

The Case for Faith

by Lee Strobel:

A Critique and Response

Critique by Paul Doland, Response by Dennis Jensen

Lee Strobel has written four books in a series, *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Faith*, *The Case for a Creator*, and *The Case for the Real Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2007; respectively). All four I have found to be very effective in arguing their respective claims. Strobel has interviewed various leading scholars in several different fields to present the strongest arguments available for Christianity. He has taken the time to present opposing arguments and claims within his books, so to a considerable degree he has presented possibly the most important pros and cons one would need to consider. But anyone who is honestly searching and evaluating the various religious and secular claims should look at the more developed critiques of Strobel's arguments as well. Paul Doland claims to have presented one such critique of Strobel's *The Case for Faith*, entitled "The Case Against Faith."

The following article contains the basic content of my debate with Doland, carried out from 2008 to 2010, following from his critique. References to Doland's critique and similar critiques and to Doland's articles containing selections from this debate can be found at the end of this article. I will sometimes agree with Doland and disagree with the Christian writers he critiques; so this is not a true defense of the entire book or any particular individual's arguments or claims. I think the reader will see that ultimately Doland's critique is insubstantial in refuting Christianity and that the final case for Christianity is sufficiently strong to persuade any reasonable person.

At the close of this debate are some additional comments concerning my methodology and references, as well as comments regarding Doland's approach. Included in this article are, to my knowledge, all of Doland's major arguments and many passing comments.

The following amounts to nearly 150,000 words and equivalent to over 400 printed pages. Given its length, some readers may wish to merely browse through the subject headings and follow only specific discussions. Others will find the entire debate interesting and edifying. The give and take of dialogue brings out the nuanced points of argument in ways some will never otherwise experience. This debate, because of its length, is produced as a PDF for the reader to view. Three particularly interesting portions, one on the problem of evil, one on God condemning honest unbelievers, and one concerning the evidence of religious experience have been made directly accessible in the webpage itself.

When quoting Doland or myself or any other speaker/writer, I have placed a number following the speaker's name or the quotation. The number "1" will follow "Strobel" or one of his interviewees. Number "2" will follow Doland's name when he first responds to Strobel's book. Number "3" will follow my name for my response to Doland's last statement, etc. This will help the reader follow the sometimes extended line of dialogue. I have also underlined those portions of my statements to which Doland has selected to respond.

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OBJECTION 1: SINCE EVIL AND SUFFERING EXIST, A LOVING GOD CANNOT

Jensen3: Doland critiques Peter Kreeft's response to the problem of evil. After submitting the problem in surely the most powerful way it can be presented, through examples from human history, Kreeft responds that "finite humans are not capable of understanding the plans and reasoning of an infinite God" (Doland's words).

Kreeft originally gave an illustration of a bear caught in a hunter's trap. The hunter wants to release the bear and has to shoot it with a tranquilizer to do so. The bear thinks such suffering only means the hunter wants to hurt it. Doland responds that Kreeft was arguing that because we have no reason to think God has no good reason for allowing evil that there must be a God who has good reason for allowing evil: there must be a greater good.

Doland in turn responds that though it might be true that an all good God does have reason for allowing such suffering, there is no reason to believe this is true and thus no reason to believe anything other than that God is evil, unjust, lacking power, or nonexistent. I then pointed out that Kreeft never claimed here that there must be a God who has good reason for allowing evil.

Doland's response greatly misunderstands the argument and the onus of proof. An answer to the problem of evil need only show a fallacy in reasoning; it need not provide evidence in order to work. We who can reason, unlike the trapped bear in Kreeft's illustration, should recognize that we have no more or less reason to think that a good God has good reason for allowing this suffering; there may be "no reason to assume that there is a greater good to come from injustice" but likewise there is no reason to assume that it will not.

The problem of evil is an argument against God's existence or goodness and as such has the onus of proof. If it cannot be shown to be impossible

or improbable that there could be a God who has such good reason for allowing any such evil, then the argument from evil fails. That is all that Kreeft's responding argument attempts. Kreeft does not conclude that "there must be a greater good," as Doland claims, he only concludes that the argument from evil has not demonstrated or given evidence against the possibility that God intends and will achieve a greater good.

Doland4: [Responding to the first underlined sentence.] I'll tell you what. I'll come over to your house, beat the ____ outa you, kill the rest of your family, steal all of your belongings, etc. Then, I'll say, hey, you can't prove it won't be good for you, so, why are you assuming it is bad? By what basis can you predict the future and know that you won't be grateful for my actions sometime in the future? Would you buy this? Don't give me this ____, Jensen.

Jensen5: I've never claimed such a state isn't bad; what I had said was that God can bring good out of such an evil such that it will in the long run be a greater good. For me to suffer like this is an evil and Doland would deserve to face judgment for doing this. But it wasn't just Doland who had inflicted this pain, it was also God who allowed it. True, but God has the right to allow this or to do this if a greater good may come of it; another human does not unless it is God who directs them to do so. Just because good may come of such evil does not mean one should be grateful to the one who wrongly does it.

Since this supposedly happened to me and since I am a Christian because of my evaluation of the evidence for Christianity, I have reason to believe that a greater good will in fact come of it. I can't be grateful to Doland for doing this but should I be grateful to God? If we know that God is going to bring a greater good out of it, then yes, if we can bring ourselves to do so, we should be grateful to God for it. But we are very human and we cannot very easily reach that point. Few of us can say with Job, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Few of us can act upon the knowledge that our loved ones who were tragically murdered

are likely so happy now that they would not want to come back to be with us. We cannot accept this because we still want to be with them. We know that we will be with them again but we do not want to wait. We don't want to endure the separation. It is not reason that keeps us from being grateful to God for our suffering, it is our desires. But these are also the desires we should be willing to give up for the sake of our larger desires, if we but think through exactly what we do as Christians desire.

On the other hand, if you think you have good independent evidence that there is no such God, then you will have reason to think that there will be no such compensation and justifying reason for this evil.

Okay, so now we've looked at both ends of the spectrum; let's swing back to the middle, the exact middle. Suppose we start on equal ground with no more reason to believe than to disbelieve in this God. That is, we can only believe that which is given in this particular suffering we have endured. In that case we would have no reason to claim that there is no God who will bring good out of this evil or any other evil. With no evidence or with equal evidence, evil in itself is no evidence against God. Because on the possibility that there is such a God, we can think of good reasons God could allow evil that a greater good might occur. But even if we couldn't think of such reasons, we shouldn't really expect to be able to do so. Should we be able to understand God's mind? It seems pretty obvious that God could have good reasons for allowing evil that we will never have the intelligence to understand.

Our true agnostic (one who thinks there is equal evidence or lack of evidence for theism and atheism) should say, "I don't really know that there is a God like the Christians claim. If there is, I know such a God will bring good out of this. But until I have reason to believe that, I don't have reason to think that some greater good will or will not come of this." Should this person accept Doland statement, "Hey, you can't prove it won't be good for you [in the long run], so why are you assuming it is bad"? Well, this statement might be taken to intimate that one should think the outcome will

be good. Doland assumes this logic is bogus, and to that degree I agree with him. The problem is that this is not what I had claimed.

I did make a statement above that I think should be slightly reformulated. Assuming we are putting ourselves in the place of a true agnostic, I said that we “should recognize that we have no more or less reason to think that a good God has good reason for allowing this suffering.” If we conjecture that there is a good God, then we should accept that this God would most likely have good reason for allowing suffering. Rather, we should not conjecture that there is or is not such a God until we have evidence. Suffering in the world is not evidence against there being such a God. The mere existence of evil in the world, in whatever degree it exists, is not in itself more compatible with atheism than theism. [Last sentence added 20Mr10.]

True agnostics would still have reason to be angry with the culprit, but they should (if they are being rational and to the degree that they can be rational at such a time) keep in mind that this may be something of which a greater good will come. They should keep this in mind since they should be aware of the possibility that there is a God like the Christians claim. I don't think anyone is unaware that there could be a good God who has the power to do something like that (bring some greater good out of some suffering). Some people repress that kind of thinking or eventually, for whatever other reasons, come to think that there is no such God; but I think none of us are quite so closed-minded or set in our beliefs to begin with. Some people are so used to the idea that there is no such God, it is so ingrained in their world view, that Doland's claims do ring true to them. I think Doland is likely in that same group since he thinks it so obvious that he is right. But we need to remember that if one begins with a tacit assumption that God is not there, then of course one cannot see that a greater good might come of most undeserved suffering in the world.

So we should be able to see that Doland's claims amount to little more than the creation of an emotional image with a couple of expletives added to

make it sound as though his views are obviously correct. A little honest and rational thinking cuts through his delusion.

Doland4: [Responding to the second underlined sentence in Jensen3.]
One wonders exactly what *would* be evidence against such to Jensen?
Again, let me come over to your house and beat the ____ outa you and see if you don't find that as evidence against my having good intentions.

Jensen5: There are two questions here that have not been asked previously. The second question is, "Do we have reason to think Doland had bad intentions had he done this evil?" Yes we do because we know what humans usually do. We know he probably would have only bad intentions if he were to do this.

We cannot say the same about God. We do not have the same data to compare to produce a probability claim. I've presented some arguments to claim that if we and everything else that exists do have a creator, then this creator is more intuitively likely to be good. If we assume that this creator controls all existence, then this God also would have good reason for allowing evil. We cannot say that a good God has no good morally justifying reason for allowing evil while we can definitely say that beyond any reasonable doubt that Doland does not have a morally justifying reason to do the evil he has suggested. [Last sentence added 5Jul09. Three sentences removed and other minor revisions 24Fb15.]

What about Doland's first question, What exactly would count as evidence against God for me? I suppose most importantly, if I were to find myself alive after death and if I were to experience a world, whether a spiritual universe or something like it, devoid of God, that would give me a very strong inclination to disbelieve in God. Now admittedly, not even this would be conclusive. It would certainly falsify important features of my current Christian belief, but it still would not absolutely demonstrate that there could not be a God. A deistic God might exist who has long ago left us on our

own. Or a good theistic God might still be there who requires us to live a little longer (in another or other worlds after death) without direct undeniable awareness of this God. If, in this spiritual world, the millennia begin to tick away and I and everyone else I encounter still have no experience of God, then my belief in such a theistic God will, for all practical purposes, become nonexistent.

I think there are other more practical, "in this world," methods of falsification, though they are far from conclusive. If there were absolutely no evidence for Christianity or even theism, we should not believe it. In principle we could not say that it is definitely false, but we would still be in error to claim that it is true. We would need to wait for the next life to verify belief in either. (This John Hick called eschatological verification. The scenarios suggested in the last paragraph we might call eschatological falsification.)

So if no one had any religious experience of God or any other spiritual entities; if we had no historical evidence of prophecies or miracles; if all of the philosophical arguments for God could fairly easily be refuted; if the best scientific findings pointed most clearly to a natural origin of the universe or a beginningless universe; if science showed us how easily chemical life could originate in our universe or most other possible but different kinds of universes; if no one, or at least only very few with very apparent psychologically unstable personalities, claimed God existed or claimed a desire for God to exist; then I would admit that the case is pretty closed against anyone rightly claiming that God exists. Remember however, this would not give us reason to claim that God does not exist. Many people think the above state, or something close to it, is the way we find our current state of knowledge. Many of these people honestly admit that agnosticism, not atheism, is the proper conclusion, however.

There may be some other related reasons for disbelief or absence of belief I would admit to, but I'm sure Doland has heard enough. My question to Doland would now be very similar: What evidence would he admit to that

would persuade him to believe? It seems that if we had God appear to Doland in any form close to God's actual being, Doland still wouldn't believe.

Doland2: Arguing that there must be no God because of the suffering in the world is sometimes called an "argument from outrage." But should one not be "outraged" at the injustice of the world?

Jensen3: Indeed, should one? Do we have any grounds to be "outraged" or even angry if we do not know that there is no reason for this suffering?

Doland thinks that the fact that the poorest people suffer most is significant. Quoting from Corey Washington's debate with William Lane Craig, Washington claims that Craig says that generally, "the innocent, the weak, and the poor . . . suffer, so the rich can show their colors, can be courageous, and develop themselves into moral beings."

But as of yet we haven't actually looked at any real theodicies, any explanations as to why God might allow evil. We have only considered the theistic defense that we do not know that God does not have good reason. This defense says that we don't need to know what God's good reason is for allowing this inequitable suffering. Developing courage may have nothing to do with it or it might be but a small and relatively insignificant part.

After having considered Kreeft's argument for many years, I must confess that I just don't think it can be answered. (I first heard it from philosophers like Alvin Plantinga and George Mavrodes in the 70's, though that certainly was not the first time it was argued.) If God's intelligence to us is like our intelligence compared to a snail's, we really shouldn't expect to know what God's reason is for allowing evil. We have no way of knowing that this is not the case. We can't even say that it is probably not the case. As we will see later, this argument which we might call skeptical theism fails only if we

consider something like certain extreme views of hell, situations in which it is inconceivable that God could allow a greater good to occur while this evil is allowed.

It is interesting that Pierre Bayle, the great fideistic philosopher who had set out the classical formulation of the argument from the problem of evil, believed the same of his argument against God. Many philosophers throughout history have agreed with Bayle's view (though I think without sufficient reason). So I think many atheists, possibly including Doland, will find disconcerting, perhaps even astonishing, my claim that Kreeft's argument is irrefutable.

At this point I should say that I think there are good theodicies that we should consider and that the best ones are found in the Scripture. The first is called the recipient oriented free will theodicy. The most basic biblical theodicy is found in the first couple of chapters of the book of Job. God allows undeserved suffering because God needs to know if we will hold fast to God or turn against God in the face of suffering. This is, by definition, a God who deserves our highest commitment. So, as long as God does deserve our commitment and is good (and the following conditions are met) it would be evil to reject God for allowing us suffering.

Two conditions must be met for this argument to work: First, God need's good reason for allowing undeserved suffering. Secondly, God must provide compensation, or, if you will, "redemption" of the evil. The reason God allows these evils is to see whether we will cling to God in the face of the emotional temptation to reject God. We have no rational justification for turning against God at this point; it is only our emotions that drive us to reject God.

As for the "compensation" part, Kreeft's quotation of Theresa illustrates this: In the next life, the worst pain in this life will seem like a night spent in a bad motel. Or think of St. Paul's words that the sufferings we now face are not even worth comparing to the joy we will experience in the next life

(Romans 8:18). And the pain Paul willingly endured was enormous (see 2 Corinthians 11).

The question applies to the atheist as well as the theist, to the one who seeks God as well as one who hates God, for even the atheist will consider an hypothetical God when facing suffering. The atheist must inevitably face the thought, “If there is a God and it is not inconceivable that this God has good reason for allowing this suffering, how will I respond to this God?”

A second biblical theodicy says that while there must be undeserved suffering in this life, it needn't be a bad as it sometimes turns out to be. We are to seek to alleviate suffering when we are able to do so. God needs to know whether we will seek to have God's heart, to become like God; to care for the persecuted, the dispossessed, the victims. This is the observer oriented free will theodicy. Jesus went about healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead. He said he had come to proclaim freedom to the captives. God's Kingdom advances when this happens, he said. When an atheist or a Christian gives medicine to the sick, gives food to the hungry, prays for the suffering, shelters or hides the innocent who are oppressed, God's Kingdom advances.

In both of these theodicies I have said that God needs to know our choices. But it is not simply that God needs to know such things, it is also that we become something different by our choices. If our choices cannot be made by anyone else, then the only way I can be a good person is by choosing to do something good. For God to simply make me good could never make me good in quite the same way.

We must not underestimate how important it is that we see that the choices we make, whether when we see someone else suffer or when we are suffering ourselves, are among the most important choices we could ever make.

With these two basic theodicies at hand, let's go on to see how they might apply to the rest of Doland's critique.

Kreeft uses an example of his daughter suffering a pin prick in order to have the achievement of threading a needle. Doland complains that "a valid explanation for a little pain does not explain extensive, intense, and apparently gratuitous pain." But Kreeft's point is simply that because we can see explanations for some pains, it may be that there are good explanations for great pain. Isn't that to be expected if God's plans and understanding are almost infinitely beyond our own?

Furthermore, given the theistic view, both the lesser pain in Kreeft's example and the greater pain Doland is concerned about are gratuitous only from the mistaken viewpoint of the sufferer. The one allowing the pain in both cases knows why it is being allowed. So it begs the question to say that great pain is gratuitous or even apparently gratuitous. Also, as Paul and Theresa have pointed out (above), our greatest suffering is in the long run more like the child's pin prick. So a comparison of "extensive, intense" pain to a child's minute suffering does "explain" the greater pain. It explains it in the sense that we can see the kinds of things that would make it possible that it would have an adequate explanation.

What of Washington's complaint of the inequity of suffering between the poor and the rich? Well, there is and has always been inequitable, undeserved suffering and not merely between the poor and the wealthy. Nearly all undeserved suffering could be less if we were to fulfill our responsibility to seek to alleviate it. God does not want it to be as bad as we have so often seen it become. But God leaves in our hands the alleviation of much suffering so that we (all people) may have the responsibility of choosing to either create something good out of an evil or letting an evil grow unchecked.

But look how horrible it is, Doland complains, shouldn't God do something about it if we don't? "God could solve the problem [a drought in Africa], or at

least mitigate it a great deal, by sending more rain. Is this really too much to ask of a compassionate, miracle-working God?" But if God will provide the compensation for this suffering, that would make it almost as though it had never happened. Also, since God wants us to make moral choices regarding such evils—sometimes very costly choices to ourselves, either as the one enduring the pain or as an observer—then God would have good reason for allowing it. But remember, even with the necessity of such testing, God still does not want it to be as bad as it could be without our intervention.

Doland4: [Responding to the first underlined sentence.] If this is the case ["God's intelligence to us is like our intelligence compared to a snail's"], then God should not be surprised that I am like the snail and don't understand. If God didn't give me enough intelligence to understand, whose fault is that?

Jensen5: Having the intelligence of a snail is only how our intelligence *compares* to God's. Since we are actually reasoning humans, we have enough intelligence that we can understand the status of the argument. We should see that we should not be able to understand what God's reason is for allowing evil and that we cannot say that God has no good reason for allowing evil. Since we have no good reason for saying that God has no good reason for allowing undeserved evil, the argument from evil fails. This we have sufficient intelligence to understand.

Doland4: [Responding to the second underlined sentence group in Jensen3 above, that God needs to know our choice concerning God in the face of suffering.] Read Job again. God specifically says he got talked into it by Satan. And he was proving Job's steadfastness to Satan, not to himself. God says, "You have incited me to ruin Job for no reason" [2:3]. GOD HIMSELF says there was no reason for it, other than he got talked into it by Satan.

Jensen5: For God to be incited “to destroy Job without reason” or “without cause” means not that God had no reason for this action but that Job didn’t deserve it. When God brings judgment, it is because we deserve it. That’s the missing “reason” God is talking about here. If there were *absolutely* no reason for it, Satan would have said, “Hey, why don’t you let me bring Job some real suffering?” and God would have said, “Sure, why not?” It isn’t merely that Satan talked God into it and that was God’s only reason for doing it; it was that Satan gave God a good reason for testing Job and that was the reason God allowed it. So it wasn’t truly without reason, except that Job didn’t deserve it.

Secondly, remember that we have already demonstrated that God could not have known what Job’s responses would have been ahead of time (at least not without them actually occurring). If God knew what the outcome would have been without its occurring, God would have just told Satan, “No, Job won’t fail me; I just know this.” In this case Satan would have known God cannot lie and he would have known that God knows whether this stated fact was true or not; so Satan wouldn’t have been able to go on to pretend that there is any reason to test Job. So neither Satan nor God knew Job’s future actions before they occurred (or without their occurring).

Doland says God was talked into it by Satan. Not necessarily, or at least not entirely. Notice that the reasons Satan brought forward and the reasons God allowed this were to test Job: “Job just serves you because of the good things you’ve given him,” or “he just reveres you because you won’t let any pain touch him.” If Satan talked God into allowing this, it was because God wanted to know if it was true or not. If God didn’t care to know, God would never have conceded to allow this.

Did God think, “I don’t really care to know whether Job will stay faithful to me in the face of suffering, but Satan and most anyone else who can think about it want to know. They all think Job serves and honors me because I prosper him and I don’t let him suffer. So I’ll allow Job suffering just because Satan and everyone else want to know.” No, this is not at all

feasible. God would have no reason to allow this suffering just because Satan wants to know something God does not care about.

Now does Doland think God was so stupid as to not be able to think of this without Satan's help? Wouldn't God have wondered if it were true? If it was so obvious to Satan and most anyone else that maybe Job is righteous just because of these benefits, wouldn't God want to know as well? Certainly God searches the depth of the human heart and the deepest human motivation without such testing. But such searching only shows our present motivation and decisions and our motivations in harsher circumstances; it does not show what we will choose in those harsher circumstances, how we will respond to God in the face of pain.

We're not told Satan had anything to do with God's decision to test Abraham when God told him to sacrifice his son. In this case, as with Job, God needed to know what his choice would be. Moses said God led the children of Israel in the desert for 40 years in order to test them to know what was in their hearts (Deuteronomy 8:2,16). Psalm 66 (10-12) speaks of God testing the Jewish people with affliction that they might be purified like silver. James said that we should consider it a great joy when we face trials that test our faith (1:3,12) and Peter spoke of our suffering as being a trial or testing (1 Peter 1:6-7). In all of these except Job there is no mention of Satan suggesting this to God. It's apparent that the idea of testing people as to their choices, and especially with suffering, is found throughout the Scripture without any need of Satan to suggest it to God. It also appears that in the story of Job, though this "adversary" might have actually been there to contend for Job's testing, Satan is hardly needed. Clearly God was aware of the need for such testing without Satan mentioning it. As so much of the Scripture teaches, this was something God needed to know whether Satan tried to persuade God or not.

So when God told Satan that he incited God to ruin Job without reason, this meant that Job didn't deserve this suffering. And this is something God needed to know whether Satan said anything or not. God needed to know

this in the other examples of testing recounted in the Bible where Satan is not mentioned. Satan was just there in Job to emphasize the point.

Now for the sake of the argument, let's assume Doland is right and the Bible does not teach that God wants to know our choices regarding God in the face of suffering. In that case I would say first that this theodicy at least fits the biblical data. But secondly, this would be a theodicy that has been accepted and expounded for many centuries even if it is not an obviously biblical theodicy. There are a number of non-biblical theodicies, some of which might be true. Even if this is not a biblical theodicy as I have claimed it to be, this is a most feasible theodicy and Doland has yet to refute it.

Doland4: [Continuing Doland4 above.] Explain this to me: if even GOD can get talked into doing wrong things by Satan, where does he have the moral right to judge us? Satan talks God into allowing the ruining of Job, and that's just all fine and good. But if Adam and Eve get talked into eating an apple, God doesn't just punish them, but everybody who ever lives thereafter. You don't notice a slight problem with this?

Jensen5: I've shown that God has not done any "wrong things" by bringing suffering to Job since God had the right to do this so long as a greater good will come of it. By the same argument I had given, God also has the right to judge us. We will see if Doland has attempted or will attempt to refute my argument. God has the right to allow suffering which we, on our own, would not have the right inflict on others. Adam and Eve were punished for eating the fruit because it was wrong for them to do so because God commanded them not to do so.

I've also shown that humanity was not "punished" for Adam and Eve's sin. They do endure a world that contains suffering and death because of Adam's sin (though even without the Fall there would still be suffering in the world). That is, they carry in themselves "a part of Adam" as it were. They (we) might be said to be punished for Adam's sin only in the sense that (in

part) we are Adam. But the important point is that whether we are punished for Adam's sin or whether we are simply born into a world of suffering and death, we are still offered a way of redemption, a way out of it. Our suffering is for a purpose that must be fulfilled and all undeserved suffering will be compensated. So in all, there is not even a "slight problem" with this. [Small additions in this paragraph for clarification 22Fb15.]

While discussing this God-needs-to-know-our-choice theodicy [third underlined sentence group in Jensen3 above], I mentioned that this applies to atheists as well as theists. I said that the atheist must inevitably ask the following question:

Jensen3: If there is a God and it is not inconceivable that this God has good reason for allowing this suffering, how will I respond to this God?

Doland4: What if there is an invisible alligator in your pants? . . . We simply don't have the time to play "what if" to every possible "if". . . .

Jensen5: True, we don't speculate about every hypothetical that we can imagine, especially ones that are unnecessarily highly specified, like Doland's alligator. But God's existence is very different from an invisible alligator. It is a very basic question as to whether the material universe has always existed on its own or whether it came from something more basic or other than the universe. So the notion of God is very natural to humans. It turns out to be the simpler and more feasible explanation of the universe.

Also, whether or not this is the reason we have an idea of God, we find that everyone does think about God's existence at some time or other. It might be pushed aside never to be entertained again, but at some time or other, it will be there. Certainly human contemplation of death causes us to consider the possibility of God's existence more than many of us might do otherwise.

More importantly, I think God does speak to everyone, calling them to seek or to trust in God. God lets us know that we do have an obligation to seek God and to seek to determine whether God exists. It is our response to this prompting that either condemns us or leads us on a path by which we will find God. If God does not call everyone in this way, then God would not condemn those who refuse to seek God.

Doland has attempted to shift the question to that of the feasibility of even considering God's existence. Since the idea of God's existence is not that outlandish, we do think about the pain we face and we see others face and we commonly think about why a good God might allow this. The point of my initial comment was this: If we think carefully about this problem, we—atheists and anyone else—should see that there could be a good God who has good, justifying reason for allowing this pain and we must ask ourselves how we will respond to such a God.

