Dr. Michael Gleghorn briefly examines some of the reasons why noted Christian philosopher William Lane Craig believes that Christianity is an eminently reasonable faith.

Reasonable Faith

One of the finest Christian philosophers of our day is William Lane Craig. Although he has become very well known for his debates with atheists and skeptics, he’s also a prolific writer. To date, he has authored or edited over thirty books and more than a hundred scholarly articles. (1) His published work explores such fascinating topics as the evidence for the existence of God, the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, divine foreknowledge and human freedom, and God’s relationship to time. In 2007 he started a web-based apologetics ministry called Reasonable Faith (www.reasonablefaith.org). The site features both scholarly and popular articles written by Craig, audio and video recordings of some of his debates, lectures, and interviews, answers to questions from his readers, and much more.
But before he launched the Reasonable Faith Web site, Craig had also authored a book by the same title. One of the best apologetics books on the market, a revised and updated third edition was recently released. His friend and colleague, the philosopher J. P. Moreland, endorsed Craig’s ministry with these words:

It is hard to overstate the impact that William Lane Craig has had for the cause of Christ. He is simply the finest Christian apologist of the last half century, and his academic work justifies ranking him among the top one percent of practicing philosophers in the Western world. Besides that, he is a winsome ambassador for Christ, an exceptional debater, and a man with the heart of an evangelist. . . . I do not know of a single thinker who has done more to raise the bar of Christian scholarship in our generation than Craig. He is one of a kind, and I thank God for his life and work.\(^2\)

Although the book has been described as “an admirable defense of basic Christian faith,”\(^3\) many readers will find the content quite advanced. According to Craig, “Reasonable Faith is intended primarily to serve as a textbook for seminary level courses on Christian apologetics.”\(^4\) For those without much prior training in philosophy, theology, and apologetics, this book will make for some very demanding reading in places. But for those who want to seriously grapple with an informed and compelling case for the truth of Christianity, this book will richly repay one’s careful and patient study.

Although we cannot possibly do it justice, in the remainder of this article we will briefly consider at least some of the reasons why Craig believes that biblical Christianity is an eminently reasonable faith.

### The Absurdity of Life Without God

Imagine for a moment that there is no God. What implications would this have for human life? Science tells us that the universe is not eternal, but that it rather had
a beginning. But if there is no God, then the universe must have come into being, uncaused, out of nothing! What’s more, the origin of life is nothing more than an unintended by-product of matter, plus time, plus chance.\[5\] No one planned or purposed for life to arise, for if there is no God, there was no one to plan or purpose it. And human beings? We are just the unpredictable result of a long evolutionary process that never had us in mind. In fact, if one were to rewind the history of life to its beginning, and allow the evolutionary process to start anew, it’s virtually certain that none of us would be here to think about it! After all, without an intelligent Agent guiding this long and complicated process, the chances that our species would accidentally emerge a second time is practically zero.\[6\]

Depressing as it is, this little thought experiment provides the appropriate backdrop for Craig’s discussion of the absurdity of life without God. In his view, if God does not exist, then human life is ultimately without meaning, value, or purpose. After all, if human beings are merely the accidental by-products of the unintended forces of nature, then what possible meaning could human life have? If there is no God, then we were not created for a purpose; we were merely “coughed” into existence by mindless material processes.

Of course, some might wonder why we couldn’t just create some meaning for our lives, or give the universe a meaning of our own. But as Craig observes, “the universe does not really acquire meaning just because I happen to give it one . . . . for suppose I give the universe one meaning, and you give it another. Who is right? The answer, of course, is neither one. For the universe without God remains objectively meaningless, no matter how we regard it.”\[7\]

Like it or not, if God does not exist, then the universe—and our very lives—are ultimately meaningless and absurd. The difficulty is, however, that no one can really live consistently and happily with such a view.\[8\] Although merely recognizing this fact does absolutely nothing to show that God actually exists, it should at least motivate us to sincerely investigate the matter with an open heart.
and an open mind. So let’s now briefly consider some of the reasons for believing that there really is a God.

The Existence of God

In the latest edition of Reasonable Faith, Craig offers a number of persuasive arguments for believing that God does, in fact, exist. Unfortunately, we can only skim the surface of these arguments here. But if you want to go deeper, his book is a great place to start.

After a brief historical survey of some of the major kinds of arguments that scholars have offered for believing that God exists, Craig offers his own defense for each of them. He begins with a defense of what is often called the cosmological argument. This argument takes its name from the Greek word kosmos, which means “world.” It essentially argues from the existence of the cosmos, or world, to the existence of a First Cause or Sufficient Reason for the world’s existence. Next he defends a teleological, or design, argument. The name for this argument comes from the Greek word telos, which means “end.” According to Craig, this argument attempts to infer “an intelligent designer of the universe, just as we infer an intelligent designer for any product in which we discern evidence of purposeful adaptation of means to some end (telos).” After the design argument, he offers a defense of the moral argument. This argument “implies the existence of a Being that is the embodiment of the ultimate Good,” as well as “the source of the objective moral values we experience in the world.” Finally, he defends what is known as the ontological argument. Ontology is the study of being, and this much-debated argument “attempts to prove from the very concept of God that God exists.”

Taken together, these arguments provide a powerful case for the existence of God. As Craig presents them, the cosmological argument implies the existence of an eternal, immaterial, unimaginably powerful, personal Creator of the universe.
The design argument reveals an intelligent designer of the cosmos. The moral argument reveals a Being who is the transcendent source and standard of moral goodness. And the ontological argument shows that if God’s existence is even possible, then He must exist!

But suppose we grant that all of these arguments are sound. Why think that Christianity is true? Many non-Christian religions believe in God. Why think that Christianity is the one that got it right? In order to answer this question we must now confront the central figure of Christianity: Jesus of Nazareth.

The Son of Man

When the previous edition of Reasonable Faith was published in 1994, most New Testament scholars thought that Jesus had never really claimed to be the Messiah, or Lord, or Son of God. But a lot has happened in the intervening fourteen years, and “the balance of scholarly opinion on Jesus’ use of Christological titles may have actually tipped in the opposite direction.”

For example, we have excellent grounds for believing that Jesus often referred to himself as “the Son of Man.” Although some believe that in using this title Jesus was merely referring to himself as a human being, the evidence suggests that he actually meant much more than that. Note, for example, that “Jesus did not refer to himself as ‘a son of man,’ but as ‘the Son of Man.’” His use of the definite article is a crucially important observation, especially in light of Daniel 7:13-14.

In this passage Daniel describes a vision in which “one like a son of man” comes before God with the clouds of heaven. God gives this person an everlasting kingdom and we are told that “all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him” (Dan. 7:14). It’s clear that Daniel’s “son of man” is much more than a human being, for he’s viewed as an appropriate object of worship. Since no one is worthy of worship but God alone (see Luke 4:8), the “son of man” must
actually be divine, as well as human.

According to Mark, at Jesus’ trial the high priest pointedly asked him if he was the Christ (or Messiah), “the Son of the Blessed One.” Jesus’ response is astonishing. “I am,” he said, “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61-62). Here Jesus not only affirms that he is the Messiah and Son of God, he also explicitly identifies himself with the coming Son of Man prophesied by Daniel.{16} Since we have excellent reasons for believing that Jesus actually made this radical claim at his trial, we’re once again confronted with that old trilemma: if Jesus really claimed to be divine, then he must have been either a lunatic, a liar, or the divine Son of Man!

Now most people would probably agree that Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic, but they might still find it difficult to accept his claim to divinity. They might wonder if we have any good reasons, independent of Jesus’ claims, for believing his claims to be true. As a matter of fact we do!

The Resurrection of Jesus

Shortly after Jesus’ crucifixion, on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter stood before a large crowd of people gathered in Jerusalem and made a truly astonishing claim: God had raised Jesus from the dead, thereby vindicating his radical personal claims to be both Lord and Messiah (see Acts 2:32-36). The reason this claim was so incredible was that the “Jews had no conception of a Messiah who, instead of triumphing over Israel’s enemies, would be shamefully executed by them as a criminal.”{17} Indeed, according to the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, “anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (21:22-23). So how could a man who had been crucified as a criminal possibly be the promised Messiah? If we reject the explanation of the New Testament, that God raised Jesus from the dead, it’s very difficult to see how early Christianity
could have ever gotten started. So are there good reasons to believe that Jesus really was raised from the dead?

According to Craig, the case for Jesus’ resurrection rests “upon the evidence for three great, independently established facts: the empty tomb, the resurrection appearances, and the origin of the Christian faith.”\(^{18}\) He marshals an extensive array of arguments and evidence in support of each fact, as well as critiquing the various naturalistic theories which have been proposed to avoid the resurrection. He concludes by noting that since God exists, miracles are possible. And once one acknowledges this, “it’s hard to deny that the resurrection of Jesus is the best explanation of the facts.”\(^{19}\)

This brings us to the significance of this event. According to the German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg:

> The resurrection of Jesus acquires such decisive meaning, not merely because someone
> . . . has been raised from the dead, but because it is Jesus of Nazareth, whose execution was instigated by the Jews because he had blasphemed against God. If this man was raised from the dead, then . . . God . . . has committed himself to him. . . . The resurrection can only be understood as the divine vindication of the man whom the Jews had rejected as a blasphemer.\(^{20}\)

In other words, by raising Jesus from the dead, God has put His seal of approval (as it were) on Jesus’ radical personal claims to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and the divine Son of Man! This forces each of us to answer the same haunting question Jesus once asked his disciples, “Who do you say I am?” (Matt. 16:15).

**Notes**

4. Craig, Reasonable Faith, 12.
5. Ibid., 76.
6. In the minds of some people, this is a rather controversial claim. But it’s been convincingly defended by naturalist authors like Stephen J. Gould and Michael Shermer. For a brief defense by Shermer, please see the articles on “Glorious Contingency” at www.metanexus.net/Magazine/ArticleDetail/tabid/68/tabid/72/Default.aspx?aid=27, accessed 4 September 2008.
7. Ibid., 79.
8. Ibid., 78.
9. Ibid., 98.
10. Ibid., 99-100.
11. Ibid., 104.
12. Ibid., 95.
13. Ibid., 301.
15. Ibid., 315.
16. Ibid., 317.
17. Ibid., 388.
18. Ibid., 360-61.
19. Ibid., 399.

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Christ and the Human Condition

Dr. Michael Gleghorn

Dr. Michael Gleghorn looks at how God has acted in Christ to address those things which ail us most: sin, suffering, death, and our broken relationship with God.

Early in the book of Job, Eliphaz the Temanite declares that “man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward” (5:7). Whether it’s the trouble that befalls us as we’re simply minding our own business or the trouble we bring upon others (or even ourselves), difficulties, sin, and suffering seem to plague us wherever we turn. Just think for a moment about some of the natural evils which afflict the human race. This class of evils includes both natural disasters like hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, and earthquakes, and diseases like cancer, leukemia, Alzheimer’s and ALS. While natural evils are bad enough, they are only part of the problem. In addition to these, we must also consider all the moral evils which human beings commit against God, one another, and themselves. This second class of evils includes things like hatred, blasphemy, murder, rape, child abuse, terrorism, and suicide. Taken together, the scope and magnitude of human sin and suffering in the world are truly mind-boggling. What does God have to say about issues such as these? Even better, what (if anything) has He done about them?
The Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga has written

As the Christian sees things, God does not stand idly by, coolly observing the suffering of His creatures. He enters into and shares our suffering. He endures the anguish of seeing his son, the second person of the Trinity, consigned to the bitterly cruel and shameful death of the cross. Some theologians claim that God cannot suffer. I believe they are wrong. God’s capacity for suffering, I believe, is proportional to his greatness; it exceeds our capacity for suffering in the same measure as his capacity for knowledge exceeds ours. Christ was prepared to endure the agonies of hell itself; and God, the Lord of the universe, was prepared to endure the suffering consequent upon his son’s humiliation and death. He was prepared to accept this suffering in order to overcome sin, and death, and the evils that afflict our world, and to confer on us a life more glorious than we can imagine.\[1\]

According to Plantinga, then, God has acted, and acted decisively through His Son, to address those things which ail us most—sin, suffering, death, and our broken relationship with God. In what follows, we will briefly examine each of these ailments. More importantly, however, we will also see how God has acted in Christ to heal our bleak condition, thereby giving us encouragement, strength and hope, both now and forevermore.

