

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**CHOOSING EVIDENCE OVER THEORY: HOW THE EVIDENCE FOR THE
RESURRECTION UNDERMINES *A PRIORI* ARGUMENTS AGAINST MIRACLES**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS**

**BY
BENJAMIN D. GRABER**

AUGUST 24, 2022

Copyright © 2022
Benjamin D. Graber

Abstract

For centuries, the prevailing arguments against miracles have been based on David Hume and others' *a priori* arguments. These theoretical arguments continue to be debated as they are not especially persuasive to those who are ideologically opposed. Because these arguments are theoretical in nature, they exclude the possibility of miraculous events. As such, there are two ways of arguing against *a priori* arguments. First, one can argue from an opposing theoretical viewpoint and debate the logic within the arguments. Second, one can argue for the probability of one miraculous event. If one event can be proven likely to have occurred, this would dismantle the entire *a priori* theory since it does not allow for a single miracle to occur.

The central miracle to Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus. Generally, skeptics would agree that *if* the resurrection occurred, it would be deemed a miracle. Therefore, one must examine the available evidence to discover if belief in it is rational. Though there is no artifact evidence (aside from the possibility of the Shroud of Turin), there is plenty of other evidence that the resurrection of Jesus was a historical event. While the resurrection will never be able to be definitively proven, it can also not be disproven.

When one investigates all the available evidence, it becomes evident that belief in the resurrection is a justified belief. The vast amount of evidence for the resurrection severely weakens the *a priori* arguments against the supernatural, not just because of the probability of the miraculous event, but because the evidence itself answers the questions that Hume raises (such as miracle probabilities, value of testimony, and defining miracles by natural law). Once the arguments themselves are deemed unlikely as a theory, this is no longer a matter of philosophical argument but a matter of antisupernaturalist biases.

Contents

Abstract	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: <i>A Priori</i> Arguments.....	1
Defining <i>A Priori</i>	1
Benedict Spinoza.....	2
David Hume	4
Antony Flew	8
Bart Ehrman	9
General Points Rebuking <i>A Priori</i> Arguments.....	12
Probabilities.....	12
Testimony.....	14
Natural Law.....	15
A General Response to Hume	17
A Response to Ehrman.....	18
Chapter 2: Evidence for the Resurrection	20
Habermas's <i>Minimal Facts</i>	20
Background of the Resurrection.....	22
Biblical Foundation.....	22
Historical Foundation.....	24
The Swoon Theory/Evidence of Jesus' Death	25
The Burial of Jesus.....	28
The Empty Tomb	31

Alternate Theories of the Cause of the Empty Tomb.....	34
The Wrong Tomb	34
The Body Was Stolen.....	35
The Appearances of Jesus	38
The Change in the Disciples.....	41
The Hallucination Theory	44
The Conversions of Paul and James.....	46
The Shroud of Turin	48
The Lack of Alternatives.....	49
Chapter 3: Biases and Analysis.....	51
Biases in Studying the Resurrection.....	51
Antibiblical Bias.....	52
Historical Study Bias.....	54
Analysis of <i>A Priori</i> Arguments.....	57
General Analytical Points.....	57
On Probabilities.....	60
On Testimony	62
On Natural Law	65
Modern Thought on Miracles.....	67
Philosophical Thought.....	68
Conclusion.....	73
Bibliography	77

Introduction

According to recent Gallup polls, only 81% of Americans claim that they believe in God with only 64% of respondents saying that they are certain that God exists.¹ As the West continues to evolve into a postmodern, relativistic, post-truth society, a topic that will continue to be debated is the possibility of miracles. There are many arguments against miracles that have been made over the centuries, with most modern arguments being based on the reasoning established by David Hume's essay "On Miracles" in the 18th century. To reject the possibility of miracles *a priori* is to reject the central claim of Christianity, that is, the resurrection of Jesus. This thesis will examine the available evidence for Jesus' resurrection to show that belief in it is rational and justified. By arguing the possibility/likelihood that the miracle of the resurrection was a historical event, this thesis will argue that *a priori* arguments against the supernatural are unsatisfactory as a theory. Further, this work will discuss the biases and worldview presuppositions both in science and society that are the root causes of skepticism.

Chapter 1: *A Priori* Arguments

Defining *A Priori*

"*A priori*" is a Latin term that means "from the former" and is the contrasting term of *a posteriori*.² In essence, while *a posteriori* beliefs are based on experience, *a priori* beliefs are based on theoretical reasoning. *A priori* propositions can be deduced aside from experience.³

¹ Lydia Saad and Zach Hrynowski, "How Many Americans Believe in God?," *Gallup*, last modified June 24, 2022, accessed July 15, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/268205/americans-believe-god.aspx>.

² "Definition of a Priori," *Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary*, n.d., accessed July 15, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/a+priori>.

³ Jason S. Baehr, "A Priori and A Posteriori," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, para. 6, accessed June 2, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/apriori/>.

Baehr illustrates *a priori* by saying “[A] person who knows (a priori) that 'All bachelors are unmarried' need not have experienced the unmarried status of all—or indeed any—bachelors to justify this proposition.”⁴

A priori arguments against miracles claim that miracles are impossible by definition (or at least unable to be identified); they do not arrive at their conclusion by examining the evidence (or lack thereof). These arguments against miracles really took hold during the Enlightenment, mainly deriving from the Deists as well as early naturalists. The foundation for many of the arguments against miracles came from the basis of Newtonian physics, which created a worldview that seemed to make God unnecessary. Ever since, miracles contradict the beliefs and understanding of much of academia.⁵ This work will now look at some of the most well-known *a priori* arguments against miracles.

Benedict Spinoza

Though Spinoza is not the most well-known philosopher to make an *a priori* argument, he was one of the first. He published his *Tractatus theologicopoliticus* in 1670, which explains his views on the impossibility of miracles and dismisses the evidential value of them.⁶ Spinoza writes:

All that God wishes or determines involves eternal necessity and truth, for we demonstrated that God’s understanding is identical with His will, and that is the same thing to say that God wills a thing, as to say that he understands it ... Hence, any event happening in nature which contravened nature’s universal laws, would necessarily also contravene the Divine decree, nature, and understanding; or if anyone asserted that God acts in contravention to the laws of nature, he, *ipso*

⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 248, accessed March 29, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=355122>.

⁶ Ibid., 249.

facto, would be compelled to assert that God acted against his own nature – an evident absurdity.⁷

By this, he claims that miracles are definitively impossible. By equating God’s knowledge and his will, he concludes that the laws of nature stem from his nature. Thus, for God to act contrary to nature (i.e. performing a miracle) would be for him to act contrary to himself. This is logically impossible.⁸

Spinoza does not rebuke the miracles in Scripture as historical events; he simply denies them as truly being miracles. He writes, “We cannot doubt that many things are narrated in Scripture as miracles of which the causes could easily be explained by reference to ascertained workings of nature.”⁹ While some miracles in the Bible could be argued this way, there are clearly some miracles that cannot be explained naturalistically. To this, Spinoza claims, “[S]ince miracles were wrought according to the understandings of the masses, who are wholly ignorant of the workings of nature, it is certain that the ancients took for a miracle whatever they could not explain by the method adopted by the unlearned in such cases.”¹⁰ Therefore, miracles are simply a working of the laws of nature that are not yet understood. Just because man does not understand how a particular event could be brought about by nature does not mean that God is its cause; it simply means that man’s knowledge is still limited.¹¹ He believes every miracle claim in the Bible was simply normal events misunderstood by its authors and thus, should not be

⁷ Benedict Spinoza, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, Revised edition., vol. 1 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1891), 82–83, accessed April 14, 2022, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/elwes-the-chief-works-of-benedict-de-spinoza-vol-1>.

⁸ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 249.

⁹ Spinoza, *The Chief Works*, 1:84.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 250.

understood today as superseding of the laws of nature.¹² Essentially, Spinoza's argument can be summed up in one line: "For whatsoever is contrary to reason, and whatsoever is contrary to reason is absurd, and *ipso facto*, to be rejected."¹³

David Hume

Since Hume is the most well-known philosopher to argue against miracles, this thesis will focus more on him than others. While scholars know him today as a philosopher, he was originally known as a historian. His work *History of England* was a bestseller for over a century.¹⁴ However, it was his work "Of Miracles" (Section X of his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*) that perhaps preserved his legacy. Concerning this work, Dr. Gary Habermas claims, "It is probably by far the most influential piece of literature written, certainly the most influential piece written against belief in miracles, but it may be the most influential piece on the subject of miracles."¹⁵

Unlike Spinoza, Hume's argument is centered more on the impossibility of ever identifying a miracle, not the logical possibility of one occurring.¹⁶ He begins by comparing the evidence for Christianity and the evidence from experience. Hume writes:

Our evidence, then, for the truth of the *Christian* religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses; because, even in the first authors of our religion, it was no greater; and it is evident it must diminish in passing from them to their disciples; nor can any one rest such confidence in their testimony, as in the immediate object of his senses. But a weaker evidence can never destroy a

¹² Spinoza, *The Chief Works*, 1:97.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1:92.

¹⁴ Aviezer Tucker, "Miracles, Historical Testimonies, and Probabilities," *History and Theory* 44, no. 3 (2005): 373.

¹⁵ *A Case Against Miracles*, Video lecture (Lynchburg, VA, 2014), 2:58, accessed June 1, 2022, https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/125860/pages/watch-a-case-against-miracles?module_item_id=13967821.

¹⁶ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 250.

stronger; and therefore, were the doctrine of the real presence ever so clearly revealed in scripture, it were directly contrary to the rules of just reasoning to give our assent to it.¹⁷

Therefore, from the beginning, he notes that evidence from firsthand experience will outweigh any and all evidence for Christianity coming from the first century.

Where Hume starts to get very controversial is when he claims, “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.”¹⁸ While there are slightly differing interpretations on how to read Hume,¹⁹ Keener says that, “On the usual reading of Hume, he manages to define away any possibility of a miracle occurring, by defining ‘miracle’ as a violation of natural law, yet defining ‘natural law’ as principles that cannot be violated.”²⁰ Therefore, prior to examining any testimony, Hume already sets the foundation that miracles do not happen.

Though it may seem as though Hume immediately precludes the possibility of miracles, this is not so. He notes that “No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous.”²¹ To illustrate this, he says that if someone told him a dead man came back to life, he would consider whether it is more probable that this event happened or that this person has been deceived or is trying to deceive.²²

¹⁷ David Hume, “Of Miracles,” in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁹ *A Case Against Miracles*, 4:55.

²⁰ Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 156, accessed April 7, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=879103>.

²¹ Hume, “Of Miracles,” 33.

²² *Ibid.*

The Christian might ask if the apostles' writings about Jesus' life amount to proof for a miracle to have happened? To Hume, the answer is no:

For *first*, there is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable: All which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men."²³

This would refute all ancient religious texts. But Hume does not claim that all testimony of miracles is due to malicious intent. He notes that surprise and wonder can also influence people to believe that a miracle has happened when it has not.²⁴ Corduan states that Hume was not arguing that people *cannot* believe that miracles have occurred, but that reasonable people should not believe them because the evidence never favors a miracle having happened.²⁵

One might ask whether there ever has been or could be valid testimony (according to Hume) to make a miracle probable or even proven. Hume's answer is no:

Upon the whole, then, it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof; and that, even supposing it amounted to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof; derived from the very nature of the fact, which it would endeavor to establish. It is experience only, which gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same experience, which assures us of the laws of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but subtract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion, either on one side or the other, with that assurance which arises from the remainder. But according to the principle here explained, this subtraction, with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have

²³ Ibid., 34.

²⁴ Ibid., 37.

²⁵ Winfried Corduan, "Miracles," in *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 171, accessed March 29, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3316970>.

such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.²⁶

Therefore, according to Hume, no amount of testimony can amount to a probability, much less a proof, that a miracle has happened. No matter how reliable the testimony is, experience of the natural world/how nature *always* behaves (according to Hume) will in principle always prevail over testimony of miracles.

Hume clearly shows the basis of his thoughts on miracles with an illustration. He tells his readers to imagine that Queen Elizabeth died on January 1, 1600. There is proof for her death both by doctor examination and being seen dead by others. Suddenly, a month later, she reappears and governs England for another three years. He concludes how he would react to this situation:

I must confess that I should be surprised at the concurrence of so many odd circumstances, but should not have the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event ... I should only assert it to have been pretended, and that it neither was, nor possibly could be real ... I should rather believe the most extraordinary events to arise from their concurrence, than admit of so signal a violation of the laws of nature.²⁷

In other words, Hume simply refuses to believe that a miracle has ever happened. Even if all signs would point to a probability that a miracle has taken place, Hume would reject it on an *a priori* basis. He does this in a tricky way, as C.S. Lewis explains:

The question, 'Do miracles occur?' and the question, 'Is the course of Nature absolutely uniform?' are the same question asked in two different ways. Hume, by sleight of hand, treats them as two different questions. He first answers 'Yes' to the question whether Nature is absolutely uniform: and then uses this 'Yes' as a ground for answering 'No,' to the question, 'Do miracles occur?' ... He gets the

²⁶ Hume, "Of Miracles," 41–42.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 42–43.

answer to one form of the question by assuming the answer to another form of the same question.²⁸

Hume is not looking objectively at the possibility of miracles; he takes a preconceived notion about the absolute uniformity of nature and uses that belief to attempt to disprove miracles. Theists see weaknesses in his argument, but antisupernaturalists see his argument to make a strong case. Hence, his work remains controversial to this day.

Antony Flew

Antony Flew is a major contributor to the discussion on miracles as the man who gave the updates on Hume's baseline argument, even though he converted to Deism late in life.²⁹ Like Hume, Flew argues, "[Miracles] must involve an overriding of a law of nature, a doing of what is known to be naturally impossible by a Power which is, by this very overriding, shown to be supernatural."³⁰ This became the basis of his argument too – not an objective look at the facts and evidence, but an *a priori* belief that nature must be absolutely uniform.

Flew's argument, similar to Hume, is not necessarily about whether miracles can occur, but how the modern mind could know if and when miracles could have occurred.³¹ Flew claims that the uniformity of nature, along with the basis of historical study, simply cannot prove that a miracle has happened, even if one hypothetically had:

The basic propositions are, first, that the present relics of the past cannot be interpreted as historical evidence at all unless we presume that the same fundamental regularities obtained then as still obtain today. Second, that in trying as best they may to determine what actually happened, historians must employ as criteria all their present knowledge, or presumed knowledge, of what is probable

²⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1960), 103.

²⁹ *A Case Against Miracles*, 7:48.

³⁰ Antony Flew, "Neo-Humean Arguments About the Miraculous," in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 46.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

or improbable, possible or impossible. Third, that, since the word *miracle* has to be defined in terms of physical necessity and physical impossibility, the application of these criteria inevitably precludes proof of the actual occurrence of a miracle.³²

Thereby, Flew's line of argument puts the emphasis on scientific truth over historical study. Science cannot have a caveat for the supernatural, and thus, historical study cannot overrule the truth established by science.³³

Perhaps Davis gives the best summary of Flew's argument with these three points:

(1) People who offer historical or probabilistic arguments in favor of the occurrence of a given purported miracle, Flew says, themselves presuppose the very regularity of nature and reliability of nature's laws that they argue against. Their position is accordingly inconsistent. (2) Once violations of natural law are in principle allowed, what control have we over the explanations of events that are offered?

(3) Even if a violation of a natural law be granted, Flew says, how could we ever be sure it was God who is responsible for it?³⁴

Once again, Flew never even considers the evidence for miracles. He argues from a purely theoretical standpoint that even if a miracle were to happen (though they do not), no one would be able to recognize that one had occurred.