So the way atheists and agnostics respond to this hypothetical God, whether in the face of suffering or not, begins to determine their condemnation or salvation. When atheists do face suffering or contemplate the suffering of someone else, they very often will think about God. Often they will do so only to say that there could never be a God who would allow this. But even then, they would be intentionally unreasonable to say this. Obviously God might have reason to allow this that they do not now understand. This is something any reasonable person should be able to see.

Will God condemn unbelievers who made the most honest decision concerning God?

Doland4: For something less absurd than the invisible alligator, let's play "what if" about Allah. What if Allah is the "one true God"? Now, I know that Jensen's position is that Allah is the same God as his, its just that some people have a better understanding of Him than others do.

Jensen5: That might be partially true but there is some ambiguity in this claim. You see, we begin with the same basic idea of God, a creator with great power and intelligence and goodness. Then people will begin to make differing claims of this God. One says God spoke to Mohammed (through an angel) and not to Paul, and taught x and not y about God. Another says God spoke to Paul and not to Mohammed, and taught y and not x about God. Are these both the same God? Someone might say no, because they are claiming different things about God. Another might say yes, because they are both claiming the same basic defining characteristics of this God (i.e., a creator with power, intelligence, and goodness). If I talk with Muslims, I assume we are talking about the same God but I would try to give some reason to think that God has not done or taught some of the things they think God has done or taught about God. They do the same for me.

But suppose we go farther. If we begin to chip away at the basic starting definition of God, it becomes even less clear that we are talking about the same being. If someone describes a God who created our world but was also created by a prior God or if God is less than absolutely good, say, I don't think that I could say this is the same God that I'm talking about.

Doland4: So what if Allah is the One True God and does NOT find Christian beliefs acceptable? To rephrase Jensen's own question, "How would you respond to this Allah?" I gather he would assert that he would tell Allah he made the best decisions he could at the time. And that is the same answer I would give his God if the situation ever arises. If I ever meet

Jensen's God, I will simply say I made the best decisions I could at the time.

Jensen5: True, I would say this. But my question was intended for a different context. The question "If there is a God and it is not inconceivable that this God has good reason for allowing this suffering, how will I respond to this God?" is the one I said atheists must at one time or another ask themselves. They wouldn't need to go down a list, "What if the Christian God is the true God? What if the Muslim God is the true God? What if the Mormon God is the true God?" etc. They need only begin with the most basic definition of God, maybe not even that much. The atheist, and everyone else, must ask, "If there is someone who deserves my highest commitment, is good, has the power to allow or inflict suffering or to withhold it and has good reason for allowing this suffering, how would I respond? Would I give my commitment to this one who deserves my commitment?"

But let's get back to Doland's very different question. If at death I should find that Islam is true and I find myself standing before Allah in judgment, I would tell Allah that I made the best decision I could as to my beliefs given the information I had. Doland says he would say the same thing. But I would also say that I had called upon God asking that I be given the truth. I had said that I would give God my highest commitment. Would Doland also say this? Because the problem is that merely examining evidence and arguments is not enough. We might have prejudices or biases that sway us to perceive the evidence one way rather than the other. We need to affirm that we would give God our commitment if God deserves our commitment and if God would reveal the truth to us. Might it be that until we do so, God gives us over to our own desired beliefs? As I've said before, it is our choices, not our knowledge, that will save or condemn us.

(For more on this issue see the coming topic in this debate, "Honest unbelievers and seeking God.")

Now if I find myself standing before the God of Islam, my plea may not make any difference anyway. In the most dominant Muslim views, Allah is completely above good and evil. Allah does not need to do anything that a greater good might occur; Allah just does as he wants to. The most righteous and observant Muslims often will say they have no assurance of salvation. I know of one Muslim lady who said she just hoped that when she would die she would catch Allah when he's in a good mood.

Freedom, omnipotence, evil, and logical necessity, continued

I pointed out that God needs to know how we respond to those who are suffering and God needs to know our free choices concerning God as we face of our own suffering. Also, we *become* something different by our choices:

Jensen3: [Jensen3 above, fourth underlined sentence group.] If our choices cannot be made by anyone else, then the only way I can be a good person is by choosing to do something good. For God to simply make me good could never make me good in quite the same way.

Doland4: Why not? Isn't God omnipotent? Why do theists always presume to say what their allegedly omnipotent God can and cannot do?

Jensen5: Because God cannot do the logically impossible. It's like saying God can make square circles. Once we understand the nature of logical impossibility and logical necessity, we see that it's just nonsense to say that God can do the logically impossible. Orthodox Christianity has for centuries maintained that this is something God cannot do. Can critics only attack theism by claiming that God should be able to do nonsense? ("He has to be able to, doesn't he? He's omnipotent, isn't he?")

Human identity

Doland4: [Continuing his last objection:] Would you not be exactly the same as you are now, if God created you five minutes ago, complete with the memories of the things you think you did? What would the difference be?

Jensen5: No, I wouldn't be the same because I had never actually done the things I remember having done. In this world (W1) I (P1 or person1) have gone through all of the experiences I remember having gone through and many more. In another possible world (W2) God could create a duplicate me (P2) five minutes ago as I would appear in this world (W1) with every atom and subatomic particle being the same. Perhaps even some spiritual component has to be copied as well. Let's assume it is copied. All of the memories are the same for both the me in W1 and the me in W2. And, in fact, we (in W1) do not know that W2 is not the real world God has created and that we are not actually living in W2. But as I said, P2 has not actually done the things I (P1) remember having done. They are not the same person because of their difference in actual histories. A person's identity involves their actual past identity.

So it seems that the point Doland would want to make would be that P2 could be the same as P1 even though P1 actually made some free choices P2 only remembers having made but actually never did make? I would disagree with this claim even though the bodies, thoughts, memories, desires, feelings, etc. are exactly the same. P2 didn't actually get to that state the way P1 did. P1 made choices that only P1 could make. Free will is the ability to make a choice that no prior causal factors can determine, no other person can determine, and the individual free agent alone can make. In one's free choices, one is an uncaused cause. So by definition, God cannot make a person make a particular choice if that person is free in that choice. A person's free choice determines something of the identity and actual life history of that person. To create P2 God must copy what P1 has created as P1. Only the physical (and to some degree possibly spiritual)

identities are duplicated. God wants people who by their free choice create themselves to be what God wants them to be. And if they create themselves into something God does not want them to be (and this desired end God has communicated to them) then that is the price of giving free will. It is so important, so vitally necessary, that we be free. Only with free will are we self-determining creations. We do not determine everything about ourselves, just the most crucial features.

God's compensation for undeserved suffering

Jensen3: [Fifth underlined sentence in Jensen3 above, the 2nd Jensen3 from the start.] Also, as Paul and Theresa have pointed out . . . our greatest suffering is in the long run more like the child's pin prick.

Doland4: This is an assertion without evidence. You (and Paul and Theresa) claim that, but where is your evidence? You have none.

Jensen5: The theist doesn't need evidence at this point in the discussion. The argument from evil says that if theism is true, we cannot adequately account for evil in the world. Any theistic response says that we can account for evil given theism. So the existence of God is assumed in both cases. Both views simply try to see if something about the world would be expected or unexpected given theism. The theodicy I'm presenting simply says that if God is there and if God is just and good and has good reason for allowing pain in the world, we should expect that God would provide compensation for any such undeserved suffering. Deserved suffering is a different matter. God does not provide compensation for that. So if we assume God's existence, we can very reasonably assume the kind of equal or greater compensation I have talked about.

Presenting a theodicy does not give any reason to believe in God. That comes at a different point in the discussion. Giving a theodicy merely answers objections for belief.

Another point that might not have been adequately stated is that this overwhelming compensation St. Paul talked about does not apply to everyone. For many people it will only be equal to the undeserved suffering endured. It is those who seek to become children of God, those who seek the God who first seeks them and who seeks to remove their guilt, who will find the one reward that is greater than anything they can imagine.

Doland4: Secondly, again, let me come over to your house, beat the _____ outa you, kill your family, etc., and see if you find it to be akin to a pin prick.

Jensen5: I'm not saying this suffering is nothing more than a pin prick but that in comparison to that which awaits us, or that which we will endure "in the long run," it is. I don't want to deny the horror, the reality of pain and evil. But I want to affirm that it will be conquered, overwhelmed in the greatness of that which awaits us.

Jensen3: [Sixth underlined sentence in the 2nd Jensen3 from the start.] But if God will provide the compensation for this suffering, that would make it almost as though it had never happened.

Doland4: You'll excuse me if I find it rather disgusting that you, while sitting in you air-conditioned house typing on your computer are alleging how important *somebody* else's suffering is. I'm sure somebody dying in the street in Iraq or starving in Africa, or dying of AIDS, etc., appreciates how important you find his suffering to be. . . . Why is it so important for them to suffer?

Jensen5: You know nothing about me and yet you know that I am not suffering while much of the world is? There are psychological pains deeper than physical pain. I would gladly bear physical pain if I could be rid of a particular source of the anguish I too have to carry. I seek God continually to cause me to be able to bear this.

The writer of Hebrews said that Jesus bore his suffering because of the glory that awaited him. Doing this, as hard as it was, was worth it to him because of what awaited him. Paul certainly said this of himself.

Remember my quotations? Our suffering here is not worth comparing to what awaits us, he said. And look at the list of what he endured. Christians throughout the world (not so much in our isolated little world we call the West) are being persecuted more than they have ever been in our history. Yet they willingly bear it because they know what awaits them. Christians throughout the centuries have endured persecution, illness, natural disaster, famine; some have even sold themselves into slavery in order to share the gospel, all because they knew what awaited them if they would be faithful to the end (Revelation 2:10). So it is hardly a matter of the Christians having it good while we glibly contemplate the suffering of others.

I'm claiming that it is important that some suffering occur in the world, that there is a reason for it, and that good is meant to come of it. Doland will say that we have to have evil in the world too; it's just a part of how the world is. I offer hope to those who are suffering; all that Doland can do is take his heel and grind it in their faces. Because that is all that Doland really has, a hopeless world of pain that we just have to accept. If I might presume to know as much as Doland assumes to know about me and if I might repeat (and slightly alter) Doland's own words back to himself: "You'll excuse me if I find it rather disgusting that you, while sitting in your air-conditioned house typing on your computer, are alleging how 'hopeless' somebody else's suffering is. I'm sure somebody dying in the street in Iraq or starving in Africa, or dying of AIDS" appreciates your enlightened understanding of the necessity of their suffering.

Remember that I also said (in the second theodicy) that the suffering could be far less if we were to fulfill our responsibility, if we become what God wants us to become. If we seek to have God's heart and compassion, we seek to remove the suffering. There does need to be some pain in the

world; it need not be the horror it has so often turned out to be. Any undeserved suffering that we have the power to stop, we should stop. So I do not, as Doland says, find it important that the starving or the wasting AIDS victim must suffer as they do.

Doland2: As I said, I cannot know for certain what greater good might come. But what possible “greater good” can come from massive injustice? What “greater good” to come is there for the African mother’s baby? The baby is dead. What “greater good” can the baby experience?

Jensen3: I have mentioned the kind of good that could come from “massive injustice.” The testing of human choice is perhaps the greatest good, and the end result for the victims (including the baby who died of the drought) is also the same: recompense for any undeserved suffering, perhaps a chance for life again on earth for those whose lives were cut short, even paradise for those whose lives are right with God.

This last statement will of course raise a long cry of objections from Doland for the implication is that some may not find heaven: “What good can come from the damnation of those who are not ‘right with God’?” But I will address the problem of hell shortly. I will wait to first hear Doland’s objections when we get there.

Theodicy 2 cont: God needs to know if we will stop the suffering

Doland2: If any Christian was there in time to save the child [an African child dying from a drought], surely he would do so, would he not? If a Christian had saved the baby’s life, would he have circumvented the “greater good” that was to come? Kreeft says he purposely let his daughter bleed a little, for the learning experience—the greater good to come. Would he have let the baby die too, in the name of the greater good? The fact that

a Christian would save the child if he could implies that Christians don't really believe that an apparently needless death serves any greater good.

Jensen3: Here our previous stated theodicies will offer an obvious answer. The Christian, like anyone else with any moral awareness, would (or should) certainly seek to save the child's life. One reason for such suffering is to test us to see whether we will respond and seek to stop the suffering. But if there is no one to respond, the mother is tested as well as to her response to God.

Doland4: This is just wanting to "have your cake and eat it too." If the child dies, it is good; if the child is saved, it is good. Nothing is ever "bad" in his reasoning. No matter what happens, "God wins" in his the-idioty. With this being the case, it is fundamentally impossible for me to ever give him something that would count against his belief in God. Everything, no matter what it is, counts as evidence for God.

Jensen5: Notice that Doland does not offer an argument against my claim, he simply complains that it accomplishes too much. It answers both questions. "If the child dies, it is good; if the child is saved, it is good." Now recall that that is not what I've said. If the child suffers and dies, it is not good. The evil will eventually be conquered, but the initial evil is not good. It is good if the Christian or atheist or anyone else gives food to the hungry and stops or prevents this evil. But it is also good that the suffering, if it does occur, will be overcome in the great goodness of God's compensation. It is only in the long run that both are good, but only because if the evil does occur, God's good so much outweighs that evil.

So yes, this argument does win either way. But instead of complaining about how much the arguments accomplish, why can't Doland show how my argument is in error? Isn't that what the reader is looking for? Isn't that what matters?

Now I have given some possible means of falsifying my beliefs; so it is not true that I think that it is “fundamentally impossible” for Doland “to ever give something that would count against” my belief in God. It’s simply that using the problem of evil just does not do the job.

It also does not follow from my argument that “everything, no matter what it is, counts as evidence for God.” The answer I’ve given to the problem of evil merely answers an accusation against belief, it does not provide evidence for belief.

Doland2: Kreeft, of course, claims that injustice not rectified in this life will be rectified in the next. . . . In other words, in the grand scheme of eternity, the dead baby’s needless death is “no biggie.” But doesn’t that make this life on Earth rather pointless? The baby, for all intents and purposes, had no human life, having died so young. And this baby is (presumably) doing fine in Heaven. Then what value is life on Earth at all?

Jensen3: I think you are making a good point here, Paul. What is the point of some dying at or prior to birth if they go straight to heaven? Why not just let them go to heaven without even being conceived? And if that’s their fate, why wouldn’t God do that for everyone? Why would we need Christ’s atoning work at all? [Added 24Fb15.]

The value or purpose of life on earth is to face the choice of seeking and finding God or rejecting God. All must make that choice in an environment in which there is neither too much nor too little evidence for God’s existence. If it were too clear that God is there, then those who do not want to believe will have virtually no choice. As it is now, if one does not want to believe, one can do so and feel intellectually honest about doing so, though I think it takes some repression of undesired thoughts (those dangerous religious queries) to do so. The sense of intellectual honesty comes to the one who rejects God only after one has sufficiently repressed the unwanted thoughts or knowledge. Just as God needs to know our choices concerning

God in the face of pain, so God needs to know our choice for or against God at other times as well. That is the essential point of our being here in this kind of world. And the aborted child or the child who has lived too short of a life to face that choice will be given that choice again, either in this world or some other world or environment sufficiently like our own.

All must choose concerning God: the fate of the stillborn

Doland4: [Responding to the above underlined sentence.] Evidence? Any evidence? No? I didn't think so. By the way, not even the Bible says this. Nowhere. This is pure ad-hoc.

Jensen5: As a Christian I accept all that the Bible teaches. But it doesn't teach everything that we think we know to be true. Where the Bible does not speak, we are free to speculate and to reason to the most feasible belief. Our new belief must simply not contradict biblical teaching. We don't need evidence for this view at this point. We are simply resolving claimed biblical difficulties (a potential conflict between what the Bible teaches and what we know is right or true) by considering possible views that fit the biblical data.

I've gone over a number of passages that show the need for God to know our choice in the face of suffering and for us to be creatures who make those choices. It would not be difficult to go through a few of the numerous passages that speak of the need for humans to choose for or against God and God's will outside of a context in which they must experience pain. From Genesis 2 and 3 where Adam and Eve are given the choice to obey God to the last verses in Revelation where John and the Spirit and the Bride call to the world to take the water of life, this teaching permeates Scripture. God appealed to Cain to choose to conquer his temptation to kill his brother. Joshua asked the people to choose to serve the Lord and affirm the covenant. God's central message through the prophets, repeated over and over in different ways, was always the same: "return to me." God revealed to Peter that God was no "respector of persons"; that anyone who

seeks God, whether Jew or Gentile, will be accepted by God. Thus God does not determine how we will choose or who will be accepted by God, it all depends upon our free choice (Acts 10:34-35). Paul claimed that God acted through history to call the Gentiles to seek God (Acts 17). These are only a few examples from Scripture. It is clear that the Bible assumes that we determine our destiny by our choice for or against God and God's will.

Now the Scripture does not tell us what happens to the children who die before they can make such a decision or the aborted or miscarried fetus (or even the mentally deficient for that matter). Some Calvinists and Fundamentalist Christians will say the answer is very simple and straightforward: if they're born in sin, they're eternally damned. Catholics have their doctrines of limbo and baptismal regeneration by which some go to heaven and some don't (but those who don't, don't really have it so bad). Geisler and others (I think W. L. Craig is in this group) say they go straight to heaven. So there is quite a lot of difference of opinion. But this is understandable given the fact that the Bible just doesn't speak definitely to this question.

The fate of the unborn is one of those doctrines we are free to speculate about. But a little thinking gives us reason to reject some of the above mentioned views. The idea that since they are born in sin they're damned like any other unrepentant sinner is just too hard to swallow given our overall understanding of Scripture. We know God is just; we know God is merciful. Given either mercy or justice, it is difficult to imagine God allowing such a thing. Given the numerous scriptural teachings (like those mentioned above) that indicate that we do have to choose, it seems clear to me that the unborn must return to this or a similar world in order to do so. Geisler's view just does not adequately take this need into account. Also, the passages Geisler mentions are simply not conclusive for his view; they can too easily be taken to mean or imply something else. (Also recall from our previous discussion that Geisler's view has the added problem of making abortion physicians and child killers our most effective though unwitting Christian evangelists.)

There are other possibilities. Hugh Ross recognizes this need for all people to face such a decision and says everyone will do so before death. God gives the fetus the ability to make such a choice while still in the womb. Of course this isn't impossible given a theistic world view but this view is not widely accepted. It is just very difficult to accept that God would force such a decision upon the unborn and deny them at least a minimal context of human life in which to make such a decision. Paul said God's patience is meant to bring us to repentance (Romans 2:4). Out of mercy God waits and allows us to choose again and again and again. So in all, it seems to me that the view that best fits the biblical data says that God gives the unborn more time; it gives them the chance to choose in another life. I might be wrong, but then to resolve the problem would just involve thinking of a different view that fits the biblical data and better or equally avoids the difficulties mentioned or any other difficulties.

We don't need evidence until we consider the evidence for Christianity generally. Once we have reason to accept Christianity, we have reason to accept the biblical teachings. Without reason to believe Christianity, we're just left with something that may be true or may not be true; we just don't know. We would be left with a belief system that is almost entirely irrelevant because it's unknowable. (Not entirely irrelevant; just the choice as to whether we would commit ourselves to God through Jesus must be contemplated before or without considering such evidence. The same is true of theism generally.)

Doland2: To postulate that, since we can't find any evidence of a greater good in this life, it must reside elsewhere, after death, strikes me as an incredibly *ad hoc* assumption designed to explain away any contrary data.

Jensen3: Why? Why does Doland think this is *ad hoc*? This is just a logically sufficient explanation and as such it answers the accusation. It certainly does explain the "contrary data" since it shows this isn't "contrary

data” at all when we evaluate the logic of the argument against theism. Now no one has claimed that a greater good for all suffering will only be found in the next life. Rather, we are simply admitting that for some evils there is no sufficiently greater good in this life.

If at the end of our entire discussion we have no evidence for God or Christianity and if this were all the evidence one would ever consider, then one should conclude that one has no reason to believe either way and that agnosticism must be admitted. The evidence for belief is very different from the evidence against belief we find in the problem of evil. The problem of evil as a claim of grounds to disbelieve says there is an inconsistency between the possibility of the existence of God (as Christians and some other theists define God) and other things we know. The theist has no need to prove that an afterlife or any other state or entity exists that would vindicate God’s goodness; we need only show that the claimed inconsistency does not obtain. So if there is an afterlife then there could be a good God. The fact that we have no evidence for this afterlife (at this point in the discussion) means nothing.

If it is the fact that Doland thinks that an afterlife is not empirically verifiable in this life that makes him think that it is ad hoc, then why even go that far? Why even bother about the problem of evil? God is not empirically verifiable in this life either. Why not claim that because of this, the idea of God is ad hoc? It appears that almost any argument Doland disagrees with he thinks he can dismiss by calling it ad hoc. Since he offers no rationale or argument for his claim, it is difficult to take his claim seriously. [Last sentence added 24Fb15.]

When we later talk about reasons for believing in God, we will discuss other kinds of evidence, though not in-this-life, empirical evidence. (Admittedly, some of the evidence is very close to empirical evidence and some might even claim that the term “empirical” is broad enough to include the kind of evidence we will consider for God’s existence.) If we find that we have good evidence that such a God does exist, then it will not at all be

unreasonable to think that this God could also create another world, a heaven, and cause us to live there—even to live there forever. We might consider evidence for an afterlife from specific evidence for Christianity. If Jesus claimed there is such an afterlife and if we find we have good reason to believe Jesus' teachings, then it also follows that we would have good reason to believe in this afterlife. So in this sense also the idea of an afterlife is not unverifiable.

Perhaps Doland sees the explanation of an afterlife as ad hoc in that it offers no real reason for evil. It's just that we have evil in the world and heaven is offered as a kind of "eraser" of that evil after it happens. Does God just stick us in a world of pain for no reason and then erase it all? One critic said it's like an evil father beating his children and then offering them candy to make up. Well, the analogy is too crass; it does not work because candy does not really make up for a beating. We need something that does truly erase or at least virtually erase all that we have endured. But the analogy does help us to see that this explanation for evil isn't really an explanation. We still don't know why God allows evil even if God does fully compensate for it. That is why I have said earlier that we need both factors, both the compensation and the good reason. The good reason I had offered earlier was that we would freely make the moral choices that occur in the context of suffering, especially choices concerning God, that would determine what we will truly become. God needs to know what our choices in the face of suffering will be concerning God.

When freedom is needed and the place of speculation

Doland quotes Kreeft:

Kreeft1: Pretend you're God and try to create a better world in your imagination. Try to create utopia. But you have to think of the consequences of everything you try to improve. Every time you use force to prevent evil, you take away freedom. To take away all evil, you must

remove all freedom and reduce people to puppets, which means they would then lack the ability to freely choose love (42).

Jensen3: Kreeft had just previously claimed that for some people, not being able to inflict pain and do evil would be hell. Doland then goes on to question this:

Doland2: If Kreeft believes that an Earth without pain and suffering would be like Hell, what exactly does Kreeft believe Heaven is like? Is there evil in Heaven, or no free will and no love? Do Satan, Hitler, Stalin, etc. run around Heaven causing random acts of pain and suffering so that its inhabitants aren't bored all of the time? Are people in Heaven mere "puppets," without the ability to freely choose love? I think that most Christians believe that Heaven has no such requirement for pain, suffering, and evil. But if so, why would life on Earth have such requirements?

Jensen3: My own view is that we will not be free in heaven. I think Kreeft takes a similar view though he disdains to say we will actually lack freedom. At any rate my own view is that freedom is only something we need in this life. Often I will make a choice that will determine all of my future choices. I determine never to make that particular choice again and let my life go on a kind of autopilot concerning that choice. For most of us, the decision not to commit suicide is that kind of choice. Whether I make a choice only once or a million times does not really matter; I'm still responsible for my one choice or my million choices. I've not become a puppet since I freely made the choice that would determine all my future choices for this issue. If you insist that I am still a puppet, then it is I (in my one or many past choices that I have made) who am the master of this puppet.

We need freedom in this life to determine whether we will enter heaven or not, whether our moral choices will be responsible choices. In heaven I won't care that I am unable to choose against God or to do evil, I've already made that decision. Why do I need to make it again? We love in heaven

because we have already chosen that on earth. There is no boredom in heaven because we are complete as we never could be on earth. We live in relation to the God we were created to know and to love. So in heaven there is no requirement of pain and evil while on earth it is necessary that there is at least the possibility of pain and evil (given Kreeft's theodicy above). In the theodicies I had presented earlier it is necessary that there be pain in this life and not merely that they be possible. But it is also necessary that we be free to make culpable moral and spiritual decisions. [Last sentence added 24Fb15.]

Earth without pain might be called hell for those who wish to inflict pain though this would certainly be a far more tolerable form of suffering than the traditional view of hell. Earth without pain would not be hell for those who do not choose to inflict pain.

Doland4: Heaven = good, right? If no freedom in heaven, that means freedom not good. Once again, Jensen is being purely ad hoc. He needs to have a reason for "free will" on this earth, yet realizes that is inconsistent with what he alleged heaven to be, so must assert that God has this bizarre need to have one environment that is "good" in one way (here) and then another environment (heaven) that is "good" in a completely different way. But God could have no such need, for God is ALL POWERFUL, and can never do anything out of necessity.

Jensen5: Doland has not shown how freedom, when it is no longer needed after this life, is in some way still needed and good. Instead he says my claim is ad hoc. He says, "The definition of ad hoc is ' . . . [something] you made up because . . . [something else you believe] is so stupid that you gotta make something up to try to hide it.' " It seems that for Doland ad hoc means any claim he doesn't like but to which he cannot provide a rational response. To try to cover up his inability to refute a claim, he simply calls the claim "stupid." Yes, I do "make up" claims to answer difficulties. This we call speculation. As with the previous issue, the state of the fetus or the child who dies before the age of accountability, we speculate to find an

answer that fits the Bible and does not contradict anything else we believe to be right or otherwise have good reason to believe. This simply shows that there is no contradiction or difficulty with the concept presented. There is nothing ad hoc about this approach as the term is traditionally understood. [Paragraph revised 8Mr09, 19Oc14.]