**Moral Evil**

When Adam and Eve first sinned in the garden (Gen. 3:6), they could hardly have imagined all the tragic consequences that would follow this single act of disobedience. Through this act, sin and death entered the world and the human condition was radically altered (Rom. 5:12-19). Human nature had become defiled with sin and this sinful nature was bequeathed to all mankind. The human race was now morally corrupt, alienated from God and one another, subject to physical death, and under the wrath of God. The entire creation, originally pronounced
“very good” by God (Gen. 1:31), was negatively affected by this first act of rebellion. Like the ripples that radiate outward when a stone is thrown into a calm body of water, the consequences of that first sin have rippled through history, bringing evil, pain, and suffering in their wake. As the Christian philosopher William Lane Craig has noted, “The terrible human evils in the world are testimony to man’s depravity in his state of spiritual alienation from God.”[2] Indeed, we are so hopelessly entangled in this web of sin and disobedience that we cannot possibly extricate ourselves. This, according to the Bible, is the sorry plight in which all men naturally find themselves.

Fortunately for us, however, God has acted to free us from our enslavement to sin, to disentangle us from the web that holds us captive, and to reconcile us to Himself. He did this by sending His Son to so thoroughly identify with us in our painful predicament that He actually became one of us. By identifying Himself with sinners who were under the wrath of God, He was able to take our sins upon Himself and endure God’s wrath in our place, so that we might be reconciled to God by placing our trust in Him. The apostle Paul put it this way: God made Christ “who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, we’re told that anyone hanged on a tree because of their sins is “accursed of God” (21:23). In the New Testament, Paul picks up on this idea and says that through His substitutionary death on the cross, Christ became “a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). We should not lose sight of the significance of these words. By identifying Himself with the guilty human race, and becoming a curse for us, He has opened the way for us to be freed from our sins and reconciled to God as we are identified with Him through faith. This is just one of the ways in which Christ has met the desperate needs of the human condition.
Natural Evil

Another reason why we suffer arises from what philosophers and theologians call *natural evil*. Natural evil refers to all the causes of human pain and suffering which are not brought about by morally-responsible agents. This would include the pain and suffering arising from natural disasters like earthquakes, famines, and storms, as well as diseases like cancer and ALS.

Now the question I want to pose is this: Is there a sense in which Christ is also a solution to the problem of natural evil? And if so, then how should we understand this? When we examine the life and ministry of Jesus as it’s recorded in the Gospels, we can hardly help but be struck by the number of miracles He performs. He walks on water, calms raging storms, feeds thousands of people with a few loaves and fish, cleanses lepers, heals the sick, restores sight to the blind, and even raises the dead! Although some might demur at all these accounts of miracles, Craig has noted that “the miracle stories are so widely represented in all strata of the Gospel traditions that it would be fatuous to regard them as not rooted in the life of Jesus.”{3}

So what is the significance of Jesus’ miracles? According to New Testament scholar Ben Witherington, Jesus’ miracles show him to be God’s special agent of blessing, healing, liberation, and salvation, as well as the “one who brings about the conditions associated with the final . . . dominion of God.”{4} Since the kingdom of God is portrayed in Scripture as a reign of peace, prosperity, health, well-being and blessing, Jesus’ miracles of healing, as well as his demonstrations of power over nature, indicate that He is indeed capable of ushering in such a wonderful kingdom.{5} And if Jesus has the power to bring in an era of health and well-being, both for our physical bodies and for the physical universe, and if he in fact will do so, then he clearly provides a solution to the problem of natural evil. Ultimately, in the new heaven and new earth, which God will give to those who love Him, we are promised that there “will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4).
Physical Death

The apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, described death as an “enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). People fear death for any number of reasons. Some fear that the process of dying will be painful. Others dread the thought of leaving behind the ones they love. Some may fear that death is simply the end, that whatever joys and pleasures this life holds, death takes them away forever. But others may fear that there is an afterlife and worry that things may not go well for them there. For many people, however, death is feared as the great unknown.{6} Friends and relatives die and we never see or hear from them again. For these people, death is like the ultimate black-hole, from which nothing and no one can ever escape.

But according to the Bible, Christ did escape the snares of death, and in doing so He dealt our mortal enemy a mortal blow of his own. I said that Paul describes death as an “enemy,” but this is simply to inform us of the fact that our enemy has been conquered by Christ. “The last enemy that will be abolished,” he writes, “is death” (1 Cor. 15:26). But how has Christ conquered this enemy? And how does His victory help us?

Christ conquered death through his resurrection from the dead and all who put their trust in Him can share in his victory. Pastor Erwin Lutzer has written:

Thus the resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Standing at the empty tomb, we are assured of the triumph of Jesus on the Cross; we are also assured that He has conquered our most fearsome enemy. Yes, death can still terrify us, but the more we know about Jesus, the more its power fades.{7}

Consider the life and death of the great Reformation theologian Martin Luther. As a young Augustinian monk, Luther struggled with a very sensitive conscience and a terrible fear of death. But once he understood the gospel and placed his trust in
Christ, his fear gradually began to fade. By the time he died, his fear was gone. It’s reported that on his deathbed, he recited some promises from the Bible, commended his spirit to God, and quietly breathed his last. Believing that Christ had conquered death and given him eternal life, he was able to die at peace and without any fear. And this is the hope of all who trust in Christ!

The Weight of Glory

Christian theologians sometimes describe the knowledge of God as “an incommensurable good.” By this they mean that knowing God in an intimate, personal way is quite literally the greatest good that any created being can experience. It is an “incommensurable” or “immeasurable” good—a good so great that it surpasses our ability even to comprehend. The apostle Paul once prayed that the Ephesians might “know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:19). He understood that “intimate relationship with God . . . is incommensurately good for created persons.”

Of course, this doesn’t mean that one who is intimately related to God will never experience any of the trials and difficulties of life. In fact, it’s possible that such a person will actually experience more trials and difficulties than would have been the case had they not been intimately related to God! Knowing the love of Christ doesn’t make one immune to suffering. It does, however, provide indescribable comfort while going through it (see 2 Cor. 1:3-5).

The apostle Paul understood this quite well. In his second letter to the Corinthians, he described himself as a servant of God who had suffered afflictions, hardships, beatings, imprisonments, labors, sleeplessness, and hunger (2 Cor. 6:4-5). In spite of this, however, he did not lose heart. He famously wrote that “momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17).

But how could Paul describe his sufferings as just a “momentary, light affliction”? 
Because, says Craig, he had an *eternal* perspective. “He understood that the length of this life, being finite, is literally infinitesimal in comparison with the eternal life we shall spend with God.”\(^{11}\)

The greatest hunger of the human heart is to know and experience the love and acceptance of God and to enjoy Him forever. In his magnificent sermon “The Weight of Glory,” C.S. Lewis wrote, “In the end that Face which is the delight or . . . terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or . . . the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be . . . disguised.”\(^{12}\) Incredibly, just as Christ has dealt with the problems of sin, suffering, and death, He has also acted decisively to reconcile us to God. Through faith in him, anyone who wants can eventually experience “an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17).

**Notes**

6. I was reminded of many of these examples while watching the round table discussion on suffering and death in Catherine Tatge, “The Question of God: Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis” (U.S.A.: PBS Home Video, 2004).
9. See, for example, Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 100.
10. Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology*
Gospel Truth or Fictitious Gossip?

Dr. Michael Gleghorn

Dr. Michael Gleghorn provides good reasons to believe that the stories about Jesus were reliably preserved by his followers before being recorded in the Gospels.

Forgetting What Lies Behind?

It was late at night and the university library was about to close. I was feverishly working to complete a project for one of my classes. A bell sounded, indicating it was time to shut down and leave the building. As I and a few other students began shutting down our computers to go home for the night, a security guard suddenly began yelling at us to leave the building immediately! Apparently we weren’t moving quickly enough, and the guard, probably tired from a long day at work, was quite irritated. We told her we would leave as soon as we could, but it
would take us a few minutes to pack up. Annoyed, she wrote down our names and threatened to report us to the administration. We, in turn, returned the favor, taking down her name and saying that we would report how rudely we were treated.

When I got back to my apartment, I immediately wrote down what had happened. I wanted to be sure that if I was contacted by the administration, I would have an accurate report of the evening’s events. Knowing how fallible human memory can be, I wanted to write everything down while it was still fresh in my mind. Most people would say this was a wise thing to do.

But it raises an interesting question about the New Testament Gospels. Although liberal and conservative scholars differ a bit over when these documents were written, most would agree that the earliest Gospel (probably Mark) was written anywhere from twenty to forty years after Jesus’ death. And the latest, the Gospel of John, probably dates to around sixty years after Jesus’ death.

But why did they wait so long to write their accounts? Some scholars say this was plenty of time for Jesus’ followers to distort and embellish their Master’s original words and deeds. Consequently, they insist, by the time the ministry of Jesus was recorded in the Gospels, it had already reached a form that was partly fictional. In short, the oral tradition which lies behind the Gospels is alleged to have been corrupted before the Gospel writers ever “put pen to papyrus.”[1] In the words of the Jesus Seminar:

The Jesus of the gospels is an imaginative theological construct, into which has been woven traces of that enigmatic sage from Nazareth—traces that cry out for . . . liberation from . . . those whose faith overpowered their memories. The search for the authentic Jesus is a search for the forgotten Jesus.[2]

Is this true? Did the faith of Jesus’ earliest followers really overpowers their
memories of what Jesus said and did? Is our faith in the Gospels well-placed—or misplaced? In the remainder of this article we'll see that there are good reasons to believe that the Gospel writers told us the “Gospel truth” about Jesus!

Why the Wait?

Do the New Testament Gospels accurately preserve for us the things which Jesus said and did? Many liberal scholars don’t think so. They maintain that the oral tradition upon which the Gospels are based became quickly corrupted by the early church. If they’re right, then some of what we read about Jesus in the Gospels never really happened. As some of the fellows of the Jesus Seminar put it:

Scholars of the gospels are faced with a . . . problem: Much of the lore recorded in the gospels and elsewhere in the Bible is folklore, which means that it is wrapped in memories that have been edited, deleted, augmented, and combined many times over many years.\(^{3}\)

This raises some important questions for us to consider. How carefully was the oral tradition about the words and deeds of Jesus transmitted in the early church? Does the evidence indicate whether or not it was corrupted before the Gospels were written? And why on earth did the Gospel writers wait so long to write their accounts?

Let’s begin with that last question. Why did the Gospel writers wait so long to record the ministry of Jesus? Let me offer two responses to this question. First, compared with other ancient biographies that are generally considered reliable, the Gospels were written relatively soon after the events they narrate. The Gospels were written anywhere from twenty to sixty years after the death of Jesus. Although this may initially seem like a long time, it’s still well within the lifetime of eyewitnesses who could either confirm or contradict these accounts of Jesus’ public ministry. By contrast, “The two earliest biographies of Alexander the Great were written . . . more than four hundred years after Alexander’s death . . .
yet historians consider them to be generally trustworthy.\footnote{4} Comparatively speaking, then, the Gospel writers really didn’t wait long at all to write their accounts.

Secondly, however, we may not even be looking at this issue correctly. As the authors of the recent book, Reinventing Jesus, point out:

\begin{quote}
It might be better to ask, Why were the Gospels written at all? If we think in categories of delay, then this presupposes that the writing of the Gospels was in the minds of these authors from the beginning. However, this is almost certainly not the case. What was paramount in the apostles’ earliest motives was oral proclamation of the gospel.\footnote{5}
\end{quote}

In the early years of the church the story of Jesus was being told and retold by eyewitnesses of these events. But still, some might ask, might these “events” have become gradually embellished with the story’s retelling, so that what’s recorded in the Gospels is no longer trustworthy?

**To Tell the Old, Old Story**

How accurately was the oral tradition about Jesus’ life and ministry preserved *before* being written down? Was it corrupted by his earliest followers *prior* to being recorded in the Gospels? Many liberal scholars think so. But there are good reasons to think otherwise.

