

Theistic Arguments: The Craig Program, 5

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March 20, 2005

Resurrection Argument

- ✦ God makes sense of the *life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.*

The Argument

1. There are four established facts concerning the fate of Jesus of Nazareth: his honorable burial by Joseph of Arimathea, the discovery of his empty tomb, his post-mortem appearances, and the origin of his disciples' belief in the resurrection.
 2. The hypothesis "God raised Jesus from the dead" is the best explanation of these facts.
 3. The hypothesis "God raised Jesus from the dead" entails that God exists.
 4. Therefore God exists.
- # (A *deductive* argument.)
 - # Steps 3 and 4 are obvious. It remains only to examine steps 1 and 2.

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Jesus' Death: Four Facts

- # In defending this premise of Jesus' death, Craig does not treat the New Testament as inspired and therefore inerrant, but simply as a collection of Greek documents coming down to us out of the first century.

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Fact 1

- ✦ Fact 1: After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb.
- ✦ Highly significant because it means that the location of Jesus's tomb was known to Jew and Christian alike in Jerusalem.
- ✦ Evidence supporting this fact:
 1. Jesus' burial is attested in the very old information handed on by Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth, Greece.
 2. The burial account is part of very old source material used by Mark in his gospel.
 3. As a member of the Jewish high court that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention.
 4. The burial story lacks any signs of legendary development.
 5. No other competing burial story exists.

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Fact 2

- ✦ Fact 2: On the Sunday after the crucifixion, Jesus' tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers.
- ✦ Evidence supporting this fact:
 1. The old information transmitted by Paul implies the empty tomb (e.g., "he was buried ... he was raised").
 2. The empty tomb story is also part of Mark's very old source material.
 3. The story is simple and lacks signs of legendary embellishment.
 4. The tomb was probably discovered empty by women. This is significant because in Jewish society, the testimony of women were regarded as unreliable.
 5. The earliest known Jewish response to the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection presupposes the empty tomb.
- ✦ Jacob Kramer: "By far most exegetes hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements concerning the empty tomb."

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Fact 3

- ✦ Fact 3: On multiple occasions and under various circumstances, different individuals and groups of people experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead.
- ✦ Evidence supporting this fact:
 1. The list of eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection appearances that is quoted by Paul imply that such appearances occurred. (Cephas, the Twelve, more than 500 brethren, James, all the apostles, Paul. [1 Cor. 15:5--8])
 2. The appearance narratives in the gospels provide multiple, independent attestation of the appearances. Gerd Ludemann: "It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ."

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Fact 4

- ✦ Fact 4: The original disciples suddenly and sincerely came to believe that Jesus was risen from the dead despite their having every predisposition to the contrary.
- ✦ Imagine the situation the disciples faced following Jesus' crucifixion:
 1. Their leader was dead.
 2. Jesus' execution exposed him as a heretic.
 3. Jewish belief about the afterlife precluded anyone's rising from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of the world.
- ✦ Nevertheless, the disciples suddenly came to believe so strongly that God had raised Jesus from the dead that they were willing to die for the truth of that belief.
- ✦ Luke Johnson: "Some sort of powerful, transformative experience is required to generate the sort of movement earliest Christianity was."
- ✦ N.T. Wright: "That is why, as an historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind him."

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Best Explanation

- # C. B. McCullagh, in *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, lists six tests historians use in determining the best explanation for a given body of historical facts:
 1. It has great explanatory scope.
 2. It has great explanatory power.
 3. It is plausible.
 4. It is not ad hoc or contrived.
 5. It is in accord with accepted beliefs.
 6. It far outstrips any of its rival theories in meeting conditions 1–5.
- # The hypothesis "God raised Jesus from the dead" passes all these tests.

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Counter-Argument 1

- # *What about alternative hypotheses, like "the disciples stole the body" or "Jesus wasn't really dead?"*
- # These are "old theories."
- # Universally rejected by contemporary scholarship (more info in Craig's debate with Brian Edwards).

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Counter-Argument 2

- # "*God raised Jesus from the dead*" lies beyond the reach of a strict historian.
- # Probably most scholars would agree.
- # The fact is that there just is no plausible *naturalistic* explanation of the facts.
- # A historian may simply choose to remain agnostic about this. But surely insofar as we are not merely historians, but human beings searching for the meaning of our existence, we cannot be debarred from drawing such a conclusion. (See next point.)

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Counter-Argument 3

- # *Most historians have reservations about the resurrection hypothesis.*
- # Why? Because the resurrection is a miracle.
- # Gerd Ludemann: "Historical criticism ... does not reckon with an intervention of God in history."
- # Thus, the resurrection cannot be historically established; it is excluded *a priori*.
- # Ludemann's only justification for this crucial presupposition of the impossibility of miracles is vague references to Hume and Kant.
- # Philosophers consider Ludemann's procedure here of merely dropping names of famous philosophers unsound [Thomas Morris]. (Ludemann was not a philosopher, but a New Testament theologian.)

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Counter-Argument 4

- # *But miracles don't exist!*
- # How do we know?
- # The only way we can reject the notion of miracles if we can show that God does not exist (i.e., that atheism is true).

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Craig-Edwards Debate 2001

- # Listen to the debate between William Lane Craig and Brian Edwards, Easter 2001:
<http://media.gospelcom.net/rzim/Nzdebate.mp3>

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