Doland claims that the need to have freedom on earth but not in heaven is “bizarre” but doesn’t tell us why? He claims that God can never do anything out of necessity but he never responds to my argument that even an omnipotent being cannot—of *necessity*—achieve certain given desired ends without following certain preconditions.

Doland2: I’ve got absolute proof that my wife exists, and this isn’t a problem. I can still choose whether I want her or not. Why, then, is it necessary for us to lack absolute proof of God’s existence?

Jensen3: Because with the knowledge that God exists comes the obligation to seek God and to moral obedience. We need to be free to choose these without feeling forced to do so. If we had no choice but to believe that God exists, we would be less free to choose against these moral obligations.

Doland2: Satan, when he chose to rebel against God, had absolute proof of God’s existence. And yet he was still free to choose not to follow God.

Jensen3: But this only shows that with enough knowledge one can still choose against God. But would this still be the case for most people (or angels)? Also, we don’t really know enough about angels or demons to speak seriously about them in such detail. We don’t know that Satan didn’t really think he could get away with his rebellion. Had he known he couldn’t get away with it, I doubt that he would have openly rebelled.

Doland2: God is often called our “Heavenly Father.” If somebody’s earthly father moved to another country and left no forwarding address, but left a few clues lying around as to where to find him, would we consider this earthly father worthy of seeking?

Jensen3: No, because an earthly father isn’t worthy of our seeking to this extreme except under the influence of some vague and subjective sense of filial affection. But once we have the notion of God as our creator and Father, there also comes the sense that something is clearly missing in our lives if we do not find this God and that this God deserves to be searched after. Just think, the creator of all things, the source of all worth and good, the one who cared enough about us to make everything about our world to be such that we could live here; doesn’t the very thought instill a desire to seek God?

Certainly there are some who would not very naturally attain to such an idea: like the child who is taken with her family to a concentration camp. But even though many endure such evil, I think that everyone does get this sense of a desire for God at some time or other unless they simply die too young. We can repress the feeling and even reach the point of believing that we never really did feel this way, but I think we’ve all had at least one initial experience like this. I think God’s Holy Spirit gives everyone that awareness. God does call us, draw us, to seek God. God wants to know if we will let this spark of a desire grow. God may initiate the spark but we have to feed it and blow on it until it flames. It is by our choice that our deepest obligations become our deepest desires.

God does need to know if we will seek and desire God, for this is what God deserves. Some people feel as though they have known God all their lives. Others, even though they might have only the “few clues lying around,” can come to desire and find God as they respond to those few clues and to the drawing and calling of God’s Spirit.

Jensen3: [above] God does call us, draw us, to seek God. God wants to know if we will let this spark of a desire grow.

Doland4: And yet He fails. He's omniscient, omnipotent, and yet fails. Hmmm. . . .

Jensen5: Yes, such is the nature of free will. It is not that God couldn't create us without free will, rather God chose to become self-limited by allowing free will.

Majority belief in God as a theistic argument

Doland2: Kreeft also dismisses atheism as "snobbish" and "elitist," as more than 90% of all human beings that have ever lived have believed in God (35). . . . At one time, more than 90% of the world's population believed that the Earth was flat, but that certainly didn't make it so.

Jensen3: But this example isn't at all analogous because much of science involves a progressive increase in knowledge. On a large scale, religious evidence is not a changing thing. When God revealed much religious information at the time of the patriarchs and Moses and Jesus there was an increase for a limited time and for a limited number of people. At the time of Darwin there was a set back in many people's thinking until some figured out that Darwin's views can very easily accommodate a very literal understanding of the Scripture. In the last half century and more the evidence for the big bang has increased the evidential status of theism. With the last decade or so, the fine tuning argument, the finding that many of the laws and constants of nature cannot deviate from their present values by barely the slightest variation for embodied intelligent life to be possible, has provided very strong evidence for theism. Now, some of the arguments for multiple universes are at least chipping away at that once overpowering argument. However, recent work is showing even multiple

universes need fine-tuning. [Last two sentences altered or added 20Mr10, 25Sep14.] And these are just a few examples. So there have been ups and down, cycles in the history of the evidence. There has been no uniform increase in evidence against theism, as we would need for the analogy to fit.

At different times in the past it may have been that belief in a flat earth was the most reasonable view, given the information available. So whether it is true or not, it was still the most justified belief. Many very strongly held scientific beliefs today may be rejected in the next generation if not sooner. They are merely justified beliefs. Nevertheless, because they are the best evidenced views we have now, they are the ones we should now believe. Since people throughout history have by and large had access to the same scientific and religious evidence (the relatively recent increase in scientific knowledge makes up an extremely tiny portion of human history) it seems more likely that the dominance of theistic belief throughout history gives at least good credence to Kreeft's claim. He admits that this is not a foolproof argument, but it does have some force. Without new evidence to discount theism, like the relatively more recent scientific evidence against a flat earth, Doland's analogy fails and atheism must be considered arrogant and elitist. Given virtually the same evidence, humanity's past and present majority belief in God makes theism the more likely position. [Last sentence added 20Mr10.] (Doland will respond to this later.)

Does Darwinism accommodate Scripture?

Doland4: [To the first underlined sentence group above.] Why would the Scriptures ever need "accommodation"?

Jensen5: This is merely to say that Darwinism happens to fit the Scripture; Scripture does not necessarily teach it but it does not say that we (and the different forms of life after the first life came into being) developed in any

other way. It says God created man from the dust of the earth, but *it doesn't* say God did not do so through various previous life forms. There may be some exceptions or special interventions to the normal evolutionary process given a literal understanding of some portions of Scripture, but generally it does fit Scripture.

Should the Bible give new scientific information?

Doland4: If God used theistic-evolution or progressive creationism to create man, why didn't he say so in the Bible? If the Bible would have said something like that, something that could be later verified as true but could not have been guessed by its authors, that would be some evidence for its authenticity. As is, there is nothing in the Bible that doesn't look like it was written by men 2,000+ years ago. Nothing looks divine at all.

Jensen5: Much of the Bible was written for people who would not have understood modern scientific concepts or would not have needed to know them. It doesn't speak of dinosaurs because they had no need to know about them. It didn't give the details about how life originated and developed for the same reason. Genesis 1, for example, is a form of literature unique in the Bible sometimes called prose-poetry. This and its highly symmetrical structure suggests that it is not a strict chronological depiction of the events of creation but a presentation of categories of existence and all that fill those categories. Much of the Bible is written phenomenologically; that is, from the viewpoint of an observer. There was simply no need to provide new scientific information.

Still, if the Bible does at times provide some glimpse of God's view of the world and its creation, we shouldn't be surprised to see features of the universe or creation that science might someday discover. And I think it sometimes does provide information that fits our best current scientific knowledge. It speaks more than once of God "stretching out" or

“expanding” the heavens (Psalm 104:2), just as modern astronomy speaks of the universe expanding from the big bang. It speaks of an absolute beginning of our universe (Genesis 1:1), again as the big bang theory would claim. Even the multiverse views admit that the universe had an absolute beginning. Some claim a beginning prior to the big bang but none claim a universe with an infinite past. (None that allow a universe that permits life that is.) (See *Reasonable Faith*, 139-40.) Again, the Bible speaks of earth hanging on nothing (Job 26:7), an idea that would not be expected in ancient thought. [Paragraph revised 19Oct08.]

We should be aware that the kind of scientific evidence Doland wants would only persuade people living in the last century or at most the last few centuries. God needed to provide evidence that would confront all people. I’ve noted that we do have some such contemporary scientific evidence, but this is not the most important focus of the evidence that God has provided us. We haven’t yet begun to talk about the traditional evidence for theism or Christianity. We have yet to look at just some of these before Doland has the right to say that nothing in the Bible looks divine. [Paragraph added 7Sep14.]

Is the God of science the God of the Bible?

Doland4: Further, if the cosmological (Big Bang) argument, fine tuning argument, or design arguments have any merit, the best they could support is that some unknown god created the universe. It’s a far cry to get to Biblegod from those arguments.

Jensen5: The cosmological argument is not the same as the scientific argument for God following the big bang. The cosmological argument does not need the big bang. It says that the universe could not go on forever into the past because there cannot be an infinite regress of causes. It

demonstrates on philosophical grounds an absolute beginning of time and space. The big bang gives scientific evidence for an absolute beginning.

Certainly we do need more than our current scientific evidence to get to the God portrayed in the Bible. But the scientific evidence (and the cosmological and some other philosophical arguments) do get us started. It is a very major step to have a God who created all things who has extremely great power and intelligence. The skies are not empty. Life is not, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury but signifying nothing.” There could hardly be a more significant awareness. It is such a major step to arrive at a creator God that the next step to Christianity almost seems small. The evidence for Christianity consists of historical and experiential evidence, both of which, I would claim, are adequate to demonstrate the existence of a superintelligent/powerful and absolutely good creator without the need for scientific or philosophical arguments.

I said that there could hardly be a more important awareness than that of God’s existence. But the core Christian insight must be greater. That God would love us so much as to provide a means of reconciliation with God and at so great a cost; that God would endure pain, and not only pain but the greatest suffering that could be endured; that God actually chose to do so before our time began and when God could have chosen to do otherwise: this is the greatest of all wonders.

Isn’t God complex and fine-tuned?

Doland4: But I don’t think those [scientific] arguments work at all anyway. Isn’t God infinitely “finely tuned,” complex, and have no origin? How is it that God is exempt from the very rules that you claim indicate a God is necessary?

Jensen5: I've argued that God is not complex or finely tuned. (When we get to that point in Doland's critique we will see if he can answer my argument.) Yes, God has no origin. As such there is no need for something else to explain God, as something else is needed to explain the universe. The scientific evidence is that the universe does have a beginning. And the philosophical argument is also very strong that our changing universe cannot go on forever into the past. It needs a changeless God for it to come into being.

Doland4: The universe is "really good" if you define "good" as large, complex, aesthetically pleasing, habitable to life in at least some regions, etc. Basically, the cosmological/fine-tuning/design arguments say the following: "something 'really good' (the universe) can't exist by itself, but something PERFECT (God) can." It's nonsense. If something "really good" couldn't exist by itself, then something perfect certainly couldn't either.

Jensen5: It is not just any "perfect being" that can exist by itself. The perfect being, God, is quite different from the "really good" universe. The universe has always been changing; God (before the origin of time) was unchanging. A simple, changeless person could always have been and could have timelessly chosen to cause a changing universe to come into being. A complex, changing entity like the universe needs an explanation for its existence; a simple, changeless being does not.

Theistic argument from majority belief in God, continued

Doland4: [Responding to the second underlined sentences in the last Jensen3 above: "Since people throughout history have by and large had access to the same scientific and religious evidence (the relatively recent increase in scientific knowledge makes up an extremely tiny portion of

human history) it seems more likely that the dominance of theistic belief throughout history gives at least good credence to Kreeft's claim.”] This is just a non-sequitur. Why would religious beliefs be less prone to be in error than scientific beliefs? When a solar eclipse comes, you wouldn't go out and bang on pots and pans to try to scare away the demon from eating the sun, right? People thousands of years ago did, and they thought at the time it was a reasonable theory. Indeed, it might have been, given what knowledge they had available to them. But it didn't make it true.

Jensen5: It doesn't make it necessarily true, but it did make it a justified belief (depending upon exactly which belief we are talking about). And such a belief may still be a justified belief, a belief one ought to continue to hold to until we come up with evidence strong enough to reject it. Doland's claim has power only if we can now give reason to reject such beliefs.

Certainly religious and secular belief are not one more prone to be in error than the other. My earlier point was that religious knowledge and the evidence for theism has not changed that much compared to secular knowledge. Yes, some religious beliefs like many of those that make definite claims about features of the physical world (like the nature of an eclipse) have been falsified. Some, like the biblical claims of an origin and expansion of the universe, have been verified. That's because increase in our secular knowledge affects those religious beliefs that make claims about our physical world. But current scientific evidence does not clearly count against God's existence. We will shortly talk about just how strong it is for or against belief in God. But unless some current evidence can be presented against theism, we are stuck with the evidence that has been available to people for millennia. Thus this evidence that has been available to people for ages should still be enough to persuade if it has persuaded most people to one conclusion. Because it has persuaded most people to theism, it should still be persuasive to all people unless or until new information becomes available which refutes that prior evidence.

Doland2: And Kreeft must, of course, also realize that 90% of all human beings that have ever lived have not believed in his God.

Jensen3: Why should Doland think that most people have not believed in the Christian God? If they all believed in a simple good creator God to whom they had some sense of obligation, then it was the same God. Of course Christianity has added on a lot more details about what this God is like or has done, but the basic concept is the same. Christians believe that they believe in the same God the ancient Hebrews believed in. What does it matter that God's trinitarian nature was not revealed to the Hebrews? It is because the basic nature of God was accepted by both that Christians think it is the same God. And though any pagan belief might be strongly overlaid with bizarre myths and anthropomorphisms (and sometimes zoomorphisms), the basic idea of a creator of all things is always there. Some forms of Buddhism and Hinduism have explicitly rejected theism. But that does not mean that the common people do not still see God through nature or their experience. So I don't think Kreeft was being in any way dishonest in claiming to speak of his God as the same God most people believe in. Remember that Paul the apostle claimed that all people know by nature that God exists (Romans 1). He was clearly not speaking of a God who was different from the God he proclaimed.

Doland2: Kreeft seems likely to believe that the followers of Buddhism, Hinduism, pagan religions, and so on are completely wrong, but he is happy to accept their members just for the moment to "prove" how "snobbish" atheism is. Is Kreeft any less "snobbish" and "elitist" in believing that his God is the real God, and everybody else's God isn't?

Jensen3: Having listened to a number of lectures by Dr. Kreeft, I can assure you that he does not believe these other religions are completely wrong. In their common acceptance of theism, most of the people who

adhere to these religions do demonstrate how elitist atheism can be. This is not an arrogance that is found everywhere in atheism, but is found far too often. It's the attitude that atheism is obvious to any thinking person or that only a fool would believe in God. Should someone say that after searching and investigating to their best ability that they cannot in all honesty believe in God though they know that most of the world does, then I think the accusation would be mitigated, at least for that individual. But I would also say that I think that if this person does honestly investigate and seek God along with their intellectual investigation, they will eventually find God.

I'm sure Kreeft would say that all other religions are wrong in some aspect of their beliefs, some aspects more than others. But it is not that the general revelation to all people is different for some, the Christians; rather it is that God has made a special revelation through Jesus. There is nothing snobbish or elitist about this. It is God's choice as to whom and when and where to give this revelation and what this revelation should be. It is no more snobbish or elitist to say this than it is to say that some particular individual made an important scientific discovery and shared it with the world. There is nothing arrogant about making knowledge or discovery claims. [Last sentence added 24Fb15.]

Free will, causal determinism, and the problem of evil

Jensen5: In Doland's first general response to the problem of evil he attempts to critique the "free will defense" of God. He attacks the notion of free will given an omnipotent, omniscient creator. He uses a parable he calls "God the Iron Worker." If God knows and determines how any material will work or what properties it will have, Doland asks, why does God not know or determine what our free choices will be? I would reply that because the nature of free choice is such that God leaves this as an area outside of God's control. God could create us so that all of our choices are determined. God instead leaves this power up to the individual. God gives

this power to us as a gift. God graciously says, this is an area in which I will not interfere. God does foreknow what our free choices will be (given tenseless time) but what God foreknows is the event occurring. So a foreknown free event cannot be altered by the one who foreknows. It is like my watching someone make a choice. I know what choice is made because I see it being made. If the person were to cease to exist before they made the choice, I wouldn't know what choice would be made. Likewise, God could not foreknow such a choice since there is nothing to know.

We have no choice but to say that this ability to freely choose comes from God, Doland points out. It must "be created and operate under God's design." Agreed. God gives us the ability to freely choose. Doland's logic now becomes difficult to follow. He says, "My current choices are either a deterministic progression from my starting point of my birth, or 'free will' magically comes from nowhere, evolving by itself." We have already seen that our free choices do not come from nowhere or evolve. Why does he think that they must be a determined progression from birth? It seems unlikely that a newborn can freely choose but certainly its nature and determined actions or even determined "choices" make up the individual that at some point will be able to *freely* choose. Why does Doland think such an individual will not be able to exercise free will or free choice? He says he is writing this paper because it is consistent with his beliefs and personality. Does this mean he thinks he has no choice but to write what he writes? If he does then he is wrong. Even if all of his prior choices and personality and beliefs have been completely determined, he could still be free to choose now if he is given this ability. He asks, "How could the thing 'free will' do anything that isn't prebuilt into it by its design from God?" By simply being the kind of thing that does not have prebuilt into it the necessity of doing any one thing rather than another.

[Reminder: the following responses apply specifically to the portions of the above paragraphs that are underlined.]

Doland6: What, exactly is “outside of the control” of an omniscient, omnipotent entity? . . . The actual answer is, by definition, NOTHING. If there is anything outside of God’s control, he is by definition, not omnipotent.

What, specifically, is not under the control of God’s design?

Jensen7: See my comments under the topic heading “Limits to God’s power and knowledge” about eleven headings below. Also, see my above two paragraphs (in Jensen5) and my previous statements.

Doland6: How can he “not” interfere? He creates our personality, right? That is interference! He creates our desires, that is interference. He creates our abilities. That is interference. You make these claims that are blatantly self-contradictory.

Jensen7: Where, exactly, is there a contradiction? Yes, God does interfere in the world by creating us with each a given personality and certain abilities. That’s not exactly interfering in our lives, that’s making us what we are. But our ability to freely choose—for God to give us this is for God to say that here is a point at which I will not interfere. Does Doland think there is a contradiction in “interfering” in our lives at one point but not at another?

Doland6: Further, per my free will article, the Bible specifically states that God interferes with free will purely on God’s whim: “So you see God is kind to some just because he wants to be, and he makes some refuse to listen” (Rom. 9:18).

Jensen7: The passage says, “Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden,” thus

Doland's paraphrase somewhat distorts the meaning. I would argue that this and the previous verses are speaking of God's involvement in history and not to one's salvation or to any moral choices for which one is responsible. God does often manipulate our choices to a given end if God wants a particular historical event or outcome to occur. The individual making these choices is not morally culpable for such choices. God may use someone who has set his or her heart to evil for God to achieve a particular purpose; thus they will be morally responsible in the process of God working out certain desired historical ends (e.g. Exodus 9:16). So even when God does interfere in our choices to attain desired historical outcomes, this is not merely God's whim, and this does not affect my claim that we are free and responsible for moral choices.

The reader may think this passage must be speaking of God controlling our moral choices, perhaps even the choices that will determine our salvation, and holding us responsible for those choices, since it speaks of having mercy on individuals. But this can also be seen as fitting God's historical purposes. The first passage in the Hebrew Scripture that the apostle Paul is citing speaks of God choosing to judge or have mercy on individuals who for their actions deserve judgment (Exodus 32:33, 33:19). The second group of passages alluded to speak of God hardening one who had originally hardened his own heart at least several times (Exodus 8:32, 9:34; cf. 10:1, 20, 27, 11:10, 14:8). As they continue to rebel against God, God eventually gives them up to their desires as Romans 1 explains. So the Romans 9 passage cannot mean that God chooses to have mercy on or to harden innocent people for no reason but God's whim alone. God could show mercy on those who deserve judgment or God could choose to bring about judgment: that is entirely up to God, Paul is saying. Either way, the judgment or the mercy, whether God kills the Israelites who rebelled during the Exodus or allows them to live, has nothing to do with God's final judgment. That judgment will be completely just. God will not arbitrarily choose to allow to live some who do not deserve to live. The only mercy there will involve the proffered mercy of Jesus' sacrifice which can only be accepted or rejected. Our final judgment depends upon our choice, it

depends upon our moral and salvific choices God has given us opportunity to make. It is always because of one's initial choice or choices that God brings judgment or further hardening to then bring judgment.

To claim that God arbitrarily chooses who will be saved and who will be lost (damned) thus overriding or denying any human free choice, as many Calvinists and Muslims claim, contradicts a very foundational teaching of Scripture. Peter had a vision that coordinated with the vision of another person Peter would soon encounter. By this means God initiated the beginning of the spread of Christianity to Gentiles and not only to the Jews. Peter said, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts those from every nation who fear him and do what is right," (Acts 10:34-36, TNIV). The King James says God is "no respecter of persons." This means God depends on human choice and does not otherwise choose—show arbitrary favoritism to determine—those who will be saved. God does not at his own whim alone pick some to be his favorites and condemn the rest. [First and last paragraph revised and second paragraph added 27Mr10.]

Jensen5: Does Doland think he is actually not free? Does he think then that the courts are wrong in holding people responsible for their actions? Couldn't someone say, "I couldn't help it; I had to kill my wife; I wasn't free to do otherwise"?

Doland6: I understand that it is not a pleasant idea that we are just chemical automatons, doing what chemical processes do. That is what seems to be the case, . . . So, in your criminal/court scenario, in many ways, it is true, the criminal didn't have a "choice"—he did what the chemicals in his body set out to do. Of course that is also true of the judge and jury. Whether the court does or does not hold him accountable, the judge and jury did what their biochemicals set out to do.

Of course if we define “choice” as being “the act of brain biochemicals doing what they normally do,” then by that definition, . . . yes, the criminal had a “choice” and the judge/jury had a “choice” on what to do with the criminal. So, in that sense, we have “choice.” But if we were to somehow clone the entire universe, right down to every atom, then the people in the clone universe would make the exact same “choices.” (This isn’t taking into account quantum uncertainty—I know of the concept of quantum uncertainty, but am not educated enough on it to apply it properly. Conceivably, due to quantum uncertainty, maybe the people in the clone universe might do something different.)

So to Jensen’s question, “Does Doland think he is actually not free?”—depends on what you mean by “free.” If you mean “free” to do other than what my biochemicals are going to do, no, I’m not. But if you define “free” as being the action of those biochemicals, then yes.

Jensen7: If one’s biochemistry determines one’s choices then one simply cannot be free; unless, of course, one can play with words to make them mean exactly the opposite of what they normally mean. Equivocation may allow one to win any argument no matter how absurd. So if one is “free” and yet one has no choice but to do what one’s biochemistry forces one to do, is one responsible for such acts? Please don’t tell me that it depends on what we mean by “responsible.” Don’t tell me that you want it to mean “not responsible.” If you do, then language has become meaningless and there is no way we can begin to communicate with each other. Just be honest enough to admit that no one can be responsible under naturalistic biochemical determinism and face the fact that though we may punish criminals to deter further crimes, we cannot hold them responsible for their actions.

Concerning “quantum uncertainty,” I agree with those scientists who believe there are imperceptible causal factors that determine the apparent ontologically random results of quantum events. Events cannot occur

uncaused any more than something can come from nothing. That does not mean there is no such thing as a free act which is a cause but uncaused by prior causes. [Previous sentence altered for clarification 20Mar10.] A free act is caused by the self with no prior causes. Doland is right that naturalism cannot account for freedom, but he is wrong in claiming such a thing cannot exist if it is caused by God. He has provided no good argument for this claim. In fact, I think it is a very good argument for theism to say that because we are aware that we are free and because we know that naturalism cannot account for freedom and that theism can, therefore God exists.

Doland8: [In response to the underlined statement above:] Equivocation is when one either accidentally, or deceptively changes the meaning of a word in mid-argument. My discussion of the meaning of the words in question was intentional, and pointed out! I made it a point that we need to consider the meaning of the terms. . . . That is NOT equivocation.

Jensen9: There is a broader sense of the word ‘equivocation’ than Doland is here using. It is *not only* the commonly known informal logical fallacy. I didn’t intend to say that he was being deceptive or unintentionally misusing words to give an argument and I apologize if I gave that impression. But I do think that by using definitions that very obviously do not apply to terms, one is engaging in a form of equivocation or at least coming very close to it. Notice that I was careful to never actually accuse him of equivocation. (Reread my sentence, Paul!) I know that he has been very clear as to just what these new definitions are. My point is simply that freedom cannot by any stretch of the imagination mean “brain biochemicals” doing only “what they normally do.” Yes, that can be a definition of ‘choice,’ but that is not free choice. Free choice cannot be the deterministic “action of those biochemicals.”

Doland10: Okay, fair enough.

Doland8: [Re] my revised article on free will [:] . . .

I will use another analogy. . . . In the terminator movies, humans programmed the terminators, but, they developed self awareness and progressed beyond their initial programming. I once encountered a Christian that argued that humans are somewhat akin to the terminator characters, wherein God conceived the original human “programming” but that our free will allows us to progress beyond that which God “programmed” into us.

At least theoretically, a terminator type scenario could happen with human programmers. I’m a programmer myself. I am not able to fully understand what results my code would produce in every possible scenario. That’s why there are bugs in software, the human engineer is imperfect. Now imagine God writing a computer program. Every line of code, He would know what it would do in every possible scenario. He could never write a ‘bug’ because he would never have any error. If God puts a line of code in that will result in “kill John Conner” He will know it. And if He didn’t want that result, He wouldn’t put in that line of code.

So, now, to take this analogy to human personality, well, what’s the difference? It is much less predictable than lines of computer code, as a general rule. That is, for humans. But if there is a “line of code” in my personality that says “engage in illicit behavior in ‘X’ specific circumstance” God would know it is there—because HE PUT IT THERE! There is no way for God to make a terminator that does what He didn’t specifically program into it from the beginning.

Jensen9: Here is where Doland begs the question. What grounds does he have to say that there is no way for God to make a person, to program a person, so they do what is not programmed in? Why can’t a person be made so that the self is the entity that chooses with no prior causal factors or programming to determine that choice?