Bart Ehrman

The last person that this work will discuss that helped develop the *a priori* argument against miracles is Bart Ehrman. Ehrman is perhaps the most prominent author of these arguments today. The big difference between Ehrman, Hume, and Flew, is that Ehrman does not

³² Ibid., 50.

³³ Corduan, "Miracles," 174.

³⁴ Stephen T. Davis, "Is It Possible to Know That Jesus Was Raised from the Dead?," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 1, no. 2 (1984): 149.

claim to be an atheist but is instead a self-proclaimed agnostic who does not believe that the Bible was inspired by God in any way.³⁵ While his argument follows in the path of the others, it does give him a slightly different approach.

Much of Ehrman's argument (other than his claims about the unreliability of the Bible) is based on his belief that miracles and historical study are incompatible. He writes, "I don't think historians can show that any of [the miracles in the Gospels] including the resurrection, ever happened ... I'm not saying that miracles by definition cannot happen."³⁶ To be fair, he does stay quite true to his claims about not believing in antisupernaturalism. His argument tends to be aimed more against the Bible than against miracles in principle.

To ground his claim about historical study, he notes that the nature of historical study is to try to determine what likely happened in the past. Because "The chances of a miracle occurring are infinitesimal,"³⁷ he believes that a historian can never determine a miracle to be the most likely possibility of what happened.

Though Ehrman writes extensively about how historians cannot in principle prove that a miracle happened, he recognizes the opposite is also true. He claims that historians cannot prove that a given miracle did not happen, either. Ehrman writes, "I argue that when it comes to miracles such as the resurrection, historical sciences simply are of no help in establishing exactly what happened."³⁸ Because of this, he refuses to believe in miracles, specifically those written of in the Bible.

³⁵ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009), sec. Accepting the Historical-Critical Method.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, sec. Excurses: The Resurrection and other Miracles in the Life of Jesus.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2014), 132, accessed May 11, 2022, <https://liberty.alma.exlibrisgroup.com>.

Building on Hume's low view of human testimony, Ehrman expounds on it pertaining to biblical authors. Some of his points are valid arguments, while other points are simply his beliefs that he assumes to be truth. A good example of both aspects can be shown from a passage from Ehrman's book, *Jesus Before the Gospels*:

The Gospels were written decades after Jesus's death by people who were not eyewitnesses and had probably never laid eyes on an eyewitness. They are filled with discrepancies and contradictions. They represent different perspectives on what Jesus said and did. For that reason, to know what actually happened in Jesus' life we have to apply rigorous historical criteria to those sources to reconstruct historical realities from later distorted memories.³⁹

His comments on eyewitnesses are simply his personal beliefs (for there is also evidence to the contrary), but his point about having different perspectives is clearly true. He uses these points to in essence disregard the miracle claims of the New Testament specifically, noting that no testimony within the Bible (whether the Gospels, Paul, etc.) are good enough to establish the likelihood of a miracle.

While Ehrman does not claim that people cannot believe in miracles, he attacks the reasoning for which people do. He writes, "I'm not saying [the resurrection] didn't happen. Some people believe it did, some believe it didn't. But if you do believe it, it is not as a historian, even if you happen to be a professional historian, but as a believer."⁴⁰ Even those who disagree with Ehrman's worldview can agree that belief is what determines whether someone thinks the resurrection happened. The foundation tends to be based more upon belief or unbelief rather than logical reasoning. Ehrman might not have the most refined or timeless arguments against

³⁹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2016), 289, accessed April 14, 2022, <https://liberty-alma-exlibrisgroup-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

⁴⁰ Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, Excursus: The Resurrection and Other Miracles in the Life of Jesus.

miracles (and specifically the resurrection), but he has had a tremendous impact in modern times and thus deserves an answer.

General Points Rebuking *A Priori* Arguments

As this thesis is not mainly about theoretically refuting the *a priori* arguments, this work will not thoroughly explain how scholars have attempted to refute them. However, it is important to understand some of the general arguments that scholars have raised. This work will focus these refutations into five sections: probabilities, testimony, natural law, rejoinders to Hume, and rejoinders to Ehrman.

Probabilities

One of the main points of these *a priori* arguments are the low probability of miracles when compared against the typical way that nature functions. This is not a strong argument because by definition, miracles are not a normal occurrence. Otherwise, they would cease to be miracles. Keener notes that, “Many things happen that are not typical experience; we do not for that reason deny that they ever happen.”⁴¹ He is not speaking purely of potentially miraculous situations, but anything that is not deemed typical. Just because something atypical occurs does not mean that that it is theoretically impossible.

What does typical even mean? In Hume’s case, it is his own experience. Mavrodes writes, “I think it is the fact that in his own experience he had never come across a miraculous event. Or, at any rate, he had never come across an event in his own experience which he took to

⁴¹ Craig S. Keener, *Miracles Today: The Supernatural Work of God in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 36, accessed April 15, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6736324>.

be miraculous.”⁴² Thus, what Hume deems atypical is what was atypical in Hume’s own personal life. On the other hand, someone like the disciples might not think of someone being raised from the dead as being so atypical, as they had seen it happen more than once.

Regardless of how low the probability is that a miracle occurred, it does not follow that a miracle hypothesis must be rejected. Tucker writes, “A low posterior probability of any hypothesis, including a miracle hypothesis, is not sufficient for rejecting it. It is rational to go on accepting and using a low-probability hypothesis as long as there is no better explanation for the evidence.”⁴³ Therefore, even if a miracle has a low probability when compared to the normal ways of nature, a more likely explanation must exist for the low probability of the miracle to be relevant. To Mavrodes, the problem is that concerning the reliability of testimony, Hume wants his readers first to compare the likelihood that it is false to the probability of the event. “That would seem to require us first to estimate the probability of the even on, at best, the evidence of our own limited experience, and then, if that probability is low, we would be required to reject contrary testimony.”⁴⁴ Thus, the probability of an event happening depends largely on one’s experience and what he/she would understand to be usual. This will differ from person to person, especially in different cultures, living in different times, with different plausibility structures, having differing experiences.

⁴² George I. Mavrodes, “David Hume and the Probability of Miracles,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43, no. 3 (1998): 176.

⁴³ Tucker, “Miracles,” 381.

⁴⁴ Mavrodes, “David Hume,” 179.

Testimony

Hume, in principle, rejects all testimony on miracle claims. Part of this is due to the time in which he lived. There is much more testimonial evidence for miracles today than there was in the time of Hume. Keener claims, “Had [Hume] lived in our day, an argument based on the nonexperience of miracles would have proved much more difficult and much less persuasive to his contemporaries (and perhaps even to Hume himself).”⁴⁵ While the sheer amount of testimony does not mean that a miraculous event is more or less likely to have happened, simply dismissing a vast amount of testimony without reason is not an option.

Furthermore, Hume ignores a general rule on historical study. Keener explains, “Even when we mistrust ancient historical sources on other points, we normally accept eyewitness testimony in them (though not always their interpretation), unless we have compelling reason not to do so.”⁴⁶ Hume clearly does not have a reason to do so aside from his preconceived notions. Beyond that, testimony of an event and experience of the usual way nature functions are different. Thus, testimony of one cannot be refuted simply by the general experience of another. Otherwise, nothing new could ever be discovered.⁴⁷ Also, most of what scholars know about the past would also have to be abandoned if scholars followed Hume’s principles.⁴⁸

Perhaps the issue is not testimony vs. experience, but rather Hume’s claims about the uniformity of them. Keener says, “We cannot trust testimony for miracles, Hume argues, because uniform human experience leads us to not expect miracles. But ... if we have eyewitness

⁴⁵ Keener, *Miracles*, 143.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁷ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 256.

⁴⁸ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 138–139.

experiences of miracles, human experience against miracles is hardly uniform.”⁴⁹ Moreover, even if human experience was in fact uniform, it would be impossible to confirm, for one would have to examine every single claim of a miracle.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Hume’s claim cannot be practically supported by evidence.

Lastly, Hume is silent concerning if someone were to witness a miracle themselves. Corner claims, “[I]t is possible that the principles he invokes in regard to testimony for the miraculous can be applied to the case of a witnessed miracle.”⁵¹ If true, this would require one to reject their own testimony based on prior experience. Rejecting testimony of a miracle claim on principle is based on prior beliefs, not on concrete reasoning.

Natural Law

Many Christians today might agree with the definition of miracles as a superseding of natural law, but miracles were not defined in reference to natural law until the 1500s.⁵² Thus, the ancient Hebrews and ancient Greeks did not believe in any sort of indisputable laws of nature.⁵³ This is key, since the Hebrews and Greeks were the ones who wrote the biblical books in which many miracles occur. Tucker notes that Hume’s reasoning may be based on Enlightenment principles that pitted religion and science against each other, thus, establishing an understanding

⁴⁹ Keener, *Miracles Today*, 35.

⁵⁰ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 143.

⁵¹ David Corner, “Miracles,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d., sec. 4, accessed March 29, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/miracles/>.

⁵² Keener, *Miracles*, 154.

⁵³ Tucker, “Miracles,” 375.

that either God or natural law controlled the world.⁵⁴ Also, Keener explains that Hume’s understanding of natural law has become obsolete with advances in physics.⁵⁵

A miracle must be something beyond an unusual event. If miracles happened in everyday life, discussing miracles would be useless.⁵⁶ But by defining them in relation to the laws of nature, Hume thereby rejects them. His basis for saying that natural law cannot be suspended is his own experience. Thereby, he tends to imply that natural law functions to some extent as prescriptive rather than descriptive. But this is not what natural law is. Natural law is simply how science understands the world to typically work. Corner explains this when he says, “There is a uniformity in nature which makes it possible to generalize about the way things behave, but there is no requirement that they behave in this way. This is the danger involved in talking about ‘laws’”⁵⁷ There can hypothetically be exceptions to natural law aside from miracles or religion. Keener notes that Hume redefining natural law to make it impossible to have any variation is simply him redefining words rather than making an argument. In the same way, one could redefine miracles to make it part of reality.⁵⁸ Furthermore, a miracle (as a one-time event) does not abolish the general uniformity of nature. A miracle is a specific point in time of divine intervention that supersedes the regularity of nature, it does not negate natural law.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Ibid., 377–378.

⁵⁵ Keener, *Miracles*, 157.

⁵⁶ Corduan, “Miracles,” 160.

⁵⁷ Mark Corner, *Signs of God: Miracles and Their Interpretation* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 24, accessed March 28, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=429684>.

⁵⁸ Keener, *Miracles*, 156.

⁵⁹ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 265.

Once again, Hume bases his argument on his own worldview presuppositions. According to Schlesinger, “If Hume refused to believe [testimony] because it clashes with an alleged law of nature established on the very presupposition that such cases have never been observed before then ... he falls into the paralogism which is called begging the question.”⁶⁰ Hume simply defines miracles out of existence. Man did not create the laws of nature; man simply observed the regularity of nature and then concocted “laws” to describe it. These laws have nothing innate about them that mean they cannot ever be broken. Perhaps C.S. Lewis said it best: “How can the discovery of the rule tell you whether, granted a sufficient cause, the rule can be suspended? ... You reply, 'But experience shows that it never has.' We reply, 'Even if that were so, this would not prove that it never can.’”⁶¹ Hume never explains this; he simply assumes that it is true.

A General Response to Hume

While there are many arguments against specific points of Hume’s work, analysis of his overall argument must not be ignored. Keener goes so far as to say that Hume’s work is merely “an antisupernatural bias, not a cogent philosophical argument.”⁶² This is his greatest flaw. He uses circular reasoning that is based upon his preconceived notions about miracles, not a grounded philosophical argument. Regardless of whether miracles do exist/have existed, Hume simply defines them in a way to negate them based purely on theoretical reasoning without examining the evidence at large. One can argue that his method is not argumentative, but rather a proclamation of his biases.

⁶⁰ George N. Schlesinger, “Miracles and Probabilities,” *Noûs* 21, no. 2 (1987): 220.

⁶¹ Lewis, *Miracles*, 46.

⁶² Lee Strobel, *The Case for Miracles: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Supernatural*, First Edition. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2018), 88.

If one is a theist, the existence of miracles is a logically justifiable belief. This is indeed the basis of the debate on miracles. Theists will tend to accept the possibility of miracles while atheists will deny them, because belief in God entirely changes one's plausibility structures. This is a major flaw in Hume's reasoning – he tries to dissuade people from believing in miracles without even considering arguments against theism.⁶³ The odds of convincing a theist of the impossibility of miracles without them questioning their theistic doctrine is exceptionally low, if not impossible. Keener observes that some scholars claim that Hume only succeeds in arguing that if one does not believe in the supernatural, miracles will not demonstrate supernatural existence. Some claim he did not even accomplish that. Thus, Hume's persuasion in his argument is insignificant.⁶⁴

Possibly the most relevant point against Hume's essay overall is the inapplicability in other fields. The principles that Hume argues ought to apply to other intellectual disciplines as well as religious matters. This is key because Hume's principles on testimony are not used outside of religion.⁶⁵ Hume explains his views as general principles, but they are never used as such. His argument thereby falls short of expounding truth as it applies to miracles.

A Response to Ehrman

Though Ehrman builds on many of Hume's principles, there are some rebuttal points specifically against Ehrman that are worth noting. While Hume argues against testimonial evidence in general, Ehrman writes against the testimony of the New Testament authors. Ehrman reads the Gospels as if the original authors intended to compose a comprehensive biography of

⁶³ Keener, *Miracles*, 154.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Mavrodes, "David Hume," 168.

the life of Jesus. He treats any small detail discrepancy as broad evidence that the Gospels are filled with errors and are therefore unreliable, even their non-miraculous historical material. This is a misreading of the Gospels and the purposes the authors had for composing them. Corner argues, “Treating the Gospel writers as witnesses taking the stand simply misses the point of what they are doing.”⁶⁶ This is precisely what Ehrman does.

Additionally, Ehrman claiming that too much time passed between the actual events and the writing of the Gospels is not a valid claim. One must understand that it was a matter of a few decades and much of the material was circulating orally with eyewitnesses still alive. Licona compares this to the History Channel interviewing veterans who fought in Vietnam in the 1970s. A modern viewer would not dismiss their stories due to the 50-year time gap, and thus, a similar timeframe for the Gospels does not prove their unreliability.⁶⁷

Ehrman is also hypocritical to claim that the Gospels are unreliable while also using them for his historical basis for reconstructing the history of Jesus’ life. Bird notes the harm in doing so. He writes “Approaches like Ehrman’s, which begin by casting doubt on the historical value of the Gospels for reconstructing the life of Jesus, but then proceed to formulate a hypothesis about the historical Jesus anyway, are essentially creating a vacuum and then filling it with scholarly fiction.”⁶⁸ Ehrman cannot have it both ways. Either the Gospels are historically

⁶⁶ Corner, *Signs of God*, 135.

⁶⁷ Michael R. Licona, “Fish Tails: Bart Ehrman’s Red Herrings and the Resurrection of Jesus,” in *Come Let Us Reason: New Essays in Christian Apologetics*, ed. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 224, accessed April 22, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=867863>.

⁶⁸ Michael F. Bird, *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus’ Divine Nature---A Response to Bart Ehrman* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 48–49, accessed July 20, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397664>.

reliable, or they are worthless to reconstructing Jesus' life. Ehrman benefits from the strength of his presentation, but this is not enough to overpower the flaws in his argument.

Chapter 2: Evidence for the Resurrection

Since this thesis aims to disprove *a priori* arguments practically rather than theoretically by collecting and analyzing the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, it is thus crucial to study all available historical evidence regarding the resurrection. This work will survey the available evidence for the resurrection concerning both biblical and nonbiblical sources.

