I could what was happening with students. The concerns were universal: the inability to spell, to read, to understand sentences, the dismissal of vocabulary, trouble with analogy, and the elevation of opinion to the level of fact. This was across the board for all students. It was a trend.

I've made a point at different times to simply scan random blogs and forums. I no longer do that. It is too discouraging. Simple, simple language and expression. No awareness of logical fallacies whatsoever. Underneath all this there is the foundation, opinion. As long as I express what I feel, then you may not criticize that. I feel what I feel, I know it's who I am, it's wrong to criticize. I may express what I feel, and you may express what you feel. I remember some years ago a posting about Hamlet, to wit, "*Hamlet* is a terrible play. It's nothing but a bunch of famous quotations strung together." She got to express her opinion and express to all readers her foolishness.

"If a doctor ever tells you that you have a malignant, inoperable brain cancer, but encourages you to get a second opinion, be sure to ask me. I'll give you my opinion. It's just as good as a specialist who may charge you \$500. I'll tell you what; I'll only charge you \$5. After all, all opinions are equal."

Critical thinking is being consumed by personal opinion. Fundamentalism is a speck on the wall compared to others that are consumed by personal opinion.

One advantage that a science class will have over a humanities class is that opinion has little to do with science ... because the concrete has universally agreed-upon standards of measurement and testing. Science is mostly concrete whereas the humanities are mostly abstract. In a science class the fundamentalists will stand out more if they refuse to consider evolution. It will seem there are more of them. They wouldn't even be noticed in the humanities. Opinion rules in the humanities.

I fully understand your perception that religion is at the heart of poor thinking. I believe that perception is correct but only in a relative sense. The difference between the sciences and the humanities is the difference between playing the game and watching the game. A weak player is quickly identified when playing the game, but who can spot a weak player in the stands?

Because Christians will take a stand against elements of Evolution (likely macro-evolution, or the mutation of one species into another and the "unwritten" requirement of being an atheist), they will stand out to you. Those same kids will not be noticed with their opinions in English, art, phys-ed, etc.

The worship of opinion, which is reinforced by the Internet, is the real culprit.

Religion Reinforces Anti-Social Behavior

Your quote—

There is a linear association between atheism and things such as intelligence, morality, and lack of violence in their culture. It even applies within the U.S. The so-called Red states have higher teen pregnancy rates than the Blue states. There is also a weaker correlation with crime rates. And certainly a measurable correlation between education and religious faith.

My reply—

I guess it depends where you are in place and time. These are not inherent traits of atheists or theists, but of “people.” North Korea brutally mistreats its people, horribly so. They are atheists. The purges of Stalin are brilliantly chronicled by Solzhenitsyn. They were atheists. The monstrous behavior of the Red Guard was done by atheists.

All this means nothing. This will ebb and flow with time. Theists will be monsters someplace, sometime. Atheists will be monsters someplace, sometime. From a Christian perspective this is not a theist or atheist problem, it is a “heart” problem.

Yes, many have been horribly brutal in the name of religion. Then, there has been horrible brutality in the name of patriotism. There has been horrible brutality for muddled reasons. The women and children at Mi Lai were not murdered for religious reasons though Christians were involved. Religion was not the motivation, but unbearable stress. It is very, very easy to find atrocities which don't seem to have any clear motive. Even the riots occurring in London right now make no sense, but I'm sure they're not philosophically driven. Brutality and cruelty is not more right or wrong because more religious people did it or more patriots did or more any “definitional group” did it.

I don't need to remind you that Dr. Mengele was a monster, and he was driven by science, not religion. What seems to be true is that people want justification for what they do ... such as a “justified war.” People will use whatever justification that will work for them. Early American slave owners used the Bible to justify cruelty toward the slaves. The Nazis used the scientific principle of eugenics to justify their slaughter of Jews, Slavs, and other inferiors.

Whereas a great many people will be horrified at what “Christianity” justified and have tossed it out, I tend to agree with Chesterton: “The Church is justified, not because her children do not sin, but because they do.” Christianity is not the problem. A cursory reading of Jesus could never justify the cruelty done in His name or the immorality. I am not going to toss out patriotism because of cruelty done in its name; neither am I going to toss out science because of Mengele and others like him.

Statistical correlation is only as good as the questions. The wording of the questions are the key, not the statistical results. When I read that atheists are more prone to divorce, I simply ignore it. I do not believe atheists love or hate their spouses any more than theists. When I read in your excerpt that more Red states have pregnancy, what does that really mean? Were the girls impregnated by Blue state

boys? Did the girls live in Blue states and move to Red states? Did the study differentiate between the period of time that the pregnancy occurred and the test questions given? This is true for all the tests. I have found statistical tests that “prove” the correlation between atheists and immorality. I simply do that believe that. The human heart is the problem, not whatever external justification is used.