In the first place, we must remember that “the interval between Jesus and the written Gospels was not dormant.”\footnote{6} In fact, this period was filled with a tremendous amount of activity. The earliest followers of Jesus told and retold his story wherever they went. This is important, for as a recent book on Jesus observes:

\begin{quote}
If the earliest proclamation about Jesus was altered in later years, then surely
first-generation Christians would know about the changes and would object to them. It would not even take outsiders to object to the “new and improved Christianity,” since those who were already believers would have serious problems with the differences in the content of their belief.\[7\]

Not only this, but New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg lists many other reasons for believing that this oral tradition was accurately transmitted by Jesus’ earliest followers.\[8\] First, Jesus’ followers believed that He “proclaimed God’s Word in a way which demanded careful retelling.” Second, over ninety percent of his teachings contained “poetic elements which would have made them easy to memorize.” Third, “the almost universal method of education in antiquity, and especially in Israel, was rote memorization, which enabled people accurately to recount quantities of material far greater than all of the Gospels put together.” And fourth, “written notes and a kind of shorthand were often privately kept by rabbis and their disciples.” Although we can’t be sure that any of Jesus’ disciples kept written notes of His teachings, it’s at least possible that they did.

Finally, we must bear in mind that the Gospels are not the product of merely one person’s memories of the events of Jesus’ life. Instead, the oral tradition which lies behind the Gospels is based on numerous eyewitness reports. This is extremely important, for as the authors of Reinventing Jesus remind us, the disciples’ “recollections were not individual memories but collective ones—confirmed by other eyewitnesses and burned into their minds by the constant retelling of the story. . . . Memory in community is a deathblow to the view that the disciples simply forgot the real Jesus.”\[9\]

**What About the Differences?**

Thus, there are excellent reasons for believing that the first Christians accurately preserved and transmitted the stories about Jesus before they were recorded in the New Testament Gospels. But if this is so, then how do we explain the fact that
the sayings of Jesus and his disciples are sometimes worded differently in different Gospels?

To cite just one example, consider the different ways in which the Gospel writers record the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples on the occasion of Peter’s famous confession at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus begins by asking his disciples a question, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke each word the question differently. Matthew records Jesus asking, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matt. 16:13). But in Mark the question reads a bit differently, “Who do people say I am?” (Mark 8:27). And in Luke it’s a bit different still, “Who do the crowds say I am?” (Luke 9:18).

Not only is the precise wording of Jesus’ question different in each of these Gospels, but the wording of Peter’s response is as well. In Matthew, Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16). But in Mark he simply says, “You are the Christ” (8:29), and in Luke, “The Christ of God” (9:20).

Now clearly these are not major differences. In each case the gist of what’s said is the same. But we must also acknowledge that in each case the details are different. What’s going on here? If the stories about Jesus were accurately preserved before being recorded in the Gospels, then why are there these subtle, yet real, differences in the words attributed to Jesus and Peter in each of these three accounts? Or to put this question in the words of Darrell Bock, how are we to understand such sayings in the Gospels—are they live, jive, or memorex?[11]

On the one hand, the view which says such sayings are merely unhistorical “jive” just doesn’t do justice to the evidence we’ve already considered regarding how carefully the oral tradition about the life of Jesus was transmitted by his earliest followers. Nor does this view adequately account for both the internal and external evidence for the historical reliability of the Gospels.[12]

On the other hand, the “memorex” view, which holds that the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ spoken words represent the exact words He spoke on the occasions
reported, doesn’t seem to square with the actual evidence of the Gospels themselves. The Gospel writers do, as we saw above, report the words of Jesus and his disciples differently, and this is so even in cases where we can be quite confident that the incident occurred only once.

This leaves us with only one more option to consider.

A “Live” Option

Dr. Darrell Bock has persuasively argued for what he calls a “live” option in explaining the differences between the Gospel accounts. He describes this option this way:

Each Evangelist retells the . . . words of Jesus in a fresh way . . . while . . . accurately presenting the “gist” of what Jesus said. . . . [T]his approach . . . recognizes the Jesus tradition as “live” in its dynamic and quality. We clearly hear Jesus . . . but . . . there is summary and emphasis in the complementary portraits that each Evangelist gives . . . .

In other words, the Gospel writers are not always giving us Jesus’ exact words, but they are always giving us his genuine voice. This distinction is absolutely necessary. For one thing, it helps explain the observed differences among Jesus’ sayings in the Gospels. It also sits well with the fact that most of these sayings had already been translated by the time they were first recorded. You see, most of Jesus’ original teaching would have been done in Aramaic, the dominant language of first-century Palestine. The Gospels, however, were written in Greek. Since “most of Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels is already a translation,” we’re not reading his exact words even when we’re reading the Gospels in Greek. Finally, Jesus’ longest speeches can be read in a matter of minutes. Yet “we know that Jesus kept his audiences for hours at a time (e.g., Mark 6:34-36).” It seems evident, then, “that the writers gave us a . . . summarized presentation of what Jesus said and did.”
But if the “live” option is correct, and the Gospels don’t always give us Jesus’ exact words, does this mean that their reports of Jesus’ teaching are untrustworthy? Not at all. The way in which the Gospel writers recorded the words and deeds of Jesus was totally consistent with the way in which responsible histories were written in the ancient world. As Dr. Bock observes, “the Greek standard of reporting speeches required a concern for accuracy in reporting the gist of what had been said, even if the exact words were not . . . recorded.”

This is exactly what a careful study of the Gospels reveals about the way in which their authors reported the words of Jesus. Although these writers lived before the invention of audio recorders, they nonetheless strove to honestly and reliably record the gist of Jesus’ teachings. We can therefore read these documents with confidence that they are telling us the “Gospel truth” about Jesus in a fresh and dynamic way.

Notes

6. Ibid., 29.
7. Ibid., 30.
8. The following points are taken from Craig L. Blomberg, “Gospels (Historical
10. All biblical citations are from the New International Version (NIV).
14. Ibid., 77.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 77-78.
17. Ibid., 79.
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God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally

Dr. Michael Gleghorn
Dr. Michael Gleghorn offers an introduction and overview of Doug Pollock’s book by the same title. Those who want to learn more about how to have natural and effective spiritual conversations are encouraged to read (and apply) Pollock’s book for themselves.

Creating God Space

If you’re a Christian, you probably wrestle from time to time with how best to share your faith with non-Christian friends and family. I mean, let’s face it. We often want to share our faith. But we’re a bit confused (maybe even overwhelmed) with how to go about it in a natural and non-threatening way. Is there a way to have spiritual conversations naturally?

According to Doug Pollock, the answer is “Yes”—and it all begins with something he calls “God Space.” “I often wonder,” he says, “what would happen if . . . the body of Christ could create low-risk, high-grace places for people to pursue their need to have spiritual conversations.”{1} But Doug not only wonders about it, he’s also spent the better part of his adult life actually doing it—and training others to do it too. Although he’s had many roles, he’s probably best known for his work as an author, speaker, and evangelism trainer for Athletes in Action.{2} His passion, however, is pointing people to Christ through spiritual conversations in which people have the freedom to simply be themselves.

You see, Doug believes that people actually want (and even need) to have such
conversations. Moreover, they’re often even willing to have them. The problem, of course, is that such conversations can often seem intimidating—even threatening—to both Christian and non-Christian alike. So Doug advocates creating a “safe space” in which to have such conversations. But he warns us that for many non-Christians in our world today, the church is often not perceived as safe. Hence, he says, if we want to reach people for Christ, then we’ve got to go to them—and help create a “safe space” for spiritual conversations right where they are.

Doug calls it “God Space” —a space where “God is . . . encountered in . . . ways that address the longings and cries of the heart.” In God Space “the ‘unworthy’ feel safe enough to bring their real selves . . . into the light, and to journey, one step at a time, toward the magnetic pull they sense deep in their souls.” It’s a space where “spiritual curiosity is aroused, and the message of Christianity becomes plausible.”

Does this sound like something you’d be interested in learning more about? Then keep reading as we consider Doug’s book in more detail.

**Spiritual Conversation-Killers**

Doug Pollock offers some great advice about how to have natural, non-threatening spiritual conversations with those who don’t know Christ. Before discussing this advice in more detail, however, we first need to pause and consider some of the ways in which we might unintentionally shut-down, or “kill,” a spiritual conversation before it even has a chance to get going.

Doug describes ten “spiritual conversation-killers” in his book. Although we can’t discuss them all, we’ll at least mention a few of them. To get started, think of the non-Christian people you know and interact with on a somewhat regular basis. How many of them would be interested in having a “low-risk, high-grace” spiritual conversation with you? If your answer is few to none of them, then you might be
guilty of the most basic spiritual conversation-killer of them all: “an unbelieving heart.” [5] If we assume that the non-Christians we know aren’t interested in talking about spiritual things, then we probably won’t have many spiritual conversations with them.

And Doug says this is a big mistake. “I’ve had spiritual conversations with people all over the world,” he writes, “including the supposed ‘tough places.’ I think it’s because the Holy Spirit has given me a conviction that if God has put eternity in every person’s heart, which is what Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us, then all people were made for spiritual conversations.” [6] So let’s not “kill” an opportunity for spiritual conversations because of unbelief. Instead, let’s assume that if we approach such conversations wisely, we’ll find people eager to talk with us.

Okay, so how do we approach such conversations wisely? In my opinion, the best way to have good spiritual conversations is simply to apply some of the very same principles that go into having good conversations of any sort. [7] For example, how well would my conversation go if I was disrespectful of the other person’s beliefs or opinions? Or what if I came across as harsh, combative, or domineering? Would such conversations be successful? Probably not. And if that’s the case with everyday conversations, then it’s probably the case with spiritual conversations too. So if we want to have good spiritual conversations, we need to be humble, gracious, kind and polite. If not, we’ll probably “kill” whatever spiritual conversations we might otherwise have had. And when that happens, no one wins.

**Wondering Your Way Into Spiritual Conversations**

In *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally*, Doug has four great chapters on noticing, serving, listening, and wondering your way into spiritual conversations. For our purposes, let’s direct our attention to that final chapter, which involves “wondering” our way into spiritual conversations. “Of all
the things you’ll read in this book,” Doug tells us, “this chapter holds the most promise if you truly want to see the quality and quantity of your spiritual conversations increase.”

So how does it work? How do we wonder our way into spiritual conversations? As Doug lays it out for us, there are essentially two steps. First, we have to be really good listeners. If we’re not actively listening to what people are telling us, then we’re not going to have much to wonder about. That’s because we wonder our way into spiritual conversations by asking good questions about what another person is telling us. That’s step two. After listening carefully to what the other person is saying, we begin to wonder “out loud” by asking questions that are relevant to the conversation we’re having.

According to Doug, “good wondering questions” will “flow naturally out of your context and . . . conversations.” They reveal “that you have listened thoughtfully.” They “are open-ended and promote more dialogue and reflection.” They “probe sensitively and reflectively into someone’s belief systems.” And finally, such questions encourage “others to investigate the Christian life” for themselves.

So by listening carefully and asking good “wondering” questions about what you’re being told, you can open the door to all sorts of spiritual conversations. Doug even offers some examples of “good ways to start wondering.” Suppose your conversation partner has made an interesting claim or expressed an intriguing perspective on some issue. You might respond by saying, “That’s an interesting perspective; I’m wondering how you arrived at that conclusion?” Notice how such a question not only demonstrates an interest in, and respect for, the other person and their views—it also serves to keep the conversation moving forward in a positive direction. Indeed, once you get a knack for listening carefully and asking good wondering questions, who knows how many spiritual conversations you might find yourself having!
Bringing the Bible Into Your Conversations

Let’s now discuss Doug’s advice about bringing the Bible into our conversations.\(^{15}\)

The word of God is powerful. Paul describes it as “the sword of the Spirit.”\(^{16}\) And the author of Hebrews tells us it can “judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” \(^{17}\) Indeed, it’s partly because the Bible is so powerful, that we need to be careful about the way in which we bring it into our conversations.

As Doug reminds us, “If people sense you’re trying to use the Bible as an authoritative ‘crowbar’ to beat them into submitting to your viewpoint, your conversation is likely over. However, if you humbly ask for permission to introduce the Scriptures into your dialogue, ‘deep spiritual magic’ begins to happen.”\(^{18}\) The key point here, of course, is asking for permission. This is important and Doug encourages us to always make a habit of it.\(^{19}\) After all, if the person has given you permission to share something from the Bible, then they won’t feel awkward or threatened when you do so. And if they haven’t given you permission, then it’s probably better just to wait and pray for a more opportune time.

Okay, that sounds good. But how can we know when it’s right to ask for permission? Here we need a measure of wisdom and even plain common sense. In general, however, when the person expresses an interest in some issue about which the Bible speaks, it might be a good time to ask for permission to share what the Bible says. Doug gives the example of talking with some non-Christian college students about the meaning of love.\(^{20}\) The students were intensely interested in this topic, but they were having a hard time defining what the word even meant. After discussing the issue for a bit, Doug asked for permission to share what the Bible has to say about love. Having gotten their permission, he directed them to the famous love passage in 1 Corinthians 13. Primed and ready, the students eagerly listened to what the Bible had to say. Its
message had suddenly become relevant to them, for it spoke directly to an issue about which they cared deeply.