Habermas's Minimal Facts

Dr. Gary Habermas, perhaps the leading scholar today on the resurrection of Jesus, has spent years studying what other scholars (of all kinds of worldviews) believe to be irrefutable facts about the resurrection, which he calls the "minimal facts." He claims to have studied over 3400 sources in three different languages, and his list continues to grow.⁶⁹ For a fact to be deemed one of his minimal facts, he has two criteria. Habermas explains, "Each event had to be established by more than adequate scholarly evidence, and usually by several critically-ascertained, independent lines of argumentation. Additionally, the vast majority of contemporary scholars in relevant fields had to acknowledge the historicity of the occurrence."⁷⁰ He has had slightly differing lists of his minimal facts in his works depending on how strictly he held to the second prerequisite. Most often, he lists either six or twelve minimal facts. This thesis will be

⁶⁹ Gary R. Habermas, "The Minimal Facts Approach to the Resurrection of Jesus: The Role of Methodology as a Crucial Component in Establishing Historicity," *Southeastern Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (2012): 18.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

using the longer list as there is still good evidence for all twelve points, because though they are not attested to by quite as many scholars, the majority of scholars will still agree.

Though his list of twelve minimal facts is rather long, this work will list them out as they are important to understand as be the basis for this chapter. Habermas writes:

The majority of critical scholars will admit virtually every one of these:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. He was buried.
3. Jesus' death caused his disciples to despair and lose hope, believing his life had ended.
4. This next fact is not quite as widely held, but the majority of scholars still think that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered to be empty just a few days later.
5. His disciples had experiences that they thought were literal appearances of the risen Jesus. In other words, they thought that Jesus appeared to them. I'm wording this very carefully, and it is held extraordinarily widely by scholars.
6. Because of these experiences, the disciples were transformed from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus, into bold proclaimers of his death and resurrection appearances. They were even willing to die for their faith in these gospel events.
7. This message was the center of early church preaching.
8. This message was especially proclaimed in the environs of Jerusalem, the city where Jesus had died and was buried just shortly before.
9. As a result of this preaching, the church was born and grew.
10. Sunday became the primary day of worship, which is a significant fact especially for the initial Jewish believers.
11. James, who had been a skeptical unbeliever, was converted to the faith most likely when he also believed that he had seen the resurrected Jesus.
12. A few years later, Saul (Paul) was also converted by an experience which he, likewise, thought to be an appearance of the risen Jesus.⁷¹

As for as the lesser-held facts, Habermas claims that for example, the empty tomb is accepted by around 75% of scholars.⁷² Thus, even the less agreed upon minimal facts still have a vast

⁷¹ Gary R. Habermas, *Evidence for the Historical Jesus: Is the Jesus of History the Christ of Faith?* (Lynchburg, VA: GaryHabermas.com, 2015), 52–53. Some of Habermas's commentary is edited out of the points in this list from the original context.

⁷² Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 70.

majority of scholars who agree to them. Licona claims that these three facts are nearly universally agreed upon across the spectrum: (1) Jesus was crucified, (2) He subsequently died, and (3) the disciples believed that the resurrected Jesus appeared them.⁷³

There are good examples of skeptics agreeing with Habermas. First, the Jesus Seminar, which rejects 80-90% of the red-letter text in the Gospels agrees with the minimal facts.⁷⁴ Second, in a discussion between Antony Flew and Gary Habermas, Flew stated that he does not dispute Habermas's minimal facts.⁷⁵ Concerning those who reject the minimal facts, Habermas responds by explaining that a rejection is not a refutation. Until each part of each fact can be refuted, it remains simply a rejection.⁷⁶ This thesis will now consider the evidence for many of these minimal facts.

Background of the Resurrection

Biblical Foundation

If Jesus' resurrection was the entire story, it would be much more difficult to believe and prove rational belief. However, the resurrection is part of a much larger story (logically speaking, not theologically). Jesus' ministry was characterized by what he, his disciples, and the crowds understood to be miracles. Keener goes so far to say that his miracles are not just a part of the

⁷³ Michael R. Licona, "Jesus's Resurrection, Realism, and the Role of the Criteria of Authenticity," in *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History: Criteria and Context in the Study of Christian Origins*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and J. Ed Komoszewski (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 298, accessed May 4, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6121629>.

⁷⁴ *The Death of Jesus By Crucifixion*, Video lecture (Lynchburg, VA, 2014), 2:30, accessed March 29, 2022, https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/125860/pages/watch-recognized-historical-data-and-defining-the-minimal-facts?module_item_id=13967905.

⁷⁵ Antony Flew and Gary Habermas, "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: A Discussion between Antony Flew and Gary Habermas," *Philosophia Christi* 6, no. 2 (2004): 3.

⁷⁶ Habermas, *Evidence for the Historical Jesus*, 56.

gospel narrative but rather central to them. This is supported by the fact that in the book of Mark, 31% of the verses are attributed to miracles in some way, which constitutes 40% of the material in the book.⁷⁷

Moreover, the resurrection is only one of the numerous miracles that Jesus performed. Therefore, the resurrection fits the context of the gospel narratives. Keener notes, “Similarly, Jesus’s earlier miracles would support the resurrection claim, and vice versa, if a reader accepts either.”⁷⁸ Though few people would accept the rest of his miracles but not the resurrection, the fact that the resurrection was not the one and only miracle involving Jesus gives support to him being a miraculous agent. Also, understanding that Jesus believed and proclaimed that he would die and be raised again (see Matt. 16:21) gives the resurrection grounding.⁷⁹ Beyond this, the Gospels promote an image of Jesus that is quite weak near the end of his life. This is contrasted with other Jewish martyrs who showed valor and thus, could have been an embarrassing image of the Messiah for early Christians. This points to the likelihood of it being true.⁸⁰ All the Gospels set the tone for the reader to not be surprised for Jesus’ resurrection when viewed in context with the rest of his ministry. Some will argue that the Gospel writers produced their works “after-the-fact” and are thus composing with a subjective bent. Even if this is true to some extent, it is unlikely that they would have reversed the entire overall tone of Jesus’ ministry. If their subjectivity caused them to alter the entire context of Jesus’ ministry, they likely would have edited some (or all) of the embarrassing details as well.

⁷⁷ Keener, *Miracles*, 84.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁷⁹ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 281.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 286.

Historical Foundation

Unlike other aspects of the Bible, there are no artifacts that can prove the resurrection (aside from the possibility of the Shroud of Turin, which will be discussed later). Therefore, modern scholars must rely primarily on testimony, much of which is religiously charged. However, that does not mean that the testimony is false. To disregard testimony of an alleged historical event simply because of religious convictions of the person in question is antithetical to principles of historical study. Habermas claims, “In the ancient world, one comment can be enough to make something historical because we don’t have so much from the ancient world.”⁸¹ Additionally, though there is limited evidence for Jesus’ individual miracles, all of the New Testament, Q (the source behind much of Mark), Jewish sources, and pagan sources are in agreement that Jesus performed miracles.⁸² This would be incredibly shocking if Jesus truly never performed a miracle. Though there is not much evidence for Jesus’ individual miracles, there is evidence for one in particular – the resurrection. The resurrection has more than just historical authentication. Geivett claims that it has “historical authentication according to the highest standards of historical inquiry.”⁸³

There are a few nonbiblical literature sources from antiquity that mention Jesus. All these examples are not worth exploring in this work for numerous reasons, but Josephus’s writing is noteworthy. The original wording of Josephus’s writing is not known, but it is common belief that what exists today was altered by Christians at some point in history. However, an Arabic manuscript containing Josephus’s writing about Jesus could truly be the original wording before

⁸¹ *The Death of Jesus By Crucifixion*, 4:26.

⁸² Keener, *Miracles*, 84.

⁸³ R. Douglas Geivett, “The Evidential Value of Miracles,” in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 186.

the Christians altered it.⁸⁴ Professor Schlomo Pines of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1971 rendered the Arabic passage as follows:

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.⁸⁵

Since Josephus was a nonbelieving Jew, there is no Christian tint to his statement. Though his claim on the resurrection is that which the disciples believed rather than verifying the event itself, it does maintain that something happened to cause the disciples to believe they had seen the resurrected Jesus. There is much more historical evidence for Jesus, his miracles, and his resurrection, but since it is not the main goal of this thesis to explore all the ancient literature, this work will investigate aspects of the resurrection account.

The Swoon Theory/Evidence of Jesus' Death

To justify Jesus' resurrection, the first point that must be established is his certain death. There is a theory referred to as "the swoon theory," which states that Jesus did not really die. He appeared to die, fooling many, and thus, his resurrection was simply a continuation of his life. There are many problems with this theory, the least of which is the question of what happened to Jesus after his supposed ascension. This theory does not answer that.

The swoon theory, which gained popularity in the 1800s, is rarely held to today. It is almost universally rejected in modern times. Apart from the main point that Jesus must somehow

⁸⁴ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1996), 194, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://liberty.alma.exlibrisgroup.com>.

⁸⁵ Shlomo Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and Its Implications* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1971), 16.

have survived one of the most gruesome execution methods in antiquity, he would have had to unwrap his body in the tomb, rolled away the giant stone from inside, and walked out, all without the guards noticing.⁸⁶

Is there evidence of anyone surviving a Roman crucifixion? J. Warner Wallace claims that there is not a single record of this occurring.⁸⁷ The only example that even comes close is from Josephus in which he saw three old friends being crucified. He asked Titus Caesar to stop the execution, which he did. They were taken off the crosses and medically attended to. Two died and the third survived. This is the only instance where someone survived a crucifixion, but it was not a full crucifixion. There are currently no known survivors of a full crucifixion.⁸⁸

The swoon theory has no factual foundation, according to Dr. Alexander Methereil.⁸⁹ Habermas claims that it is not a viable theory when surveying the historical, medical, and theological data of the resurrection.⁹⁰ It is simply a theory with no evidence whatsoever concocted to explain away the resurrection. The swoon theory is not a viable option, especially because there certainly is good evidence that Jesus died.

⁸⁶ Paul Gould, Travis Dickinson, and Keith Loftin, *Stand Firm: Apologetics and the Brilliance of the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 120.

⁸⁷ Strobel, *The Case for Miracles*, 204.

⁸⁸ Timothy McGrew and Lydia McGrew, “The Argument From Miracles: A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012), 605, accessed June 16, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=437472>.

⁸⁹ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 297.

⁹⁰ *Jesus' Post-Death Appearances*, Video lecture (Lynchburg, VA, 2014), 2:11, accessed March 29, 2022, https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/125860/pages/watch-recognized-historical-data-and-defining-the-minimal-facts?module_item_id=13967905.

Even skeptic Bart Ehrman claims twelve sources as historical evidence for the crucifixion, with four of them being non-Christian sources.⁹¹ Jesus' death by crucifixion is in all four Gospels, as well as Josephus and Tacitus.⁹² Even before the victim was nailed to a cross, the process was brutal. Jesus' crucifixion was no different. When Jesus was scourged, it was not a light whipping. It was intended to weaken the victim to a point just shy of death before placing them on the cross.⁹³ Thus, Edwards concludes, "Even before the actual crucifixion, Jesus' physical condition was at least serious and possibly critical."⁹⁴ Therefore, Jesus was not far from death prior to being nailed to the cross. There were many who died just from the torture that occurred before the crucifixion.

According to the swoon theory, the soldiers made a mistake and thought Jesus was dead when he was not. Though the soldiers were not medically trained to know when a victim was dead, they were expert killing machines. Crucifixion was what they did, and they did it well. Plus, is it really difficult to know if a person is dead, especially in the state that Jesus was?⁹⁵ For the soldiers though, there was an absolute necessity to know that the victim was dead. Metherell explains, "If a prisoner somehow escaped, the responsible soldiers would be put to death themselves, so they had a huge incentive to make absolutely sure that each and every victim was

⁹¹ *The Death of Jesus By Crucifixion*, 5:13.

⁹² Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 49.

⁹³ William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *JAMA* 255, no. 11 (March 21, 1986): 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁵ Stobel, *The Case for Christ*, 296.

dead when he was removed from the cross.”⁹⁶ They did ensure that Jesus was dead; they thrust a spear into his side (John 19:31-37).

This act was not unique to Jesus’ crucifixion. In many crucifixion accounts, there was a similar defeating blow to the victim on the cross. There is evidence of a man having his skull crushed, another threatened with a bow and arrow, other victims being stabbed, as well as crushing the ankles so that the person could no longer lift himself up, ensuring asphyxiation.⁹⁷ According to John, when the soldier speared Jesus, blood and water came out of Jesus’ body. The medical understanding is that the spear burst the pericardial sac around the heart, which was the water, and the heart itself, which was the blood.⁹⁸ From a modern medical interpretation of the data, all evidence indicates that Jesus was indeed dead when taken off the cross.⁹⁹

Very few people today hold to the swoon theory due to the lack of evidence. Both the evidence for Jesus’ death and the lack of *any* evidence that Jesus survived have pushed this theory to the wayside. But the acceptance of his death is clearly not an acceptance of his resurrection. The next crucial detail of the narrative is the burial of his body.

The Burial of Jesus

The report of the empty tomb is contingent on Jesus being buried. If there was no tomb (or if he was simply thrown in a common grave) there can be no empty tomb. As Habermas’s

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Habermas, *Evidence for the Historical Jesus*, 64.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Edwards, Gabel, and Hosmer, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” 1.

second minimal fact, Jesus' burial is well attested. A. T. Robinson of Cambridge University claims that "the burial is one of the earliest and best-attested facts about Jesus."¹⁰⁰

Removing Jesus from the cross and burying him was in accordance with Jewish practice. Josephus noted that Jews took down those who had been executed by crucifixion and buried them prior to sunset.¹⁰¹ Skeptics such as Ehrman have noted the normality of leaving corpses on the cross. But Evans discredits the validity of this argument: "In fact, we are not sure how 'normal' leaving the corpse on the cross, unburied, was in the Roman Empire. That it often happened is not in dispute. But the evidence is more variegated than Ehrman and others have assumed."¹⁰² Therefore, while this was something that did occur at times, it is wrong to simply assume that this happened to Jesus without any corroborating evidence.

Scholars agree that the burial accounts in the New Testament are very early material. In Mark, the burial story was from his source material, thus coming from a source that existed prior to the composition of what scholars believe to be the first Gospel. This would reflect the truthfulness of it since eyewitnesses would have still been alive to rebuke a falsity.¹⁰³ The burial

¹⁰⁰ John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1973), 131.

¹⁰¹ Craig A. Evans, "The Testimony of Josephus and the Burial of Jesus," in *Raised on the Third Day: Defending the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. W. David Beck and Michael R. Licona (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 104, accessed April 22, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6564531>.

¹⁰² Craig A. Evans, "Getting the Burial Traditions and Evidences Right," in *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus' Divine Nature - A Response to Bart Ehrman*, ed. Michael F. Bird (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014), 74, accessed June 1, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397664>.

¹⁰³ William Lane Craig, "Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?," in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 1996), 147, accessed May 18, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397732>.

account in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 is also based on very early material likely being devised less than five years after Jesus' death.¹⁰⁴

Additionally, the fact that Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned is likely historical. He was not a well-known figure in the early church, so to add his name to the account if it were not true would have been pointless.¹⁰⁵ Not only was Joseph a little-known person, but Arimathea was not an important town, nor did it have any scriptural significance.¹⁰⁶ Again, there was no conceivable reason for the early church to fabricate this detail.