God put the programming in so that a person would do some things or be apt to do some things depending on the strength of other factors directing the individual to do something else. But free will allows one to compare the two options to be decided and act for one or the other without the programming saying one should be chosen over the other in any given circumstance. The programming is not determinative.

Admittedly, if we start with just naturalism, we just can't get there from here. We cannot get free will because all causes are themselves effects that have a prior cause. Free will is an uncaused cause, a self which produces causes but with these causes having no prior causes other than the self. It, free will, cannot be unless that is how God made us. But, with the exception of human choice, that is not the way we find the causal processes in nature.

Doland10: First, could you answer my question about a terminator[: . . .] Could God create a computer program that wouldn't do exactly as God knew it would do in every situation? Yes or no?

Jensen11: The nature of computer programs is such that (correct me if I'm wrong) certain results must inevitably occur every time it is working (given all the machinery, the hardware and the software, is working as intended). If this is correct, then God would always know what the program would do in every situation. So given these stated qualifications, my answer to your question is "no."

My claim is rather different. I'm saying that though we are programmed in a given way and usually follow that program, there are times in which we face decisions in which the programming does not apply and we decide ultimately by our own choice without any prior causal factors determining our choices. It is not merely that A can be chosen as easily as B with no causal factors being involved. Rather the causal factors are only influential factors. One can weigh influencing factors and choose the best alternative

in the light of those factors. As such we would still be following a completely deterministic program. But then we can make a choice entirely out of keeping with those factors and also out of keeping with any other unperceived and unconscious causal or influential factors. It is here that your determinism comes to an end and free choice steps in. But one can choose to allow those influencing factors to affect one's choices or not. Our natural tendency is to let them influence our decisions but it is not necessary that they do so.

Doland12: [to the first underlined paragraph above] . . . Simply showing something is beyond human prediction does not make it beyond prediction of an omniscient entity. So, when it comes to humans, we are a lot more complex than a computer, and our brain synapses are not predictable to another human. I can't look at your brain and see what will happen. But God could. He would know what is going on in every synapse. So, if God could not create a "Terminator," how could he create a human with free will? Our brain is just more complex, not anything fundamentally different.

[To the second underlined sentences above.] The way you have defined free will here is pure randomness. Like in my restaurant example, say that after carefully weighing the pros and cons of water, Coke and tea, I pour gasoline on myself and light myself on fire. Would that be "free will" at work to you?

Jensen13: This is not randomness though setting oneself on fire is a possible choice one could make. Now one does have influencing factors rather than determining factors as I've said. If, however, there were no influencing factors motivating one to set oneself on fire, one would not freely choose to do so. So one does need some influencing factor like mental illness, depression, etc. If one is free, one may choose for or against yielding to the pressure, as it were, such depression exerts to commit suicide.

Also, reread my answer to your question [in Doland10 above]. I said God could create a “terminator,” an android without free will, a computer program that God would know exactly and always what it would do. God could not create a program that God would not know what it would do without also adding to it free will.

Doland12: [continued from Doland12 above] Basically, with your earlier statement: “One can weigh influencing factors and choose the best alternative in the light of those factors. As such we would be still following a completely deterministic program,” you seem to have conceded that when people make choices that can be deemed a logical outcome from known information, then the “choice” was deterministic. And have retreated to merely asserting that if the “choice” doesn’t make sense from known information, only then is “free will” at work. As in my, “should I have a glass of water, or light myself on fire?” example. If that is your “free will,” you have watered it down to insignificance.

Jensen13: No, the choice does make sense from known information. This should be clear from my last response above. It deals with the same influencing factors; it does not create new influencing factors from nothing and choose an option not given by those influencing factors. But one is free to choose against any of those influencing factors and even to choose against the conclusion of reason. Under a world view of causal determinism one may also choose quite logically, given that the brain is programmed to think logically and to the degree that the neural machinery is able to deal with the logical questions at hand.

Furthermore, the free choice is not insignificant. Speaking of moral choices, only if one is free to choose among alternatives (with influencing forces) can one’s choice be responsible and thus significant. A moral choice that is not free would be as insignificant as your example of choosing between normal beverages at a restaurant. That is why such insignificant choices

may fall to determinate causes. We don't take the time to be sure that we do freely choose. We don't need to.

Doland12: [continued from Doland12 above] So, again, you are just left with assertions, without evidence, and contrary to evidence. Again.

Jensen13: You have shown that many of our choices do have determinate causes other than our selves. You have not shown that all of our choices have determinate causes. It appears that it is you who are making assertions without evidence. Indeed, it is you who have made assertions contrary to the evidence since I have in our last exchange provided evidence for free choice.

Doland10: Second, explain exactly how anybody makes any choice that is made with "no prior causal factors"?

Jensen11: See my previous paragraph (the last paragraph in Jensen9 above). By one's choice one is not determined by causal factors outside of oneself or in oneself. Rather one determines by one's free choices what one will be. I determine myself to be a good or evil person by my choice to do or think or speak particular good or evil actions or thoughts or statements. When we trace back causes, we reach an end at the self. The buck stops here. In our choice we are an uncaused cause just as God is an uncaused cause for the universe.

Doland12: What is really funny is, at least many Christians (maybe not you, I'm not sure) but many Christians will mischaracterize Big Bang theory as saying "the universe came from nothing", and then the Christian will argue that is impossible, something cannot come from nothing. Yet, regularly Christians argue for things coming from nothing. Your deity came

from nothing. He creates things from nothing, like he created the universe from nothing. And now you argue that even things God creates (us) can do things from nothing via free will. What a complete load of garbage.

Jensen13: To be an uncaused cause is not the same as creating something out of nothing. To say that God is an uncaused cause is to say that God alone originated the universe and no prior cause made God or made God choose exactly what God chose. Likewise we do not act or create our choices from nothing, we are the source of our choices. The Big Bang theory does have to say that the universe came from nothing if there is no God to create the singularity and if it does not claim a previous existence for the universe. (And current alternative views which claim existence before the Big Bang still cannot avoid a beginning at some time in the past.) Atheists have to slip in magic when their views are pressed. When people like Vic Stenger or Quentin Smith say the universe came from nothing, they're just opting for magic. It is much more reasonable to accept an eternal God as the source of material existence.

There is no Christian view that says that God came from nothing and I do not know of even any other theistic religion that says such a thing. God has always been. That is not coming out of nothing. And nothing in the Bible says that God created out of nothing. (Likely Philo originated the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* but Augustine was its great popularizer.) But neither was matter preexistent according to Scripture. "All things were created through him and without him nothing was created that was created." (John 1:3.) From God's own being existence came, and yet it was made to become other than God. It is from God but it is not God.

Doland10: The fact that I can't list every single factor involved in [a] choice does NOT prove there is some "free will" or soul involved. It doesn't even imply that, as far as I can see. It just means that I don't know every causal factor involved.

Jensen11: Free will is not proven by our failure to know all of the causal factors, true. It is not too difficult to imagine that we could all be determined in all of our choices as Doland claims. But neither is free will disproven. Even if all the causal (or influential) factors were known, free will would not be disproven.

Doland12: What does it mean to be “proven” or “disproven”? What would be sufficient evidence for you? There will (probably) always be gaps in our knowledge of how we make decisions, your argument is essentially “free will of the gaps”.

Jensen13: Not at all. There are no knowledge gaps to fill with free will because you have not shown that any moral choice cannot involve free choice. You need to show that for any moral choice you make, your choice is not free, that all of the influencing or causal factors force you to make a particular decision. You don’t have to say what that decision is or be able to enumerated the causes, you just need to show that you cannot act in contradiction to those causes or influences. I mean by disproven simply the weak sense of the word that you give good reason to disbelieve something. What amazes me is that you still think that by piling up apparent causes for choices proves one cannot act in contradiction to those causes.

Doland10: I was just endeavoring to make clear that it is just ludicrous to propose that choices are ever made with “no prior causal factors.” Every choice has causal factors. Otherwise it would be pure random.

Jensen11: Doland had just given a long example of how his choice of beverage at a restaurant is determined by all the prior causal factors taken together. His desire for sugar, his thirst, his desire to be health conscious, the amount of similar substances he had consumed earlier that day, his desire not to kill himself, etc. are all weighed in his mind, some consciously,

some unconsciously, to determine his choice. But this does not show that all choices have causes that in turn have prior causes. I'm not saying that some choices have no cause. A free choice has the cause of the *self* which has no prior cause concerning that choice. The existence of the self has a cause, but there is no causal chain going back prior to the self for the particular choice that is made.

The final outcome of a free choice may be similar to a purely random choice (if there could be such a thing) in that it would not be determined by the mechanistic chain of cause and effect going back to the infinite past (I assume Doland would say this of causation). It is similar to randomness in that we cannot know even in principle what it would possibly be since the self cannot be investigated as to what it will choose if it is free. An uncaused choice by a free agent is the only choice that can be responsible. A random choice, one which the self does not choose but occurs because of truly chance processes, cannot be a choice for which one is responsible.

Doland12: Name one choice that cannot be traced to causal factors. . . .
When everything that I see points to having causal factors, and can show them in at least most cases, it becomes insufficient for you to make a vague assertion, "well, maybe not 'all' the time."

Jensen13: No, it *is* quite sufficient to say that many of our choices are not caused by mechanistic forces beyond our control. All events, all choices, do have causes, but agent causation points out that one cause of events is not itself caused to choose in one particular way rather than another. So here I am pointing out not the choice but the cause that does not itself have prior causes. It is not as though there are a number of events in the world without causes, rather there are numerous events that all have a particular cause, the self, that has no prior cause for that event. You have given no reason to think that this cause itself must have prior causes for its effects.

Doland8: What is the fundamental difference, besides complexity, to human personality and a computer program?

Jensen9: The difference is that the programming is not all that we are. We are also able to choose without the programming determining our choices.

Doland10: You keep making this claim without evidence. And in fact, [it] is contrary to the evidence. I presented some of this contrarian evidence, by referring you to the article by Keith Augustine: “The Case Against Immortality.” http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/keith_augustine/immortality.html.

As much as you might find distaste to the idea, the evidence very much points to that we ARE just the product of our biology. I have evidence to support that claim, you have a counter-claim with zero evidence. I accept claims that have evidence, you accept claims that you like and don't care if you have no evidence.

Jensen11: No, you did not give any evidence for your claim. Do you think stories about the tensile strength of metals or the terminator or choosing your drink at a restaurant constitute evidence? On the other hand, you are right that I have not presented evidence for free will. I have merely shown that it is not impossible or even unlikely. I've done nothing more than refute your claim that there cannot be such a thing since that is all that has been needed until now. So what positive evidence can I give for free will? I have alluded to the basic evidence when I chided you for not being able to account for human responsibility. The basic evidence is that we are aware that we are responsible agents. This awareness is the basis of our judicial systems which assume people to be responsible and mete out punishment or reward, praise or blame, according to our actions. It is assumed in all other human relations as well.

If you haven't already, look at Einstein's life and thought for a very interesting dialectic of beliefs. He was a determinist like you and didn't think

people should be held responsible for their moral actions. Yet he couldn't help but hate the Nazis and hold them responsible for what they had done. Though he did accept a somewhat deistic God, he couldn't live consistently with his particular presuppositions (as Frances Schaeffer used to say).

So it is our awareness that we are responsible that provides evidence that we are free in our moral choices. Now, as I've said already, if I were not a theist, I would have difficulty understanding how any naturalistic processes could produce freedom. We should expect the universe to be a completely deterministic causal nexus going back to an infinite past. (Also recall that the idea of a changing universe with an infinite past constitutes one of the reasons we claim naturalism to be incoherent.) If our moral intuition is correct—that is, if our awareness of our moral responsibility is veridical—then we have good evidence for free will.

But going on, if one finds the evidence for Christianity persuasive, as I do, one has further evidence for free will. Since the Scripture holds people responsible for their actions, and since I have justification for holding the biblical teachings as true, and since one cannot be responsible unless one is free, it follows that we must be free. So all of my arguments for biblical Christianity constitute evidence for free will.

Jensen13: To my statement above, “No, you did not give any evidence for your claim,” Doland did make a response but it contained no arguments against free will. Since his particular statement has no evidential relevance to the debate but only concerns methodological issues, the reader may find his statement (abridged) and my response at the end of the debate where I discuss methodology.

Doland12: [To the second underlined sentence in Jensen11 above.] For the record, I do not consider analogies, such as the tensile strength of metals and the terminator analogies to be evidence. They are intended to

be teaching tools, not evidence. As to the restaurant example, that is an example. Examples that fit my model are evidence supporting my model. I gave one example that fits my model, you've given none to support your model, all you have provided is just a free-will-of-the-gaps. So, I would say that the restaurant example constitutes a piece of evidence. Not, in itself sufficient, but my 1 example is infinitely more than your 0 examples.

Jensen13: If the example of choosing a beverage constitutes evidence but not sufficient evidence for belief in determinism, then you have admitted that you do not have adequate reason to believe in determinism. So why do you claim that it is true?

I'm pretty sure you will take back your last statement since you have previously claimed to have enough evidence to believe in determinism. The restaurant example merely demonstrates that a deterministic model is not impossible, it does not demonstrate that it is not the case or cannot be the case that free will could occur no matter what causal nexus is involved. Free will is not having an event that has no cause. Free will is having a cause that has no prior cause. It is not a free-will-of-the-gaps because there are no gaps of effects that are missing causes. Normal mechanistic causation does still occur with each mechanistic cause being in need of a prior cause.

But let me belabor the issue just a little more in the hope that you will see that you have no grounds for rejecting free will. Think about the beverage example. Let's change it a little. Suppose you are about to set a drink before a business partner. However, you already know what he wants and you provide it; rather, the choice before you is whether to empty a vial of poison into the drink before he arrives. I want to make this a moral choice because this is where the issue of free choice must be present; without free choice one would not be morally responsible. Suppose you would greatly benefit financially from this person's death and you have a perfect plan to avoid getting caught. You weigh in your mind the benefits and detriments of the different choices. You have desperate financial needs but you know

murder is wrong and you have an innate repulsion at doing evil—and especially an evil you know to be this great. You weigh the various causal factors pushing you this way and that as you seek to make your decision. Under your view, your neural machinery works like a computer to calculate, as it were, a decision. Under my view, under agent causation, the neural machinery still works, the weighing of relative benefits and detriments still goes on; but you, the one who decides, have the power to shift from one potential decision to the other in a way that can override the conclusion of that neurocomputer. You can make your decision; it is a choice that comes from you alone with nothing else, no calculation of prior influencing forces, making you to decide one way rather than another.

This is not a free-will-of-the-gaps because it is present in at least any moral decision of any free person. It is not a matter of having some influencing forces that seem to lack prior causes but which are really there all along and which we will (likely) eventually be able to discover. Rather, this uncaused cause of the self is always there, intervening in the process of moral decision. There is no lack of a cause, you are the cause.

Einstein's inconsistency with determinism

Would we all have been Nazis?

Do the evil deserve justice?

Doland12: [To the third underlined sentence in Jensen11 above] Well, for one, humans (including Einstein) are emotional entities, that do not always have consistent beliefs, or always act consistent with stated beliefs. That is our nature. But, how I would respond to the Nazi question you raise: It is natural for us to react with emotion to actions such as the Nazis, but, ultimately, each Nazi was a product of his or her environment and biology. If I was born in Nazi Germany, I'd have been a Nazi, and so would you. Or at least very much likely. Moreover, there is no punishment that can be done

after the fact to bring back any of their victims. Once it is past, it cannot be undone. That is a fact whether you are right or I am right. Therefore, it follows that the only purpose to punishing the perpetrators can do is to discourage it from happening again. And that is a worthy goal whether you are right or I am right.

From this, it also follows that to punish someone like God allegedly does in hell where there is no useful purpose to the punishment except pure vengeance is itself pointless and evil.

Jensen13: Nazism was a mass movement that swept Germany but there were still many who resisted. Let me repeat an anecdote I had heard. Some of my details might be off a little but the following is essentially what happened. A man on a bus happened to see some “Brownshirts” beating a Jewish man. He muttered “Kultur Scham.” I believe these were the words meaning, essentially, this is a shame, a disgrace, to our culture, to our nation. Someone overheard him who did not share his opinion and he was soon interrogated by the police. People know the difference between right and wrong. Even a common man like this could not be coerced when faced with reality. However effective the propaganda machinery or the social or police pressure might be, we all have the chance to choose for good over evil. Protest was almost never visible; whenever it was, it was quickly crushed. Resistance had to be done underground. But there were many Dietrich Bonhoeffers and Sophie Scholls. Just to have grown up in Nazi Germany did not mean one would become a Nazi.

If we are not free, then the only justification for punishment would be for deterrence as you claim. But if we are free and responsible, then punishment would be just, it would be as we deserve. It does not matter that the victims cannot be brought back to life in this life or that the pain cannot be undone; what matters is that for any evil one does, one deserves punishment appropriate to that evil. That is what justice means.

Imagine yourself living in post-Nazi Germany after the war. Imagine that Hitler had survived as well as most of his officials. Imagine the invading forces thought nothing of the holocaust or any of the other Nazi crimes against humanity. Imagine the Nazi leaders were free but they were not to control the government. Imagine Mengales or Hitler or any of the others were free to walk the streets and boast of their crimes. Suppose deterrence were not an issue—that somehow, however we might construct the scenario, we know that punishing these men and women would not deter future crimes. Now imagine that you are sitting at a bar with an ex-commandant of a concentration camp. Even without taking a drink he starts boasting about the ways he used to torture prisoners. He mentions a boy of ten or twelve whom he had hanged. The boy was so light that he hung there for quite a long time before the rope strangled him. The commandant thought it very funny how the boy grimaced and twisted for so long before he died. (This incident, that is the hanging, actually occurred. I think it was recounted by Elie Wiesel in *Night*).

You say, Well we can't undo the death or suffering, so why punish the criminal? You think there is nothing wrong with this monster being free to wallow in the evil he had done and to boast about it? You don't see that we should punish a criminal like this simply because he deserves it? Even with your deterministic model, shouldn't you recognize that a man like this is a cancer to humanity and should not be allowed to live? We do know what it means to be human and we know that we are responsible for our acts. Paul, we are free, because that is the only way we can be responsible. And we can only be free if we are created by a God who can create us with free will. Einstein was right when he affirmed his humanness and held the Nazis responsible for their evils. Only once we understand that, can we go on to understand forgiveness.

We have already talked much about the idea of hell. One of my main points was that because we are free, the lost receive exactly the punishment they deserve. Justice is not pointless and evil.

Free will and determinism, continued

Doland8: Could God write a computer program that He wouldn't know exactly what every line of code would do in every situation? Could he program into a computer program a "free will"?

Jensen9: But simply not knowing what is in the program does not amount to freedom. If we are simply programmed to do and think and be all and only what we are programmed to do and think, then whether anyone, including our creator, does not know everything about that programming does nothing to make that programming non-determinative.

Doland8: . . . Lithium, in small doses, is actually a necessary nutrient, involved in balancing neurotransmitters in the brain. A study of different towns in Texas showed that . . . towns with higher levels of lithium in the local drinking water had lower violent crime and mental illness. According to the study, the difference was very statistically significant, meaning not likely to be coincidental.

. . . A deficiency of this nutrient increases one's risk of mental illness and propensity to violence. . . . From your worldview, how . . . is your "soul" knocked out of kilter by not having a few micrograms of lithium?

Jensen9: C.S. Lewis did a beautiful discussion on the relationship of nature and reason in *Miracles*. As a simple headache can keep one from clear thinking, so a change in one's brain can affect one morally as well. Good people become violent with certain mental damage or drug usage (e.g., "angel dust," or phencyclidine). Some people have lost their entire religious orientation with a lobotomy, for example. There is no problem in

seeing that just as one may be unable to function rationally with loss of the some part or function of a physical brain, so one may be unable to properly function morally or spiritually as well. God does not hold one responsible under such conditions. One needs at least sufficient rational abilities, moral awareness, and capacities to freely choose in order to be responsible both morally and spiritually.

Doland10: You did NOT answer the question. The question was: “How is your ‘soul’ knocked out of kilter by not having a few micrograms of lithium?” The operative word in the question is ‘HOW.’ Remember YOUR claim that we make choices “with no prior causal factors.” You essentially have just conceded your entire argument. I win. You made a claim about there being no prior causal factors, and claimed our choices are not a product of our biology, and then conceded they indeed are! So, you lose.

Jensen11: From the context of your statement “How is your soul knocked out of kilter?” I take it you mean, “How can a physical change in the body make one more prone to evil actions?” Recall that you were talking about lithium deprivation contributing to wrong moral actions. (If you meant something else, please rephrase your question a little more clearly and precisely. I really don’t know what to make of a “soul” being “knocked out of kilter.”) Well, assuming I understand your question correctly I would say, that’s just the way we are physically. And that’s why I gave further examples to illuminate your claim. This response you took as conceding your argument. But you never made any argument to respond to! How is it a problem that lithium deprivation or brain damage make people unable to make culpable moral choices? What does it matter? What matters is that, as I have said, those with “sufficient rational abilities, moral awareness, and capacities to freely choose” are morally responsible. Suppose someone with sufficient physical injury were in a coma. That also makes them unable to make responsible moral decisions in the world outside of their own minds. Do you think that should also be a problem for theists?

You say, “You made a claim about there being no prior causal factors, and claimed our choices are not a product of our biology, and then conceded they indeed are! So, you lose.” We are only concerned about those who are sufficiently physically and mentally healthy such that they are culpable for their moral decisions, as well as those who may be impaired in some ways such that though they are not responsible for some of their actions, thoughts, and words, they would be responsible for others. Now I’ve said that there are influencing factors for our choices but that there are no determining causes of our choices other than the self who chooses. So what you call causes or causal factors, I say are influencing factors which may be disregarded at will. I did indeed claim (not concede) that some of our choices are, as you say, a “product of our biology,” but we are not responsible for such choices.

Doland12: [to the first underlined sentence above] . . . You win! That is indeed THE WAY WE ARE PHYSICALLY. Except one thin—YOU ARGUE OUR SOUL IS NOT PHYSICAL. So, well, you lose. The question is, how is this PHYSICAL thing, lithium, interacting with our NONPHYSICAL soul? Hmmm?

Jensen13: Actually I haven’t said anything about the “soul” in our discussion that I can remember. So if you want to bring up “souls,” you should define or at least give some suggestion of an idea of what you are talking about. Then we could carry on a discussion. But you claim I believe they are some kind of non-physical entities. That’s nice. What does it have to do with our discussion? Please quit claiming that I’ve said something when I haven’t.

What I have talked about was the self with its power of free will. I think I’ve said that I believe a person does survive death though I’m not sure that one does or does not need a physical body of some kind to do so. The Christian view, remember, says that at least eventually we shall have some kind of physical body, namely a resurrected body. One’s self is primarily a consciousness, an awareness of a physical world and of itself. Being a

center of awareness of this world and of itself, the self is clearly a nonphysical entity. So if you are talking about the nonphysical aspect of a person—one's awareness, one's rational abilities, one's freedom to choose—then I would agree that this self does interact with the physical world and physical things like lithium. As to how this interaction occurs, I would refer you first to C.S. Lewis' discussion in *Miracles* which I had mentioned earlier (Jensen9 above). Of course it appears you haven't read it yet, otherwise you would likely refer to his arguments. (Paul, how long do you expect me to keep spoon-feeding you?! Note: this last statement is part of an inside joke, although I doubt that Doland takes it to be very funny. The reader may wish to look at our dialogue on methodology at the end of this piece to see my point.)

More to the point, as I've said, lithium and other drugs do interact with the nonphysical aspects of the self. At least for humans and for this life, we are dependent upon our physical bodies for our awareness of the outside world (through the senses) and our nonphysical abilities such as our moral awareness, our rational abilities, our ability to act freely, even possibly our very consciousness itself are limited when our bodies malfunction. How do physical conditions and chemicals interact with the nonphysical self? We do not really know. Somehow, for us at least, if the physical brain is altered and hindered from its proper function, the mind cannot work with the brain, and consciousness and other nonphysical characteristics are diminished and possibly even entirely removed. Whether consciousness can be entirely removed with the destruction of the body we do not know by normal empirical investigation. There is a little, somewhat empirical, evidence in the form of near death experience that claim that consciousness does continue with the shutting down of the body.

Jensen11: [from the second underlined sentence in Jensen11 above.]
Suppose someone with sufficient physical injury were in a coma. That also makes them unable to make responsible moral decisions in the world

outside of their own minds. Do you think that should also be a problem for theists?

Doland12: Oh for ___ sake, no, because people in comas are not making any decisions considered to be moral decisions. They aren't even making moral decisions within their mind as they are unconscious. Now, if you start seeing people in comas going around raping, murdering, joining the Nazis or KKK, let me know, okay? What is wrong with you? Maybe you need some more lithium or something?

Jensen13: Paul, you need to watch a few more zombie movies. No, of course I'm making an absurd suggestion. That's my point! Since the last argument you've presented seems, to my thinking, to be so glaringly unsound, I'm just wondering if you don't also see an argument in this similar situation. If you can see arguments that are invisible to me, arguments that make no sense to me, maybe you can see one here.

Jensen11: [From the third underlined sentence above.] We are only concerned about those who are sufficiently physically and mentally healthy such that they are culpable for their moral decisions.

Doland12: I'd be willing to bet that every single one of the people in the study about lithium in the water, if you were to talk to them, you would probably judge them as being indeed mentally healthy enough to be judged for their actions.

THERE IS NO EXACT DIVIDING LINE between being mentally and physically healthy and not being so. EVERYBODY is imperfect. EVERYBODY has mental and physical defects compared to the "norm." So, if your God is going to let people off the hook for not getting quite enough lithium, then He has to let EVERYBODY off.