If we could learn how to introduce the Bible like *that*, our non-Christian friends might be more eager to hear what it says. In the next section we’ll conclude our discussion of Doug’s book by considering “missed opportunities” and “burned bridges.”  

**Missed Opportunities and Burned Bridges**

We’ve considered several ways to improve our conversations, but it’s easy to make mistakes. So now we’ll consider Doug’s advice about “missed opportunities” and “burned bridges.” Can “missed opportunities” be reclaimed and “burned bridges” be rebuilt? And if so, then how do we do it?

Let’s first consider missed opportunities. Suppose you had a conversation with a neighbor who made a comment that left a wide-open door for spiritual conversation—and you said . . . nothing. We’ve probably all had conversations like this. Maybe the comment caught us off guard, and we just weren’t sure how to respond. Or maybe we felt too tired, or scared, or something else. Whatever the reason, we can “reclaim” such missed opportunities. It’s often not even that hard. Doug tells of missing out on a great opportunity because he just wasn’t sure what to say. About a month later, however, he got another opportunity. He told the person that he’d been thinking a lot about a comment which they had previously made. Intrigued, the person asked what it was—and almost immediately they were right back where they had left off a month earlier!

Okay, that’s the easy one. But what if we didn’t remain silent. What if we said the wrong thing— and now feel like we’ve burned our bridges with another person? Granted, this is more difficult. But Doug throws down a challenge. For once we recognize and admit our mistake to ourselves, we can then confess it to God and bring the issue before Him in prayer. After praying about it, Doug says, we can
actually go to the person and let them know that we’ve been thinking about how we “come across” in spiritual conversations. We can even ask if they’d be willing to give us “some honest feedback” about how others might perceive us in this area. And if so, then we can listen carefully and apologize for any mistakes we might have made. Of course, we can’t predict how the other person will respond. But by taking this approach, we can go a long way toward restoring the relationship.{23}

If you’d be interested in creating some “God Space” for your own conversations, then I encourage you to get (and read) Doug’s book for yourself. I think you’ll be really glad you did.

Notes

2. For more on Doug, check out his website: www.godsgps.com/
3. Pollock, God Space, 16.
4. The citations in this paragraph can be found in Pollock, God Space, 20-21.
5. This is “Killer 1” in Doug’s view. See Pollock, God Space, 24.
6. Ibid., 25.
7. In what follows, I briefly mention several of the spiritual conversation-killers which Doug discusses on pp. 29-32. Specifically, Doug mentions conversation “killers” like disrespect, control, judgment and combativeness.
10. Ibid., 14.
11. All of the quoted material in this paragraph comes from a section on “Good Wondering Questions” in Pollock, God Space, 73.
12. See the examples under this section heading in Pollock, God Space, 73.
13. Ibid., 73.
14. This is one way in which Doug likes to refer to non-Christians. See Pollock, *God Space*, 16.
15. See Pollock’s chapter 9, “Bringing the Bible into your Conversations,” in *God Space*, 87-99.
17. Hebrews 4:12 (NASB).
19. Ibid., 93.
20. See the discussion in Pollock, *God Space*, 90-94.
21. Doug discusses this topic in chapter 10, “Reclaiming Missed Opportunities and Rebuilding Burned Bridges,” 100-106.
22. Doug shares this story on pp. 101-103.
23. The citations in this paragraph come from Doug’s discussion on p. 106.

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**Dealing with Doubt in Our Christian Faith**

Dr. Michael Gleghorn

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn points out that it is not having doubts about our Christian*
faith that is an issue, but rather how we respond to that doubt. Attacking this issue from a biblical worldview perspective, Michael helps us understand our doubts and respond to them as an informed Christian.

Help! My Doubts Scare Me!

Have you ever doubted your faith? We all have doubts from time to time. We may doubt that our boss really hit a hole-in-one at the golf course last weekend, or that our best friend really caught a fish as big as the one he claimed to catch, or that the strange looking guy on that late night TV show was really abducted by alien beings from a distant galaxy! Sometimes the things we doubt aren’t really that important, but other times they are. And the more important something is to us, the more personally invested we are in it, the scarier it can be to start having doubts about it. So when Christians begin to have doubts about something as significant as the truth of their Christian faith, it’s quite understandable that this might worry or even frighten them.

Reflecting on this issue in *The Case for Faith*, Lee Strobel wrote:

> For many Christians, merely having doubts of any kind can be scary. They wonder whether their questions disqualify them being a follower of Christ. They feel insecure because they’re not sure whether it’s permissible to express uncertainty about God, Jesus, or the Bible. So they keep their questions to themselves—and inside, unanswered, they grow and fester . . . until they eventually succeed in choking out their faith.\[1\]

So what can we do if we find ourselves struggling with doubts about the truth of Christianity? Why do such doubts arise? And how can we rid ourselves of these taunting Goliaths?

First, we must always remember that sooner or later we’ll probably *all* have to
wrestle with doubts about our faith. As Christian philosopher William Lane Craig observes, “Any Christian who is intellectually engaged and reflecting about his faith will inevitably face the problem of doubt.” {2} Doubts can arise for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes they’re largely intellectual. We might doubt that the Bible is really inspired by God or that Jesus was really born of a virgin. But doubts can take other forms as well. If a person has experienced great sorrow or disappointment, such as personal wounds from family or friends, the loss of a job, a painful divorce, the death of a loved one, or the loss of health, they may be seriously tempted to doubt the goodness, love, and care of their heavenly Father. {3}

Whenever they come and whatever form they take, we must each deal honestly with our doubts. To ignore them is to court spiritual disaster. But facing them can lead ultimately to a deeper faith. As Christian minister Lynn Anderson has said, “A faith that’s challenged by adversity or tough questions . . . is often a stronger faith in the end.” {4}

It’s Not All in Your Head!

Sometimes people have sincere doubts about the truth of Christianity, intellectual obstacles that hinder them from placing their trust in Christ. In such cases, Christians have an obligation to respond to the person’s doubts and make a humble and thoughtful defense for the truth of Christianity. Nevertheless, as Craig observes, it’s important to realize that “doubt is never a purely intellectual problem.” Like it or not, there’s always a “spiritual dimension to the problem that must be recognized.” {5} Because of this, sometimes a person’s objections to Christianity are really just a smokescreen, an attempt to cover up the real reason for their rejection of Christ, which is often an underlying moral or spiritual issue.

I once heard a story about a Christian apologist who spoke at a university about the evidence for Christianity. Afterward, a student approached him and said, “I
honestly didn’t expect this to happen, but you satisfactorily answered all my objections to Christianity.” The apologist was a bit startled by such a frank admission, but he quickly recovered himself and said, “Well that’s great! Why not give your life to Christ right now, then?” But the student said, “No. I’m not willing to do that. I would have to change the way I’m living, and I’m just not ready to do that right now.”

In this case all the student’s reasons for doubting the Christian faith had, by his own admission, been satisfactorily answered. What was really holding him back were not his doubts about the truth of Christianity, but a desire to live life on his own terms. To put it bluntly, he didn’t want God meddling in his affairs. He didn’t want to be morally accountable to some ultimate authority. The truth is that a person’s intellectual objections to Christianity are rarely the whole story. As Christian scholar Ravi Zacharias observed, “A man rejects God neither because of intellectual demands nor because of the scarcity of evidence. A man rejects God because of a moral resistance that refuses to admit his need for God.”

Unfortunately, Christians aren’t immune to doubting their faith for similar reasons. I know of a young man who had converted to Christianity, but who’s now raising various objections to it. But when one looks beneath the surface, one sees that he’s currently involved in an immoral lifestyle. In order to continue living as he wants, without being unduly plagued by a guilty conscience, he must call into question the truth of Christianity. For the Bible tells him plainly that he’s disobeying God. Of course, ultimately no one is immune to doubts about Christianity, so we’ll now consider some ways to guard our hearts and minds.

**I Believe, Help My Unbelief!**

As He came down the mountain, Jesus was met by a large crowd of people. A father had brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus’ disciples, but they were not able to cast the demon out. In desperation the father appealed to Jesus, “If You
can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” Jesus answered, “If You can! All things are possible to him who believes.” The father responded, “I do believe; help my unbelief.” \[7\]

Can you identify with the father in this story? I know I can. Oftentimes as Christians we find that our faith is in precisely the same state as this father’s. We genuinely believe, but we need help with our unbelief. It’s always been an encouragement to me that after the father’s admission of a faith mixed with doubt, Jesus nonetheless cast out the demon and healed the man’s son.\[8\] But of course no Christian should be content to remain in this state. If we want to grow in our faith and rid ourselves of doubts, what are some positive steps we can take to accomplish this?

Well, in the first place, it’s helpful to be familiar with the “principle of displacement.” As Sue “Archimedes” Bohlin, one of my colleagues, has written:

The Bible teaches the principle of “displacement.” That is, rather than trying to make thoughts shoo away, we are told to replace them with what is good, true, and perfect (Phil. 4:8). As the truth comes in the lies are displaced—much like when we fill a bathtub too full of water, and when we get in, our bodies displace the water, which flows out over the top of the tub.\[9\]

Once we grasp this principle, a number of steps for dealing with doubt quickly become evident. For one thing, we can memorize and meditate upon Scripture. We can also listen attentively to good Christian music. Paul speaks to the importance of both of these in Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

In addition, we can read good Christian books that provide intelligent answers to some of the questions we might be asking. Great Christian scholars have addressed almost every conceivable objection to the truth of Christianity. If you have nagging doubts about some aspect of your faith, there’s almost certainly a
work of Christian scholarship that speaks to it in detail. Finally, we must never forget that this is a spiritual battle. So let’s remember to put on the full armor of God so we can stand firm in the midst of it!{10}

**Faith and Reason**

How can we *know if Christianity is really true?* Is it by reason, or evidence, or mystical experience? Dr. Craig has an answer to this question that you might find a bit surprising.{11} He distinguishes between *knowing* Christianity is true and *showing* that it’s true. Ideally, one attempts to *show* that Christianity is true with good arguments and evidence. But Craig doesn’t think that this is how we *know* our faith is true. Rather, he believes that we can *know* our faith is true because “God’s Spirit makes it evident to us that our faith is true.”{12}

Consider Paul’s statement in Romans 8:16, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Since every believer is indwelt by God’s Spirit, every believer also receives the Spirit’s testimony that he is one of God’s children. This is sometimes called the “assurance of salvation.” Dr. Craig comments on the significance of this:

> Salvation entails that God exists, that Christ atoned for our sins . . . and so forth, so that if you are assured of your salvation, then you must be assured of . . . these other truths as well. Hence, the witness of the Holy Spirit gives the believer an immediate assurance that his faith is true.{13}

Now this is remarkable. For it means we can *know* that Christianity is true, wholly apart from arguments, simply by attending to the witness of the Holy Spirit. And this is so not only for believers but for unbelievers, too. For the Spirit convicts the unbelieving world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, particularly the sin of unbelief.{14} So when we’re confronted with objections to Christianity that we can’t answer, we needn’t worry. First, answers are usually available if one knows where to look. But second, the witness of the Spirit trumps any objections we
might encounter.

Consider an illustration from the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga. Suppose I’m accused of stealing a document out of a colleague’s office. Suppose I have a motive, an opportunity, and a history of doing such things. Suppose further that someone thought they saw me lurking around my colleague’s office just before the document went missing. There’s much evidence against me. But in fact, I didn’t steal the document. I was on a walk at the time. Now should I doubt my innocence since the evidence is against me? Of course not! For I know I’m not guilty!{15}

Similarly, writes Dr. Craig, “I needn’t be shaken when objections come along that I can’t answer.”{16} For my faith isn’t ultimately based on arguments, but on the witness of God’s Spirit.

**Stepping into the Light**

We’ve seen that both Christians and non-Christians can have doubts about the truth of Christianity. We’ve also seen that such doubts are never just an intellectual issue; there’s always a spiritual dynamic that’s involved as well. But since we’ll probably never be able to fully resolve every single doubt we might experience, I would like to conclude by suggesting one final way to make our doubts flee before us, much as roaches flee to their hidden lairs when one turns on the light!