Perhaps the greatest argument against anyone who disputes the burial narrative is the lack of any alternative. It is not just that there are no strong alternatives, but there are no other burial traditions that even exist. Craig notes, "If this burial by Joseph (of Arimathea) were a legend that developed later, you'd expect to find other competing burial traditions about what happened to Jesus' body. However, you don't find these at all."¹⁰⁷ Even if some of the details in the burial accounts were incorrect, other reports with corrected details would likely exist. But the lack of *any* alternative whatsoever makes it difficult to dispute the historicity of Jesus' burial. Even if it could hypothetically be proven that Jesus was not buried, it would not indicate that he could not have been raised from the dead. Habermas claims, "It's irrelevant whether Jesus was in the tomb, whether they took the body and put it in someone's living room, whether it was in a trash heap; if

¹⁰⁴ William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 27.

¹⁰⁵ Habermas, *Evidence for the Historical Jesus*, 68.

¹⁰⁶ William Lane Craig, "The Empty Tomb of Jesus," in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 250.

¹⁰⁷ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 33.

Jesus is going to rise, he could rise in your living room.”¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, there is no persuasive argument to dissuade one from believing the burial account.

The Empty Tomb

The empty tomb is a widely accepted fact, but as it was noted in Habermas’s minimal facts, it is not quite as broadly accepted by scholars as are the other facts. Many skeptics accept the empty tomb but have alternate theories on *why* it was empty. Others will dispute the empty tomb. This could be because the more facts that skeptics accept, the harder it becomes to reject the resurrection. Regardless of one’s position, there is good evidence for the empty tomb. However, an empty tomb by itself does not prove that Jesus was resurrected. But as Habermas claims, “It adds some credibility to the disciples’ claim to have seen the risen Jesus, since it both seriously complicates the search for a naturalistic hypothesis, as well as indicating that whatever happened most likely involved Jesus’ body.”¹⁰⁹ Likewise, if the tomb was *not* empty, it would severely damage the credibility of the disciples’ claims of the post-resurrection appearances.

The burial account and the empty tomb are closely interconnected. If the burial story is true, then the location of the tomb would have been known by both Jews and Christians (from Joseph and the women, respectively). Thus, if the burial was a true historical event, then the empty tomb is not a radical conclusion, but the logical one.¹¹⁰ Craig notes, “Those who deny the empty tomb, such as the German theologian Hans Grass, realize this and thus are forced to argue

¹⁰⁸ *A Historian Explains the Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus (Dr. Gary Habermas)*, 2019, 21:17, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWSG5okmUr8>.

¹⁰⁹ Gary R. Habermas, “The Case for Christ’s Resurrection,” in *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 188, accessed March 29, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3316970>.

¹¹⁰ Craig, “The Empty Tomb of Jesus,” 251–252.

at length against the burial account as well.”¹¹¹ The problem with this reasoning is that all the evidence indicates the burial and empty tomb.

The earliest propaganda from the Jews is very revealing. In Matthew 28:11-15, the guards approached the chief priests and elders to inform them of what had happened. The chief priests and elders told them to tell people that the disciples stole the body. Even from the very beginning, the opposition presupposed the empty tomb! In this passage, v.15b says, “And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day” (*English Standard Version*). It would be virtually impossible for that story to spread in Jerusalem if Jesus’ body was still in the tomb. Plus, it would have been absurd for the Jewish council to devise such a lie.¹¹²

Moreover, the Gospels’ account of the resurrection is straightforward, without any theological or apologetic interpretation present in the text. Craig compares this to the creation of legends: “This is how legends look: they are colored by theological and other developments. By contrast, Mark’s account of the discovery of the empty tomb is a simple, straightforward report of what happened.”¹¹³ If it were a made-up story or developed over time, the simplicity of the narrative would probably not be so. Beyond the Gospels, the early creed found in 1 Corinthians 15, which this work discussed as evidence for the burial, also speaks of the empty tomb, which as previously mentioned, came from within five years after Jesus’ death (and resurrection). Aside from all four Gospels and Paul’s writing in 1 Corinthians, the empty tomb is also implied in both Peter’s and Paul’s sermons in Acts 2 and Acts 13, respectively.

¹¹¹ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 26.

¹¹² Gould, Dickinson, and Loftin, *Stand Firm*, 113.

¹¹³ Craig, “Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?,” 150–151.

The disciples proclaimed the resurrection within Jerusalem. This would have been impossible if Jesus' body were still in the tomb just outside the city walls.¹¹⁴ No one would have believed their message with a body still in the tomb. But the message flourished in Jerusalem, which validates an empty tomb.¹¹⁵

A major detail in the empty tomb account is that it was reported first by women. In that culture, no one would have created a false story that promoted the witness of the women alone. Although women could testify in court, the value of their testimony depended on the importance of the matter at hand. Thus, women were not to be used as witnesses for matters that required vital testimony.¹¹⁶ Therefore, the early church would have likely not have created such an embarrassing story had it not been true. This was a monumental event, and consequently, a fabricated story would have used other witnesses such as the disciples. If the women's testimony was not embarrassing enough, Luke 24:11 shows that the disciples did not believe the women. Though Peter and John deemed it worthy enough to go and examine the tomb for themselves, Luke makes it evident that they thought the women were untrustworthy.¹¹⁷ The more embarrassing the story is, the less likely it is to be fabricated by people on that same side.

The empty tomb does not in itself prove that Jesus was resurrected. Logically speaking, there are several natural reasons that the tomb could have been found empty, just as any other body that has gone missing throughout the course of history. There are two main alternative

¹¹⁴ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 70.

¹¹⁵ William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 221, accessed June 16, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4067915>.

¹¹⁶ Habermas, *Evidence for the Historical Jesus*, 71.

¹¹⁷ Gould, Dickinson, and Loftin, *Stand Firm*, 112–113.

theories of the empty tomb narrative – the women visited the wrong tomb, and the disciples stole the body.

Alternate Theories of the Cause of the Empty Tomb

The Wrong Tomb

While the theory that the women went to the wrong tomb would explain why they found an empty tomb, it raises more questions than it answers. Luke 23:55-56 shows that the women “saw the tomb and how his body was laid,” but also, “Then they returned and prepared ointments and spices.” They therefore had plans to return to the tomb. The likelihood that they would have forgotten where to go would have been low (though not impossible). Assuming that they had gone to the wrong tomb, once they told the disciples, this theory implies that the disciples also went to the wrong tomb. If both these unlikely occurrences happened, the Jews would have been quick to reveal the body in the correct tomb.¹¹⁸

Additionally, Joseph and his helper (possibly Nicodemus) who buried him certainly would have checked the tomb (of which they surely knew the location) when they heard the rumors. If not right away, they certainly would not have let thirty years go by without ever bothering to look.¹¹⁹ While the wrong tomb theory could be possible as an initial error by the women, as a comprehensive theory it simply does not work.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 121.

¹¹⁹ Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 177, accessed June 16, 2022, <https://liberty.alma.exlibrisgroup.com>.

The Body Was Stolen

While the most common theory of the body being stolen is that the disciples were the culprits, it logically could have been anyone. For one to deny that Jesus was resurrected while still accepting the fact of the empty tomb, there must have been someone who removed the body from the tomb prior to the women arriving. The issue for skeptics is that there is no evidence that this occurred.¹²⁰ This theory is essentially an antisupernaturalist assumption that there must have been some natural cause to the tomb being empty. There are two common options for who could have stolen the body – unknown grave robbers or the disciples, the latter being the option typically argued by skeptics.

Grave robbing is always a possibility. Although it was common in antiquity, the main reason it occurred was due to the valuables often placed in the tombs. For example, the tombs of the Pharaohs were much more commonly robbed than the tombs of everyday Egyptians.¹²¹ However, the odds of Jesus' body being targeted by grave robbers is quite low for two reasons. First, there is no evidence of anything of notable value being placed in the tomb. Swinburne remarks, "Jews did not normally bury valuables; and this was a hurried burial of a crucified criminal, buried by a stranger who would not have had access to such associated valuables."¹²² Furthermore, had grave robbers entered the tomb, they would have stolen valuable objects, not the body.¹²³ Also, remember that the Jews had guards placed at the tomb. Grave robbers (regardless of who they could have been) would have had to somehow get past the guards.

¹²⁰ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 45.

¹²¹ Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*, 182.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

The disciples (and the women) are the ones that skeptics more often accuse of stealing the body. Since the women were the first to discover the empty tomb (especially considering the details of their discovery given in the Gospels), it is unlikely that they would have stolen Jesus' body. Thus, there would have had to be someone to remove the body from the tomb prior to the women arriving, of which there is no evidence.¹²⁴ In John's Gospel, he observes the grave clothes folded and left behind in the tomb (John 20:6-7). Had the disciples (or the women) stolen Jesus' body, it is quite unlikely that they would have left the clothes behind.¹²⁵ The clothes would also seem to indicate that the body had not been stolen,¹²⁶ for there would have been no reason to remove the clothes when stealing the body. Additionally, the disciples (just like any other grave robbers) would have had to get past the guards. The age-old question is relevant here. If the disciples stole the body while the guards slept, as the propaganda from Jewish council stated (Matt. 28:13), how would the guards have known it was the disciples? The simple answer is that they would have been ignorant to the truth, regardless of what it was, had they been asleep.

This theory presupposes a theology of resurrection, while denying the theology of Jesus' resurrection. It is clear from Luke 18:31-34 that the disciples did not understand the coming resurrection, and even if they had, they would not have stolen the body to fake the resurrection. But the bigger issue is the entire theological idea of resurrection. In Jewish understanding, resurrection happened at the eschaton *only*. There was no understanding of a resurrection in the

¹²⁴ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 45.

¹²⁵ Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*, 182.

¹²⁶ Craig, "The Empty Tomb of Jesus," 260.

middle of human history, let alone a single resurrection rather than the entirety of believers.¹²⁷ Craig notes, “That’s why, I think, the disciples had so much trouble understanding Jesus’ predictions of His own resurrection.”¹²⁸ Aside from the disciples’ own understanding (or lack thereof), it would be very difficult to convince other Jews that Jesus had resurrected when it was understood by the Jews as theologically impossible. Why would the disciples steal the body to create a fake story of something that the entire Jewish community thought opposite to biblical teaching?

Regardless of all the logical problems with this theory, the prevailing issue is that it is only a sufficient answer for one variable of the resurrection account. Historians in principle search for the simplest and most encompassing explanation of the evidence.¹²⁹ As this work will discuss later, details such as the appearances of Jesus, the change in the disciples, the conversion of Paul, and others, are not answered by this theory. In essence, this argument is attempting to try and refute the exceptional likelihood of the empty tomb without offering any concrete evidence as to who did it *and* why they would have done it. Even Flew, when questioned about what happened to the body answered, “I’m not going to offer a theory because I simply don’t think one can reconstruct the story of what happened in the city all that long ago and we haven’t the sort of evidence that one might have today with the invention of cameras and all the rest of it.”¹³⁰ A theory that answers the empty tomb without any evidence is not an argument from ignorance but rather a clear rejection of the evidence based on preconceived notions about Jesus.

¹²⁷ Craig, *On Guard*, 249–250.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹²⁹ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 45.

¹³⁰ Flew and Habermas, “My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism,” 28.

The Appearances of Jesus

Another one of Habermas's minimal facts is that the disciples *believed* they had experiences of the risen Christ. While some might equate this to saying that the disciples had experiences, there is debate over what exactly caused the disciples to have these experiences. While believers understand the disciples' experiences to be of a genuinely resurrected Jesus, skeptics have other theories of what it could possibly have entailed. Regardless, most scholars at the very least accept that the disciples had experiences of some sort.¹³¹

Some claim that the images the apostles witnessed of the risen Christ were a glimpse into a spiritual reality rather than a physical manifestation.¹³² Like many other theories, while logically possible, there is little backing to this idea. Both Paul and Peter imply a physical resurrection of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, Paul writes of the nature of resurrection. He is clear that resurrection involves a physical body, not just a spiritual immortal soul. Peter, in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 3, contrasts David's body to the raised body of Jesus, thus implying a physical resurrection.

Visions do occur in the Bible, such as Stephen's vision of Jesus when he is stoned in Acts 7. There are indeed visions of Jesus in the New Testament. However, they are distinguished from what is deemed a physical appearance of Jesus. The NT authors made a distinction between visions and appearances in which visions happened within the mind and others around could not see it, such as Stephen's vision in Acts 7. Appearances occurred in the physical realm and were witnessed by multiple people or even large groups.¹³³

¹³¹ Habermas, "The Case for Christ's Resurrection," 180–182.

¹³² Craig, "Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?," 156.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 157.

Moreover, there is both biblical and nonbiblical accounts for people touching Jesus' physical resurrected body. Ignatius, writing possibly within a decade after John authored his Gospel, wrote that the disciples touched Jesus.¹³⁴ Also, the Gospels twice claim that the women touched him (Matt. 28:9; John 20:17). Furthermore, 1 John 1:1-4 may be evidence as well. Craig therefore claims, "To be perfectly candid, the only grounds for denying the physical, bodily nature of the postmortem appearances of Jesus is philosophical, not historical: Such appearances would be miracles of the most stupendous proportions, and that many critics cannot swallow."¹³⁵ The historical evidence points to a physical body and rejecting it is once again based on presuppositions. The main failure of this theory is clear. If one, for the sake of argument, believes that Paul taught that Jesus reappeared as a spiritual, nonphysical being and believes that the Bible teaches that at death, man is rid of his body and becomes this disembodied spirit, Habermas concludes, "If that was Paul's view you would still have a glorious resurrection view for both Jesus and us. So my point is if that's what the New Testament taught, that's what all of us would believe and nobody would be upset with it. We'd all say this is a really cool view. So you get nowhere by doing that kind of theory because you still have a resurrection."¹³⁶ It might challenge the orthodox, traditional understanding of the resurrection, but it would not disprove Christianity.

Some claim that the physical resurrection of Jesus was simply a legend that developed over time. Not only is this a baseless claim, but it is also impractical. All the disciples (aside

¹³⁴ Gary R. Habermas and Antony Flew, *Resurrected? An Atheist and Theist Dialogue*, ed. John F. Ankerberg (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 13, accessed May 24, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=616348>.

¹³⁵ Craig, *On Guard*, 240.

¹³⁶ *A Historian Explains*, 25:44.

from Judas) saw Jesus post-resurrection as is stated in Acts 1:13. Furthermore, as Habermas notes, “Four of the arguments for Jesus’ resurrection appearances come from Paul: his early reception of the creedal account, the appearance to Paul himself, his testimony that his message was given the stamp of approval by other apostles, and his own confirmation of their appearance reports.”¹³⁷ There are skeptics who believe that the Gospels are unreliable, but these skeptics will more often than not assert the reliability of some, if not all, of Paul’s Epistles. Also, the creedal material in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff is worth revisiting. Not only is this early material coming from likely the early 30s A.D. (therefore within mere years after Jesus’ death/resurrection), but also critical scholars believe that Paul received this information from Peter and James during his trip to Jerusalem. Therefore, there is a connection between Paul’s writing and the original disciples. Even if the scholars are wrong about the earlier date, it surely existed prior to A.D. 51, when Paul made his initial journey to Corinth.¹³⁸

Regardless of if it was a few years after Jesus’ death and resurrection or two decades, it is still too short of a timeframe for legends to develop. This has been the primary issue for this theory ever since D. F. Strauss first promoted it.¹³⁹ Furthermore, the short timeframe means that eyewitnesses were still alive to confirm or deny the truth of any of the New Testament writings. This would undermine any attempt at perpetuating a legendary account.¹⁴⁰

There are three details regarding the appearances that give evidence for the historical likelihood of Jesus’ resurrection. First, as this work has established, the testimony of women was

¹³⁷ Gary R. Habermas, “The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus,” in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 270.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹³⁹ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 51.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

not held in high esteem in that culture. For the Gospel writers to fabricate an account in which Jesus appeared first to women would have been futile. Craig alleges that this may be the reason that women are not mentioned in Paul's list of appearances in 1 Corinthians 15.¹⁴¹ Thus, Jesus' appearance to the women first is likely historical.