Jensen13: It doesn't matter how someone judges their own actions, what matters is how culpable they actually are. And it isn't a matter of letting some people "off the hook" and holding others as completely responsible. To the degree that one is responsible, to that degree they will be held accountable for any particular moral choice they make. And everyone will have some opportunity and will be given sufficient moral awareness to make the moral and spiritual decisions that will determine their destiny.

Doland12: Are you familiar with Occam's Razor? Basically, when you have a solution with elements that don't add any explanatory power, they can be eliminated from the solution. Your adding a nonphysical soul into the question doesn't add any explanatory power and therefore can be removed. The soul here is basically a proverbial fifth wheel.

In fact, your soul hypothesis detracts from the explanatory power because you've added an element without any explanation of what the ___ it is doing and how it is interacting with the physical entities. Again, your adding a nonphysical soul not only doesn't help explain the lithium connection to behavior, it detracts from the solution because you've added an element with no definable purpose and no discernible mode of operation.

Jensen13: Not only have I never mentioned the "soul" in this context, now Doland says I have a "soul hypothesis." (After having made this last statement, I looked up any usage of the word "soul" I had made within this debate. When we started over two years ago I did use it to indicate the person that survives death in hell or is destroyed in hell. I did not there indicate anything else about this entity and I specifically did not say it was physical or not physical.) It seems that the only way Doland can present an argument is by pretending I've given an argument (or at least an hypothesis) and then attacking that hypothesis without explaining what my supposed hypothesis/argument is.

Okay, let's assume he is talking about what I have above called the self and its nonphysical aspects. If I'm wrong, he can come back and correct me later and we will be able to carry on our discussion on the right track. (Maybe he'll tell us more clearly what I'm supposed to believe about "souls.") Now I do agree with Occam that one should not multiply entities beyond necessity. The question is, Can we account for all aspects of existence without these nonphysical entities? I think it is very obvious that we cannot. Most certainly, we are aware that a particular nonphysical entity does exist, namely human consciousness. Even mere sentience, my awareness of my physical surroundings through my senses, is not a physical entity itself. So the nonphysical self, a center of consciousness, undeniably exists.

How does the naturalist answer the question Doland has posed? Lithium and other drugs and physical changes in the brain may alter one's mental abilities and even one's entire consciousness since the mind is thought to be a function of the brain's activity. But this does not explain how a mind can be produced from a brain's activity. It cannot be produced by any conceivable means by purely physical processes. What arrangement of a machine, what amount of complexity of that machine, can produce awareness? It cannot. Again, the naturalist must resort to magic; this time in their attempt to create consciousness from matter.

Doland10: I suppose you would probably try to say not so fast, that you conceded that biology is part, but not all. But, what part is it NOT? Take language. We know where in the brain language is stored. If those areas of the brain are damaged, we have impaired language abilities. Or how about morality? I presented evidence that simply not getting enough lithium impairs moral choices of violence. So, what exactly is the part [of] ourselves that is NOT our biology? What part of human thought is not a part of our biology?

And you need to do more than merely assert something, you need to DEMONSTRATE it. I realize that is a concept that just blows the theist mind. Actual evidence is just beyond your ken. But, that is what you need to produce if you expect to be taken seriously by someone that is not already taken in by your mind virus of religion.

Jensen11: It's interesting to notice how you jump from claims about how I have conceded the argument to admitting what I have argued elsewhere, that "biology is part, but not all" of what we are. Language and logic may be phenomena that developed by chance in our history if the naturalistic evolutionary scenario is correct. But then it would have been only by chance that they were lucky enough to fit the real world. I admit that lithium and other chemicals and physical changes in the brain can affect one's moral choices, but what does that have to do with morality being completely a function of our "biology"? Demonstrate that we are not free and that for normal moral agents all of their choices are determined by causes outside of their control and you would then have a case. Since you are claiming that we are not free, the burden is on you at this point to demonstrate your claim. To use your own words, it seems that the ability to present "actual evidence is just beyond your ken." But you have also asked me to demonstrate my claim that we are free. I have just done so in my last response (the Jensen11 just prior to my last three). I will have to look back to all of my previous statements to be sure, but I don't think I have done so until now. If so, that simply means that until now there has been no need to present such an argument. All that I've done has been to show that your claims do not hold.

Doland10: And by the way, what exactly is your evidence that God doesn't hold you responsible if you have biochemical reasons for your actions? Where does God say, "I will send you to hell for all eternity, unless you had inadequate dietary intake of lithium, and in that case, you are forgiven." Where does it say anything like that?

Jensen11: How about Romans 1? It talks about evidence people have for God's existence that is so clear that they will be "without excuse" when they face God in judgment. That the biblical writers are concerned about the idea of someone being without excuse shows that God would take into account factors like drug ingestion or deficiency, dementia, etc. In other words, people are held responsible to God only for those choices over which they have control.

Doland12: Oh for ___ sake. EVERYBODY knows that Romans says 100% opposite of what you say. What it says [is] "when you die, don't come crying that you didn't know, all men are universally without excuse."

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." How do you manage to get "some men have excuses" out of the universal "men are without excuse" [?]

Jensen13: Please reread my second to the last sentence (in Jensen11 above). I'm completely amazed that Doland actually read this sentence and would go on to claim that Romans 1 does not answer this question. If someone does have or claim an excuse for some sin, that doesn't mean they have an excuse at other times. Whatever the rightful excuse one may have at one point in time, they do not have it all the time and thus they are ultimately without excuse. Think of the story of Lot having sexual intercourse with his daughters after they got him drunk. If that was truly a good excuse for his sin (which is very questionable), it wasn't an excuse for other sins he, like everyone else, was guilty of.

Oh, and one point I failed to reiterate in my last response to Doland10: remember that in our earlier discussion of hell I claimed that the Scripture does not necessarily teach that the punishment of hell is eternal. That's only one of three possible views. You keep bringing up accusations about

God sending people to an eternal hell and you know that I've argued against that. You're just attacking straw men. [Last two paragraphs revised 26Ag14.]

Doland10: [continuation of Doland 10 above] If anything, I'd say it says very nearly the opposite. For example, in the book of Exodus, Moses is on the mountain getting the tablets and some of the people have given up hope and made a golden idol and started to pray and dance to it. So Moses has 3,000 people slaughtered:

Exodus 32:27-29 NIV: Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'" The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."

In verse 33, God says that whoever sinned against him is blotted out of his book. That says the 3,000 were killed and damned forever. Period. Nothing about "oh, except for those that didn't get enough Lithium, I'm leaving those in my book."

Jensen11: Because the rest of the Scripture, like the Romans 1 passage, makes it clear that God does not hold people accountable for that over which they have no control, it is clear that God did not have to make any such additional statement here. And what's this stuff about being damned forever? Where does it say that in this passage? Moses asked God to blot him out of God's book if God would not relent and forgive the people. If Moses had any concept of the New Testament idea of hell, he would not very likely be asking to be sent there in the people's place, if that is what he

meant by being “blotted out of God’s book.” But of course he didn’t. He probably just meant, be killed.

Doland12: YOU _____. God says so: Ex 32:33: The LORD replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.” It is standard Christian theology that “the book” in question is who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. You do know this, right? Right?

Jensen13: Sorry Paul, but I *do not* know that and you haven’t even tried to defend your claim that that is what it does mean. There is no “standard Christian theology” that says that “the book” tells us who goes to heaven or hell. As you have done before, your claims amount to a lot of melodrama and no argument. The New Testament speaks of the Book of Life which contains the names of those who have eternal life (Revelation 21:27) and it says that those not written in this book are damned (20:15). It also speaks of other books that are open on the day of judgment (20:12). The Hebrew Scripture uses the expression, “Book of Life” once (Psalm 69:28) but it is not at all clear this passage means the same thing the New Testament passages mean. The Exodus passage only speaks of God’s book which could be one of the other books mentioned above or something entirely different. Furthermore, you have not answered the argument I just gave that it cannot mean the same as the New Testament “Book of Life.” Also recall that I have argued that the New Testament is not clear that the lost are punished forever.

God’s goodness: “Kill your brothers”?

Fictional “plot devices” in Gospels and Exodus?

The Exodus never happened?

Doland10: And are you going to seriously try to tell me that Moses’ strap-on sword-fest where he praises his people for killing their own “sons and brothers,” saying they are blessed as being more of God’s “goodness”?

That is more of your equivocation on the word “good.” It’s not good, you know it is not good, so, please, stop lying to me.

Jensen11: These were people who saw the full power of God. They watched the Red Sea part which they crossed just in time while the Egyptian army was drowned; a pillar of smoke by day and one of fire by night led them; they saw the plagues of Egypt which hit everyone but their own people; they saw the earth open and swallow those who rebelled against Moses. They knew who God was and they knew the severity of this sin in God’s eyes. They knew that there could be almost nothing more horrible than this kind of idolatry. And you are going to tell me that they did not deserve what they got? If God is good, God must be just. I find it hard to imagine how atheists can have such a perverted view of justice and goodness.

Doland12: [Responding to the first four sentences.] My first response to this is, does this not trigger any ___ alarms in your head? None at all? How could it be possible that someone had seen all these things and still doubt? It’s like in the NT, where Jesus does miracle after miracle, and yet invariably the next scene the disciples are like “duh, Jesus, whadda we gonna do now?” This just reeks of “plot device,” that the characters do things because the story required it, not because anybody would actually behave that way in real life.

Also note how this scene is totally contradictory to the NT. You have heard of the prodigal son haven’t you? The prodigal son turns his back on his father who had done so much for him, and yet is welcomed back when he returns. The father does not strap on a sword and slice up the son. If the parable had the father slicing up the son, would you approve? Why not? You just defended God and Moses for that.

Also, of note, THE EXODUS NEVER HAPPENED. It is a growing consensus among historians that there was no Exodus. If a million plus people had lived in exile, they would have left traces.

Jensen13: I don't know what fiction you read but there is nothing in the Exodus account or in the Gospel accounts that "reeks of 'plot device.'" A fiction writer would not likely write of occasional but sometimes repeated intellectual bunglings or of an inability to apprehend the obvious, not unless they want to imitate events that commonly happen in the real world. There is nothing particularly interesting about such a "plot line." On the other hand, unless caricaturized to an extreme, as you have tried to do in depicting these accounts, these are the kinds of things that do happen in the real world. People do things that they know they should not do, things that they know will hurt them in the end. As soon as we have a chance to forget something we do not want to believe, we do so. And we often do so repeatedly. That's also how faith is for the Christian. We have good reason to believe, but once the apprehension or experience is over, we fight our feelings and emotional pressure drawing us to disbelieve. Faith is a battle of the mind against emotions, it is standing on what we have good evidence to believe against our feelings.

As I say, your description of the dullness of the disciples is a caricature. In fact, the places where the disciples seemed most dense—like when they had previously experienced the feeding of 5000 with a few loaves of bread and a few fish, and then it looks as if they didn't apprehend that Jesus could do it all over again—might be somewhat excused. When considering how to feed the second multitude, this time of 4000 people, Matthew's account (15:33) seems to indicate "that they were protesting only their inability to feed the multitude *on their own* apart from Jesus' intervention." (Blomberg, *Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 190). So the realism of these stories become even more evident. And as I have pointed out earlier, the fact that it's the disciples who are usually slow to learn or have faith counts strongly against these accounts being fiction. Esteemed leaders are not portrayed as failures and buffoons.

The Exodus account does not contradict Jesus' teachings. We needed the Law to show us what justice requires and what we deserve. With that

understanding we are aware that God's mercy has meaning. It's like when Dawkins asks how it is that God couldn't think of a better way to forgive us than to die a horrible death on a cross. No, there is no other way. We can't just pretend sin and evil are nothing, that they can be removed by a mere word from God. The Law and the events of the Exodus show the reality of the nature of sin and what it deserves. Jesus' point is that once we understand that, then we can see how much God wants to reconcile us back to himself. Without the Law and the accounts in the Exodus and elsewhere in the Hebrew Scripture the story of the prodigal son would not make much sense. When the son returned to his father he would have said, "Hey Pop, I'm back. I really had a fun time until that famine came. You should have come with me." And the father would have said, "You're back? I didn't even know you left." There would have been nothing to forgive.

Once we understand the horror of evil, then we can understand how much God seeks us to return to him. And it is not a matter of approving the story of the prodigal son over a story in which the father kills the son (as the golden calf incident would have it). I approve of both because both tell us what God is like and what we deserve.

As for your claim that the Exodus never happened, it has indeed become more popular to disbelieve in this event in recent years, though this is hardly a "growing consensus." But it is interesting that the historical and archeological evidence has not substantially changed since the time it was more widely accepted. This suggests that it is not because of any historical evidence but rather because of more subjective social influences in academic circles that it is now less accepted. A million plus people would not have necessarily left traces in a wilderness where the elements and wild animals typically leave little behind. Also, it is very questionable that archeologists have looked in the right places. The traditional site for Mt. Sinai is not at all likely the true site, and the route of the Exodus might have been more in the Arabian peninsula which is now to a large degree inaccessible to archeologists. Finally, in the Bible, numbers are possibly the most difficult items to copy accurately over many generations of

transcription. Some have contested whether there were actually a million plus people in the Exodus.

Jensen11: [From the second to the last underlined sentences in Jensen11 above.] And you are going to tell me that they did not deserve what they got?

Doland12: If you insist on considering the moral ramifications of the event pretending it did happen, then, yes, I will tell you, you ____, they did NOT deserve what they got. If, hypothetically, these people saw all these wonders and yet somehow still had a moment of weakness and prayed to some idol, then maybe they could stand a good [reprimand], but they could not possibly deserve execution and eternal damnation. Only a ____ would propose that.

Jensen13: Again I repeat, those destroyed in God's judgment in the golden calf incident were not necessarily condemned in their next life. God judges us justly. If there were any "moments of weakness" that were in any way excusable, God would take that into account. (Cf. Luke 10:13-14 for examples of how God considers and takes into accounts certain more excusable sins and certain less excusable sins.) With our understanding of God's mercy (from Jesus' teachings and parables like that of the prodigal son) we should expect that God would still have thought that those who died worshipping the calf would yet be reconciled to him. Remember that Jesus taught that some sins, or at least a certain sin, would not be forgiven in this life or in the next (Matthew 12:32). This suggests that some may not be forgiven in this life but that there will be opportunity for forgiveness in the next.

Jensen11: [From the last two underlined sentences in Jensen11 above.] If God is good, God must be just. I find it hard to imagine how atheists can have such a perverted view of justice and goodness.

Doland12: You are going to defend slicing up family members and sending them to eternal torment over a moment of weakness, and tell me that I have a perverted view of justice and goodness?

Jensen13: First of all, they weren't family members. It says all the Levites rallied to Moses (v.26). So those indulging in idolatry whom they killed were not Levites. When Moses said God blessed the Levites because they set themselves against their sons and brothers (v.29), it means sons and brothers in an extended sense. All the Israelites were brothers. Do you really think a Levite would kill his wife or son or father or mother even if they were among the revelers? And how could God bless the Levites if many of the Levites made up those who indulged in this idolatry?

Secondly, as I've said repeatedly, this has nothing to do with eternal torment. It doesn't even tell us anything of the status in the afterlife of those who were killed. Thirdly, a moment of weakness is no excuse after all that they had seen of God's power. You don't make a golden calf in a moment. It was all fully premeditated.

Free will and determinism, continued

Doland10: If you were correct that God does indeed forgive people if their biology is out of whack, then He'd have to forgive EVERYBODY because EVERYBODY has imperfect nutrition and biology. NOBODY is perfect biologically.

Jensen11: Minor differences in our physical makeup and even major failings in our biology that have little effect on our mental abilities do not

alter our moral awareness. We have quite a wide range of physical variation before we reach a point at which we are not responsible for our actions.

Doland12: _____. I mentioned the lithium study which indicates that very small changes in our biology can make significant changes in our “moral awareness.” I can point you to other studies showing other aspects in diet make significant changes in behavior, or “moral awareness.”

Jensen13: First, a couple of minor points: One, the information you originally summarized only indicated that the correspondence of lithium deficiency and moral behavior/criminal behavior/mental illness were, as you said, “not likely to be coincidental.” That is not an extremely strong scientific conclusion. Now you say it definitely does “make significant changes in our ‘moral awareness.’”

Two, it is not clear that those towns with higher lithium content in the water and less crime/mental illness are not actually the more abnormal state. The study you mentioned may address this, but, as I say, from your summary this is not evident. My point is simply that the populations with higher lithium may be in a slightly more “drugged” state; they may be less prone to, say, violence, for reasons similar to the reasons the prisoners at Guantanamo were less prone to violence, they appear to have been sedated much of the time.

So if someone robs a liquor store in a low lithium town whereas he wouldn't have done so had he lived in a higher lithium town, it may be that the robbery would have been his more normal behavior and God would correctly judge him as being fully responsible for this act. If living in the higher lithium town he were less apt to make the decision to rob the store, God would simply wait until he could make a similar moral decision for which he would be responsible. Even if the lithium is as morally deterministic as you suggest, wouldn't God merely wait until he moves to or visits a low lithium town?

On the other hand, suppose insufficient lithium actually causes one to carry out a moral evil without the full control of one's will. God would take that into account and not judge the person as accountable for this act. God would simply wait until this person does have sufficient lithium to be responsible to make such a moral choice. God would judge them as less accountable but to the degree that they are truly accountable.

Incidentally, you may have heard that some recent studies have shown that focusing magnetic pulses on certain parts of the brain (the TPJ specifically) can disrupt our ability to make moral decisions.

So my conclusion would be that it is possible that certain physical forces as well as certain very special chemicals may, in even very small quantity, have a very significant effect on one's moral awareness and behavior. My point is and has always been that God takes into account all such mitigating circumstance. Nevertheless, I do continue to maintain that "minor changes in our physical makeup . . . do not alter our moral awareness." If you put a chemical in your brain like phencyclidine or some other street drugs, that's not a minor change.

As for your claim that "other aspects of our diet make significant changes in our behavior" and moral awareness, depending on what is eaten, I would probably end up contesting whether the changes are significant or whether the drugs that are taken are insignificant. I very strongly doubt that any natural foods have the effect you claim. Of course, caffeine and alcohol certainly do. If coffee is considered a natural food, then only if taken in pretty extreme amounts might it affect one's moral behavior and awareness. And alcohol is a very significant drug. So if we are not considering factors other than chemical and physical influences, most of the time most people have a clear moral awareness and are morally responsible. Even if *most* people do not have clear moral awareness and are not responsible *most* of the time, at least they are some of the time.

God and time

Jensen5: Doland asks if I think God is timeless or temporal. I think the best view is the one William Lane Craig argues for: God is timeless *sans* creation but enters time with the first creation. So God is not timeless now. Craig is not only a prominent philosopher of religion, he is also a leading scholar in the philosophy of time. I would recommend his book *Time and Eternity* (Crossway, 2001) for an introduction to his thought in this area. It is less technical than his other books on the subject.

Doland6: Like many Christian hypothesis, this is just untestable. . . . Which makes it a useless statement.

Jensen7: I've pointed out numerous times that untestability does not matter at this point. An explanation may be accepted because it explains the most even though it is not, at present at least, testable. But this view was not chosen for no reason. There is good reason to think that God is in time now but existed timelessly before time came to be. If God were timeless now, there would be some things we would know that God would not know. God would not know what time it is right now because God is not aware of time. Likewise God had to be timeless before time existed simply because there was no time. Once any change occurs, time exists. Without a timeless past we are stuck with an infinite temporal past, an infinite regress of causes in time, which I have shown to be incoherent. (Note: I do not think I am making a self-contradiction by saying "before time existed" because I think we can extend time into timlessness. We can think of "ten minutes before the big bang," assuming the big bang was the beginning of our time, as leading scientists now commonly assume. This is essentially the same as saying that we can extend a measure, say a yard stick, out into space, say one end on the other and again on the other, forever. Thus even though scientists say space is finite, that it was actually space itself that expanded with the big bang, still we can measure into infinite extension and talk of hypothetical points so many inches—or light years—beyond the end of space.)

Doland8: And I think that blue can extend into non-blueness. You are just babbling complete gibberish.

Jensen9: Notice that Doland has ignored my argument and has simply complained that I'm speaking nonsense. Now not many people who accept that God created timelessly will accept that time can be extended into the timeless. Craig, for example, I think would disagree with my claim. But I think my claim is sound given my understanding of timelessness. I see time as change and timelessness as changelessness. If something does not change in any way, it is timeless in itself. If there were change in anything going on around it, then in that changing world the amount of time the unchanging entity was timeless could be measured. And yet for the changeless entity, no time would have passed. I'm sure Doland will again ignore my argument and merely say I'm speaking nonsense. But this is not a crucial point and I would have no qualm in giving it up. I just happen to think this is the meaning of time and timelessness.

Incidentally, I think that my argument carries much the same force as the one **Michael Tooley presented when he debated with William Lane Craig.** He gave the same illustration of extending a measuring rod infinitely into space. He was claiming that there must be an actual infinity since space extends forever. I would say that this is not an actual infinity since space, or infinite extension, is really nothing. He would have a good argument only if he could get an actually infinitely long measuring rod; then there would be an actual infinite. But space and time, only being dimensions, can be infinite. Once time came into being, an actual infinite past and a potentially infinite future came into being: time became infinite. Likewise, once space came to exist, extension came to exist infinitely in all directions. Before they came to be, they were not infinite or finite in measure. (I think, or at least hope, I am using the word "space" in a different sense than in my last comments in Jensen7 as I have said scientists use it.) With the creation of time, we do have an infinite past into which we can measure; we can meaningfully speak of a billion years before

the big bang or whenever time did begin. But likewise, because there was no time, meaning change as time, before the first change occurred (which might have been the big bang) we are also extending a measure of time into timelessness. Now of course I am not sure of all these claims. These concepts are very difficult to grasp and work with. I may have to eventually fall back on a position closer to Craig's; perhaps it truly is unacceptable to say that time can be extended into the timeless.

Doland10: [To the first underlined sentence above.] I gather that you think you have said something coherent. I've read your paragraph about timeless and changeless several times over and I just can't make any sense of it. T'is true that I indeed suspect it is complete nonsense, and equivocation, but, I guess I can't say for sure since I haven't any idea what you are saying.

You referenced arguments about actual vs potential or theoretical infinity. I've heard some of that before, I just don't know the math enough to comment. I will plead ignorance on this point.

Jensen11: But if Doland does not understand the arguments, what reason can he give to even suspect incoherence or nonsense? William L. Craig and J. P. Moreland edited the monumental *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* due to be out just this month (May 2009). I would highly recommend it for coming to understand and for getting into the depths of such arguments.

Time before creation?

Doland6: [The continuation of Doland's response to the underlined statement in Jensen5 above] But, even though I can't definitively prove Craig wrong, I can say why it fails the plausibility test. For the very definition of "creation" requires order, meaning time. If I create something,

there is a time before it exists, a time when I do the creation, and then a time afterwards. Jensen has God creating time, when the very act of creating time implies time exists to begin with! . . .

Craig's hypothesis is incoherent because it is internally inconsistent.

Jensen7: Doland is here making empty claims, claims he cannot support. First he says " 'creation' requires order, meaning time." We can imagine a well ordered crystal, say, eternally existing. Suppose it never changes and nothing else exists to change. It would have timeless order. So order does not mean time. And why does creation require order? Doland does not say.

Certainly if I create something, there is a time before it exists because I exist in time. But if a timeless (changeless) God creates the first change, that would be the first creation of time. If something is created, it does not follow that there had to be change before it was created. There was in the mind of God a timeless choice for time to begin. With that unchanging choice the first change came into being. So creation does not require the existence of time and Craig's hypothesis shows no incoherence.

Doland8: I meant ordered as in sequential. Things happen one after the other. To create means an order or a sequence of events, that kind of order. And so the idea of "creating" time is incoherent.

Jensen9: And I've shown that we do not need time for creation. A timeless, changeless choice for time to begin can give rise to the first change. But it has timelessly happened.

Doland10: You've done no such thing, you've made an assertion, an illogical assertion, you haven't 'shown' anything! Don't you see that to make a choice requires CHANGE. As an entity transitions from not having made a choice to having made a choice, that is CHANGE and TIME.

Jensen11: There need be no “transition from not having made a choice to having made a choice.” The choice has eternally been made, it never changed. The choice to create has changelessly, eternally been there in the mind of God and it has changelessly been made. Since there was no time, it has instantly produced the same result: the origin of time.

Doland12: If there was never any moment where other options were being considered, how can you ever call it a “choice”? That doesn’t jive with the idea of a “choice” to me.

Jensen13: Why would other options need to be considered for a choice to take place? There could be simply one timeless intention, and that can also be called a choice. If other options are being considered as well, again, they do not need to occur in time. The comparison of options could be something which is simply, instantly (as it were) seen rather than occurring over time. [Sentence added 27Sp14.] The timeless mind of God simply chooses and the choice follows from God’s nature. God chose to create because God’s love and goodness (which are essentially the same thing) required the existence of creatures who would know the overwhelming good of loving God, and this desire that was in the nature of God outweighed the desire not to endure the pain (to God) that creation might entail. God’s nature was such that it required that with this choice this outcome would occur whatever the cost to God.

Doland12: [Continuation of Doland12 above] Besides, in the Bible, many times God makes “choices,” changes his mind on what he is going to do. Like the time that God was going to kill Moses, until his wife gives him an on-the-spot circumcision! . . . Care to explain this ___?

Jensen13: As I’ve said before, my view is that God is and has been in time since the creation. God is *not* timeless now. God simply responds to people according to how they act and respond to him. If you sin, God will judge

you; if you don't, he won't. A choice like that is pretty well determined in advance; it doesn't take any real changing of one's mind.