In John 7:17 Jesus says, “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” Here, Jesus frankly encourages us to put His teachings to the test and see for ourselves whether He really speaks for God or not. As biblical scholar Merrill Tenney comments, “Spiritual understanding is not produced solely by learning facts or procedures, but rather it depends on obedience to known truth. Obedience to God’s known will develops discernment between falsehood and truth.”{17} Are
we really serious about dealing with our lingering doubts? If so, Jesus says that if we resolutely choose to do God’s will, we can know if His teaching is really from God!

Sadly, however, many of us will never take Jesus up on His challenge. No matter how loudly we might claim to want to rid ourselves of doubt, the truth is that many of us just aren’t willing to do God’s will. But if you are, then Jesus says that “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”{18} In other words, we can know by experience that Jesus is from God, that His teachings are true, and that He really is who He claimed to be!

As Christian philosopher Dallas Willard observes, the issue ultimately comes down to what we really want:

\[
\text{The Bible says that if you seek God with all your heart, then you will surely find him. Surely find him. It’s the person who wants to know God that God reveals himself to. And if a person doesn’t want to know God—well, God has created the world and the human mind in such a way that he doesn’t have to.}\{19\}
\]

The psalmist encourages us to “taste and see that the Lord is good.”{20} If we do, we can know not only that God is good, but also that He exists. And even if we still have some lingering doubts and unanswered questions in the back of our minds, as we surely will, they’ll gradually fade into utter insignificance as we become more intimately acquainted with Him who loves us and who reconciled us to Himself through the death of His Son!{21}

Notes
4. Ibid., 326.
10. See Ephesians 6:10-20.
11. This section is largely just a summary of the discussion of faith and reason in Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 35-39.
12. Ibid., 35.
13. Ibid., 36.
16. Ibid., 39.
18. John 8:32.

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Body and Soul in the Old Testament

Dr. Michael Gleghorn

Dr. Michael Gleghorn addresses how the Old Testament treats body and soul. What does it have to say about the nature and destiny of humanity?

The Breath of Life

The worldview of Naturalism tells us that the natural world is all that exists. There is nothing “above” or “beyond” this. Space, time, matter, and energy, the sort of things studied in physics, are the only material entities. You are your body, and nothing more. You do not have an immaterial mind or soul that is (in some sense) distinct from your body. You are your body. And when your body dies, you will cease to exist.

But is this true? In this article we address body and soul in the Old Testament. What does the Old Testament have to say about the nature and destiny of humanity?

Let’s begin with the creation of Adam. Consider the way in which the Bible describes this event: “Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (Genesis 2:7). Note that Adam is created from two distinct elements:
the dust of the ground and the breath of life. His body is composed of “dust from the ground.” But he doesn’t become “a living creature” until God takes the second step of breathing “the breath of life” into his nostrils. Although this description may well be metaphorical in certain respects, it seems evident that God must add “the breath of life” for Adam to become a living human being.

Here’s another observation. Notice that Adam doesn’t suddenly spring to life once the dust of the earth has been ordered in a particular way. Apparently, human personality does not spontaneously emerge once God has formed the dust of the ground into a human body.\footnote{1} Merely ordering the physical elements into a human body is not enough (at least, at this initial stage of human development) to get a human person. That second step, in which God breathes the breath of life into the already formed body, is also necessary.

So what are we to make of this? Does Genesis give us a picture of a human being as a body-soul composite? At this point, such a conclusion would be premature. We have not yet considered what a soul is, nor whether “the breath of life” in some way corresponds to, or produces, it. One thing seems clear, however. The Bible seems to suggest that human beings are more than just physical bodies. There appears to be an additional component to our nature, and we need to spend some time gaining a better understanding of what that is.

**Surviving the Death of the Body**

The book of Genesis briefly describes the death of Jacob’s wife, Rachel, as she gave birth to their son, Benjamin.\footnote{2} We read that “as her soul was departing (for she died),” she named her son (Genesis 35:18).

How are we to understand the phrase, “as her soul was departing”? In Hebrew, the word here translated “soul” is the term *nephesh*. Part of the difficulty in understanding the phrase is that *nephesh* can be used in a variety of ways. According to the Christian philosopher J. P. Moreland, “The term *nephesh* . . . is
used primarily of human beings, though it is also used of animals (Genesis 1:20; 9:10; 24:30) and of God Himself (Judges 10:16; Isaiah 1:14).”

Depending on the context, the term might refer to a part of the body, like the neck (Psalm 105:18) or throat (Isaiah 5:14). It can also be used of the principle of life, as in Leviticus 17:11: “the life [that is, nephesh] of the flesh is in the blood.” Strangely, however, it can also refer to a dead human body (Numbers 5:2; 6:11). Moreover, it can be used of various psychological aspects of human experience, like emotions or desires (Proverbs 21:10; Isaiah 26:9; Micah 7:1). Finally, there are also indications that the term can refer to what might be called the “soul”—the immaterial component of a human being in which one’s personal identity is located.

So when we read that Rachel’s “soul was departing,” does this simply mean that she was dying, that the “principle of life” (which had sustained her to this point) was departing? Or could it mean that her “soul,” an immaterial component of her being encompassing her personal identity, was departing? In other words, is this verse merely telling us that Rachel’s body was dying, or is it also telling us that, as her body was dying, her soul was leaving her body (possibly to continue its existence elsewhere)?

If we examine other passages of Scripture, we see evidence that the human soul continues to exist after the death of the body. Consider Psalm 49:15: “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.” In Hebrew thought, Sheol was the place of the dead, somewhat like the Greek conception of Hades. In this passage, the Psalmist expresses confidence that God will ransom his “soul” from the place of the dead and receive the Psalmist to himself. This view of the soul becomes even clearer when we examine what the Old Testament has to say about the afterlife.
The Place of the Dead

In the Old Testament the place of the dead is called Sheol. Of course, in some places the term simply refers to the grave. Nevertheless, according to John Cooper, “There is virtual consensus that the Israelites did believe in some sort of ethereal existence after death in a place called Sheol.”[6] What sort of place was this?

Job describes it as a place of “ease,” where “the wicked cease from troubling” and “the weary are at rest” (3:13, 17-18). That sounds pretty good! However, it’s also described as a place of “darkness” and “the land of forgetfulness” (Psalm 88:12), a place where not much is happening. As the author of Ecclesiastes puts it: “There is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going” (9:10). Hence, J. P. Moreland observes, “Life in Sheol is often depicted as lethargic and inactive.”[7]

But there are exceptions. Consider the case of Saul and the medium of Endor (1 Samuel 28). The prophet Samuel had died, and Saul is preparing to go to war against the Philistines (vv. 1-4). After seeing the Philistine army, however, Saul is afraid (v. 5). He inquires of the Lord, but the Lord does not answer him (v. 6). In desperation, Saul seeks out a medium at Endor, and asks her to call up Samuel from the dead (vv. 7-11). Incredibly, the plan works, and Samuel actually makes an appearance (vv. 12-14).

Saul inquires of Samuel, but Samuel essentially rebukes Saul (vv. 15-16), reminding Saul of his prior disobedience. He tells Saul that Israel will be defeated by the Philistines and informs him that “Tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me” (vv. 18-19). It’s a fascinating story, but we must not lose sight of what (for us) is the main point.

Notice that Samuel, who had previously died, and whose body had been buried (v. 3), retains his personal identity in the shadowy underworld of Sheol. He still
knows who he is, remembers Saul, and can function as the Lord’s prophet. Although Samuel is pictured in the story as “an old man . . . wrapped in a robe” (v. 14), Moreland reminds us that the Bible often uses such imagery “in a nonliteral way to describe immaterial, invisible realities.”

Regardless, the Old Testament teaches that human beings continue to exist after the death of the body. Moreover, the righteous express a hope that God will rescue their souls even from Sheol.

**Redemption from Sheol**

The Old Testament pictures all those who die as going initially to Sheol, the place of the dead. However, it also intimates a hope for the righteous even “beyond the grave.” As John Cooper notes, “Several Psalms read most naturally as confessing a steadfast if unspecified trust in God beyond death.”

Consider Psalm 49. The psalmist observes that all people die. Sooner or later each person’s life ends in death (vv. 5-12). But for the psalmist that is not the end of the story. Though he knows that this life will end with the death of his body, he nonetheless confidently proclaims: “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me” (v. 15).

Or consider Psalm 73. The psalmist begins by confessing that he was “envious of the arrogant” and “wicked” (v. 3). However, as he contemplated that their end is “destruction,” his hope in God was renewed (vv. 17-24).

Although the psalmist recognized that he, too, would die, he declares his hope in God: “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (v. 26). After surveying such material, one Old Testament scholar notes that before God “there is not only the alternative between this life and the shadow existence in the world of the dead; there is a third possibility—a permanent, living fellowship with him.”

This third possibility was the confident hope of the psalmists.
Of course, if we’re going to be fair, we must also agree with C. S. Lewis, who observes that throughout much of the Old Testament, belief in the afterlife held virtually no “religious importance” whatever.\footnote{11} What mattered to the ancient Israelite was life on this earth. It is here that we can enjoy fellowship with family, friends—and God.

So why did God reveal so little to the ancient Israelites about the nature of the afterlife? Lewis suggests that God may have wanted His people to come to love Him primarily as an end in itself—and not for any rewards he might bestow in the afterlife. If one becomes friends with God in this life, then one will naturally fear to lose this relationship in death. And at this point, God can step in with the “good news” that friendship with Him can continue beyond death.\footnote{12} Indeed, God even promised to raise the bodies of his people from the dead, to continue their friendship with him on a new earth!

**The Resurrection of the Body**

The resurrection of the body is a doctrine that many believers rarely think about. Yet this doctrine is not only taught throughout the New Testament, it’s even found in the Old Testament.

Consider Daniel 12:2: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” This verse is not denying a disembodied afterlife between death and resurrection. Rather, it is affirming that the souls of the dead, whose bodies appear to be asleep in the “dust of the earth,” shall be “awakened” and raised from the dead.

Notice that some are raised “to everlasting life,” but others to “everlasting contempt.” Cooper writes, “This verse . . . connects resurrection, judgment, and two eternal destinies.”\footnote{13} The Old Testament suggests that the souls of the dead will one day be reunited with their bodies for all eternity. As Moreland observes, “Old Testament teaching implies that the soul or spirit is added to flesh
and bones to form a living human person (Genesis 2:7; Ezekiel 37) and that the resurrection of the dead involves the re-embodiment of the same soul or spirit (Isaiah 26:14, 19).”{14}

How might we sum up Old Testament teaching about the nature and destiny of human beings? First, human beings appear to be composed of both body and soul. When God created Adam, he first formed his body from the dust of the earth, and then “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). This at least hints at the possibility that human beings are a body-soul composite. The evidence for this is strengthened, however, when we consider Old Testament teaching about life after death.

Throughout the Old Testament we see evidence for continued personal existence, after the death of the body, in a place called Sheol. An interesting example of this can be seen when Saul, with the help of a medium, calls up the prophet Samuel from the dead. We saw that Samuel continues to exist and retain his personal identity even after the death of his body (1 Samuel 28).

But this was not the end of the story. For the Old Testament also teaches that the souls of the dead will one day be reunited with resurrected bodies, either to enjoy eternal life on a new earth, or to suffer eternal shame and contempt. This, in a nutshell, is what the Old Testament has to say about the nature and destiny of human beings.

Notes

2. See the story in Genesis 35:16-20.
4. The material in this paragraph is indebted to Moreland, The Soul, 45-46.
9. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Loc. 906. The preceding words, concerning hope “beyond the grave” are also taken from Cooper, Loc. 902.

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**Prophecies of the Messiah**

Dr. Michael Gleghorn

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn argues that the Bible contains genuine prophecies about a coming Messiah that were accurately fulfilled in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.*
The Place of His Birth

Biblical prophecy is a fascinating subject. It not only includes predictions of events that are still in the future. It also includes predictions of events that were future at the time the prophecy was given, but which have now been fulfilled and are part of the past. This latter category includes all the prophecies about a coming Messiah that Christians believe were accurately fulfilled in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. If the Bible really does contain such prophecies, then we would seem to have evidence that’s at least consistent with the divine inspiration of the Bible. One can see how an all-knowing God could accurately foretell the future, but it’s not clear how a finite human being could do so. Thus, if there are accurately fulfilled prophecies in the Bible, then we have yet another reason to believe that the biblical worldview is true.

Let’s begin with a prophecy about the Messiah’s birthplace. “Messiah” is a Hebrew term that simply means “anointed one.” When translated into Greek, the language of the New Testament, the term becomes “Christ.” Christians believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah promised in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Mark 14:61-62).