Second, Jesus appeared to both believers and unbelievers. Most of his appearances were to believers, but there were also the appearances to his James, his brother, and Paul, who were both unbelievers at the time Jesus appeared to them.¹⁴² Though they later became believers, they were clearly not wanting to promote a risen Jesus when he appeared to them. That not only believers are included in these experiences ruins a lot of alternative theories.

Lastly, there are a lot of unanswered questions if one removes the ascension from the resurrection account. For the ascension to happen, Jesus had to be raised from the dead. C. S. Lewis claims, "But if [the body] were real, then something happened to it after it ceased to appear. You cannot take away the Ascension without putting something else in its place."¹⁴³ If Jesus never died (swoon theory), what happened to his body? If there were a physical body after the resurrection, what happened to it? If it were not physical appearances, but rather spiritual experiences, why did they stop forty days after Easter Sunday? Just declaring that the biblical accounts are false is not enough; the skeptic must have valid answers.

The Change in the Disciples

The issue for both skeptics and believers with the resurrection is that there are no artifacts or concrete data to definitively prove either side. The entire discussion is based on the evidence

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 52.

¹⁴² Gould, Dickinson, and Loftin, *Stand Firm*, 115.

¹⁴³ Lewis, *Miracles*, 149.

available and searching for the best possible explanation. There is one aspect that is incredibly difficult (or even impossible) to explain if the resurrection is not a true historical event – the sudden transformation of the disciples.

What could cause the timid disciples to suddenly become pillars of the Christian faith? Even critical scholars agree that the resurrection appearances (regardless of what caused them) caused this reversal.¹⁴⁴ Not only was there this change in who they were, but there was also a massive shift in what they believed. Blomberg writes:

What motivated a group of devoted Jews to change what they believed to be the eternally immutable Sabbath (or day of rest and worship) from Saturday to Sunday ... what led them to declare Jesus to be both Lord and liberator despite his death by crucifixion, already interpreted, in light of Deuteronomy 21:23, to represent God's curse; and how the Jewish expectation of all people being raised from the dead together at the end of time (Dan 12:2) allowed them to declare Jesus to have been raised in advance of Judgment Day and separate from the general resurrection.¹⁴⁵

These are not small theological matters like the debate over hymns vs. contemporary music; these are monumental core theological/doctrinal shifts in the faith, and not just in a certain area. The resurrection is the only event that could have caused such a drastic change so quickly.

Considering what the disciples saw happen to Jesus, from the beatings, to being nailed to the cross, to being speared, etc., the only thing that could have convinced them of the resurrection was the resurrected Jesus. Anything shy of a resurrected body would have been unconvincing, or at least not have caused the abrupt radical change in their hearts.¹⁴⁶ Beyond witnessing the crucifixion events, to the disciples, the Messiah being killed was unimaginable, let

¹⁴⁴ Habermas, "The Case for Christ's Resurrection," 60.

¹⁴⁵ Craig L Blomberg, "Jesus of Nazareth: How Historians Can Know Him and Why It Matters," *Christ on Campus Initiative* (2008): 27.

¹⁴⁶ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 23.

alone a shameful death. This is why Peter pulls Jesus aside and rebukes his death predictions in Matthew 16:22. Yet, the disciples came to believe in Jesus as Messiah even after his death.¹⁴⁷

There are historical sources that claim the disciples suffered willingly for their faith later in their lives. Habermas provides seven sources, but that number increases to eleven if Paul and James the brother of Jesus are included along with the disciples.¹⁴⁸ Even Antony Flew admits that the disciples were not lying, since lying involves intent.¹⁴⁹ They also had nothing to gain and everything to lose if what they were preaching was false.¹⁵⁰ What then would be their reason? If their preaching were based on fallacies, one would expect at least one of them to recant their testimony at some point, especially when facing death. However, there is not *any* evidence stating that any eyewitnesses ever recanted their statements. Later generations were forced into recanting, but the eyewitnesses never did.¹⁵¹ The odds of this being true if the resurrection were false is incredibly low.

Some skeptics have compared the martyrdom of the disciples to suicide pilots, Muslims, Kamikaze pilots, or Nazis, all who have given their lives for what they believed was a true cause.¹⁵² While there is some similarity, the two situations are quite different. Habermas and Licona claim, “Contemporary martyrs die for what they believe to be true. The disciples of Jesus died for what they knew to be either true or false.”¹⁵³ This is key. Theoretical belief is quite

¹⁴⁷ Gould, Dickinson, and Loftin, *Stand Firm*, 118.

¹⁴⁸ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 60.

¹⁴⁹ Habermas and Flew, *Resurrected?*, 21.

¹⁵⁰ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 17.

¹⁵¹ Strobel, *The Case for Miracles*, 206.

¹⁵² McGrew and McGrew, “The Argument From Miracles: A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth,” 624.

¹⁵³ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 59.

different from empirical knowledge. Believing what is true is not equivalent to knowing what is true. People have died from the beginning of time over false ideas they believe to be true.

Habermas claims, “There are virtually no examples in history of people who willingly died (in their right mind) for what they know to be false”¹⁵⁴ Therefore, the disciples must not only have believed what they preached, but also knew it to be true. The only alternative option would be that the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were hallucinations, a theory which this work must address due to its prevalence.

The Hallucination Theory

The hallucination theory is self-explanatory – it states that the appearances of Jesus were simply hallucinations and that there was no resurrection of Jesus physically or spiritually. There are numerous issues with this theory, but the first is that it is not an all-encompassing theory. This theory alone does not answer the empty tomb, and therefore, must be conjoined with another theory to explain these two facts, let alone the rest of the minimal facts.¹⁵⁵

This theory, when used today, ignores an important detail of the ancient world. A vision of a dead man would not convince the receiver that the man was alive, but rather, would be evidence that he was dead.¹⁵⁶ Thus, Craig notes, “Hallucinations would never have led to the conclusion that Jesus had been raised from the dead”¹⁵⁷

The hallucination theory, like many other alternative theories, ignores the facts. According to modern science, for hallucinations to occur, a person must be in a special state of

¹⁵⁴ *Jesus' Post-Death Appearances*, 9:15.

¹⁵⁵ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 60.

¹⁵⁶ Craig, *On Guard*, 225.

¹⁵⁷ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 60.

mind or be artificially stimulated by medicinal compounds. Craig writes, “But the disciples after Jesus’ crucifixion were utterly crushed and in no frame of mind to hallucinate. In no way did they expect Jesus to come back to life. As far as they were concerned, the last act of the tragedy had been played, and the show was over.”¹⁵⁸ This is made evident by them doubting the women’s account as well as the “Doubting Thomas” episode in John 20. Also, the women, who reported the resurrection first, were on their way to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ dead body. Hence, they had no expectation of Jesus resurrecting and thereby did not meet the conditions for a hallucination to occur.¹⁵⁹

Another issue is that this theory would require several group hallucinations. Jesus did not only appear to individuals; he appeared to the disciples as a group, to the group of women, and even to a group of 500 according to 1 Corinthians 15:6. It is virtually impossible for group hallucinations to occur under these various conditions.¹⁶⁰ Concerning the group hallucinations, Habermas claims, “To think that all of those persons were automatically candidates for hallucinatory experiences multiplies the improbable, bordering on naiveté.” Assuming all these individuals and groups had hallucinations under the stated conditions is arguably more improbable than Jesus actually appearing.

Even if one would accept the extremely low probability of the hallucinations happening, one must deal with the fact that three different times, Jesus was not recognized.¹⁶¹ This is quite inexplicable. Also, if all the appearances were hallucinations, why would they suddenly cease?

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ McGrew and McGrew, “The Argument From Miracles: A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth,” 620.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Lewis, *Miracles*, 147. See Luke 24:13-31; John 20:15; 21:4.

McGrew and McGrew write, “Whatever their causes, the visions of Peter and Cornelius in Acts and even of Paul on the road to Damascus are qualitatively distinct from these appearances. Paul never claimed that Jesus broke bread with him or ate a meal with him.”¹⁶² These are all questions that the hallucination theory does not answer. Coupled together with the lack of evidence, the hallucination theory is simply not a viable option for the cause of the disciples changing the entire course of their lives.

The Conversions of Paul and James

The conversions of Saul/Paul and James the brother of Jesus are evidence for Jesus’ resurrection. Paul (or Saul, as he was known prior to his conversion) was a Pharisee, and thus a very knowledgeable man with deep theological/doctrinal beliefs and convictions. He also was a notorious persecutor of Christians. There must have been a life altering situation to reverse his lifestyle. Paul is clear that he was an eyewitness to the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor. 15:8). As reflected by this being included in Habermas’s minimal facts, most scholars accept this as a historical fact.¹⁶³

There are no other plausible alternative theories. For Paul’s vision of Jesus to have been fake, Habermas claims, “He has to manifest several problems at the same time: conversion disorder, auditory and visual hallucinations, and perhaps a Messiah complex. That’s a pretty complicated theory, all without any evidence!”¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, it is very unlikely that Paul, a

¹⁶² McGrew and McGrew, “The Argument From Miracles: A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth,” 626.

¹⁶³ Habermas, “The Case for Christ’s Resurrection,” 182.

¹⁶⁴ Habermas and Flew, *Resurrected?*, 11.

persecutor of Christians, would suddenly turn from his ways on the road to Damascus to join the side he is persecuting if what he witnessed was anything short of certain.

Paul's conversion story was already circulating around Judea within three years of its occurrence, thus making it reliable.¹⁶⁵ It is also interesting that this story does not center simply around an unbeliever in Jesus, but rather a staunch enemy of the church. Thus, the risen Jesus was witnessed by both friend and enemy.¹⁶⁶

James the brother of Jesus was not a believer in him during his ministry as stated outright in John 7:5. However, James is later acknowledged as a leader of the church in Jerusalem and given the term apostle (Acts 15:12-21; Gal. 1:18-19).¹⁶⁷ What would have converted the brother of Jesus after he had been an unbeliever the entire time Jesus was alive? Paul's credal material in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 mentions James as one who witnessed the resurrected Jesus. This would be the most probable event to turn James, a known skeptic, into a believer.

It is worth noting that James became a martyr. Josephus explains that Annas, the high priest, arranged a mob to stone James in A.D. 62. Almost all scholars believe this passage of Josephus to be authentic.¹⁶⁸ This narrative is further verified by Hegesippus and Clement of Alexandria.¹⁶⁹ With these variables, it is likely that James had an experience of the risen Jesus, which is why it is also included in Habermas's minimal facts.

¹⁶⁵ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 64.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁶⁸ Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What Is the Evidence?," in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 1996), 212, accessed May 18, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397732>.

¹⁶⁹ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 68.

The Shroud of Turin

Though the Shroud of Turin is not the most convincing piece of evidence, it is the only possible artifact that is directly associated with Jesus' crucifixion. A shroud is the cloth that the body was wrapped in for burial. These shroud-wrapped bodies were placed in temporary tombs for roughly a year to allow the body to decay until the bones could be collected.¹⁷⁰ The Shroud of Turin is the shroud that some believe to be the shroud that Jesus' body was placed in.

The historicity of the shroud (of it being a shroud, not that it is Jesus' shroud) is almost certain. Habermas claims, "According to a recent scientific ... conference ... every scientist, over a dozen, who responded to the comment of what is the image of the Shroud made of, they all, I understand, all came to the conclusion that the image on the shroud is because of radiation from the dead crucified body underneath."¹⁷¹ In other words, while it is definitely possible it might not be the image of Jesus, the shroud could not be reproduced with modern technology.

Habermas says he believes the odds of the shroud being the one Jesus was buried in at 60-85% depending on his mood that day.¹⁷² It is by no means certain, even among Christian scholars. There are some details in the shroud that reflect the crucifixion narratives. For example, it has an image of a man who was crucified. There are over 120 wounds on the man's chest, legs, and back, which match the beatings of Jesus. There is a stabbing wound on the right side with blood and serum having leaked out. There are puncture wounds on the head that are consistent

¹⁷⁰ Mark W. Foreman, "The Image on the Shroud: A Best Explanations Approach," in *Raised on the Third Day: Defending the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. W. David Beck and Michael R. Licona (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 38–39, accessed May 25, 2022, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6564531>.

¹⁷¹ *A Historian Explains*, 23:53.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 23:03.

with a crown of thorns.¹⁷³ These are all consistent with the crucifixion, but perhaps the most striking feature would be that it exists today. This would only be possible if the Gospel accounts were true in that the grave clothes were found in the tomb.¹⁷⁴

The Shroud of Turin is unlikely to convince any skeptic of Jesus' resurrection. However, it is the only possible artifact that exists today to try and prove the resurrection. Even the possibility of it is intriguing if nothing else. Of all the ancient burial garments that are known today, the Shroud of Turin is the only one to have body images as it does.¹⁷⁵

The Lack of Alternatives

This work has discussed various points of positive evidence for the resurrection, but the final aspect to examine is the evidence against alternative explanations to the historical facts. The initial question is that if the resurrection never occurred, where did the entire idea originate? Köstenberger notes, "There was no precedent in Judaism for a raised Messiah to create this idea or even look for it. In Jewish faith, resurrection was something that happens to all at the end of history. So there is no real context to generate such a view unless there was a real impulse in an actual event (Jesus' resurrection!) to create this new idea."¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, the Messiah was not supposed to be killed according to Jewish understanding, so resurrection was already incompatible with messianic theology.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ All of these facts about the shroud taken from Foreman, "The Image on the Shroud," 39. He has an extensive list of 24 facts regarding details about the shroud.

¹⁷⁴ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 45.

¹⁷⁵ *A Historian Explains*, 23:53.

¹⁷⁶ Andreas J. Köstenberger, Darrell L. Bock, and Josh Chatraw, *Truth in a Culture of Doubt: Engaging Skeptical Challenges to the Bible* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), sec. The Origins for Christianity.

¹⁷⁷ Craig, *On Guard*, 247.

The main problem with any alternative theory is that it explains *a* fact, not *all* the facts. If Jesus' body was stolen, why did Paul have such a monumental conversion? If the disciples were hallucinating, where did the body go? Every alternative theory (including those not discussed in this work) suffer from this major shortcoming. Davis claims, "All of the alternative hypotheses with which I am familiar are historically weak; some are so weak that they collapse of their own weight once spelled out ... The alternative theories that have been proposed are not only weaker but far weaker at explaining the available historical evidence."¹⁷⁸ There is no other all-encompassing theory that explains all the facts of the resurrection narrative except for the resurrection hypothesis.

There is also little (if any) evidence for other theories. Nonetheless, skeptics put the onus on believers to prove the resurrection. Habermas turns the tables, saying, "But just as Christians are asked to give first century evidence— and we've provided much of this evidence— the critic should be able to produce some first-century evidence against the Resurrection."¹⁷⁹ Aside from needing to provide their own evidence (of which there is essentially none), skeptics must respond to the strong evidence for the resurrection; they cannot simply disregard it.¹⁸⁰ The problem is, many do simply disregard the evidence. This is obviously a worldview issue (not a historicity issue) when skeptics disregard evidence and promulgate virtually impossible theories.

Naturalist theories are beginning to fall by the wayside. There are some theories that are revived from time to time, but the minimal facts are sufficient (even to skeptics) to negate most

¹⁷⁸ Stephen T. Davis, "Is Belief in the Resurrection Rational?" *Philo* 2 (1999): 57-58, quoted in Habermas, "The Case for Christ's Resurrection," 194.