And you read the story too quickly. It was Moses' son who was not circumcised when they started back from Midian to Egypt (Exodus 4:24-26). Maybe as the years passed as Moses was living in Midian he lost sight of his Hebrew identity and neglected the customs all Hebrews were required to follow. Remember he was supposedly there for 40 years and he left Midian when he was about 80. It was probably his second son he had failed to circumcise. God sent his angel to stop Moses with the threat of death, likely to the son, if Moses did not correct this before reentering Egypt. (The wording in what we have of the Hebrew allows for the possibility that it was the son, not Moses, who was threatened.) The incident upset Moses' wife, Zipporah, and she and the sons probably went back to Midian at this time. Now recall that when God made his covenant with Abraham, he promised his descendants the land of Canaan, Abraham would be the father of many nations, all nations would be blessed through him, and *Elohim* would be his God (Genesis 17). Abraham and all his male descendants were to be circumcised. Anyone not circumcised was to be cut off from his people (v.14), which usually meant they would be killed. Moses knew all of this since he had lived some of his early life with his Hebrew parents. He knew of the obligation of circumcision and he knew he had sinned in his failure to have his son circumcised.

Exactly how this event occurred is not clear. The first image that comes to my mind is that of Moses or the son running around a tent being pursued by somebody with a big sword. But of course that can't be how it happened. Had God wanted to kill Moses or his son, God could have done it instantly, no questions asked. Somehow it was communicated that the problem was that the son needed to be circumcised. So it had to have been more of an encounter involving a warning and enough time to remedy the problem. The angel must have waited to see what Moses or his wife would do. My suspicion is that the son (or Moses if it was he who was threatened) became deathly ill. The angel, perhaps as just an audible voice, then

communicated why this was happening and Zipporah then circumcised her son.

Relativity requires a timeless God?

Jensen5: Doland points out that relativity tells us that the time-frame of one part of the universe could be very different from that of another. If we could see someone in a part of the universe that is traveling close to the speed of light, they would appear to be moving in slow motion and we would appear to them like a high speed movie. With this, Doland claims that if God created and thus cannot be tied to any particular time-frame, God must be timeless. But Psalm 90 says that God can experience any time-frame desired. So there isn't really any need for God to be timeless (at least while time does exist).

God regretted and yet chose creation: diversity from God's unity

Jensen5: Doland claims that the God of the Bible regretted creating humanity (Genesis 6:6), sent a flood, and then regretted destroying everyone in the flood. I don't see any passage indicating that God regretted sending the flood so I'm not sure where Doland got that idea. Gleason Archer points out that when the Ninevites turned from their wickedness, God repented of his intention to destroy them (Jonah 3:10). The idea of regretting or repenting of an act or choice in both cases simply means that God responded to people as they deserved and according to the manner in which they first responded (*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* [Zondervan, 1982] 80-81). Before choosing to foreknow, God at least knew that humanity could fall this far into sin. (God couldn't definitely know that this would actually happen without it happening.) With only the possibility that it

would happen, God decided that it would be worth the cost—and the cost to God was very great.

But if God thought it was worth the cost of the incarnation, passion, and atonement—to endure excruciating suffering and death—how can Genesis 6 say God regretted creating humanity and that God was deeply grieved at the depth of humanity's wickedness? How can this be the God who is “not a man that he should repent.” (1 Samuel 15:29; cf., Numbers 23:19, Ezekiel 24:14). I think the answer is found in understanding that sometimes God displays different and seemingly conflicting attributes and actions that ultimately do not conflict. There are sometimes more than one attribute of God mentioned in Scripture though ultimately, I would claim, they reduce to one. We can think of the justice, holiness, goodness, mercy, and love of God as all being distinct. Yet they are all manifestations of one attribute. God is holy and other than we are because God is absolutely good. Goodness requires justice but it also requires love. God loves that which deserves love because it has value. We have value because we are created by God. Our value or worth comes from God. Love inevitably seeks to give mercy. God desires to give mercy to us who deserve justice (which ultimately may not be to our liking). God's mercy cannot be arbitrary. It cannot say, “I don't want to see your sin so I just won't see it.” God's mercy must fit justice. It says, “I can only give mercy by fulfilling justice. I can only cease to see your sin if it is no more. It can be no more only if I bear it myself.” So God can only give mercy, bring us back to God, by taking the justice, the judgment, we deserve.

We see this in other ways as well. God desires that all people would be saved, be reconciled with God. Yet God desires that people freely choose to be made right with God. It is much better that we freely choose than to be forced to do what is right or good. Both the desire that we do good and be free spring from the absolute goodness of God. Though God desires us to return and find again the relationship with God we were made for, God will allow the possibility that this desire be frustrated because it is better that this be freely chosen than that it be forced upon us. So God does have

more than one desire in this case: a desire that we come to God and a desire that we do so freely, which may involve not coming to God. The latter desire can frustrate the former because the latter is more important.

In the same way, we can see two apparently distinct passions within God. Genesis 6 expresses one of these passions of God: God feels grief at our wickedness. God is grieved (and was grieved before the creation) for ever having created such evil creatures as we humans have at times turned out to be. At the same time we can see the other passion of God: God gladly created us and rejoiced that there would be those who will (by means of their free choice) find the ultimate joy and fulfillment of knowing and loving God. It is the nature of God's absolute love that it is inevitably willing to endure the pain this reconciliation requires. God knows grief as well as joy for creating us. The joy is greater. Genesis 6 is just pointing out one aspect of God's passion. One aspect of God's passion repents of or regrets having created us while another aspect does not regret having created us. The latter sees that though the present evil is something one would wish had never been, ultimately that evil will be erased and a far greater good will come through having allowed that evil. God rejoices that so much good will come from the allowance of free choice and yet grieves over the particular evils that occur when they do occur. We see conflicting emotions in our own human experience. Why should we think God cannot experience conflicting emotions that flow from the same single source of good?

Doland6: Here is the passage [showing God regretted causing the flood]:

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done." Genesis 8:20-21.

True, it doesn't specifically use the word "regret," but, the tone is clearly of lament. . . .

You have a God that knows everything that is ever going to happen, and yet somehow "repents" of His own actions! . . .

Jensen7: There might be a sense of sadness in God's promise never again to destroy the earth by flood. God is certainly grieved over the judgment that had to be carried out. This is stated elsewhere in Scripture. God can possess seemingly conflicting emotions just as humans do. But God never said, "I wish I had never done this." My point was that Doland was claiming regret for causing the flood when the text indicates nothing of the sort. Yet none of this matters anyway since I've already admitted God repented of creating humanity in chapter 6 and the issue of repentance or regret is the issue Doland wants to argue is inapplicable to God. And there are other passages that indicate God "regrets" or is sorrowful at having to punish the wicked. God can be sorrowful at having to punish the wicked and be sorrowful at even having created humanity and yet have joy in knowing the enormously greater good that will come through our creation.

Imagine that you are a surgeon and you have a son who has a disability that keeps him from being able to walk. His life is so filled with anguish when he watches other children run and play and he wishes so much he could do the same. You learn of a surgical procedure that can give him back the use of his legs but it is very painful. You do the surgery and your son looks at you as you cause him so much suffering. He is too young to understand why you are doing this and may even think you don't love him any more. But this is the only way you can heal him. You have great sorrow and anguish at causing him this pain and yet at the same time you have joy knowing the results that will come of this. As your scalpel cuts into your son's leg you even have a strong desire not to be doing this surgery. Yet another part of you is glad that you are doing this because you know what the outcome will be. As you deal with and seek to reconcile these conflicting emotions and desires you ultimately come to accept that it is for

the best and your desire to do the surgery, in fact your joy in doing it, outweighs your desire not to do it. Likewise God has great anguish over the pain God inflicts or allows to be inflicted upon us both when we deserve it and when we do not, but God also has great joy in anticipating the results that will come of this. We can even say that God regretted creating us and inflicting deserved punishment and allowing undeserved suffering while at the same time God rejoiced that these were done because of the great good that will come of them. Like the surgeon, the desire for the greater good causes God to ultimately wish and choose and desire our creation and our needed sufferings. With this analysis I hope Doland understands how God can regret and repent of our creation and sufferings while still desiring them.

Doland6: Further, even if we forget about the omniscience issue, repentance implies making an error, but God is perfect! How can a perfect entity make an error to repent of? And if God Himself can make errors, then by what rationale can He punish people for all eternity? God can make mistakes, but humans aren't allowed to under threat of eternal damnation? Can I send God to hell for His mistakes? Honestly, it just blows my mind that theists don't see how utterly preposterous what they propose is!

Jensen7: I have shown that repentance and regret in this case do no indicate making an error. Think of my illustration of the surgeon. Part of him regretted and repented of doing the surgery, part of him rejoiced in doing it. There was no error in his thinking. And people are not condemned for making mistakes, they are condemned for knowingly rejecting God and God's offer of salvation. So much for Doland's imagined "utterly preposterous" theistic claims.

Doland8: Humans, being imperfect, can find themselves in situations like the surgeon, that he is forced to make a choice that is overall the best and

yet has negative aspects. A PERFECT GOD COULD NEVER BE SO CONSTRAINED! I've said this repeatedly.

Jensen9: And I've repeatedly argued that this is not true. And Doland has not responded to my argument. It is logically *impossible* to attain the greater good without allowing suffering. Thus God *is* constrained.

Doland10: Please demonstrate this alleged logical impossibility.

Jensen11: Okay, I'll give it again. Let me see if there is some way I can present it a little differently. I think Doland has admitted (or will admit) that we cannot be responsible if we are determined in our choices, either biochemically or any other way. So if we are free in our choices, not determined, we are responsible for our choices. It is a greater good that we freely choose the good, and most significantly, that we choose for God freely, than that we choose God and the good by being determined to do so. It is better that we be responsible or culpable and thus free in our moral/spiritual choices than that we be determined.

It is also a greater good that we freely choose to continue to honor and commit ourselves to the God who deserves our commitment in the face of undeserved suffering that God allows to come to us, than that we be determined to so choose. This is the case even given the possibility that we freely choose against God. So to attain this greater good, there must be human pain and we must be free in our moral choice.

A free choice cannot be determined. A free choice cannot be foreknown since the future is (at present) nonexistent and the agent cannot make a free choice until the time of that choice occurs. Non-free choices can be foreknown since God can simply determine what the choices will be by setting up the necessary causal chain to reach that end. (Given a tenseless or B theory of time, all of time is one and complete. As such, God can foreknow such choices. This is much the same as remembering a free

choice made yesterday. The agent was no less free in making the choice even though as we look back at it, it is unalterable.)

So God is constrained by logical necessity that follows from the nature of free will. It is something God cannot control by the very definition of free will and it is something God needs to allow us in order that the greater good occur.

Now the form of the more general argument as Kreeft presented it is more like this: It is logically impossible that the greater good occur without suffering and therefore necessary that there be suffering for the greater good to occur. God desires the greater good to occur. Thus God may be constrained by logical necessity to allow suffering in order to attain the greater good. Here there is no argument for logical necessity or impossibility; rather, since there is undeserved suffering, it must be in some way logically necessary for a greater good to occur which God desires. Why else would God allow it unless God had to in order to attain his desired end? So it is not the case that it is more likely that God is impotent, evil, or non-existent. Rather, it is more likely that God has to do it this way to attain the end God desires and it is only logic that constrains the choices God can make. "If there is a God . . ." does not run into a self-defeating conclusion as critics have said. Rather, there is a very reasonable and likely alternative left.

Doland12: You STILL have not demonstrated why evil is necessary in this. If God wants me to be able to freely choose him, why is it necessary that I also be free to choose to go rape someone? This does not follow. And why is it that my free will to choose to rape someone should be able to override someone else's free will to not be raped just because I happen to be stronger or quicker than my victim? If God is really into this "free will" thing, He should make it to where any potential victim's free will is just as important to the outcome of events as the free will of any potential perpetrator.

And what about natural disasters? If I am right about there being no God, then there is no “evil” intent with natural disasters, they just happen. But if you are right, then God premeditatedly put in the ocean a fissure that he knew would eventually create an earthquake and a tsunami that killed roughly a quarter million people. So, if YOU are right, YOUR God commits acts of premeditated evil, with evil intent.

Jensen13: God does premeditatedly allow suffering like tsunamis, but not with evil intent. That is, suffering is needed. It must occur so that the greater good will occur. [Added 27Fb15.]

First let's not confuse levels of argument. I've not proven that there has to be evil in the world for God to be able to bring about a greater good; I've only given a plausible theodicy that involves a *claim* that there is a logical necessity that requires at least certain types of evil (such as undeserved suffering) and free will for the greater good to be done. With a plausible theodicy that involves a claim that a particular logical impossibility is involved or even with merely a plausible theistic defense (Kreeft's argument) it is demonstrated that an argument against God's goodness or power or existence does not work. If it is understood that God cannot do the logically impossible and if it seems plausible that it is logically impossible that the greatest good can occur without suffering, then it is clear that a perfect God is constrained to attain God's desired goal. I haven't given a syllogism with an undeniable conclusion that follows inexorably from undeniable premises, if that is what you were looking for.

To refute my argument you have to show that one or more of my premises do not work or the conclusion does not follow. You have dwelt on the issue of free will, which is a good tactic if you could demonstrate that free will is not possible or likely. Just show that it is more reasonable to believe that there cannot be free will than that there can be and you would win the argument. But this you have not been able to do. I think you have shown that it is more reasonable to think that there is no free will given naturalism, but you have not done so assuming theism. And since there is otherwise

nothing prima facie more likely about naturalism than theism, your argument fails.

First you ask, "If God wants me to be able to freely choose him, why is it necessary that I also be free to choose to go rape someone? This does not follow." First of all recall that my primary theodicy claimed that the victim has to be able to choose God in the face of undeserved suffering. God deserves our commitment, the suffering will be compensated (to the point that it will seem as though it had not been), and God's reason for allowing the suffering will be fulfilled (the testing of our choice for God in the midst of suffering which God allows). So God still deserves our commitment, God will give compensation; God just needs to know what our choice will be and we need to be creatures who have as part of their definition: moral agents who freely choose God in the face of suffering. Remember, this is what I called the Jobian theodicy or the recipient or patient oriented theodicy. The important issue is what the recipient of undeserved suffering chooses.

What you bring up (your hypothetical choice to rape someone) relates to the agent oriented theodicy. Why does God allow someone to inflict pain on someone else? The traditional agent oriented free will theodicy responds to this. Here it is claimed that God desires to know what we will freely choose in our choice to do evil or good to others as well as in our choice to accept or reject God. Free choice is important since one's choice must be free for one to be responsible. As with the recipient oriented theodicy, by making this choice one becomes a different person one could not become without this choice.

The deficiency in this theodicy, if taken as the only theodicy one would use, is that we can imagine that its purpose could be fulfilled without pain occurring. If we need to freely choose, if God needs to know what our choice might be in choosing the good or the evil, God could allow that without suffering. God could create us in a kind of dream world. We could think about the decision to do evil like raping someone, make the choice, and whatever our choice might be, no one would be hurt. Our victim is just

a part of our dream. So the agent oriented theodicy can only be tagged on if the recipient oriented theodicy is already employed. That is, God allows us to be the agents of this suffering, to be free to choose to inflict pain, since there has to be suffering in the world anyway given the recipient oriented theodicy.

And we must not forget that there is also the observer oriented theodicy. Here God asks us what we will do when we see others suffering. Will we seek to stop or mitigate the suffering? Will we seek to have God's compassion on those who suffer? God seeks to know our choice and by our choice we become beings we couldn't have been otherwise. Like the agent oriented theodicy, it is not necessary that there be pain in order for the purpose of this theodicy to be fulfilled. God could create us in a kind of dream world in which we seek to have compassion on those we take to be suffering even though they are not actually in pain. However, since pain already has to exist given the recipient oriented theodicy, the purpose of the observer oriented theodicy can be fulfilled in a world of actual pain. [Minor changes last three paragraphs 27Fb15.]

I'm sorry I had to review a long argument that I've presented long ago in this debate. I could have omitted discussion of the agent oriented theodicy had you not brought up issues involving that argument. But you speak as if you had never heard my recipient oriented argument before. The recipient oriented theodicy answers the problem of natural evil: the tsunamis, the earthquakes in Haiti, etc., and yet you don't seem to even recall my argument. I also could have omitted mention of the observer oriented theodicy except that it helps to mitigate the force of your rape example. If observers, friends, relatives, and others in any relationship with the victim and perpetrator had fulfilled their responsibility, the rape might never take place: the mother praying for her son whom she suspects is doing something that is very wrong, the friend who is troubled about his friend's behavior and thinks about trying to dissuade him (the rapist) from going out that night, the stranger who sees the man grab the woman in the back alley and decides on whether to intervene, etc. It may be necessary that some

evil occur, but it need not be as bad as it turns out if we fulfill our responsibility. Think of how different the holocaust would have been had more professed gentile Christians obeyed their Lord's commands and hid and sheltered the Jews and resisted the Nazis.

So by allowing tsunamis God does not commit "acts of premeditated evil with evil intent," rather God allows suffering with intent to bring about the good of allowing free agents the choice for or against God in the face of suffering. After it's all over, for many, a very great good will be produced, the good of becoming ones who have chosen God in the face and midst of suffering. This is a much greater good than could occur without allowing suffering. And don't tell me it's not worth the cost. It definitely is if all undeserved suffering is compensated.

Would everyone "believe" if they thought it was true?

Doland8: Secondly, [to Jensen7 above: "And people are not condemned for making mistakes, they are condemned for knowingly rejecting God and God's offer of salvation."] . . . NOBODY "knowingly rejects God's offer of salvation." If I believed that the offer was real, I'd take it and so would EVERYBODY.

Jensen9: Oh? You think Chris Hitchens would? He writes, "Who wishes that there was a permanent, unalterable celestial despotism that subjected us to continual surveillance and could convict us of thought-crimes, and who regarded us as its private property even after we died? How happy we ought to be at the reflection that there exists not a shred of respectable evidence to support such a horrible hypothesis." (*The Portable Atheist* [Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007] xxii.) Fantasize of rape and sadism, dream of how you would love to kill the Jews or the Tutsi, but since it's all only in your mind there can be nothing wrong with it (Hitchens' reasons). How dare there be a God who presumes the right to intrude into the private

musings of his creatures and judge these thoughts? Hitchens' reasons for hating God are obvious. Not that his thought life is so evil as I've described, but the fallacy of his thinking is obvious. Contra Hitchens, there *should* be a God who will judge our "thought-crimes." (And of course the second fallacy of Hitchens' thinking involves the assumption that what one thinks will never come out in one's actions. Dreaming about killing the Tutsi resulted in the murder of almost a million people.)

So you think Hitchens would jump at the offer of eternal life if he thought it was true? You've been in the congregation of the fundamentalist atheists. You should know that there are people like Hitchens who have their own various reasons to so hate any idea of God that they wouldn't care in the least what God offers them.

Doland10: Okay, I concede I was wrong, there are people that say that they wouldn't accept God's offer even if it was true. Yet, I guess I wonder, would they really? It is easy to say you wouldn't so long as the possibility seems nil. But, I guess I'll concede the point. That said, I still think MOST people would take the offer if they really thought it was true.

Jensen11: And that is why God allows the evidence to be not so overwhelmingly obvious that people cannot deny it if they do not want it to be true. With the knowledge that it is true, they are "without excuse," if they reject God. But if it were too obvious and strong, the freedom of their choice would be too impaired. God needs to know what our choice will be.

Honest unbelievers and seeking God, again

Doland8: [Continued response to the last underlined sentence in Jensen7 above: "And people are not condemned for making mistakes, they are condemned for knowingly rejecting God and God's offer of salvation."] Am I supposed to believe everything I hear? And if you say no, I shouldn't

believe everything, but I should believe this particular thing because there is good evidence for it; even if you are right, then I am making a mistake by misreading the evidence. So I would be sent to hell because of a mistake.

Jensen9: People are not condemned for what they *know* but for what they *choose*. The person who says, “God, I want to know if you are there. I’ll give you all that you ask of me, all that you deserve from me, if you let me know”—that person will find out. It doesn’t matter how poor you think our evidence is so long as you are willing to accept a good answer when God gives you one and so long as you seek this God who deserves your commitment. Just be willing to suspend your judgment and hatred enough to say this to God (because some of your statements sound as though you really do hate God).

So I should rephrase my statement you were responding to. People are condemned for knowingly rejecting God and God’s offer of salvation but they are also condemned for willfully rejecting a hypothetical God on just the possibility that there really is a good God who deserves their commitment. [Added 27Sp14]

It may seem that more is needed at this point. The Bible claims that we need to seek God with all of our heart and will. If one can barely get beyond a begrudging, “Okay, God, if you’re there I might accept you if you give me a good explanation for all my questions, but you’ve gotta do some pretty good talking.” that person will have a hard time reaching any kind of longing desire for God. One needs to just be willing to suspend one’s judgments enough to accept that there might be good explanations (I’ve tried to give some though I doubt that you’ve found them to be very persuasive). Once you reach that point of suspending judgment, then you’ve got a chance. That’s when one can say, “God, I don’t even want to want you, but I choose to want you.” If someone can just do that, if someone can simply tell God they don’t even will to choose God, but they choose to will it, then God can give that person a desire that will lead to the discovery.

Doesn't it make sense to think that just on the possibility that there is a good creator God and source of all existence that we should be condemned if we do not seek this God. To reject this God, even to merely ignore this God, would be among the most horrible of evils.

For more on this topic, see our earlier discussion on God condemning intellectually honest unbelievers. Also, see our earlier topic heading "Sufficient reason to believe?"

Doland10: [To the first underlined sentence in Jensen9 above.] I've done all that, please read my autobiographical info on my site. http://www.caseagainstfaith.com/other_stuff/PaulJacobsen.htm.

Jensen11: But do you still do it? John 7:17 does not put a time limit on this test. As I've said before, if you continue to say this to God and actually mean it, even if in this life you never do get the answer you want, you will find your answer. I think the discover-only-in-the-next-life type experiences are the exception, but I cannot rule out their possibility.

I think there is one other factor Doland needs to consider before his request or search can hope to be effective. He needs to have the humility to avoid blasphemy. Suppose the God who commanded the Levites to kill those in the camp who were worshiping the golden calf is the God he should be seeking? Will Doland have the humility to say I don't know that you don't have the right to take our lives when you desire; I don't know that you don't have the right to enforce justice; I don't know that they didn't deserve this from the evil they committed; I don't know that they will still never find you and know the eternal joy of knowing and loving you; I don't know that a greater good will not come after your judgment is complete? (Even if they did not deserve the judgment God brought upon them, Doland does not know that this God did not have good reason for doing this and will not recompense all undeserved suffering.) God is not merely looking to see Doland's choices to seek God, God is looking to see his choices and prejudices concerning what God must or must not do and must be like. Yes,

God must be good, but to dictate all that God must do or not do to express that goodness will often go beyond reasonable limits for critics like Doland. [Paragraph added 4Mr15.]

Doland10: [Responding to second underlined sentence group in Jensen9 above.] What, specifically, is inherently wrong with disbelieving something before getting good answers? Basically you are saying that you really need to have a strong desire to believe before even beginning. What if a Mormon said to you that you need to really want to believe Mormonism before God will reveal to you the truth of Mormonism? Would you sign up for that? No.

Jensen11: What is “inherently wrong with disbelieving something before getting good answers” is that it is irrational. One should rather withhold making a conclusion. One should say, “I don’t know if it’s true or not, but I’m open to any answer, negative or positive, if or when it comes.”

Yes, one needs a strong desire to believe in God before even beginning. But reread the rest of that paragraph. One isn’t without hope who does not happen to have that desire. One needs a will to at least seek that desire in order to begin the search. Just asking God for merely the desire is enough to start. It’s not our desires or our knowledge that matters, what matters first and foremost is our choice.

Seeking a desire for God is not necessarily the same as desiring that any particular religion or belief be true. For example, there is no inherent need for desiring to be married to one or a dozen women for eternity, or that Yahweh be a human who evolved to a god. But if we accept as the starting definition for God that this be one who deserves our highest commitment, then we have an obligation to seek such a God and to seek to determine whether such a being exists. But more than that, on the possibility that there be such a God, we really should desire and will to seek this God.

Now some people claim they find that hard to grasp in the abstract. I should desire and want to seek this God just on the possibility that such a being exists? No, there is more to it than just that. It is a matter of desiring that which can fulfill our very being. *That* we clearly should seek. On the possibility that there is One who made us, and who couldn't make us without our being such that we cannot have fulfillment without knowing and loving this creator, on that possibility we should desire and desire to discover such a being. So desiring God and desiring that God be there are very different from desiring that any other particular belief be true. And the fact that one might have this desire for God needs to be carefully kept from being a factor in bringing one to any particular belief. It is the evidence that should persuade us, not any desire to believe in this God.

You say that you have called upon God and now you disbelieve because God has never answered you. Maybe there are some other reasons you disbelieve but I think that is the gist of what you have said. It sounds as though you are saying that you would believe still if God were to somehow show himself to you, speak to you, etc. Would you? Or would you just explain it away like you did my friend's experience in which she felt a presence in her otherwise empty room? What would you say to a voice that tells you that this is God? What if the same voice told you this was the one who told the Levites to go through their camp and kill everyone who was worshiping the golden calf? You said this was clearly evil of this God. Would just the fact that God spoke to you remove your belief that God is evil? Would it give you reason to believe or would there still be objections stopping you from believing in this God? Would you be willing to even start choosing to desire this God if you still thought this God were evil? These are questions you have to seriously answer before you can begin to seek God again.

Doland10: [continuing Doland10 above.] Essentially you are making rational thought and reasonable skepticism as an evil boogiemán. And yet

you would employ the same rational thought and skepticism to anybody else's fantastical claims. You just make an exception for YOUR God.