In Micah 5:2 we read, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” This prophecy was given in the eighth century B.C., more than seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus!

Notice, first, that it refers to a future ruler who will come from the town of Bethlehem. When King Herod, shortly after Jesus’ birth, asked the Jewish religious leaders where the Christ (or Messiah) was to be born, they told him that
he was to be born in Bethlehem and cited this verse from Micah as support (Matt. 2:1-6). Both Matthew and Luke confirm that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1 and Luke 2:4-7). So He clearly meets this necessary qualification for being the promised Messiah.

But that’s not all. Micah also says that the origins of this ruler are “from of old, from ancient times.” How should we understand this? One commentator notes, “The terms ‘old’ . . . and ‘ancient times’ . . . may denote ‘great antiquity’ as well as ‘eternity’ in the strictest sense.”{1} Dr. Allen Ross states, “At the least this means that Messiah was pre-existent; at the most it means He is eternal.”{2} Micah’s prophecy thus suggests that the Messiah will be a supernatural, perhaps even divine, person. And this astonishing conclusion is precisely what Jesus claimed for Himself!{3}

The Time of His Appearing

Let’s now consider a fascinating prophecy that, in the opinion of many scholars, tells us when the Messiah would make His appearance. It’s found in Daniel 9.

Daniel was one of the Jewish captives who had been brought to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. The prophecy in Daniel 9 was given in the sixth century B.C. While much can be said about this passage, we must focus on a few important points.

To begin, verse 24 gives us the time parameters during which the prophecy will unfold. It reads, “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin,” and so on. Although we can’t go into all the details, the ‘seventy ‘sevens’” concern seventy distinct seven-year periods of time, or a total of 490 years.

Next, verse 25 tells us that from the issuing of a decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of the Messiah, there will be a total of sixty-nine “sevens,” or 483
years. There are two views we must consider. The first holds that this decree was issued by the Persian ruler Artaxerxes to Ezra the priest in 457 B.C. Adding 483 years to this date brings us to A.D. 27, the year many scholars believe Jesus began His public ministry! The second view holds that the reference is to a later decree of Artaxerxes, issued on March 5, 444 B.C. Adding 483 years to this date takes us to A.D. 38. But according to this view, the years in question should be calculated according to a lunar calendar, consisting of twelve thirty-day months. If each of the 483 years consists of only 360 days, then we arrive at March 30, 33 A.D. Dr. Allen Ross says “that is the Monday of the Passion week, the day of the Triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.” The views thus differ on the date of Jesus’ death, but each can comfortably fit the evidence.

Finally, verse 26 says that after the period of sixty-nine “sevens” the Messiah will be “cut off” and have nothing. According to one scholar, “The word translated ‘cut off’ is used of executing . . . a criminal.” All of this fits quite well with the crucifixion of Jesus. Indeed, the accuracy of this prophecy, written over five hundred years before Jesus’ birth, bears eloquent testimony to the divine inspiration and truth of the Bible.

The Nature of His Ministry

In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses told the Israelites, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” This verse promised a succession of prophets who would speak God’s words to the people. Ultimately, however, it refers to Jesus Christ. One commentator notes that the Messianic interpretation of this passage is mentioned not only in the New Testament, but also among the Essenes, Jews, Gnostics, and others. Peter explicitly applied this passage to Jesus in one of his sermons (Acts 3:22-23).

But not only was the Messiah to be a great prophet, it was also foretold that he would be a priest and king as well. The prophet Zechariah was told to make a
royal crown and symbolically set it on the head of Joshua, the high priest. The Lord then said, “Here is the man whose name is the Branch . . . he will . . . sit and rule on his throne. And . . . be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two” (Zechariah 6:12-13). ‘The title “Branch” is a messianic title.’ \[11\] So the scene symbolizes the future Messiah, here referred to as “the Branch,” uniting the offices of king and priest in one person.

But why is it important that the Messiah be a priest? As a prophet he speaks God’s word to the people. As a king he rules from his throne. But why must he also be a priest? “Because priests dealt with sin,” says Michael Brown, a Christian scholar who is ethnically Jewish. “Priests bore the iniquities of the people on their shoulders.” \[12\] And this, of course, is precisely what Jesus did for us: “He . . . bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24).

Dr. Brown points to a tradition in the Talmud that says that on the Day of Atonement there were three signs that the animal sacrifices offered by the high priest had been accepted by God. According to this tradition, in the forty years prior to the temple’s destruction in A.D. 70, all three signs turned up negative every single time. \[13\] Dr. Brown comments, “Jesus probably was crucified in A.D. 30, and the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70.” \[14\] So during this forty-year period God signaled that he no longer accepted these sacrifices. Why? Because final atonement had been made by Jesus! \[15\]

The Significance of His Death

Without any doubt, one of the most astonishing prophecies about the promised Messiah is found in Isaiah 52-53. The verses were written about seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus. They largely concern the death of the Lord’s “Suffering Servant.” According to many scholars, a careful comparison of this passage with the Gospels’ portrayal of Jesus’ suffering and death reveals too many similarities to be merely coincidental.
In some of the most-cited verses from this intriguing passage we read: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:5-6). Here we have a vivid depiction of substitutionary atonement. The Lord lays upon His servant “the iniquity of us all” and punishes him “for our transgressions.” In other words, God’s servant dies as a substitute in our place. This is precisely what Jesus claimed for himself, saying, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

The parallels between Isaiah’s “Suffering Servant” and Jesus are certainly impressive. But some scholars have suggested that Isaiah’s “servant” is actually the nation of Israel and not the Messiah. Dr. Michael Brown dismisses this notion however, insisting that ‘nowhere in the . . . foundational, authoritative Jewish writings do we find the interpretation that this passage refers to the nation of Israel. References to the servant as a people actually end with Isaiah 48:20.”[16] What’s more, he says, “Many . . . Jewish interpreters . . . had no problem seeing this passage as referring to the Messiah . . . By the sixteenth century, Rabbi Moshe Alshech said, ‘Our rabbis with one voice accept and affirm . . . that the prophet is speaking of the Messiah, and we shall . . . also adhere to the same view.’”[17]

For his part, Dr. Brown is so convinced that this passage prophetically depicts the suffering and death of Jesus that he feels “as if God would have to apologize to the human race and to the Jewish people for putting this passage into the scriptures” if Jesus is not the one in view!{18} Although this is a strong statement, it’s not unjustified. For Isaiah 53 not only foretells the death of God’s servant for the sins of the people, it also implies his resurrection!
The Mystery of His Resurrection

In the opinion of many scholars, Isaiah 53 not only foretells the death of God’s servant; it also implies his resurrection from the dead!

It’s important to notice that Isaiah 53 makes it absolutely clear that the Messiah is put to death. It says that “he was cut off from the land of the living” (v. 8), and that ‘he poured out his life unto death” (v. 12). On the other hand, however, it also says that ‘he will see his offspring and prolong his days” (v. 10), and that after his suffering “he will see the light of life and be satisfied” (v. 11). So the text teaches both that the Messiah will die and that he will live again. And although the passage doesn’t explicitly teach the Messiah’s resurrection, it’s certainly consistent with it. This is really staggering in light of the compelling historical evidence for the death and resurrection of Jesus!

Let’s now pause to consider what we’ve learned in this brief article. Micah 5:2 teaches that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. Also, by teaching the preexistence, or even eternality, of the Messiah, the prophecy suggests that he’ll be a supernatural, possibly even divine, figure. In Daniel 9:24-27 we saw that the Messiah would appear to Israel sometime around A.D. 27 – 33, precisely the time of Jesus’ public ministry! Deuteronomy and Zechariah teach that the Messiah would minister as prophet, priest, and king. As a prophet, Jesus spoke God’s word to the people. As a priest, he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. And while he didn’t reign as king during his first advent, he was called “the king of the Jews” (Matt. 27:11, 37). And Christians believe that he’s in some sense reigning now from heaven and that he’ll one day reign on earth as well (Luke 1:32-33). Finally, Isaiah 53 teaches that the Messiah would die for our sins—and then somehow live again. This is consistent with the New Testament’s record of Jesus’ substitutionary death and bodily resurrection.

Of course, we’ve not been able to consider all the prophecies. But hopefully enough has been said to conclude with Dr. Brown that if Jesus isn’t the Messiah,
“there will never be a Messiah. It’s too late for anyone else. It’s him or no one.” Well, you’ve now heard the evidence; the verdict is up to you.

**Notes**

3. See, for example, Matthew 11:27; John 8:58 and 10:30.
7. Ibid.
8. The first holds that He was crucified in A.D. 30, the second in A.D. 33.
13. See Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 39a.
Ancient Perspectives on Happiness

Dr. Michael Gleghorn

After examining several pagan view of happiness from the ancient world, Dr. Michael Gleghorn argues for the view of Christian philosopher Augustine.

The Declaration of Independence says that all men “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights,” including “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”\(^1\) Although we could say a lot about this statement, I want to focus on that very last phrase: the pursuit of happiness. What exactly is happiness? And how should we pursue it in order to have the best chance of attaining it? These questions not only interest us, they also interested some of the greatest thinkers
from the far-flung past.

So what is happiness? An online dictionary says that happiness “results from the possession . . . of what one considers good.”\(^2\) A good start, but it raises another question, namely, what should we consider good? Many things can be described as good: a cat, a job, a lover, and a book may all qualify. And each of these things might even make us happy . . . at least, for a while. But is there a good that offers us genuine and lasting happiness? If so, what is it? Now we’re getting closer to what the ancients were interested in knowing about happiness.

Of course, as you can probably guess, many different answers were proposed. A few thought that happiness could be found in the pleasures of the flesh. But most believed you needed something a bit more . . . lofty, shall we say, in order to experience real happiness, things like friendship, peace of mind, virtue, and even God. One thing they virtually all agreed on was that a truly good and happy life ought to be lived with a sense of mission or purpose. Hence, the ancients did not think about happiness primarily in terms of just “having a good time.” Instead, they thought there was an important moral component to happiness. As Christian theologian Ellen Charry notes, for the ancients, happiness “comes from using oneself consistently, intentionally, and effectively, and hence it is a moral undertaking.”\(^3\)

The link between morality and happiness has, I fear, become rather under-appreciated in our own day. But important as it is, many (including myself) don’t believe that this can be the final word on happiness. So in an effort to find out what is, we’ll spend the rest of this article looking first at some of the most important pagan perspectives on happiness from the ancient world before concluding with a Christian proposal by possibly the greatest theologian in the early church, a man named Augustine.\(^4\)
Epicureanism

Let’s begin with Epicureanism. Epicurus lived from 341-270 B.C. and is often viewed as the poster boy for a hedonistic lifestyle. A popular gourmet cooking site, epicurious.com, creatively plays off this reputation to celebrate the pleasures of a great meal. But as we’ll see, Epicurus was not the total “party animal” that people often think.

Although he rightly regarded physical pleasure as a good thing, and believed that it was natural for us to want it, he personally thought that friendship and mental tranquility were even better. It was these latter sources of happiness, and not merely the pleasures of the flesh, which Epicurus thought of as the greatest goods. In order to attain them, he even commended a life of virtue. After all, it’s the virtuous person, living at peace with his neighbors, who generally has far less cause for fear and worry than someone who’s been up to no good. Such a person is thus more likely to experience the true joys of friendship and mental tranquility than his non-virtuous counterpart.

As you can probably see, there are aspects of Epicureanism that even a Christian can appreciate. But there are problems with this view as well. For example, while Epicurus did not deny either God or the gods, he did teach that they were rather unconcerned about human affairs, and he denied that there would be a final judgment. For him, death was simply the end of existence and you didn’t need to worry that God would judge you for your deeds in an afterlife. But these ideas made many people uncomfortable.

For instance, the Roman philosopher Cicero (106-43 B.C.) reacted strongly against Epicureanism in his book The Nature of the Gods. And Lactantius, an early Christian writer (A.D. 250-325), believed that only the fear of God “guards the mutual society of men.” In his view, if people think they aren’t accountable to God, society will likely be in trouble. Hence, many thinkers worried that Epicureanism might lead to an amoral—or even immoral—pursuit of
pleasure as the highest good of life. And unfortunately, this “can just as easily lead to debauchery and . . . selfishness as it can to the simple, honest life style of Epicurus.” \( ^9 \)

So while the Epicurean view of happiness has some things in its favor, there are several reasons for rejecting it.