¹⁷⁹ Habermas and Flew, *Resurrected?*, 58.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

naturalist alternative theories.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, most alternative theories are silent regarding the post-resurrection appearances.¹⁸² If a theory cannot explain the appearances, then the theory has failed. The lack of valid alternative theories is summed up well by Flew: “I’m not offering a naturalistic account of what happened. I don’t think it’s possible to offer any satisfactory naturalistic account of what happened.”¹⁸³ Flew is absolutely correct. There is no satisfactory alternative. As Gould claims, “The best theory, of course, must explain all the facts, not just one or two of them.”¹⁸⁴ There is not a single alternative theory that explains all the facts, and thus, the resurrection theory is the best option to explain the evidence.

Chapter 3: Biases and Analysis

This thesis has examined the most well-known *a priori* arguments against miracles, general arguments rejecting them, and examining the evidence for the resurrection. It is now important to consider the biases that exist regarding study of the resurrection and to analyze the *a priori* arguments by showing how the available evidence provides a rejection of the main points of these arguments.

Biases in Studying the Resurrection

Before analyzing the *a priori* arguments amid the evidence for the resurrection, it is important to understand the biases that exist amongst those who reject miracles on an *a priori* basis. There are two main biases that the people making these arguments tend to have – an

¹⁸¹ Habermas, “The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus,” 272.

¹⁸² Ibid., 271.

¹⁸³ Habermas and Flew, *Resurrected?*, 30.

¹⁸⁴ Gould, Dickinson, and Loftin, *Stand Firm*, 119.

antibiblical/antisupernatural bias and a bias regarding historical study. Though these biases are often combined, one must understand them individually since they both are often at the core of antisupernaturalist philosophy on miracles.

Antibiblical Bias

A skeptic can accept the historical value of the Bible, possibly including the miraculous events, without subjecting himself to its theology and doctrine. One can view the Gospels/Acts purely historically, even consider them to be historically true, and yet still reject the Christian faith. There are many everyday people who believe in the events of the Bible and yet do not subject themselves to its teaching.

Many people claim that they come to the Bible neutrally and without presuppositions, claiming that the Bible disproves itself. This is simply false. Wink claims, “People with an attenuated sense of what is possible will bring that conviction to the Bible and diminish it by the poverty of their own experience.”¹⁸⁵ This is clear especially in Hume’s work. Hume clearly downplays (or even completely negates) the possibility of miracles based solely on his own personal lack of experiencing miraculous events.

A priori arguments (at least those examined in this thesis) are based in a post-Enlightenment, Western culture. Being immersed in this culture often gives people a negative bias when it comes to supernaturalism. Keener notes, “[M]odern Western interpreters who are skeptical of all such events or read all of them through a purely naturalistic paradigm are hardly neutral in their assumptions.”¹⁸⁶ This bias against the supernatural aspects/events in the Bible

¹⁸⁵ Walter Wink, “Write What You See: An Odyssey,” *The Fourth R*, May 1994, para. 26, accessed July 27, 2022, <https://www.westarinstitute.org/editorials/write-what-you-see>.

¹⁸⁶ Keener, *Miracles*, 133.

means that the argument will by default be based upon a naturalistic framework instead of a neutral positioned philosophy to determine what is historically true.

The major issue with reading the Bible with a Western mindset is that it was written to an ancient Eastern civilization. When a modern Western reader opens the Bible and tries to interpret it (both theologically and historically) from a Western point of view, it is reading Western cultural philosophy into the Eastern texts. Likewise, modern readers with an antisupernaturalist methodology who cannot contemplate their own presuppositions will likely fail to come to the text of the Gospels and Acts on their own terms.¹⁸⁷ In other words, reading an antisupernaturalist foundation into an ancient text will change the reading of the text from the original context in which the original readers understood it.¹⁸⁸ If a post-Enlightenment Western reader cannot read the text aside from his/her antisupernatural bias, their interpretations and ideas will be based upon those worldviews and presuppositions rather than the text itself. In this case, these people call the historicity of the text into question not because of a fault in the text, per se, or historical evidence disproving the events described, but based solely on an antisupernaturalist, and therefore, antibiblical philosophy.

One main issue when discussing the historicity of the Bible, especially the four Gospels, is the difference in the details. Because the books were written with a theological intent and in an ancient Eastern culture, most of these details can be explained away. But this is not enough to satisfy those with an antibiblical bias. Licona illustrates this by comparing the biblical texts to that of a professional photographer taking a picture of a couple. When he gets back to the office, he might Photoshop the picture, slightly alter the hues, sharpness, add blur, etc. While the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 136.

¹⁸⁸ Licona, "Jesus's Resurrection," 292.

doctored photograph does not perfectly reflect the true image that was captured, the core character of the picture is nonetheless preserved.¹⁸⁹ Unsurprisingly, many skeptics will try to negate the historicity of the Bible due to one “Photoshopped” scene.

Finally, those with an antisupernaturalist/antibiblical bias will judge the Bible (especially the resurrection accounts) differently than other ancient texts. Because of the bias they hold against the Bible, their standards of historical study suddenly change. The text ought to be approached using the same principles used in ancient historical study, in which scholars care more about early sources and tradition rather than disregarding the historical value of a text due to it being of a religious nature.¹⁹⁰

Historical Study Bias

Perhaps the more influential bias when discussing the historicity of the resurrection is the bias regarding historical study and biblical texts. Though there are different approaches to historical study, the main goal of the historian is to study all available evidence to attempt to explain the most likely course of events that occurred in the past. This is an issue when considering the resurrection due to what each historian understands as “likely” or even logically possible. Instead of simply explaining what happened, the nature of historical study has changed over time. Cross explains that since Hume’s era, many philosophers and scientists now believe that “the historian's purpose is not just to record historical events but to explain them in terms of what are accepted as the laws governing all occurrences of the kind in question.”¹⁹¹ This thereby

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Habermas, “The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus,” 268–269.

¹⁹¹ Anthony R. Cross, “Historical Methodology and New Testament Study,” *Themelios* 22, no. 3 (1997): 36, accessed April 28, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/historical-methodology-and-new-testament-study/>.

alters the nature of documenting historical events since there is a larger philosophical aim. In other words, modern historians use supernatural elements as criteria for if there is any historical value of an event preserved within a text.¹⁹² They are thus taking the possible historical value of a text and rejecting it along with any supernatural elements that also might be present. This is clearly an issue when examining a supernatural event such as the resurrection.

Skeptics like Ehrman claim that historians cannot study miracle claims because it is beyond the scope of historical study due to its supernatural nature.¹⁹³ This is simply not true. Blomberg notes that, “[O]ther ancient documents sometimes contain miracle narratives that don’t preclude historians, whatever their views of the supernatural, from deriving sober historical detail from many other portions of those works.”¹⁹⁴ Thus, a miracle claim does not negate the historical value of a text simply because it is supernatural. If other ancient texts can be studied despite their miracle claims, then the Bible likewise ought to be studied by historians. Furthermore, a historian’s personal convictions on the supernatural does not alter the course of events. Just because one is an atheist and thus rejects the divine does not mean that historically speaking, Moses did not part the Red Sea. A historical event cannot change based on one’s predispositions. Disregarding the historicity of the Bible simply because of the miracle narratives alone reflects on the historian, not on the Bible.

This understanding combines a supernatural cause with a supernatural event. A historian can observe what seems to be a supernatural event without conceding a supernatural cause.

Keener observes, “Historians may treat events without expressing certainty about their causes;

¹⁹² Keener, *Miracles*, 125.

¹⁹³ Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, sec. Excursus: The Resurrection and Other Miracles in the Life of Jesus.

¹⁹⁴ Blomberg, “Jesus of Nazareth,” 26.

for example, though scholars do not agree whether Carloman died of natural causes or murder (on orders of his brother Charlemagne), there is little debate as to whether he died in 771 C.E.”¹⁹⁵ Claiming that an event happened in the past need not include an explanation of how or why that event happened. Arguing that historical study is incompatible with miracle claims is combining the interpretation of its cause with the historical fact of its occurrence.

Many skeptics contradict themselves when it is advantageous for their position. If historians are not able to verify the historicity of miracle claims, then they are also unable to disprove a miracle. As Beckwith says, “But disproving the historicity of a miracle is only possible if it is within the bounds of the historical endeavor to investigate a miracle.”¹⁹⁶ Skeptics tend to claim that a historian cannot investigate miracle claims when it does not advance their viewpoint but will ignore this principle if they are able to use it to argue against miracles.

Ehrman, though he claims that a historian cannot study miracle claims, contradicts himself by saying that they can study the resurrection. He writes, “Historians, of course, have no difficulty whatsoever speaking about the belief in Jesus’ resurrection, since it is a matter of public record.”¹⁹⁷ He is correct on this point. But this is not the typical skeptics’ talking point. They often will not admit this truth because admitting a so-called miraculous event occurred means that there must be a cause, typically God, in whom they refuse to believe. Geivett points out, “[Naturalists] would sooner describe the alleged ‘event’ as a nonevent than be forced to come up with a plausible explanation that is compatible with naturalism.”¹⁹⁸ This is because

¹⁹⁵ Keener, *Miracles*, 145.

¹⁹⁶ Francis J. Beckwith, “History and Miracles,” in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 87.

¹⁹⁷ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 231.

¹⁹⁸ Geivett, “The Evidential Value,” 183.

often there is no valid natural explanation for a so-called miraculous event. Therefore, they attack the process and deem it impossible to verify the event happened rather than trying to come up with a valid explanation for what could have been the cause apart from supernatural processes. There are always alternative explanations to argue against a miraculous event occurring – whether the argument is against the miraculous nature, the actual occurrence, etc. But often it is not more reasonable to do so, thus questioning the validity of rejecting the miracle.¹⁹⁹ The main point is that a historian is able to study miraculous events to understand what most likely happened in the past due to the nature of historical study, regardless of one's worldview and presuppositions. Therefore, the resurrection need not be a theological study only and the likelihood of its occurrence can be studied by historians.

Analysis of *A Priori* Arguments

General Analytical Points

It is easy for believers in miracles to rebuke the *a priori* reasoning of skeptics without realizing that they make *a priori* assumptions about miracles as well. While skeptics make *a priori* assumptions about miracles being impossible/improbable, believers make *a priori* assumptions that miracles are both probable and likely. The difference is that the latter are consistent with historical evidence regarding miracle claims of the resurrection.

The problem is that these *a priori* arguments ignore the evidence for a miraculous claim and reject them on a theoretical level. Thus, they have no concrete answer for questions regarding the resurrection; they have only improbable or impossible theories. Keener notes, “It

¹⁹⁹ Corner, *Signs of God*, 27.

amounts to saying, ‘miracles violate the principle that miracles never happen.’”²⁰⁰ The issue is not necessarily that they reject miracles on an *a priori* basis, but rather that they define them out of existence and ignore any evidence for their occurrence. Each miracle claim must be investigated on its own; miraculous events cannot be automatically rejected.²⁰¹ To automatically reject them is simply an assumption rather than an actual philosophical argument.

The basis of these arguments is the belief in God (or lack thereof). If one believes in God, miracles become possible or even probable. If science has proven that the universe is a closed loop of cause and effect, then miraculous events are indeed impossible.²⁰² But science has not proven God out of existence, and thus, miracles cannot be rejected *a priori*. Typically, the *a priori* arguments reflect some type of atheism or agnosticism and are thus birthed out of these worldviews, rather than successfully convincing the masses that atheism/agnosticism is correct.

Because the *a priori* arguments generally are not strong nor convincing (yet still a default position for antisupernaturalists), this remains a live debate hundreds of years after Hume originally made his arguments. Craig claims that *a priori* reasoning “survives in theology only as a hangover from an earlier Deist age and ought to be once for all abandoned.”²⁰³ It is simply a weak argument to reject miracles on an *a priori* basis and have no naturalist explanation for the evidence of the resurrection. If Habermas’s minimal facts can be established and no alternative theory explains them as well as the resurrection hypothesis, then believing the resurrection

²⁰⁰ Keener, *Miracles*, 163.

²⁰¹ Cross, “Historical Methodology,” 38.

²⁰² Blomberg, “Jesus of Nazareth,” 26.

²⁰³ William Lane Craig, “The Problem of Miracles” in *Gospel Perspectives 6, The Miracles of Jesus*, 43, quoted in Cross, “Historical Methodology,” 40.

hypothesis is a justified response.²⁰⁴ Belief in the resurrection hypothesis is quite simple. To believe that Jesus was miraculously resurrected from the dead requires only the presupposition that God exists. To believe the alternatives requires many presuppositions.²⁰⁵ If God does exist as the creator of the universe, it is rational to believe that he would interfere with the world at certain points throughout history.

These *a priori* arguments are not based on any beliefs that could disprove the resurrection; they hinge on one's plausibility structure rather than actually rebuking the historical event itself. Craig writes:

I can't think of any accepted beliefs that disconfirm the resurrection hypothesis—unless one thinks of, say, “Dead men do not rise” as disconfirmatory. But this generalization based on what naturally happens when people die does nothing to disconfirm the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead. We may consistently believe both that men do not rise naturally from the dead and that God raised Jesus from the dead.²⁰⁶

And in fact, this is exactly what Christians believe. Hence, *a priori* arguments are simply a philosophical manifestation of atheism, or at least not believing in God as the Bible describes him. Because these philosophers cannot win the argument on the evidential front, they must try to disprove miracles before the evidence is presented. Once the evidence is considered, often the occurrence of a miracle is the best explanation for the available facts. At this point, the skeptic has lost the battle. It would be extremely difficult for a skeptic to argue that Jesus was raised from the dead as a historical fact but maintain that it was not a miraculous event. There are no known naturalistic causes for a dead man rising from the dead three days post-mortem. Therefore, they must make these *a priori* arguments. Hence, though they remain quite weak

²⁰⁴ Craig, *On Guard*, 220.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 260.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

philosophically, they are still used widely today, both amongst philosophers and the everyday person.

On Probabilities

One of Hume's main points in his argument is that no amount of testimony can ever establish that a miracle was/is probable. His reasoning is based on his own personal experience of never witnessing a miracle. It is understandable that Hume did not witness anyone being raised from the dead. Regardless of if one believes this is possible, there are only a small number of instances throughout history where this is claimed to have happened. Therefore, Hume's experience if no resurrections have ever happened would likely be identical to his experience if there were a minimal number of resurrections throughout the course of human history.²⁰⁷ Thus, one person's experience (or even the overall experience of mankind) does not disprove the resurrection. In a similar way, only a few select people have ever walked on the moon. Because all but a handful of people have not experienced walking on the moon does not disprove that man has walked on the moon. Concerning the significance of testimony vs. normal human experience, Habermas says, "But there reaches a point when there is so much evidence that it actually overrides what we think about the natural scheme of nature on this particular occasion."²⁰⁸ The same could be said about experience. The overwhelming amount of evidence is enough to override the lack of uniform experience for Jesus' resurrection.

Additionally, Hume's assumptions about what is probable are incorrect. In the course of history, he is correct in that miracles are not the most probable in the sense that they do not

²⁰⁷ Mavrodes, "David Hume," 177.

²⁰⁸ Habermas and Flew, *Resurrected?*, 47.

describe the way nature typically functions. However, when considering the facts surrounding the resurrection, the resurrection hypothesis is the most probable explanation for the facts. Tucker explains this principle, saying, “A low posterior probability of any hypothesis, including a miracle hypothesis, is not sufficient for rejecting it. It is rational to go on accepting and using a low-probability hypothesis as long as there is no better explanation for the evidence.”²⁰⁹ As the evidence has shown, there is currently no better explanation of the facts of the resurrection. Even if the resurrection hypothesis is deemed improbable, until there is a better explanation available concerning the evidence, it is a rational theory to hold.²¹⁰ It might have a low probability in general, but it has a high probability by comparison to other alternative theories. Even when the other theories are combined (as one must do to explain away the facts), the probability is virtually impossible and continues to dwindle as more and more theories are combined. There are so many parts to the story that even explaining the appearances of Jesus alone has no probable theories aside from the resurrection hypothesis.