Jensen11: I am rather making irrational skepticism, certainly not rational thought, the evil boogiemer. A rational skepticism, withholding a definite conclusion pending good evidence, is needed for almost any religious and anti-religious claims. That is what I have done.

Please do not misunderstand my previous statements (my previous Jensen11). If God is evil, one should not seek such a God. If God deserves our commitment, then God must be good. But if there is such a God, that does not mean this God could not command the Levites to kill those who had committed this horrible evil. [Added 27Sp14.]

God regretted and yet chose creation: diversity from God's unity, continued

Jensen5: [From the second underlined sentence in Jensen5 above:] The idea of regretting or repenting of an act or choice in both cases simply means that God responded to people as they deserved and according to the manner in which they first responded.

Doland6: Look up the words in the dictionary, please! It means to have a change of heart, a change of mind, something impossible for someone that already knows everything!

Jensen7: To regret doing something does not necessarily mean to change one's mind. One can regret having to do something while at the same time knowing it must be done. One can regret doing something even while choosing to do it. Now repentance does carry with it the sense of changing one's mind. This is the sense in Jonah 3 where God repented of his

intention to destroy the Ninevites. But this fits the notion Archer argues for, that God responds to people as they deserve and according to the manner in which they respond to God. God changed his mind about inflicting judgment because the people repented. God repented of, changed his mind about, the intention to destroy them; that is, God intended to destroy them so long as they remained unrepentant. In the same way we can talk about Genesis 6 as saying God changed his mind about creating humanity; God responded to them according to the manner in which they acted. But also, as I claimed earlier, God wished he had never created humanity and still wished he had and was glad he had.

Jensen5: [From last underlined sentence in Jensen5 above.] . . . God displays different and seemingly conflicting attributes and actions that ultimately do not conflict.

Doland6: Translating Jensen's spin into English, "yeah, they contradict, I just don't want to admit it." They do contradict. Plainly and obviously.

Jensen7: Translation: "I don't know how to respond to Jensen's argument so I'll just pretend that he hasn't really given an argument and that my claim still holds and I'll just hope that some of my readers will be inattentive enough to swallow it." [Added 29Sp14.] My previous explanations above show that they plainly and obviously do *not* contradict. Let the reader decide.

Limits to God's power and knowledge

Jensen5: Doland says that God would know everything that ever happens in this world as well as in every possible world. But God cannot know what is logically impossible to know any more than God can do what is logically

impossible to do. Some aspects or portions of all other possible worlds are impossible for God to know because they are logically impossible to know. That God cannot do the logically impossible has long been assumed and expounded in orthodox theology. Doland complains that theists use this as a means to avoid criticism. Perhaps, but there is nothing *ad hoc* or dishonest about this as Doland claims. It is just a matter of understanding what a theological position claims and seeing that as a result certain accusations do not apply.

Doland6: What you are saying is that there are limits that not even God can bridge. Some things are impossible, period, even for God. But, then what is the source of “logical limits”? Some theists argue that God Himself defines what is and what isn’t possible. That God could decide, for example that square circles can exist because He defines it so. Others, like you, say that logical limits exist and not even God can do anything about it. But, if so, that more or less obviates a need for God to exist at all! If some things are possible and some things are not, and this is true whether or not there is a God, why do you even need a God then?

Jensen7: Think about what is involved in making a square circle. It isn’t that there is a limit to God’s power in his failure to produce such a thing, rather it is just nonsense. And logic is not something that is outside of God that even God is subject to. God is subject to logic or reason because it is part of God’s nature. This is similar to ethics. It can only be if God exists who is the source of good. God does not arbitrarily choose for reason or the good to exist. Since both are a part of God’s being, God is reasonable and good and by creation gives us of this worth and rationality. So if there were no God and if there were a universe, could there be square circles? No, there could not be; reason would still be universal and unavoidable because it is intrinsic to what is. If something could exist without God, whether abstract or concrete entities, reason would still exist and rule over existence. For something to exist, reason must apply to it. But if that were so, then reason would be separate from God (assuming, remember, that something could exist without God). But since God is the source of reason,

without God nothing could exist concerning which reason is a part or over which reason rules. All that exists only exist because God is.

Doland asks, “If some things are possible and some things are not, and this is true whether or not there is a God, why do you even need a God then?” But nothing is possible if there is no God. There would be nothing. We need God for anything to exist. We need God for reason to exist.

Doland8: [To first two underlined sentences in Jensen7 above.] What if the only reason why a “square circle” is nonsense is because God defined that things cannot simultaneously have the property of “no straight sides” and “four straight sides,” but that if God defined otherwise, then “square circles” would exist? Of course I don’t believe that. I’m just saying that if God was truly omnipotent, then that would be the case.

Jensen9: Well, the logic follows from the definitions. Anyone can set the definitions. Square circles could exist if a straight line were defined not as the shortest distance between two points but as a line every point of which is equidistant from another fixed point. But if we start with definitions that preclude each other, then yes, it follows that certain things cannot be and some things must be. So, yes, you can make omnipotence into a nonsensical term if you define it as having the ability to do logically mutually exclusive acts or create logically mutually exclusive characteristics. That is why orthodox Christianity has never accepted that definition of omnipotence. To claim that omnipotence requires being able to do the logically impossible is to attack a straw man.

Doland10: I accept that most Christians see omnipotence the way you describe. Okay, fine. But, you just don’t realize that makes your God hypothesis superfluous. By your account, there are things about reality that can be no other way and not even God can change that. Therefore there are attributes of reality that are INDEPENDENT from God and do not require a God. But those attributes of reality are sufficient to explain reality, therefore obviating any need for a God at all.

Jensen11: Attributes of reality are part of the way reality is. In any possible world, what is must have attributes. Reason is the ability to see those attributes and the relations between them and to apply such attributes to hypotheticals. Concerning free will, for example, we have the one concept (among others) of “not being able to control.” That is, one is not able to control another’s choice insofar as the second agent is free. These attributes of reality or hypotheticals are just characteristics of such concrete and abstract entities. They are not independent of God any more than that which exists is independent of God. If all that exists other than God came from God then even though God gave them a degree of independence of existence, they are still ultimately dependent on God. If God removes his hand, they would cease to be (at least as the entities they are now; perhaps they must then return to the God who made them).

Now where do you get this idea that attributes of reality can explain reality? An attribute of an existent entity, say the straightness of an edge of a pencil, does not explain the existence of the pencil. Logic or reason does not explain the existence of anything in the sense of causing it to be, it just “sees” concerning entities and existence some things that are and that must be and that cannot be.

Doland12: I really wish you could follow a conversation. According to YOU, what is “logically impossible” is “logically impossible” period, and not even God can change that. If “God removes his hand” they are still, according to YOU, logically impossible. But, if things are logically possible or impossible even if “God removes his hand,” then we can construct a model of the universe purely based on logic and evidence. God is not needed in the model because, according to YOU, what is logically possible or not is not under God’s control. Which means God is superfluous.

Jensen13: I do admit that I find it very difficult to follow Doland’s “argument.” Let me try to analyze his statements sentence by sentence to see if we can make any progress. He doesn’t think I’ve addressed his

claims at all though I have tried to respond to everything he has said. I may make some analyses Doland considers to be completely irrelevant to his claims. That is the cost we must pay if we are to understand his claims since at the moment I have no idea how he thinks his argument might work.

If God removes his hand, it will certainly still be the case that some things are logically impossible and that some things are logically possible. But if it is logically possible for something to be, it does not follow that God will allow it to actually be. We may say that it could exist in a possible world but it may be that God will choose not to actualize that world.

When you say, “we can construct a model of the universe purely based on logic and evidence,” are you saying that by using logic and by rationally assessing evidence we can better understand the universe we are aware of? I think that must be your meaning but correct me if I’m wrong. Constructing a model means to have an understanding of features of an entity (or the entire universe in this case) one would not have otherwise.

Now whether “God removes his hand” or not does not in itself determine whether we are able to assess evidence about the universe to better understand it. If God removes his hand in the area of our rational abilities, then certainly we would not be able to “construct a model of the universe purely based on logic and evidence” and it will only matter if something is logically impossible at this point if this is an area in which it is logically impossible to remove his hand. It is difficult to see how God could not remove his hand in the area of our rational abilities, at least generally speaking. There may be some underlying laws or rules that at their core involve logical necessity and impossibility that determine that in some cases God cannot diminish one’s rational abilities. For example, given God’s nature of absolute goodness we know that there are some things God cannot do (as I’ve mentioned earlier). I cannot rule out the possibility that for some person at some time, God has to allow them their full cognitive abilities because of such unseen underlying logic. But generally

speaking we should admit that an omnipotent being has the ability to limit someone's rational abilities whenever desired.

Finally you say that I have claimed that "what is logically possible or not is not under God's control." I have never said such a thing. If something is logically possible, then it is under God's control. If it is logically impossible, it is not, to that extent, under God's control. Now THAT a proposition is logically possible or impossible follows to a large degree from the language, the meaning of the terms used, and as such is in some sense independent of God. Square circles could never exist, whether God exists or not. But this does not make God in any way superfluous.

Our awareness of this fact that square circles could not exist whether God exists or not, our rational ability, comes from God and as such is dependent on God. An atheistic model of the universe could be aware of and designate entities that are logically possible and indicate others that are logically impossible. Of course, it would also exclude God from the model and deny that existent entities are dependent upon God. It would also deny a need for God for us to have rational awareness of such and it would affirm that entities have a rational nature (that features of entities can be rationally discerned). Such a model may tell us much about the universe but it may also be gravely in error at some points. My claim is that it is in error in certain fundamental areas and that a theistic model of the universe is needed to correct it.

I have explored your claim as thoroughly as I know how. Hopefully I have (somewhere or other) hit upon the particular argument you think gives you justification in claiming that God is superfluous.

Jensen7: [Third & fourth underlined sentences in Jensen7 above.] And logic is not something that is outside of God that even God is subject to. God is subject to logic or reason because it is part of God's nature.

Doland8: Could God have had a different nature? And if he had a different nature, would it be possible for square circles to exist? If you say no, God couldn't have had a different nature to make square circles to exist, then you are saying that there are certain facts about reality that simply have to be that way period, God or no God, obviating the need for a god at all.

Jensen9: God could not have a different nature. But that doesn't mean that things have to be the way they are, God or no God, since we need God for anything to exist. If, say, nothing existed then it would still be true that something cannot come from nothing; there would simply be no awareness of this truth. This qualifies my above discussion of God and logic (in Jensen7 above). Still, it is not as though logic exists independently of God or anything that exists or does not exist. Rather, existence and nonexistence have certain characteristics and reason gives the awareness of those characteristics. Reason reflects the nature of existence and nonexistence. The difference in my claims here and in my above discussion of God and reason is to say that reason is the awareness of characteristics of existence and nonexistence, it is not some separate self-existing entity.

God and reason

Cosmological argument comments

Doland10: [To the underlined sentence portion in Jensen9 above.] Why? God himself is an exemption from this rule, as God doesn't need another God to create him. Bottom line is, "something" exists without explanation, it just does. Either it is God, or it is reality itself. But since you have already conceded that there are attributes of reality that not even God can change, then, it might as well just be reality that exists without explanation.

Jensen11: But God is the only possible exception to the rule and it is necessary that there be an exception to the rule. Nothing else works. That is, we need something changeless and personal to cause existence. Personality is the only thing we know of that can be an uncaused cause. And if something is a changing entity (like everything that we know of that exists other than God) then it has prior causes that have produced it. If all that exists, what you call reality, is made up of changing entities, then we would have an infinite regress of causes going into the infinite past. And that cannot produce existence. Each cause is not sufficient *in itself* to produce an effect because each cause is dependent upon a prior cause to exist. So an infinite number of causes will not be able to produce any effect since none of these causes have in themselves individually the power to produce an effect. If they do not have the power individually to produce an effect, they do not have that power in toto.

All attributes of reality, that is of existent entities other than God, God can change; but then they would have other attributes. Ultimately, existent entities must have some attributes or characteristics. But if entities have given attributes, then certain consequences must follow. This is the kind of necessity by which God is constrained. It has much to do with whether entities can or cannot exist without explanation. As I've shown in my previous paragraph, I think this (logic) shows that only a timeless personal entity can exist uncaused or unexplained and that all changing entities need an explanation. [Paragraph altered 4Ap10.]

Jensen13: I should rephrase my statement above that God is “an exception to the rule.” The “rule” Doland has in mind is that all existence needs an explanation. I should rather say that this rule is false and that the proper rational rule is that all changing existence needs an explanation. Thus God does not need a cause or explanation if God is self existent and unchanging in his primordial nature.

Some of the “attributes of reality that not even God can change,” like the rational conclusions discussed above, indicate that God must exist.

Doland12: [To the underlined sentence portion in Jensen11 above.] . . . Personality is not and never has been any such thing as an “uncaused cause.” You ever have any pets? Notice how your different pets have different personalities? Does that just happen without cause? . . .

Jensen13: By personality I do not mean someone’s characteristics like being funny, moody, serious, etc.; I mean being a person and having consciousness, reason, intelligence, moral awareness, and will. Personhood is actually a better term. (My dictionary indicates I’m using an archaic definition of personality when I mean personhood.) It does not arise out of nothing, it is either eternally existent or it ultimately comes from a previously eternally existent person. In God, it is eternally existent; in humans, it comes from God. But it is the only conceivable entity that can be an uncaused cause. All other causation requires prior causes of effects and becomes trapped in an infinite regress if there is no first cause. [Paragraph revised 3April10.]

Jensen7: [Fifth underlined sentence portion in Jensen7 above.] God is reasonable and good.

Doland8: Who defines “reasonable and good”? There is much in the Bible where God is NOT reasonable or good. You will of course say that I don’t understand, or that there are good reasons, or whatever. But, THAT, my friend, is equivocation. I KNOW what reasonable and good mean, and God of the Bible does NOT have those attributes. So, if you want to throw these words around “reasonable and good” but they don’t mean what “reasonable and good” “actually” mean, then “you” are equivocating! (See, I actually know how to use the word...)

Jensen9: I simply showed that God is reasonable and good by showing good reasons God could have allowed the various evils of which you have accused God. That is not equivocation. You just don't want to admit these are good reasons. Since you have given no new arguments against my claim, let the reader decide who is right.

Why would God create if God knows it all?

Doland4: So, if a God knows every detail of every second of existence everywhere in this universe and every possible universe, how could He be motivated to actualize any of them? How could He be emotionally involved in any of them?

Jensen5: Let's assume that God does have such knowledge without it being necessary that such known worlds or portions of such worlds exist. If God's nature is absolute goodness, then God could be motivated to actualize that known possible world which would end in the greatest good and God would be emotionally involved in doing so. God does not want to merely know what good is possible, God wants it to actually be.

Doland6: Why? If I know every single detail about you, right down to where every atom is, and what trajectory each atom will ever take, what is the difference to me if I actually put those atoms there, or if I just know that I could put those atoms there? What's my motivation? What is the real difference between something being "actual" and not actual from God's perspective? What makes it more "real" because there are atoms or not?

Jensen7: The difference is whether any good occurs or not. If I as a conscious entity exist and find the greatest of all joys, the joy of knowing God, then the greatest good occurs for me. If God merely contemplates this state, even knowing everything about me that can be known, and I do not

come to actually exist, then no good occurs. God wants the greatest possible good to occur.

Jensen5: [Continuation of answer to last Doland4 above.] If God cannot know what future events (involving free choice) will occur without their occurring, then at a different (“prior”) stage in God’s being, God may choose at that “time” not to foreknow the events in order to make the choice that they occur or not occur. At this point God can at least foreknow the limits of what will occur. God knew that the amount of evil in the world could have been much greater or much less. God knew it could never have been over a given point or under a given point since there are limits as to just how much evil or good people and conscious beings can do. People have only so much power, both individually and collectively. So knowing that the amount of evil in the world would be within certain limits, God knew that however the universe might turn out to be, it would still be worth creating. God knew it would be worth it because of the ultimately greater good that would come no matter how evil the world may turn out to be.

Doland6: [Responding to the first underlined statement above.] You put the word “prior” in quotes because you are at least cognizant that it is senseless to speak of “prior” of a timeless entity. But, you want to assume that something analogous is possible, a “God time” if you will. Well, that’s just another untestable, incoherent claim. What, exactly, is this “time that isn’t time” that God has, and how do I test that it does or doesn’t exist? You have NO way to answer this. Its just wild speculation.

Jensen7: First, I have said that with the creation God is not timeless. But God’s time may be different from ours just as our time is different from that of someone traveling near the speed of light. There might be an absolute time with our time frames being variations, usually only slight variations, of that absolute time. But again, God can occupy all of those differing time frames. Secondly, there is nothing incoherent in this claim. Show me an

inconsistency. Thirdly, again, show me why this needs to be testable. I'm just saying that this is a model that explains how certain things can be. I'm not claiming that it must be true. It might be that God's absolute time is simply our own earth time frame and that God simply fits other such time frames as they are needed. When I am just showing you how something could be, I do not need to provide verification for it. The verification I offer involves the historical evidence for Jesus' resurrection, messianic prophecy, religious experience, scientific evidence for God's existence via fine-tuning and the absolute origin of the universe, and philosophical arguments. If say, I demonstrate God's existence and Jesus' messiahship, then it follows that I should believe Jesus' teachings. Many of those teachings are not verifiable by other means. Nevertheless, they have still been verified by the process I have presented. At other times I have merely shown how there is no inconsistency in the views I have presented or in any of the implications of those views. Also, recall that these claims may be potentially tested by eschatological verification.

Jensen5: [From the second underlined statement in Jensen5 above.] God knew it would be worth it because of the ultimately greater good that would come no matter how evil the world may turn out to be.

Doland6: You again are placing contrivances upon God, that He somehow couldn't enact his "greater good" without the evil that happens to come along. This is just a plain contradiction to an omnipotent entity.

Jensen7: I have already shown that omnipotence cannot do the logically impossible. And I have also already shown that my claim is most feasible. Consider the basic theodicy I had presented. God needed to know how we would respond to God in the face of suffering, of the emotional temptation to turn against the God who deserves our commitment. It is logically impossible for God to do that unless that suffering occurs. We cannot be the kind of individuals who have passed the test without actually enduring

and passing the test. It is logically impossible for us to be that unless that suffering occurs.

OBJECTION 2: SINCE MIRACLES CONTRADICT SCIENCE, THEY CANNOT BE TRUE

Can we recognize divine acts?

Jensen3: Doland does not like William Lane Craig's statement that "natural laws assume that no other natural or supernatural factors are interfering with the operation that the law describes." What Craig means is that for natural laws to work as we know them **we** must "assume that no other natural or supernatural **factors** are interfering with the **operation** that the law describes" [emphasis mine]. Craig does not say that natural laws interfere with each other as Doland misreads. . . . Laws are descriptions of the behavior of entities alone and in relation to each other. Change the circumstances and the operations change. The laws do not change. [Paragraph abridged for clarity 10April10.]

Doland seems to claim that Craig's idea of supernatural intervention cannot be shown to be different from violating natural laws. Suppose, for example, the earth were to be stopped in its rotation yet with no noticeably different physical effects other than what had been experienced previously (no one even feels a jolt as one would with a quickly stopping car). "Did God 'violate' the natural law of inertia, or merely 'intervene' in the operation of the law of inertia with a supernatural force?" But again, Craig never claimed a miracle involves an intervention in the operation of the law of inertia if by that one means that the laws alone change without anything of the physical nature of the entities in the universe changing.

If some giant hand (or force, or mass of particles, etc.) were able to reach out and stop (or intercept) the earth's rotation (and also stop each subatomic particle) so that no sense of breaking would occur, wouldn't that be at least in principle like Doland's earlier example of someone catching an apple before it hits the ground? If no law of gravity was violated or intervened with in the latter, why assume it was violated or intervened with

in the former? The only intervention that occurs in a miracle is the intervention of new or previously unperceived causal factors. It could involve anything from adding electrons to a cloud to cause lightning to strike when a prophet raises his staff, to allowing a wind to build to push back a sea to dry ground. It might even involve changing the cells of a dead body to something like their premortem state.

Before going on I should comment that the Bible does give some accounts of either the sun reversing its apparent direction of movement in the sky as a sundial might record or the sun staying still in the sky when it should appear to move (Isaiah 38, Joshua 10). We should not assume these require that the earth be stopped in its rotation. These might, for instance, be accounted for by unusual atmospheric phenomena (say, for the latter, sunlight from below the western horizon reflecting off of noctilucent clouds onto ice or snow or water—or all three—to the east and onto noctilucent or other high altitude clouds farther east.) (See <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html>, 28Oc07.) However, the context and the unusualness of the phenomena would surely evidence the supernatural claim made by the prophet or warrior (respectively). When Moses parted the Red Sea, the text indicates that a strong wind pushed back the sea. No supernatural phenomena or beings were apparent, just a wind blowing on the sea. But it is the fact that the sea parted when Moses raised his staff and it closed later when he raised his staff again that gives evidence of Moses' religious claims. That is to say, if someone were to witness such phenomena, one would be confronting good evidence via a miracle. Likewise, because of the unusualness of the "late lighting" phenomenon just when Joshua asked for it, this should be evidence for a miracle to anyone witnessing it.

(We should also notice, however, that in the Joshua account it is not entirely clear that it is being claimed that the sunlight continued longer than usual rather than that the sun should be darkened, as by a storm. In the latter case, the miraculous nature of the phenomenon would be far less evident.)

Doland4: Say it were to happen that the earth stopped spinning for some amount of period, without any ill effects. Could we really know it was “supernatural”? Perhaps it was something naturalistic, just something completely unknown that happened. What exactly is the dividing line between natural and supernatural? In my view, the dividing line is whether or not the source of the phenomena is of our physical cosmos or not. But, if something like that ever happened, we may never be able to determine for certain whether the earth stopped because of something natural or supernatural.

Jensen5: True, depending upon the phenomenon and the context we may or may not have evidence for a claimed miracle. Doland assumes we would never have reason to think it isn't a natural phenomenon. Well, imagine you're standing next to Moses when the Red Sea parts. He raises his hands and the sea parts just like in the movie. Later he does it again and the waters come back together. Of course we don't have any direct evidence today that that is what actually happened. Christians believe it because of more indirect evidence: the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God and that he believed it, and so on. But my point is that if you were to be standing there next to Moses when this happened, this would be the kind of state of affairs that would give you reason to believe exactly what Moses said was the cause of the sea parting. You would have reason to believe that the God Moses talked about really did this. You wouldn't think this was caused by chance. You wouldn't say, “Well, the wind has been known to do this kind of thing, so that must have been all that happened.” In fact the Bible says that a wind did do it. But we can't accept that this was a chance occurrence. The probability against that is too great if Moses just happened to raise his hands when this happened. Again, I'm not at this point claiming any more direct evidence that this particular event actually happened. I'm just saying that we can recognize the type of phenomena that would give reason to accept religious claims.

Doland2: It appears that Craig is trying to make miracles seem to be less of an intrusion into the natural world than they really are. . . . If God stopped the Earth from spinning on a dime, then every single atom on Earth had its own little miracle of having its momentum “intervened in.” It isn’t any less intrusive for a supernatural force to “intervene in” the Earth’s momentum than it is for it to “violate” the law of inertia.

Jensen3: I think Doland misunderstands Craig’s intention here. I doubt that Craig is concerned about how intrusive such a miracle might be. He (and I) might have questions about how likely it is that the God of the Bible would want to perform a miracle like this, but I doubt that he is concerned to say that God does not “intrude” in our world. Rather, there is a conceptual difficulty involved when one speaks of a violation of natural law. Roughly (and as was noted earlier), the problem is that laws are descriptions of the behavior of entities. We can change the behavior if we change the entity but that does not change the law. We cannot merely change the law since the law describes the differing behavior however we might change the entity. We cannot merely change the law, or, if you will, violate the law. If there is a God or a supernature, then it isn’t difficult imagining God acting into our physical universe like we act in or intervene in our universe. But it is difficult to conceive of God changing or violating or suspending natural law.

Craig claims that extraordinary claims do not require extraordinary evidence. I tend to agree with Doland’s critique at this point. We don’t need strong evidence that someone won a lottery but we do need stronger than normal evidence that someone rose from the dead. Now a natural resurrection, the cells of the body just by chance returning to a premortem state, is so extremely improbable that it is difficult to imagine any evidence being adequate to give us reason to believe it. But as Craig points out, it would not be improbable for a superpowerful, superintelligent being to be able to raise someone from the dead. So if we have good evidence for a resurrection, that someone who was definitely dead is now alive, we would

also have good evidence that someone with very great intelligence and/or power raised this person from the dead.

This gets us back to the question of how much evidence is good enough evidence. Do extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence? We agree that they do though I suspect Doland would require much more extraordinary evidence than I would. If Doland and I were to witness a resurrection in which the victim claimed before the event that this would occur and if both of us were sure the person had definitely been dead for some time (say the blood was drained from the body), though I don't know exactly how Doland would respond to this scenario, I tend to think we would both admit that someone with a greater than normal power and/or knowledge had done this.

Now suppose we have only the testimonial evidence: someone tells us they saw someone alive after their public execution who predicted they would rise from the dead. This certainly does not have the same power as a direct experience for oneself, but I think it should be admitted to have some force. If we have some background beliefs about this intelligent/powerful being such that we think that it is either very unlikely or very likely or, perhaps, as likely as not that there is such a being, then this background belief would surely have some effect on our acceptance of the truthfulness of the witnesses' claim of a resurrection.