**Stoicism**

Stoicism was another important school of thought that addressed the issue of human happiness. In the ancient world, it “was the single most successful and longest-lasting movement in Greco-Roman philosophy.” \( ^{10} \) The Stoics’ manly, morally tough philosophy of life had broad appeal in the ancient world. It attracted slaves like Epictetus (ca. A.D. 55-ca. 135) as well as the Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 121-180). Even many of the early church fathers admired the Stoic emphasis on moral virtue and integrity. \( ^{11} \)

So what did the Stoics think about human happiness? According to Ellen Charry, the Stoics viewed “the goal of life” as human flourishing. This was understood, however, not in terms of having a long life or being financially successful. Rather, it was viewed “as maintaining one’s dignity and grace whatever may happen.” \( ^{12} \) The Stoics understood that things don’t always work out as we want. Life throws us many curve balls and, if we’re not prepared, we’re bound to be disappointed.

Their solution? In a statement reminiscent of the Buddha’s teaching, the Stoic Epictetus declared, “Demand not that events happen as you wish, but wish them to happen as they do happen, and you will get on well.” \( ^{13} \) We often don’t have any control over what goes on around us. But we can control how we react to it. By knowing the good and morally virtuous thing to do, and by consistently choosing to do this, one attains the highest happiness of which human beings are capable; namely, “the enjoyment of self that comes from the conviction that one is
living a principled life of the highest integrity.” {14} This, in a nutshell, is the Stoic conception of human happiness.

But there are some problems with this view. Although Christians will readily cheer the Stoic commitment to a life of moral virtue, they’ll nonetheless deny that such a life is ever really possible apart from the grace of God. As the Christian theologian Augustine observed, Stoicism fails to adequately address the problem of human sinfulness. Moreover, he thought, it holds out the false hope that one can achieve happiness through self-effort. But as Augustine wisely saw, only God can make us truly happy. Hence, while there’s much to admire about Stoicism, as a philosophy of human happiness it must ultimately disappoint. {15}

**Neo-Platonism**

Having now surveyed Epicureanism and Stoicism, and found each of them wanting, we must next turn to Neo-Platonism to see if it fares any better.

Probably the most important Neo-Platonist philosopher was a man named Plotinus, who lived in the third century A.D. Plotinus believed that in the beginning was the One, “the supreme transcendent principle” and the “ground of all being.” {16} Everything which now exists ultimately originated from the One through a series of emanations. Since everything proceeds from the One not by a process of creation, but rather by a process of emanation, “Creator and creation . . . are not sharply distinguished in Plotinus’s account.” {17}

Although this is certainly different from the biblical view, in which there is a clear distinction between Creator and creation, it would probably not be fair to simply call Plotinus a pantheist—that is, someone who believes that “all” of reality is “Divine.” According to one scholar, Plotinus tried “to steer a middle course” between pure pantheism (on the one hand) and creation by God (on the other). {18} But since everything that exists emanates or proceeds from the One, Plotinus’s view is certainly close to pantheism. And it is thus quite different from
the biblical doctrine of creation.

But how is this relevant to Plotinus’s perspective on the nature of human happiness? According to Plotinus, since everything (including mankind) emanates out of the One, human beings can only truly find happiness by realizing their “oneness” with the One. In Plotinus’s view, “Happiness resides in a person’s realization that she is one with divinity.”\(^\text{[19]}\) According to Plotinus, then, realizing one’s “oneness” with the One is the key to human happiness.

Are there any problems with this view? Although there’s much to admire about Neo-Platonism, and while it was quite influential in the early church, it was never entirely accepted, and that for several reasons. From a Christian perspective, Neo-Platonism ultimately has a defective view of God, creation, human nature, the meaning of salvation, and what happens to a person after death. In other words, while the system is very religious, it’s not Christianity. And thus, while we can agree with Plotinus that happiness can only be found in God, we must nonetheless reject his system on the grounds that he’s not pointing us to the one true God.

**Augustinianism**

Having previously surveyed some of the most important perspectives on happiness from the ancient world, we’ll now bring our discussion to a close by briefly considering the thought of Augustine, one of the greatest theologians of the early church. Augustine lived from A.D. 354 to 430 and was familiar with the various perspectives on happiness which we’ve already examined.

Like the Epicureans, he believed that our happiness is at least tangentially related to our physical well-being. Like the Stoics, he believed that a life of integrity and moral virtue was important for human happiness. And like the Neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus, Augustine thought that true human happiness could only be found in God.

Nevertheless, Augustine views each of these perspectives as ultimately
inadequate for all who long to experience lasting human happiness (and Augustine thinks that’s pretty much all of us). After all, neither physical well-being nor a virtuous life can grant us lasting happiness if our existence ends at death. And while he agrees with Plotinus that happiness can only be found in God, Augustine (like all Christians) is convinced that Plotinus ultimately has a defective view of God.\(^{20}\)

So where is true and lasting happiness to be found? Ellen Charry sums up Augustine’s view quite nicely when she writes, “Happiness is knowing, loving, and enjoying God securely.”\(^{21}\) In Augustine’s view, happiness is a condition in which one’s desires are realized. Happy is he who has what” he wants,” he writes in his little book on happiness.\(^{22}\) But he also believed that what we all really want is the everlasting possession of the greatest good that can be had. That is, we want the best that there is—and we want it forever!

But since the greatest good can only be God, the source and foundation of every other good there is (or ever will be), it seems that what we ultimately want, whether we realize it or not, is God! And if we not only want the best that there is, but want it forever, it seems that we must ultimately want the very thing God freely offers us in Christ, namely, everlasting life in the presence of God. The psalmist urges us to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). And those who do are promised joy in His presence and “eternal pleasures” at His right hand (Psalm 16:11).

This, then, is Augustine’s view on human happiness. In my opinion, it’s far and away the best perspective that we’ve examined in this article, and I hope you’ll think so, too.

**Notes**


4. Ellen Charry surveys the views of each of these persons and perspectives in the first two chapters of her book God and the Art of Happiness, 3-62.

5. For more, check out www.epicurious.com


7. This paragraph is indebted to the discussion of Epicurus in Solomon and Higgins, A Short History of Philosophy, 70-71.


10. Solomon and Higgins, A Short History of Philosophy, 71.


15. This paragraph is indebted to Ellen Charry’s discussion of Augustine’s critique of Stoicism in *God and the Art of Happiness*, 14-15.


20. This paragraph and the one that precedes it are generally indebted to Charry’s discussion in *God and the Art of Happiness*, 3-62.


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**The All-Present God**

Dr. Michael Gleghorn
“As Charles Haddon Spurgeon once observed, there are very few things as uplifting for the heart and the mind as a serious study of the being and attributes of God. Hopefully, this little article on God’s omnipresence will encourage some others to take up such studies for themselves. They won’t be disappointed.” —Dr. Michael Gleghorn

Introduction

We can never get away from God. To some, this is quite threatening. To others, it is merely irritating or annoying. But for those who know and love God, it is deeply comforting and consoling, for it means that we are never alone.

In this article, I want to discuss an attribute of God that is often referred to as omnipresence. It’s a big word, but all it means is that God is present everywhere. It was while meditating on this attribute that David was led to pen the oft-quoted verses of Psalm 139:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast (vv. 7-10).
Clearly David took comfort in the fact that he could never get away from God, that there was nowhere he could go where God was not.

In a similar manner, King Solomon also spoke of God’s omnipresence in his prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. He said, “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27). Here, Solomon recognizes that unlike human beings, God’s presence cannot be localized to merely one place on the earth. Indeed, the universe itself is not sufficient to contain the being of its Creator!

So how is the doctrine that God is everywhere present to be understood? And what practical applications might this have for our lives?

To begin, it is helpful to observe that just as the doctrine of God’s eternity attempts to explain how God is related to time, the doctrine of omnipresence attempts to explain how He is related to space. Does God completely transcend space? That is, might He exist completely “outside” or “beyond” our spatial universe in some sense? Or is it better to think of Him as existing everywhere throughout all space? Then again, could it be the case that He somehow exists both within and beyond the created order? Obviously, these are deep and difficult questions. But since thinking through such things is part of what it means to love God with our minds, let us ponder these matters as carefully as we can (Mark 12:30).

**God and Space**

Other Scriptures certainly seem to affirm God’s omnipresence. God asks the prophet Jeremiah, “Am I only a God nearby . . . and not a God far away? . . . . Do I not fill heaven and earth?” (23:23-24). Here the Lord affirms that He is present everywhere, that there is nowhere in heaven and earth where He is not. But how should we understand this?
Should we think of God as “spread out” through the universe like an invisible gas? Although this might be the mental image which most naturally suggests itself to our minds, we should carefully avoid embracing it. After all, “God is spirit” (John 4:24). And a spirit, unlike a gas, is a non-physical entity. If we think of God as being spread throughout the universe like an invisible gas, then we might be tempted to think of God as only partially present at any one place. For instance, we might come to believe that there is a small amount of God in our bedroom, even more of Him throughout our house, and more still in the three-mile radius around our house. And this, I’m sure you would agree, is crazy! We don’t want to think of God’s omnipresence in these terms.

Instead, if we want to think of God as existing everywhere in space (and many theologians would caution us against this), then we ought to think of Him as being fully present at every point of space at the same time. Now admittedly, this is a difficult concept to grasp. But an analogy may help to clarify the point.

A number of Christian theologians and philosophers have suggested that we should think of God’s relationship to the world as similar to the soul’s relationship to the body. On one construal of this view, the soul is held to be “spatially present in the body,” but “not extended throughout it.” Instead, it’s thought to be “somehow wholly present at all points in its body.” In a similar way, it is said, we can also think of God as being “spatially located in the universe” and yet “wholly present at every point in it.”

Of course, it must be emphasized that this is only an analogy. I’m certainly not suggesting that the world really is God’s body! The analogy is intended simply to help us understand one way in which God might be thought of as omnipresent. But it’s not the only way.

**God and Spacelessness**

Many Christian philosophers do not believe that we should think of God as
literally present in space. Instead, they believe that God completely transcends space, existing “beyond” or “outside” the spatial universe which we inhabit. But if this is so, then how do they think the doctrine of God’s omnipresence should be understood? Moreover, why do they believe that God is not present in space?

Let’s take the second question first. Why think that God isn’t present in space? Well, say these thinkers, consider the doctrine of creation. God created the universe *ex nihilo*, or “out of nothing.” Literally nothing existed (except God) “before” He brought the universe into being. In other words, prior to creation, not even space existed. Rather, space is brought into being by God at the moment of creation. But if God does not exist in space prior to creating the universe, then why should we think that He is located in space after bringing the universe into being? According to this view, there just isn’t any good reason for thinking that He is.

But wait a minute! If God isn’t located in space, then how can it still be said that He’s present everywhere? Doesn’t this amount to a denial of God’s omnipresence? According to proponents of this view, we should understand God’s omnipresence to mean that He both knows what is happening everywhere in space and that He is active at every point in space. In other words, God not only knows what is happening everywhere on earth, He also knows what is happening elsewhere in our solar system and in every galaxy of the universe. Moreover, He is continually exercising His power to sustain the universe in being and He is able to act anywhere He desires throughout this vast cosmos which He has created. Hence, even if God is not literally present in space, advocates of this view still insist that He both knows what is happening and is able to exercise His power anywhere in the world at any time He chooses.

Having now considered the two major views regarding how we should understand the doctrine of God’s omnipresence, we’ll briefly look at some of the difficulties that are raised by this doctrine.
Difficulties with Omnipresence

Recall how David in Psalm 139 affirms that there is nowhere he can flee from God’s presence, for God is present everywhere. But this raises a difficulty, for elsewhere in the Bible David says something which seems to directly contradict this sentiment.

Pursued by Saul in the Desert of Ziph, David, who had the opportunity to kill Saul but humbly refused, pleaded with Saul not to shed his blood “far from the presence of the Lord” (1 Sam. 26:20). But wait a minute! If God is present everywhere, as David elsewhere affirms, then what sense does it make to speak of dying far from the presence of the Lord? How can one be far from the presence of the Lord if the Lord is present everywhere?

It seems to me that the best way of handling these difficulties is to make an important distinction regarding the way in which God is everywhere present. What I mean is this. Although God is present everywhere, He is uniquely present at certain times and places when He desires to reveal Himself in some special way.