If the historical facts are true, the resurrection hypothesis might not be improbable at all. McGrew and McGrew claim that their minimal facts put the probability of the resurrection hypothesis at 99.99%.²¹¹ This is not an arbitrary “we are certain” claim by the authors, but a calculated probability using Bayes’ Theorem.²¹² Indeed, the probability only becomes minimal when miracles are rejected *a priori*, which is clearly circular reasoning. Arguing that miracles are impossible/improbable, and then using that definition to conclude that it is improbable that the

²⁰⁹ Tucker, “Miracles,” 381.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 385.

²¹¹ The authors refer to their facts as “salient facts.” While they do not use all of Habermas’s minimal facts, their facts line up with Habermas’s; they simply do not use all 6/12.

²¹² McGrew and McGrew, “The Argument From Miracles: A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth,” 630.

resurrection occurred is not an actual analysis of the probability of the miracle occurring, but rather a predisposition against miracles in which a miraculous event is deemed improbable because miracles are improbable, not because the evidence makes the miracle improbable. Therefore, Hume's argument against the probability of the resurrection (by way of all miracles being improbable) is an invalid argument when examining all the evidence for the resurrection.

On Testimony

Hume claims that no amount of testimony is ever sufficient to establish a miracle. This is simply an argument from ignorance when discussing the resurrection. This might be true if one is considering testimony alone, but testimony of a miracle claim is never without any other evidence (at least in the time and place in which it happened). With the resurrection, all the evidence discussed must be considered along with the testimony. Testimony corroborated by evidence is hard to refute. Consider that modern courts are centered around testimony corroborated by evidence. If a court can use this information to justify condemning someone to a life sentence in prison, it should be enough to confirm the likelihood of the resurrection.

It is also absurd to equate eyewitness testimony with nonwitness interpretation. Keener explains, "But should we not grant greater credence to the word of a thousand eyewitnesses (even if that were all there were) than to the insistence of a hundred thousand nonwitness colleagues merely restating unproved assumptions?"²¹³ Keener goes on to illustrate this: "One would hardly expect an officer at an accident scene to exclude all eyewitnesses as biased and thus turn to nonobservers for the most reliable information."²¹⁴ This is precisely what Hume and

²¹³ Keener, *Miracles*, 202.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

others have done. Living centuries after the resurrection, they discredit the eyewitness testimony based on their own theoretical and philosophical presuppositions. Philosophers today who build on Hume's original argument are doing the same thing – putting more emphasis on Hume's claims than the facts from history.

Aside from the disciples' testimony, what if one was to witness a miracle today? What would Hume say to the hundreds (if not thousands) who claim they themselves saw the resurrected Jesus? If Hume's argument is relevant today, then it would have been relevant at the time of the resurrection. All that his argument establishes is that if one experiences a true miracle, other people ought to be skeptical of his testimony. The apostles surely experienced this, but that does not discredit their experiences. Just because others might be skeptical of a miracle claim does not mean that the direct observer should doubt his own testimony as well.²¹⁵ Even so, if no testimony can establish a miracle, and there are no miracles, then there should be no miracle testimony.²¹⁶ Thus, Hume's argument only pertains to past events in which the reader has not experienced. It makes no claims towards firsthand miracle witnesses, but surely Hume could not have been arguing that one must reject their own testimony and experiences. If it is logical for the eyewitnesses (the apostles) to believe their own testimony and experiences, why must others that come later reject it? If the apostles have good reason to believe, so does a modern Christian.

Hume also attacks the character of people who make miracle claims. This is a moot point. As Corner claims, "Poor first-century fishermen were no more likely to distort the truth than

²¹⁵ Gould, Dickinson, and Loftin, *Stand Firm*, 61.

²¹⁶ Mavrodes, "David Hume," 167.

wealthy, educated and respected citizens of the third millennium.”²¹⁷ This is simply a red herring argument that does not pertain to whether a miracle occurred. Plus, there were all kinds of people who were eyewitnesses to a risen Christ, including Paul, a Pharisee. One’s educational level, philosophical coherence, etc. does not determine one’s ability to witness a miraculous event (though it could affect their interpretation of it). Craig writes, “Although the apostles were unlearned men, all one needs in order to prove that something happened (say, a disease’s being cured at a sheer verbal command) is five good senses and common sense.”²¹⁸ Thus, Hume cannot simply disregard the eyewitness testimony based on the qualities of the people who witnessed it. There is no evidence that they were mentally ill, pathological liars, etc. They simply reported what they saw, and Hume does not believe it, so he attacks their character. His method of attack is just as weak as when it is used by opposing politicians today.

Hume’s argument on testimony cannot be absolute. First, Hume puts forth his principles as general principles for life. There is nothing that applies them solely to religious matters/miracles. Outside of religious matters, man does not adhere to Hume’s principles in the intellectual world, and thus, they should not apply to the religious realm either. This is true especially of his view of testimonial evidence.²¹⁹ Furthermore, there comes a time where there is so much evidence that Hume’s principles must be overruled. Habermas explains:

Therefore, David Hume’s general point, that dead men don’t rise, may be overridden in a very particular circumstance. Why? Because we have plenty of evidence that this man was dead three days ago, and today we have at least that much evidence if not more, that he was seen again, alive. But then the evidence grew as both singly and in groups, more people also witnessed him alive. Facts

²¹⁷ Corner, *Signs of God*, 18.

²¹⁸ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 255.

²¹⁹ Mavrodes, “David Hume,” 168.

can add up like that until sometimes we just have to throw out hypotheses that say that these things cannot ever happen.²²⁰

People can put forth theoretical ideas and often they can hold to them without any issues.

Hume's point that dead men do not rise is not a principle to be negated in normal circumstances, obviously. But the sheer amount of evidence for this principle being broken by the resurrection of Jesus must override the hypothesis that what normally occurs must be true in every single circumstance. Theoretical reasoning 1700 years later cannot refute eyewitness testimony purely on the basis of not believing in the possibility of miracles.

On Natural Law

Hume's argument hinges on him defining a miracle as a violation of natural law. Scholars debate if this definition is comprehensive. Regardless, most people understand the resurrection as a violation of natural law. But is the resurrection of Jesus truly antithetical to the laws of nature? Currently, resurrection of the dead cannot be explained by scientific reasoning. However, Tucker notes, "[T]here is no law of nature that explicitly contradicts it."²²¹ Furthermore, the laws of nature are simply part of science. Since all of scientific understanding is subject to change as more information becomes available, the understood laws of nature could be altered in the future.

Science is a study of how nature regularly acts. History deals with specificities of what happened in the past, especially anomalies. Miracles are by definition a working of the divine, and thus, must be studied on a case-by-case basis rather than attributing them to laws of nature. Because of this, testimony is much more relevant to studying a miracle claim than the normality

²²⁰ Habermas, *Evidence for the Historical Jesus*, 83.

²²¹ Tucker, "Miracles," 376.

of nature.²²² Hume argues the exact opposite. If testimony for every inexplicable or anomaly is overruled by the typical way nature functions, there are many instances where true historical events would have to be negated. Davis notes, “Just as we came rationally to believe in airplanes, vaccines, and trips to the moon ... so in theory at least we could come rationally to believe in the miracle of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.”²²³ At one point in history, man having the ability to fly would have seemed to breaking the laws of nature. Nowadays, everyone believes that airplanes can fly. Just because something seems outside the realm of possibilities does not mean that it could not happen.

The foundational question of this argument is whether God exists. If God does not exist, then the laws of nature truly govern the world, and nothing is able to override them. However, if there is a God, then the laws of nature depend on God. Swinburne writes, “Any evidence that there is a God, and, in particular, evidence that there is a God of a kind who might be expected to intervene occasionally in the natural order will be evidence supporting historical evidence that he has done so.”²²⁴ If the Christian God exists, he is clearly the kind who would be expected to intervene. He is not subject to any laws of nature. The laws of nature describe nature; they do not prescribe how nature *must* act. Keener says, “No one who believes in a God who created laws of nature believes that God is subject to such laws—as if God illegally ‘violates’ them by doing a

²²² Keener, *Miracles*, 168.

²²³ Davis, “Is It Possible,” 150.

²²⁴ Richard Swinburne, “Evidence for the Resurrection,” in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 198, accessed July 28, 2022, <https://academic-oup-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/book/12487>.

miracle.”²²⁵ He simply created nature to act in a certain way, but he can at any time intervene and cause an event to run contrary to the way the world typically works.

As it pertains to the resurrection, Hume’s argument is that nature behaves in a certain way and that billions of people dying and not coming back to life proves that dead men are not raised naturally. Christians agree. The argument has never been that Jesus was resurrected by natural causes, but rather that God resurrected him.²²⁶ There is simply nothing gained by Hume’s argument using natural law. Because Christians believe that God supersedes natural law at certain points to cause a miracle, claiming that the laws of nature act a certain way is irrelevant to the resurrection. Christians have always believed that God acted contrary to the way the world typically works to raise Jesus from the dead, and so Hume’s argument using natural law is null to anyone who believes Jesus was raised.

Modern Thought on Miracles

If Hume’s argument against miracles were true, the way society views miracles should be relatively uniform, especially outside the church. Strobel notes, “As it turns out, nearly two out of five US adults (38 percent) said they have had such an experience – which means that an eye popping 94,792,000 Americans are convinced that God has performed at least one miracle for them personally.”²²⁷ This does not include people who believe that miracles, such as the resurrection, happened in the past. That number would undoubtedly be much higher. Furthermore, Strobel claims, “A 2004 survey showed that 55 percent of US physicians have seen

²²⁵ Keener, *Miracles Today*, 34.

²²⁶ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 145.

²²⁷ Strobel, *The Case for Miracles*, 30.

results in their patients that they would consider miraculous.”²²⁸ If the *a priori* arguments are correct, these statistics should be very different. If nature acts in uniform ways, how would one explain such a massive number of so-called miracles happening to hundreds of millions of people worldwide? If miraculous testimony is never sufficient, what is to be done with this vast amount of testimony? Ignore it? Prove it wrong? No answer seems sufficient.

The amount of evidence for miracles occurring in general continues to grow, especially in amount of testimony. This is causing the naturalistic arguments about the resurrection to fall away. The arguments simply are not enough to answer the facts. Habermas claims, “Less than 25% of the critics in the last 25 years ... used naturalistic theories anymore. They will usually say something like this: ‘Yeah, [the] facts are good. I don't agree that your idea is the way to go, but you've got an evidence case.’”²²⁹ In other words, the skeptical position is becoming less of an argument against the possibility of miracles and more about rejecting the truth simply based on worldview presuppositions.

Philosophical Thought

The analysis of the *a priori* arguments really centers on the philosophical basis of the arguments. To make these arguments, one must make philosophical assumptions that are not necessarily logical or generally accepted principles. For example, Keener explains, “Scientists are experts about the normal happenings of nature, but when asking whether something outside the norm happens, they no longer speak as scientists per se, because how to address anomalies or metanormal phenomena is a philosophic question.”²³⁰ This does not mean that scientists cannot

²²⁸ Ibid., 31.

²²⁹ *A Historian Explains*, 9:37.

²³⁰ Keener, *Miracles*, 152.

study abnormalities (especially since historical study is a branch of scientific study). However, for Hume to use scientific principles to argue against miracles is not good reasoning since he is using scientific evidence to make a philosophical point. Since miracles are single unique events scattered throughout history and cannot be repeatable, science cannot answer the philosophical questions that revolve around these events.²³¹

The basis of any argument against miracles (not just *a priori* arguments) is a denial of the existence of God (or any divine being). Keener writes, “The denial of God’s existence is, contrary to what some scholars suppose, not widely accepted as a straightforward premise among current philosophers of religion (or even among all scientists) hence will hardly pass as a presupposition without argument.”²³² This is exactly what many scientists and philosophers do. Because Western society is becoming more and more secular, they often assume that atheism is the accepted belief about the divine. Simply claiming that God does not exist is an insufficient foundation for an argument. Assuming that there is no God to intervene in nature is simply a worldview presupposition, not an accepted fact.²³³

The issue for the antisupernaturalist is that they must cling to an atheistic (or agnostic, deist, etc.) framework or else the possibility of miracles is virtually certain. If there is no God, there is no being that could supersede the laws of nature, but if there is a God as the Bible reveals him, it makes the theoretical possibility of miracles near certain. Even Flew claims that if “God exists, the Resurrection becomes ‘enormously more likely.’”²³⁴ This foundation is why this

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., 146.

²³³ Ibid., 142.

²³⁴ Habermas and Flew, *Resurrected?*, 44.

debate is so difficult between antisupernaturalists and Christians; it is not simply a differing interpretation of the facts, but a baseline presupposition that precedes the facts. Corduan explains, “Much of [the debate concerning miracles] has been simply a confrontation of dogmatic commitments, whether it be from the skeptic’s assertion that miracles just cannot happen or from the believer’s demand that all authorized miracles must be accepted as true as a matter of faith.”²³⁵ Because of this, neither side has a completely convincing argument. Each side has dogmatic commitments that will typically not be swayed either way based on either historical evidence or theoretical reasoning.

Is this entire thesis therefore worthless in trying to convince skeptics that the *a priori* arguments are unlikely in light of historical evidence for the resurrection? No. When there is so much historical evidence, the onus is on the skeptic to convince the believer why all the evidence must be rejected. Theoretical reasoning is not enough because it does not answer the evidence. Theories cannot overrule reality. As Köstenberger says, “Arguing that the Bible cannot be true because miracles cannot happen is sort of like arguing the earth cannot revolve around the sun because everyone knows the sun revolves around the earth. Once you allow historical evidence to point you forward rather than holding a prior bias against miracles, the evidence is amazingly strong for a bodily resurrection of Jesus.”²³⁶ Skeptics tend not to study the evidence before making their antisupernaturalist claims (especially everyday people who reject miracles). They would rather hold to their presuppositions than come to terms with the fact that they might be wrong and thus, their entire philosophical framework and religious principles could be demolished. Geivett and Habermas note, “It is possible to cling to the denial of miracles as an

²³⁵ Corduan, “Miracles,” 170.

²³⁶ Köstenberger, Bock, and Chatraw, *Truth in a Culture of Doubt*, sec. The Origins of Christianity.

article of faith without rational justification.”²³⁷ Just as it takes faith to believe that the resurrection occurred, it takes (arguably) more faith to believe in the *a priori* impossibility of miracles.

Furthermore, just as one can believe *a priori* that miracles do not exist without knowing all (or any) of the facts, one can believe that miracles do exist without having all the answers. Geivett and Habermas claim, “The demand for proof as a condition for believing is unrealistically and unnecessarily high. Much of what we believe results from thinking about what makes the most sense in light of all the evidence at our disposal. That is a responsible way to believe.”²³⁸ The important part is that one looks at the arguments from both sides to follow where the evidence leads without assuming his worldview presuppositions as correct. It is also important to not set the bar too high on evidential matters. Keener claims, “I think we need *sufficient* and *credible* evidence, which varies in each case. The standard needs to be reasonable so we're not too credulous but so we don't rule out things at the beginning.”²³⁹ When miracles are considered, instead of agreeing on the facts of what happened and differing on the causes and interpretations (as is typical with natural events), skeptics and believers will disagree on the fundamental facts of what happened.²⁴⁰ This is again the problem that if the skeptic concedes what happened, a miracle becomes the most likely explanation, so therefore, the fundamental facts of the occurrence are disputed.