If you wish to believe whatever statistics you saw as proof of **inherent** character traits of atheists vis-à-vis theists, you may do so. But I think you will be doing yourself a disservice if you do. It is very hard to believe a statistic and not include all members of the population into that statistic. If it is true that most prisoners are Afro-Americans, then one could extend the idea that all Afro-Americans are inclined toward crime. Of course, are they inherently inclined, or are impoverished circumstances and no hope the real culprit?

If all German military and civil servants swore a personal oath to Hitler, then all Germans must have thought and felt the same way? These illustrations are not proof of what really exists; they are ratios of a subgroup within a population in which questions have been devised that are not objectively agreed upon.

Unless I can see the questions and the criteria of selection for the population I have no interest in “correlation” of abstract beliefs and concrete behavior. The problem is how have the beliefs been “defined.” Concrete behavior is not difficult to define, but belief is. For instance, to one atheist a person who goes to church at least once a year is a Christian; to another, a person who reads his Bible at least once a week is a Christian.

Would you trust a survey designed by fundamentalist that showed a “correlation” between evolutionists and increased crime? Is a person an evolutionist because he says he is or because he believes certain tenets?

You stated the support of correlation between intelligence and atheism. Was IQ the standard of intelligence? The IQ’s of the Nazis at Nuremberg are available, and they were a great lot of IQ’s. Now what does that prove? I’m sure all the scientists doing “research” at the Nazis camps on children, twins, and dwarfs were brilliant. And the correlation? Frankly, it is whatever you wish it to be based on your beliefs and presuppositions.

Because beliefs are abstract and exist in the mind only, I have little regard, if any, for any statistical study that proves correlation between an abstract and the concrete. I will not tout the ones that “support” my side. Frankly, they are not needed and are not helpful.

Conclusion

In no way do I consider my comments to be final, conclusive, or non-responsible. You may write back on whatever points that you wish to. Ultimately there will be no certainty until we die. I point to the resurrection of Christ as evidence for life after death, and you point to the only conclusion possible from a materialistic perspective—only mindless matter/energy will ultimately exist.

My strongest objection is not the Bible, but the step of faith that is needed to believe that the mind is an illusion. I see no other naturalistic response than the mind is an illusion of the brain for the purpose of survival ... for a bit longer. Ultimately it does appear, from a materialistic perspective, the universe will collapse into fire or expand into ice.

I am required to believe that my purposes, morals, dreams, hopes are all illusions, merely means, a manipulation by nature. And that baffles me. What is the big deal about a particular group of matter/energy (i.e., human and the rest of nature) having any more significance than the cosmic dust clouds throughout the universe?

If naturalism is correct, then we are on a sinking ship. And to make it worse, there is no “we” that really independently think that. Processes in the brain are creating the illusion that “we” are thinking that. Whether we live morally or immorally, whether we strive to live or commit suicide is meaningless. Even our emails back and forth are totally meaningless if the mind is meaningless. They merely occurred because of natural processes.

My coherency in the body of truth as I believe is that meaning and purpose have to be real, not illusory. I truly believe that the first principle of presuppositions has to be real—“I” exist. The moment that any logic or wording subordinates “I” to matter/energy is the moment that “I” is not real but an illusion.

Of course, I can be accused by a naturalist that I merely want to believe there is meaning and refuse to see and accept the obvious truth. That sounds ok ... except for one rather obvious problem. If naturalism is true, then “I” have chosen nothing to believe because “I” does not exist. Unless the mind is truly independent of the brain, then any “decisions” by “I” are not decisions at all.

To me the issue between theists and atheists is quite simply. Is there a real “I”?

1. If there is, then a terrible door has been opened for all kinds of non-naturalism; and it can never be closed. If our minds, exist apart from natural processes ... then a Mind could exist before natural processes, before matter/energy.
2. If there is not, then how does one escape total materialistic determinism and the eventual conclusion that all abstracts are illusions: truth, love, good, kindness, morality, justice, etc? If they are illusions, then why are we discussing them or arguing about them ... unless we, like chimps, are wired to kill each other?

I do not believe that truth and good and morality and the soul and God (Mind) exist because the Bible says so, but I believe the Bible because I believe that truth and good and morality and the soul and God exist. The Bible merely confirms my coherency; it does not create it.