The best example of this is the unique incarnation of God the Son in the man Christ Jesus. Jesus was one person with two natures, one divine and one human. According to His divine nature, He remained omnipresent even during His time on earth. Yet in his human nature, Jesus was limited (like all other men) to a particular time and place. And it was in this more limited sense that God specially chose to reveal Himself to us. Hence, in the Gospel of John we learn that God’s grace and truth, His love and salvation, His blessing and glory, are all uniquely revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. (10)

In a similar way, concerning the example of David above, we can say that while God was certainly present in the Desert of Ziph, He had chosen to specially reveal Himself to the people of Israel. He was thus present to the people of Israel in a
way that He was not present to the other nations. It is in this sense that David
pleads with Saul not to shed his blood “far from the presence of the Lord.”

The Importance of Omnipresence

Let’s think about this in terms of a “good news/bad news” approach, beginning
with the “bad news” first. Although God’s omnipresence, considered in itself, is
really only good news, there is certainly a sense in which sinful men and women,
much like you and me, might be tempted to regard this doctrine as bad news.
Why is that?

Well, if God is always present, then like it or not, every evil thought, word, or
deed that we think, say, or do is always done directly in His presence! That’s a
sobering thought, isn’t it? There is literally nothing that we can ever do in a
hidden or secret way. Whenever we lie or steal, commit adultery or take God’s
name in vain, we do so in the presence of the God to whom we are all ultimately
accountable. Indeed, Jesus warned that on the day of judgment we will even have
to give an account for every “careless word” which we have spoken (Matt. 12:36)!
This, at least for sinners like ourselves, is what we might call the bad news of
God’s omnipresence.

But as I said previously, the reality is that God’s omnipresence is actually very
good news. For it means that no matter what our circumstances, God is always
present! When we’re anxious or scared, God is there. When we’re under pressure
at work or having difficulties in a relationship, God is there. Yes; even if we’re
sick or dying, God is present then, too. David wrote in the Psalms, “Even though I
walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with
me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). For the one who’s
been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ, the fact that God is always
present is very “good news” indeed!

I hope you can see that the doctrine of God’s omnipresence is not just an
interesting issue for philosophers and theologians to ponder (although it is certainly that). It’s also an extremely practical doctrine that is highly relevant to almost every aspect of our lives. For wherever we go, whatever joys we encounter or difficulties we face, God is there. And for the Christian, He is present as our Protector, Savior, Counselor, and Friend!

**Notes**

1. All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.
2. See, for example, Jesus’ remarks in Luke 24:39: “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”
5. Of course, some theologians (e.g., Process theologians) *do* believe that the universe is God’s body. According to them, God is like the soul of the world (which is His body). This view is usually termed *panentheism*, which is not the same as pantheism.
6. This section is particularly indebted to the discussion of omnipresence in Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 509-11.
7. I put “before” in quotation marks since, if God is timeless without creation, there really isn’t literally any temporal moment “before” God brings the universe into being. The universe, along with time itself, simply has its beginning at the moment of creation. Nevertheless, for the purpose of communicating to our radio audience in the limited amount of time available, it is much easier to simply say “before” creation.
9. Ibid., 510-11.
10. In this regard, please see John 1:1, 14-18; 3:16-21.

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**How Reason Can Lead to God - Part 2**

Dr. Michael Gleghorn

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn continues to make a compelling case for how reason can lead us, step by step, to the logical conclusion of God’s existence based on the book ‘How Reason Can Lead to God.’*

**Foundation of Mind**
In this article we’re continuing our examination of Christian philosopher Josh Rasmussen’s book, *How Reason Can Lead to God*.\(^1\) In my previous article, I introduced the book and showed how Rasmussen began constructing a “bridge of reason” that led to “an independent, self-sufficient, . . . eternally powerful foundation of all reality.”\(^2\)

But Rasmussen goes further, arguing that there must also be “a certain mind-like aspect” to this foundation.\(^3\) And that’s what we’ll explore in this article. We’re going to follow Rasmussen’s lead as he takes us over the “bridge of reason.” And once we’ve taken that final step, we’ll see that it’s led us not to some cold, calculating, “mind-like” reality, but to a very “special treasure.”\(^4\)

But to begin, why does Rasmussen think that the foundation of all reality must be “mind-like”? To answer that question, consider that one of the things the foundation has produced is *you*—and *you* have a mind. As Rasmussen notes, “you are capable of thinking, feeling, and making decisions.”\(^5\) Indeed, if you’re awake and functioning normally, you have some awareness of what is going on “around” you—and even of what is going on “within” you. That’s because you possess a conscious (even *self-conscious*) mind. How is this to be explained?

According to Rasmussen there are only two live options: either minds ultimately originate from some sort of “mind-like” or “mental” reality, or else they arise solely from a physical process.\(^6\) Is one of these options better than the other?
Rasmussen thinks so, and points to “a construction problem” with the matter-to-mind option. Here’s the problem. Just as a black steel pipe cannot be constructed out of emerald green toothpaste, so a self-conscious mind cannot be constructed from mindless particles. Particles just aren’t the right thing for constructing the thoughts, feelings, and purposes of a mind. In order to construct a mind, “mental materials” are needed. Hence, the foundation of all reality must be mind-like in order to account for the unique features of self-conscious human minds.

But at this point, some may raise an objection. After all, if we say there’s a construction problem going from matter to minds, then wouldn’t there also be a problem in saying that an immaterial mind created the material world? The answer is “No.”

**Foundation of Matter**

Above, we argued that one can’t explain the thoughts and intentions of human minds by appealing only to material particles. There must rather be an ultimate mind at the foundation of all reality.

But of course, human beings also have *bodies*. And your body (including your brain) is an example of incredible material complexity. Not only that, but in order for you to be physically alive, the “fundamental parameters” of the universe must be delicately balanced, or “fine-tuned,” with a precision that is mind-boggling. As physicist Alan Lightman observes, “If these fundamental parameters were much different from what they are, it is not only human beings who would not exist. No life of any kind would exist.”

How should we account for such complexity? Can we explain it in terms of chance? That’s wildly implausible. And better explanations are available. After all, one could try to explain the words of your favorite novel by appealing to “chance.” But is that “the best explanation?” Isn’t it far more likely that an
intelligent mind selected and ordered the words of that story with the intention of communicating something meaningful to others? While the chance hypothesis is possible, is it really probable? If we’re interested in truth, shouldn’t we prefer the best explanation?

So what is a better explanation for the material complexity that we observe—not only in our bodies, but in the fine-tuning of the universe that allows for our existence? If the ordering of the letters and words in your favorite novel is best explained by an intelligent mind, then what about the biological complexity of human beings? Scientists have observed “that molecular biology has uncovered an analogy between DNA and language.” In short, “The genetic code functions exactly like a language code.” {12} And just as the words in a novel require an intelligent author, the genetic code requires an intelligent designer.

Hence, a foundational mind offers a good explanation not only for human minds, but for the complexity of human bodies as well. Moreover, a foundational mind also provides the best explanation for objective moral values.

Foundation of Morals

What is the best explanation for our moral experience in the world? How might we best account for our sense of right and wrong, good and evil? So far, we’ve seen two reasons for thinking that the ultimate foundation of reality is “mind-like.” First, a foundational mind best explains the existence of human minds. Second, it also offers the best explanation for the staggering material complexity of the human body and the exquisite “fine-tuning” of the universe that allows for our existence. Might a foundational mind also provide the best explanation for our moral experience? Rasmussen thinks so, and he offers potent reasons for us to think so too.{13}

Consider our sense of right and wrong. How should this be explained? Rasmussen proposes that our “moral senses are a window into a moral landscape.”{14} Just
as our sense of sight helps us perceive objects in the physical world, so our moral sense helps us perceive values in the moral world. Of course, just as our sense of sight may not be perfect, such that a tree appears blurry or indistinct, so also our moral sense may not be perfect, such that a particular action may not be clearly seen as right or wrong. But in each case, even imperfect “sight” can provide some reliable information about both the material and moral landscapes.

How might we best explain both the moral landscape and our experience of it? “Can the particles that comprise a material landscape, with dirt and trees, produce standards of good and bad, right and wrong?” It’s hard to see how undirected particles could do such a thing. And naturally, they could have no reason to do so.

On the other hand, a foundational mind with a moral nature could account for both the moral landscape and our experience of it. As Rasmussen observes, such a being would account for moral values because of its moral nature. Further, such a being would have both a reason and resources to create moral agents (like us) with the ability to perceive these values. Its reason for creating such agents is that we’re valuable. A mind-like foundation thus offers a better explanation for human moral experience than mindless particles ever could.

**Foundation of Reason**

Human minds are special for their ability to reason. This ability helps us think correctly. When we reason correctly, we can begin with certain basic truths and infer yet other truths that logically follow from these. For example, from the basic truths that “all men are mortal” and “Socrates is a man” we can logically infer the further truth that “Socrates is mortal.”

But here an interesting puzzle arises. Where does our ability to reason come from? How might we account for the origin of human reason? And one of the interesting topics tackled by Josh Rasmussen in his book, *How Reason Can Lead*
to God, is the origin of reason itself. What’s the best explanation for this incredible ability?

If the universe sprang into being “from nothing, with no mind behind it,” then not only human minds, but even rationality itself, must ultimately come from mindless material particles. But as Rasmussen observes, “If people come only from mindless particles, then reasoning comes from non-reason.” But could reason really come from non-reason? Is that the most plausible explanation? Or might a better explanation be at hand?

The atheistic scientist J. B. S. Haldane once observed, “If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true . . . and hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms.” For Haldane, if human reason arises entirely from a non-rational historical and physical process, then we have little reason to think that our beliefs are true.

Fortunately, there’s a way out of this difficulty. We can suggest that human reason comes from an ultimately rational foundation. In that case, reason comes from reason. We’ve already seen that the best way to account for minds, matter, and morals is by positing a foundational Mind as the source of all reality. And this is also the best way to account for human reason as well. As Rasmussen notes, “by anchoring reason in the nature of the foundation, we can explain how the foundation of all existence can be the foundation of minds, matter, morals . . . and reason itself.”

In the next section we will follow Rasmussen “to the treasure at the end of the bridge of reason.”

Perfect Foundation

In this article we’ve seen that a foundational Mind offers the best explanation for
the existence of human minds and bodies, moral concepts, and even reason itself. In my previous article, we saw that this foundation is also independent, self-sufficient, and eternally powerful. Today, with some final help from the Christian philosopher Josh Rasmussen, we want to pull together the various strands of this discussion to see what unifies the various features of this foundation into a single, coherent being. What sort of being might all these features point to? According to Rasmussen, they all point to a perfect being. But why does he think so?

Rasmussen argues that a perfect being must have two essential features. First, it must have no defects, or imperfections. And second, it must have “supreme value.” In other words, a perfect being cannot possibly be improved.

But why think the foundation of all reality is a perfect being? Simply put, the concept of perfection enables us to account for all the characteristics of this being that reason has revealed to us. Perfection accounts for this being’s independent, self-sufficient, and eternally powerful nature. It also accounts for how this being can be the ultimate foundation of other minds, astonishing material complexity, morality, and reason itself. As Rasmussen observes, “Perfection unifies all the attributes of the foundation” and “successfully predicts every dimension of our world.”

A perfect being is thus the foundation of “every good and perfect gift” that we possess and enjoy, and must surely be described as “the greatest possible treasure.” Moreover, since this being possesses “the maximal concentration of goodness, value, and power imaginable,” it can only properly be termed “God.” Thus, by following the “light of reason” to the end of the “bridge of reason,” we have arrived not at meaninglessness or despair, but at “the greatest possible treasure,” the self-sufficient, eternally powerful, supremely rational, and perfectly good, Creator God.

If you would like to explore the work of Josh Rasmussen further, I would recommend reading his book, How Reason Can Lead to God: A Philosopher’s
Bridge to Faith. You can also visit his website at joshualrasmussen.com.

Notes
2. See my previous article, “How Reason Can Lead to God, Part 1.”
4. Ibid., 8.
5. Ibid., 76.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 77.
8. Ibid., 92. The phraseology of “mental materials” in the previous sentence is also borrowed from Rasmussen.
10. Rasmussen deals with this option, as well as several others, in *How Reason Can Lead to God*, 95-108.
11. Ibid., 95.
16. Ibid., 119.
17. Ibid., 121.
18. Ibid., 121-22.
19. Ibid., 122.
20. Ibid., 133.
21. Ibid., 133-34.
24. Ibid., 136.
25. Ibid., 137-38.
26. Ibid., 148.
27. Ibid. See also James 1:17.

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