²³⁷ R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, “Conclusion: Has God Acted in History?,” in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 278.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 277.

²³⁹ Strobel, *The Case for Miracles*, 93.

²⁴⁰ Davis, “Is It Possible,” 151.

When either side comes to the evidence without bias to understand the best explanations, both the believer and the skeptic will find that belief in the resurrection is at the least a rational belief for people to hold, or at the most, something that is completely true on both historical and theological fronts. Even Flew during his atheist days admitted that belief in the resurrection is rational.²⁴¹ As Geivett and Habermas state, “Anyone who genuinely desires to believe what is true about miracles will probably increase the chances of doing that by seeking to believe what is most rational.”²⁴² It is difficult to seek what is most rational and what is true when it stands opposed to one’s beliefs, but only when one looks for what is true rather than what is in agreement with their presuppositions can one understand the best options.

A priori arguments are based on modernist assumptions (that not all modern philosophers and scientists assume). These assumptions are opposed to miracle claims. People on both sides of this issue must ask if this justifies *a priori* rejecting miracles or if these assumptions should be revisited and potential revised.²⁴³ The evidence would seem to argue that a theistic cause for a miraculous event should be accepted as possible (if not likely).

Lastly, this topic is unlikely to convince a skeptic that the resurrection occurred, just as the *a priori* arguments are unlikely to convince a believer that miracles are impossible. However, this is not because of the type or amount of evidence or the interpretation and analysis thereof. Habermas remembers Flew saying, “Christians believe because they want to believe. Atheists don’t believe because they don’t want to believe.”²⁴⁴ This does not mean that believers should

²⁴¹ Habermas and Flew, *Resurrected?*, 22.

²⁴² Geivett and Habermas, “Conclusion,” 278.

²⁴³ Keener, *Miracles*, 90.

²⁴⁴ Habermas and Flew, *Resurrected?*, 71. Flew did not remember saying this, but he did not reject the logic of it.

stop examining the evidence for the resurrection just because skeptics will continue to reject it. There will always be some people that are examining the evidence for the resurrection because they are truly curious if there is any true evidence for its historical occurrence. This work has established that there is a plethora of evidence for the resurrection and enough to at least call into question, if not invalidate the *a priori* arguments. Just because many will choose to continue to reject the possibility of miracles does not mean that the resurrection did not happen. If skeptics ever want to win this debate, they must abandon the foundational principles of the *a priori* arguments and have a more complete answer to the continually growing amount of evidence that Jesus truly rose from the dead.

Conclusion

The evidence this work has surveyed, and the analysis thereof, shows that while the resurrection of Jesus can never be definitively proven, it is a more probable hypothesis than the validity of the *a priori* arguments. The *a priori* arguments promoted by people such as Spinoza, Hume, Flew, and more recently, Ehrman all argue against the possibility of miracles before the evidence is even considered. These arguments (especially Hume's), center around the laws of nature, rejecting all relevant testimony, and the overall probability of miracles occurring, are quite easily argued on a theoretical level. The circular reasoning and anti-supernatural biases that are the core of these arguments are very easy to rebuke. However, theoretical arguing will only end with both sides clinging harder to their preconceived notions about miracles. Anti-supernaturalists will reject miracles, supernaturalists will generally accept them.

If there is evidence that makes a miraculous event such as the resurrection likely to have occurred, this would thereby prove the *a priori* arguments wrong. However, since resurrection cannot be proven, the *a priori* arguments can at most be shown to be unlikely. The evidence for

the resurrection is astounding. From the death of Jesus, to the discovery of the empty tomb, to the resurrection appearances, to the conversion of James and Paul, the amount of evidence continues to grow as time passes. As Habermas's minimal facts state, even many skeptics will accept much of the evidence for individual facts regarding the resurrection even though they themselves do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. While this is not sufficient to prove Jesus' resurrection, it demands answers. The *a priori* arguments claim that this evidence should be rejected on the grounds that "miracles do not happen." This debate will continue until the end of time on philosophical, theoretical, and theological levels. But the skeptic must have answers to not just some, but all of the evidence for the resurrection.

There are alternative theories, such as the disciples raiding the tomb, the hallucination theory, and the swoon theory. While these alternatives may (at best) answer one aspect of the available evidence, no alternative theory comes close to answering all of it. To do so, multiple theories must be applied. With each theory that is added, the likelihood of it being correct plummets. Even so, the likelihood would have to surpass the possibility of the resurrection hypothesis being correct. As of now, there are no superior alternatives.

Those searching for alternatives and those who promote the *a priori* arguments tend to have an antibiblical bias and/or bias against historical study and miracles. Because they do not believe the Bible on a theological level, they reject it on a historical level. Thus, they reject the miracles (and therefore, the resurrection) that are written within. They also claim that historians cannot study miracle claims due to the nature of historical study being incompatible with miracles. They approach miracles from a theological/philosophical position rather than a historical position; they combine the divine cause with the historical event rather than looking at what happened historically *and then* investigating the causes.

When analyzing Hume's main argument while considering the evidence for the resurrection, his argument breaks down. His argument concerning the probabilities of miracles is relevant only if miracles are known to never occur; no believer disagrees that miracles are not the most probable occurrence in everyday life. Further, as it pertains to the resurrection, all of the evidence might actually make the resurrection a high probability of what occurred, instead of maximally improbable like Hume claims.

His arguments on testimony do not apply generally to all aspects of life. He rejects all testimony based on preconceived notions rather than analysis of the testimony itself. He also makes no claims about if one were to personally witness a miracle, thus raising the question of the hundreds of witnesses of the resurrection. He also stoops low enough to attack the intelligence of the New Testament witnesses, which is an irrelevant point because level of knowledge has no effect on one's ability to witness an event.

Lastly, his positions on the laws of nature are simply another presupposition. He turns the laws of nature into a prescriptive law that God (if he exists) must abide by. His understanding of the laws of nature makes it irrelevant to the resurrection. Christians have never argued that Jesus was raised by natural causes but rather that it was a moment where God worked outside of nature. Furthermore, the defining of miracles by way of natural law is a post-Enlightenment understanding of miracles with no basis in ancient thought.

Modern thought and belief of miracles raises many questions for Hume's argument. An extremely large amount of people claim to have witnessed something miraculous. As more people claim to witness miraculous events, the *a priori* events become less likely. Some events can be ruled out *a priori*, but it is quite difficult to do so on the scale of thousands (or millions) of witnessed events.

When both sides of the argument are deconstructed, it comes down to philosophical and theological presuppositions. Atheistic worldviews must find a way to deny the resurrection and miracles more broadly. They must do this *a priori* because with a miracle such as the resurrection, no one is able to explain all the facts, so the facts must be rejected before they are considered. Those who are theists, on the other hand, will generally reject these arguments and generally accept the possibility of miracles, and thus, will accept (or at least consider) the resurrection hypothesis.

Hume's argument is still widely popular today. It is the foundation of most current anti-supernaturalist arguments against miracles. Even if Hume's argument were true, for it to be a strong argument, it would have to answer at the very least the minimal facts, as well as other less agreed upon facts. If the evidence for the resurrection cannot be answered, then not only are believers justified in believing the resurrection hypothesis, but also the *a priori* arguments are unlikely and quite weak. As Habermas claims,

When alternative explanations fail to explain the known data, the impressive evidences that establish the disciples' experiences as firmly as anything in the New Testament now become impressive evidences for the Resurrection appearances themselves. So given a reasonable explanation, the disciples' experiences in light of the failure of alternatives indicate that the disciples were vindicated: they witnessed Resurrection appearances of Jesus.²⁴⁵

To find the truth, one must follow the facts. Until skeptics can truly look at the evidence for the resurrection apart from a Humean presuppositional worldview, the question of miracles and the resurrection will continue to be debated.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 93.

Bibliography

- Baehr, Jason S. "A Priori and A Posteriori." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed June 2, 2022. <https://iep.utm.edu/apriori/>.
- Beckwith, Francis J. "History and Miracles." In *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, 86–98. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997.
- Bird, Michael F. *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus' Divine Nature---A Response to Bart Ehrman*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014. Accessed July 20, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397664>.
- Blomberg, Craig L. "Jesus of Nazareth: How Historians Can Know Him and Why It Matters." *Christ on Campus Initiative* (2008): 29.
- Corduan, Winfried. "Miracles." In *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview*, edited by Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004. Accessed March 29, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3316970>.
- Corner, David. "Miracles." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d. Accessed March 29, 2022. <https://iep.utm.edu/miracles/>.
- Corner, Mark. *Signs of God: Miracles and Their Interpretation*. Abingdon, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005. Accessed March 28, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=429684>.
- Craig, William Lane. "Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?" In *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, edited by Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland. Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 1996. Accessed May 18, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397732>.
- . *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010. Accessed June 16, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4067915>.
- . *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008. Accessed March 29, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=355122>.
- . "The Empty Tomb of Jesus." In *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, 247–262. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997.
- . *The Son Rises: Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000.
- Cross, Anthony R. "Historical Methodology and New Testament Study." *Themelios* 22, no. 3 (1997). Accessed April 28, 2022.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/historical-methodology-and-new-testament-study/>.

- Davis, Stephen T. "Is It Possible to Know That Jesus Was Raised from the Dead?" *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 1, no. 2 (1984): 147–159.
- Edwards, William D., Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer. "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ." *JAMA* 255, no. 11 (March 21, 1986): 1455–1463.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2014. Accessed May 11, 2022. <https://liberty.alma.exlibrisgroup.com>.
- . *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . *Jesus Before the Gospels*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2016. Accessed April 14, 2022. <https://liberty-alma-exlibrisgroup-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>.
- . *Jesus, Interrupted*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009.
- Evans, Craig A. "Getting the Burial Traditions and Evidences Right." In *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus' Divine Nature - A Response to Bart Ehrman*, edited by Michael F. Bird, 71–93. Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014. Accessed June 1, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397664>.
- . "The Testimony of Josephus and the Burial of Jesus." In *Raised on the Third Day: Defending the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, edited by W. David Beck and Michael R. Licona, 103–112. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. Accessed April 22, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6564531>.
- Flew, Antony. "Neo-Humean Arguments About the Miraculous." In *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, 45–58. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997.
- Flew, Antony, and Gary Habermas. "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: A Discussion between Antony Flew and Gary Habermas." *Philosophia Christi* 6, no. 2 (2004): 197–211.
- Foreman, Mark W. "The Image on the Shroud: A Best Explanations Approach." In *Raised on the Third Day: Defending the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, edited by W. David Beck and Michael R. Licona. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. Accessed May 25, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6564531>.
- Geivett, R. Douglas. "The Evidential Value of Miracles." In *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, 178–196. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997.

- Geivett, R. Douglas, and Gary R. Habermas. "Conclusion: Has God Acted in History?" In *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, 276–279. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997.
- Gould, Paul, Travis Dickinson, and Keith Loftin. *Stand Firm: Apologetics and the Brilliance of the Gospel*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018.
- Habermas, Gary R. *Evidence for the Historical Jesus: Is the Jesus of History the Christ of Faith?* Lynchburg, VA: GaryHabermas.com, 2015.
- . "The Case for Christ's Resurrection." In *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview*, edited by Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004. Accessed March 29, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3316970>.
- . *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*. Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1996. Accessed May 24, 2022. <https://liberty.alma.exlibrisgroup.com>.
- . "The Minimal Facts Approach to the Resurrection of Jesus: The Role of Methodology as a Crucial Component in Establishing Historicity." *Southeastern Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (2012): 15–26.
- . "The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus." In *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, 262–276. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997.
- Habermas, Gary R., and Antony Flew. *Resurrected? An Atheist and Theist Dialogue*. Edited by John F. Ankerberg. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010. Accessed May 24, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=616348>.
- Habermas, Gary R., and Michael R. Licona. *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004.
- Hume, David. "Of Miracles." In *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, 29–44. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997.
- Keener, Craig S. *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011. Accessed April 7, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=879103>.
- . *Miracles Today: The Supernatural Work of God in the Modern World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021. Accessed April 15, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6736324>.
- Köstenberger, Andreas J., Darrell L. Bock, and Josh Chatraw. *Truth in a Culture of Doubt: Engaging Skeptical Challenges to the Bible*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014.
- Lewis, C. S. *Miracles*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1960.

- Licona, Michael R. "Fish Tails: Bart Ehrman's Red Herrings and the Resurrection of Jesus." In *Come Let Us Reason: New Essays in Christian Apologetics*, edited by Paul Copan and William Lane Craig. B&H Publishing Group, 2012. Accessed April 22, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=867863>.
- . "Jesus's Resurrection, Realism, and the Role of the Criteria of Authenticity." In *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History: Criteria and Context in the Study of Christian Origins*, edited by Darrell L. Bock and J. Ed Komoszewski, 285–304. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019. Accessed May 4, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6121629>.
- . *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.
- Mavrodes, George I. "David Hume and the Probability of Miracles." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43, no. 3 (1998): 167–182.
- McGrew, Timothy, and Lydia McGrew. "The Argument From Miracles: A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth." In *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland. West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012. Accessed June 16, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=437472>.
- Pines, Shlomo. *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and Its Implications*. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1971.
- Robinson, John A. T. *The Human Face of God*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1973.
- Saad, Lydia, and Zach Hrynowski. "How Many Americans Believe in God?" *Gallup*. Last modified June 24, 2022. Accessed July 15, 2022. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/268205/americans-believe-god.aspx>.
- Schlesinger, George N. "Miracles and Probabilities." *Noûs* 21, no. 2 (1987): 219–232.
- Spinoza, Benedict. *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*. Translated by R. H. M. Elwes. Revised edition. Vol. 1. London: George Bell and Sons, 1891. Accessed April 14, 2022. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/elwes-the-chief-works-of-benedict-de-spinoza-vol-1>.
- Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.
- . *The Case for Miracles: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Supernatural*. First Edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2018.
- Swinburne, Richard. "Evidence for the Resurrection." In *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, edited by Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998. Accessed July 28, 2022. <https://academic-oup-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/book/12487>.

- . *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003. Accessed June 16, 2022. <https://liberty.alma.exlibrisgroup.com>.
- Tucker, Aviezer. “Miracles, Historical Testimonies, and Probabilities.” *History and Theory* 44, no. 3 (2005): 373–390.
- Wink, Walter. “Write What You See: An Odyssey.” *The Fourth R*, May 1994. Accessed July 27, 2022. <https://www.westarinstitute.org/editorials/write-what-you-see>.
- Yamauchi, Edwin M. “Jesus Outside the New Testament: What Is the Evidence?” In *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, edited by Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland. Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 1996. Accessed May 18, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397732>.
- A Case Against Miracles*. Video lecture. Lynchburg, VA, 2014. Accessed June 1, 2022. https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/125860/pages/watch-a-case-against-miracles?module_item_id=13967821.
- A Historian Explains the Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus (Dr. Gary Habermas)*, 2019. Accessed May 24, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWSG5okmUr8>.
- “Definition of a Priori.” *Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary*, n.d. Accessed July 15, 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/a+priori>.
- Jesus’ Post-Death Appearances*. Video lecture. Lynchburg, VA, 2014. Accessed March 29, 2022. https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/125860/pages/watch-recognized-historical-data-and-defining-the-minimal-facts?module_item_id=13967905.
- The Death of Jesus By Crucifixion*. Video lecture. Lynchburg, VA, 2014. Accessed March 29, 2022. https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/125860/pages/watch-recognized-historical-data-and-defining-the-minimal-facts?module_item_id=13967905.