If we had only a very few witnesses, we would be much more prone to disbelieve them even if we thought it was very likely that there does exist such a superpowerful/intelligent being who had the power to carry out a resurrection. But if we had a large number of witnesses, we should be more inclined to accept their claim. Even if we thought the existence of this superintelligent/powerful being very unlikely, these numerous witnesses would give us evidence that should cause us to think the resurrection and the existence of such a superpowerful/intelligent being more likely. How much more likely is difficult to say. If one feels one has other very strong evidence against the existence of such a powerful/intelligent being, this

may be enough to persuade one that there must be a better explanation than a resurrection: that these witnesses were not truthful or intelligent enough to know what they saw (even though the number of witnesses would count against all of them being untruthful or of inadequate intelligence).

In the evidence for Jesus' resurrection, we have good reason to believe that about five hundred people saw Jesus alive after his resurrection. I think this is good evidence that he did rise from the dead and that it was effected by someone with much greater than normal intelligence and or power. But should this be enough to cause us to take the next step and believe Jesus' claims? This next step is not quite as certain as the previous one. Here we must trust a person's claims on the basis of the fact that that person knows whether their claim is definitely true. We trust a person's unexceptional claims with little support. As one's claims become more extraordinary we need greater justification to accept them though not absolute point by point verification.

We shouldn't need full proof of Jesus' claim to know one powerful enough to create the universe if he demonstrates the superhuman power or knowledge of predicting and fulfilling a resurrection from the dead. We have reason to accept his further description of the nature of the one who effected the resurrection as well as similar spiritual claims.

Much also depends on one's background beliefs (as was discussed above) and the justification for those beliefs. I think that if one had completely equal background beliefs (or completely equal lack of belief both for and against theism) one would find the above evidence adequate grounds for belief in the resurrection and Jesus' claims. I also think that once one honestly examines all other evidence for and against belief, one will find good reason to believe and no good evidence against belief.

But there is still some ambiguity. I said that there is good reason to believe that 500 people saw Jesus alive after his death. But despite this likelihood,

it is possible that this is not true. Or it is possible that they lacked sufficient intelligence or credibility. Of course there are good responses to these possibilities, some of which have been mentioned, but such responses can only argue to varying degree of probability. Because of such questions I find it important to back up the resurrection evidence with what I believe is some very strong evidence for Jesus' messiahship via prophecy from the Hebrew Scripture. (See "**Did Daniel Prove Jesus the Jewish Messiah?**")

Assuming the principle that "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence," the critic can make this into such an extreme principle that any belief in God is in practice unattainable whatever the evidence. Craig does not say that we need no evidence at all and I doubt that he would say that we do not need strong evidence. So Doland is likely wrong in assuming that Craig thinks that just because a miracle is claimed it should be accepted by the same evidence we accept for any normal common occurrence. To say that this is "ordinary evidence" is ambiguous as well. For any ordinary claim, there could be quite a bit of variation as to what we should accept as sufficient evidence to support it; much depends on the claim that is being made.

The following discussion concerns the idea of supernaturalism so we need to look at this concept before going on. Now the concept of "supernature" does not necessarily involve personalism, the existence of a conscious being or beings outside of our known "nature" or universe. As such, some religions speak of attaining knowledge of a spiritual world without any God or spiritual beings. Witness Huxley's idea of opening the "doors of perception" to another spiritual world via mystical experience. But for theists the basic idea at the core of supernaturalism is that God is there. It does not seem necessary that a naturalistic science could not subsume an impersonal supernaturalism under its scope. If we just learn the correct techniques perhaps we will learn whether there really is such a supernature and possibly even investigate it. But in a personalistic supernaturalism, or theism, God might be beyond of our ability to discover. All would depend

upon God's self-disclosure. If God were to perform a miracle, this could provide evidence of the existence of such a being.

Testimonial evidence for miracles and the Book of Mormon

Doland4: [Re. the first underlined statement above.] But, how much force? . . . Particularly when the testimonial evidence is highly suspect? . . . I accept it is "some force," just very, *very*, **very** little force. About as much force as Jensen finds of the affidavits in the beginning of the *Book of Mormon* of the people swearing to its truthfulness.

Jensen5: The testimony of the eleven "witnesses" for the *Book of Mormon* is very questionable, however. The *Book of Mormon* was purportedly translated from script on ancient golden plates in 1829. Eight of these witnesses only claimed to have seen and handled the gold plates, which, if true, could have been manufactured props. There is also some evidence that they were "persuaded" to sign the document saying they saw them. One of the eight did independently speak of seeing angels. Of the eleven, three others said they witnessed angels as well, but one, at least at one point, repudiated his testimony. Another one of these three said he and the other two heard God's voice. Some distinguished their experiences as being visionary but one said his was a very normal sensory experience. Some individuals handled cloth covered plates they were not allowed to uncover to look at. Some of the official Mormon accounts of these claimed experiences conflict and it is difficult to see how they can be reconciled. By 1847 none of the surviving eleven witnesses were Mormons. Of course this does not mean that they all repudiated their claimed experiences; some only repudiated what Smith and/or Young had changed Mormonism into and some may have left for other reasons. (See <http://mit.irr.org/facts-on-book-of-mormon-witnesses-part-1>—and the continuing web page—for more on the evidence of the witnesses of the *Book of Mormon*.) We see that the resurrection evidence is much more credible.

Resurrection evidence

Doland4: [Re. the second underlined statement in Jensen3 above] We have ONE SENTENCE from Paul about this. This really happened and it escaped the notice of the Gospel authors? Please. This is NOT good reason!

Jensen5: We have one sentence saying there were five hundred witnesses and several other sentences enumerating various other witnesses by name or group. This was all part of the traditional teaching Paul said was of greatest importance which he had long ago delivered to them (1 Corinthians 15:3). So this was part of the basic gospel Paul and probably all the other apostles always presented. Being from 1 Corinthians, this statement is much older than any of the final written accounts in the Gospels. It also looks to be an even older creedal type statement that may date back to the very earliest years of the church. It is not at all uncommon to find one statement given in the Epistles repeated nowhere else. The basic teachings were all assumed and usually didn't need repeating. Some doctrines were discussed in the Epistles only as the need presented itself. Someone at Corinth said there was no resurrection and so Paul had to deal with this topic in detail.

We have accounts in the Gospels in which large numbers of people were probably together when the resurrected Jesus was present. The "five hundred at one time" could have been at the ascension, for example (Luke 24:50), or possibly at Galilee (Matthew 28:10,16-20). In the latter, only the eleven are mentioned because they are the primary group of disciples. This does not mean there were not other followers (cf. Acts 1:15). Since the angel announced that Jesus would be seen in Galilee, this would have been passed on to all of Jesus' known follower, not just the eleven, and as many as could go would have headed for Galilee.

All four Gospels give a different number of women who visited the tomb on the morning of the resurrection. Luke even speaks of the “other women” who were in this group. In these narratives the recorders and those who passed on these accounts were just not concerned about the number of witnesses. They were concerned about what Jesus said and did.

Secondarily, they were also concerned about what those who saw him said and did. Those who used the account of the resurrection to evangelize or to present the basic gospel content were concerned about the numbers and the identities of those who saw him: thus the very early account we find in 1 Corinthians was preserved primarily for these purposes. Notice that the ones who first saw Jesus, the women, were not mentioned in Paul’s account. The testimony of women held little force at this time in history. So it wasn’t included in an account that would be used for evangelism.

Editorial selection was used because the different accounts had different purposes. But there is no good reason to claim the Gospel writers knew nothing about there being 500 who saw Jesus alive. They simply did not feel a need to give a number when describing the various appearances. [Last two paragraphs revised 11Ap10.]

But if we did have nothing more than just one sentence and if the Gospel writers made no mention of it, it would still be sufficient evidence. In the last verse in his Gospel, John said there were a large number of things Jesus did (likely speaking of after the resurrection) that were not recounted. It should not be considered unusual to have this event go unmentioned by the four. Paul could never have made this kind of statement to this audience without risking everything that was most important to him. Above all else he wanted the Corinthian church to remain faithful to Jesus and the teaching he had given them. He could have been too easily refuted if his claim was false and Paul would never have been believed again.

Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena

Doland2: If you allow supernatural explanations into the pool of options [of scientific explanations for any phenomenon under investigation], how do you determine whether or not a supernatural event occurred? Craig offers his ideas on this. First, he says, “You would have to investigate to see if something cannot be accounted for in terms of the natural forces that were operable at that time and place” (67). The problem here is, how can you know this for sure? How can you know that you have, in fact, accounted for all the natural forces that were operable at the time of a purported miracle? For example, if something appears to be levitating and defying the laws of gravity, and you cannot find any natural force to account for it, how do you know that you haven’t missed something? How do you know that your pool of options isn’t simply missing the right explanation? Perhaps the supernatural explanation seems to be the best one only because you haven’t yet found the right naturalistic one.

Jensen3: Here one shouldn’t consider one explanation as necessarily better than the other unless the evidence better supports one view over the other. If we do not have a good naturalistic explanation, then we should consider the possibility of a theistic (personalistic supernatural) explanation. (A nonpersonalistic supernatural explanation is in principle no different than a naturalistic one, though it would be largely empirically inaccessible. Nevertheless, we might be able to infer a supernature from phenomena in our world.) So is God or some other superpowerful, supernatural being causing the levitation phenomenon, or is there some natural explanation? Our ancestors would have been wrong to assume *prima facie* that the phenomenon is more likely caused by such a superpowerful person. But likewise we would be wrong to reject a theistic explanation out of hand.

All other things being equal, a naturalistic explanation for repeatable phenomena is initially more likely than a theistic one. This is because experience has shown us that such phenomena do usually have natural explanations (at least more proximate explanations). So as Craig says, we

should always look for a naturalistic explanation first. But surely he is correct to say that we should not exclude what I have called a theistic explanation from investigation. If nature is uniform, that does not mean that a superpowerful/intelligent being (if there is one) could not at times act into nature just as we act into our world, even though we know that that is not what normally occurs.

Much, possibly most of science involves reasoning to the best explanation. If we cannot find a good naturalistic explanation for a phenomenon and a theistic (personalistic supernatural) explanation does explain it, then the latter is clearly the better explanation and we should go for the better explanation. If new information comes along giving a natural explanation, then we should change our views. But until then the supernatural explanation should be accepted because it is the more justified belief. We can't just go with "Well, maybe there's some naturalistic explanation we haven't thought up yet, so that has to be better than any theistic or supernatural explanation." That's just dogma, not science.

Consider two possible scenarios: One, suppose the object began levitating for no known reason. Your book just rose off your desk and it's floating in midair. Two, you are talking with a friend who tells you, "look at what I can do," and some object begins to float in the air. In one, we should think the phenomenon has a natural explanation though we keep in mind that it is always possible it has a supernatural or a personalistic supernatural explanation. We will look for the naturalistic explanation but if we never find it, we still will not believe the supernatural explanation without special evidence for it. We should accept that it *may* have a supernatural explanation but there is just no reason to accept that it does if we have nothing more than the experience as described. In two, we will assume our friend has some power or knowledge most people do not have even if we think it a mere magician's trick. We would likely believe our friend's explanation unless it were just too outlandish. These are the kinds of things magicians and illusionists are able to do. But if the phenomenon were much more noteworthy, like a resurrection or a parting of a sea, we would

more likely believe the one apparently performing the miracle as to its cause. If Jesus says I'm going to be raised from the dead through the power of the God of the Hebrew Bible and we experience him alive after his public execution, we would have reason to believe his claim.

Under some possible theistic world views, nature is not uniform. But uniform natural law is assumed under the biblical world view. God is said to have decreed the ordinances of the heavens and that they shall not be broken (at least until the end of the age, Jeremiah 31:35-36). And just as it is to God's glory to hide secrets in nature so it is our glory (meaning at least in part that it is our purpose) to discover them. (Proverbs 25:2; note: in the context of the time and culture of this writing it was primarily the king who had the right to do scientific investigation). Scientific investigation does give us truth, the Bible claims.

We cannot discover the secrets of nature if they never follow some uniform patterns or at least some underlying patterns that we may search out. But if nature is uniform, we would be able to investigate even a miracle, at least to a given point. If we reach a point at which we can no longer trace back causes, we should consider that we may have a supernatural cause. Supernature would be like a third dimensional world to a two dimensional flatlander. The flatlander would not even be able to conceive of where the third dimension is, much less seek to investigate it. (See Edwin Abbott's *Flatland* for more on this idea.) So up to the point of God's intervention into nature from supernature we might be able in principle to scientifically investigate, but we would not be able to investigate any further into supernature.

It is a misconception to claim that the possibility of miracles precludes science merely because there would be something in the world outside of science's scope of investigation. Does any honest (and sane) scientist really believe that we will someday know everything? If not, then there will always be something unknowable to science. Even now, our best view of

quantum mechanics says there are some things that are just impossible for us to know, like the position of a particle if we know its velocity.

Sometimes it is claimed that the possibility of God interfering in nature would make any scientific investigation questionable. Couldn't any chemistry student claim their experiment failed because God (or the devil) added some extra chemical to the brew? Maybe under some very unusual form of theism, perhaps, but that isn't something the Jewish and Christian God would do. The Christian God doesn't normally interfere in nature or allow Satan to control the normal course of nature. God does so only for special and important reasons. Nature is uniform enough that we can tell it is uniform but that does not mean it cannot allow intelligent interference. If the student's lab partner had a grudge against our chemistry student or wanted to play a practical joke, the partner might slip into the lab at night to add the unwanted chemical. Does this possibility prove that we can never trust science? Of course not. But this human interference is in principle no different from the theistic interference in nature we call a miracle.

What an honest scientific investigation has no right to do is to say that no matter how much we fail to find a naturalistic explanation we can never consider a theistic supernatural explanation. Just because all of our accepted investigations of nature have brought up naturalistic explanations is no reason to think there can be no exceptions. And, of course, science has not investigated all phenomena. Science is meant to be a search for truth. To preclude a possible explanation from consideration simply because all phenomena we have ever investigated has never had that kind of explanation is a very unscientific approach. How can science be sure of learning anything new if all possible explanations are not considered?

Also, we should notice that scientific investigation is only now beginning to get close to ultimate and more distant causes (e.g., the big bang, the origin of life, etc.). Science has in the past considered only the more proximate causes. If the biblical view is correct that God normally uses natural forces and does not usually act directly into nature to produce a particular

phenomenon, then we should not normally expect to reach supernatural explanations unless or until we investigate the more ultimate causes.

Jensen3: [First underlined sentence in Jensen3 above.] Here one shouldn't consider one explanation as necessarily better than the other unless the evidence better supports one view over the other.

Doland4: As I explained in my paper, the term "evidence" only has meaning for naturalistic explanations! Once you start talking about evidence, you cannot be talking about the supernatural. And if you are talking about the supernatural, you cannot be talking about evidence. We only have naturalistic senses. And if a supernatural agent could alter reality, he/she/it could cover up this alteration PERFECTLY.

Jensen5: This claim I've refuted just a couple of questions earlier as well as in the previous response by showing how we can have evidence for the supernatural. Doland is making a claim without an argument; it's just question begging. What Doland calls "naturalistic senses" I assume to be physical senses. We only experience the physical world with our senses. But we can still infer a supernatural world from physical senses. Furthermore, if we have a sensory experience that we might call a vision, we may then experience directly the supernatural world.

And what does it matter that God could "cover up" reality? This is irrelevant.

Doland10: No, it's not "irrelevant." And it is just not God that could cover up reality. Or, at least, once you start to allow supernatural explanations, then you can't just assume only God. Like how do you know that when you open your Bible, that the words you are reading aren't just some satanic delusion to get you to believe a lie?

Once you allow supernatural explanations, you have no basis to assume something isn't supernatural even if it appears natural. You assume your senses give you accurate information about the world, even if they are imperfect and do not give you perfect information. You still assume the information is reasonably accurate and can be depended on. But you have no basis for that unless you assume a priori that there are no supernatural agents interfering.

Jensen11: Doland's first objection is that the Bible could all be a Satanic lie. How this applies to miracles is not easy to see since, as we will see, one possible answer involves verification by miracles. Here Doland's thinking has gone in a circle (which is not to say that this is "circular reasoning.") Now interestingly, the second century Gnostics thought this of the Hebrew Scripture. The evil or at least second rate god of the Hebrew Bible created the material world. The real God, the God of Jesus, was a spiritual being completely distinct from matter, they said. Muslims and non-Christian Jews have not always but have at various times in their history claimed that the New Testament is a Satanic lie. How do we determine whether their claims are true or not? One should look for evidence that any rational person should be willing to accept and demonstrate the truth or falsity of any of these various views. One should not say, "Well, there are various supernatural possibilities, so we have to reject them all."

How do we know the Bible is not a Satanic lie? One, by considering the evidence from miracles, the evidence for Jesus' resurrection and fulfilled messianic prophecy. I've given the logic of such arguments earlier. Two, one could look at religious experience as verification that a claimed belief is from God or truthful in any claims that are made. Three, one might claim a contemporary miracle: say a healing of an otherwise incurable disease or injury or infirmity if, say, it is done in the name of Jesus. For example, I know of a Muslim man who became a Christian after witnessing what he claimed was a visible and undeniable lengthening of a person's shorter leg to the length of the longer leg. Four, some have claimed the Bible (I know of some Muslims who have claimed this of the Qu'ran) has provided

accurate scientific knowledge that is lacking or in error in other holy books. I've mentioned earlier the origin of the universe in the big bang and the expansion of the universe. One problem with this approach is that it only verifies the particular book in which this statement is made. It wouldn't verify the work of any other biblical writers. Nevertheless, this might sufficiently support the spiritual claims made by the one verified writer and that may give us at least some verified biblical doctrines. Five, in the past some Christians have attempted to prove the basic Christian doctrines entirely by philosophical arguments. This is a very complicated history with difficult and subtle arguments, most of which I think fail. I think the probability of God's existence has been demonstrated philosophically, but few other doctrines have. These various enumerated grounds for believing the Bible is all it claims to be, if any of them are sound, would refute the possibility of the book being a lie from Satan.

Doland's second objection is that we cannot trust our senses if there is any possibility that there is any supernatural agent who could interfere with our perception to provide nonveridical experiences or hallucinations. He says "you have no basis for that [accepting the general accuracy of sense experience] unless you assume a priori that there are no supernatural agents interfering." Doland's fear should also arise if there were any possibility of extraterrestrial aliens who could be watching us and possibly manipulating us to see and experience only what they want us to experience. We could all be mere brains in vats hooked up to stimulators which make us believe we are seeing a world which is not really there. Does Doland have to conclude that a Matrix type world simply cannot be a possibility since it would destroy his assurance that the world he perceives around him may not be real? The Matrix movies certainly had some unrealistic plot lines and assumptions, but that does not mean that the basic idea is impossible. Shouldn't we accept that though such scenarios are possible, they are not truly a threat to our foundational beliefs like our awareness of the world around us or our memories?

One problem with certain multiverse hypotheses is that in a multiverse in which all possible arrangements of matter with all possible kinds of laws and entities in those universes we will end up with many universes containing Boltzmann Brains (BBs). These are chance arrangements of matter which happen to have the particular complexity that will allow consciousness and awareness to occur. Most nontheists think that an organism with enough neural complexity will, by virtue of that complexity, be conscious. I think that it is absurd to believe that a mere arrangement of complex parts will ever produce consciousness but since most naturalists do assume this, let's assume it as well. Some such BBs will, because of the particular arrangement of their material constituents, happen to believe they exist as embodied organisms like ourselves. Until they happen to dissolve back into their environment, they will have this awareness and, for some, even have apparent past memories of their fictitious earlier life. Does this give Doland proof that such multiverse hypotheses cannot be true? Of course not. We can't exclude hypotheses merely because they have consequences we don't like. Doland or I may happen to be BBs and in ten seconds we may be dissolved and whisked away by some cosmic wind. Even if this is true, it does not give us reason to doubt what we think we are seeing and sensing around us. Beliefs such as our belief in an external world are properly basic beliefs. Though we may keep in mind the possibility that we are only BBs, we should assume that we are not. We should accept the apparently perceived world around us because of our sense of certainty that it is really there. [Five previous paragraphs and part of a sixth have been replaced by this one and the last five sentences of the paragraph above. My comments were too involved and confusing. Since Doland had not responded to anything stated in those previous paragraphs (I'm sure I have confused him as well) I think it is permissible to replace them with these simpler statements. 19Oc14.]

Doland12: [Jensen11 above, 2nd paragraph, 1st and 2nd underlined sentence] How do you know the "messianic prophecies" were not ALSO satanic lies? How do you know that Satan cannot resurrect someone to propagate his lies? Even if he can't do that, how do you know that Satan

cannot do a good job at faking it, like animating a dead body or giving people delusions? Maybe Osiris is the One True God, but, Satan has buried all the evidence. Once you allow the supernatural into the equation, you don't have any justification for saying "only the supernatural I like is real." . . . If the Bible is a satanic lie, that would include the whole Jesus story, so, by extension, Satan would be happy to do things [like perform exceptional healings] "in the name of Jesus" just so that you would believe his Jesus lies — and forget that Osiris is really the One True God.

Jensen13: So how do you know that you are really living in the world you think you are living in given your assumption of naturalism? How do you know you haven't ingested some mind-altering drugs just a few hours ago, fallen asleep, and dreamed everything that's around you that you now think is real? The drugs are so effective that you don't remember a thing about your real life. Maybe they even put you into a coma and you will never wake up to the real world. But everything is so real, you say, there aren't any drugs that can do that. Maybe there aren't any in the world you are dreaming, but there are in the real world which you don't remember. These drugs are so effective they even give you a whole new set of memories. Maybe they allowed your brain to distort some of your own previous memories. They caused you to think the stories you have heard about other fictitious and real people to be your own. So Paul, if you really think it's a problem to have supernatural beings because it is always possible that they could be messing with your mind, creating false evidence or even creating whole dream worlds that aren't even there but you think are there, then you should recognize that you have the same problem with naturalism. Just as I can never know for sure that God is not actually evil and has deceived me with the evidence (whether directly experienced miraculous signs or historical evidence or whatever) and will toss me into an eternal hell when I die just for the fun of it, you can't know for sure that anything you think is real either. And my little drug-experience scenario isn't the only one I can come up with to give you problems. As another good example, [and as I've mentioned above,] look at the current discussions

concerning Boltzmann Brains as they relate to possible multiple universes (cf. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 148-9).

I think your response would just be, “Hey, if I’m wrong, I’m wrong. I can only go by what evidence I have.” You’ve made a response like this earlier in another context. Well, I’d say the same thing only I have claimed that theism and Christianity in particular has the stronger evidence. If any spiritual universe is possible we ultimately have to trust the claims of spiritual beings who could be evil and could lie to us. If a naturalistic universe is true, one must trust that one is not by chance experiencing other kinds of hallucinations, or other non-veridical experiences brought on by natural processes. But I have pointed out earlier that there is a logic to trusting persons. Here we should look at something of this logic, the logic of how we trust other persons. (I have gone into this earlier when talking about the logic of miracles.) Once it is admitted that we may have reason to trust these spiritual beings or, on the other hand, that we have to accept that our normal experiences are normally veridical, (whether they really are or not), then we can begin to assess and compare the relative evidence for theism and naturalism.

As for the logic of how we trust persons consider the following. I have evidence that Jesus claimed he would rise from the dead in support of his religious claims and his claim to be the Messiah and I also have evidence that 500 witnesses actually saw him alive after his public execution. That’s good evidence to trust his claims. He could have been lying about his religious claims. But to the degree we trust someone’s unexceptional claims on weaker evidence so we should trust their more exceptional claims on stronger evidence. In either case we are still trusting in the claims of people who could be deceiving us. I trust in my religious experience that has given me assurance that I have a relationship with the creator God who loves me. Some people claim that they have actually heard an audible voice giving them this or similar information. My experience or theirs could be a deception by an evil god or by Satan as you suggest (maybe the true God is too weak to stop him or there is no such God). Just because some

supernatural being could be deceiving me is not enough reason to distrust the information I'm given. Knowing myself, I feel sure I cannot produce this experience in myself. If someone who could be a supernatural being is giving me this information, though I could be deceived, I'm going to take that chance and believe that I'm being given the truth. This is a reasonable chance to take. It would be an unreasonable chance to believe something with no evidence, to take a leap of faith just because I want to believe it.

Furthermore, I have earlier given reason to think it more likely that if there is a creator for the universe, this God is good and concerned about the creation, and especially any creation that has the moral, intellectual, and volitional ability to respond to and relate to God. If there is such a good creator, this God would not deceive those who earnestly seek God.

Now earlier when I talked about religious experience and the need to seek God I mentioned the need to take into account the possibility of spiritual deception. If there is one who deserves our highest commitment (the ultimate definition of God), whatever else God might be like, we would have an obligation to seek this God and to seek to determine whether this God exists (on merely the possibility that this God does exist). To merely investigate religious claims by evidence alone and to fail to seek this God would leave us open to the kinds of deception you suggest. At least if there is such a God who has the power to stop other spiritual beings from deceiving us and has the knowledge of when or whether they are doing so (on the possibility that there are such other spiritual beings), such a God would keep us from deception if we do seek this God. If we do not, this God would have no obligation to stop us from coming to believe whatever we might want to believe. However intellectually honest we might think ourselves to be (and for that matter, actually be), if we do not seek God, why should God be obligated to allow our intellectual abilities to be capable of bringing us to the truth in this matter?

So there are some areas in which we can and should take into account the possibility of spiritual deception. We can be assured that we will be kept

from deception if there is a God who has a given power and intelligence and goodness and who deserves our commitment. But under anything other than this possibility, we cannot know with certainty that we are not deceived in our attainment of spiritual knowledge. But likewise one cannot be assured of any knowledge of the natural world given naturalism.

Would God lengthen a shorter leg?

Jensen11: [From Jensen11 above, 2nd paragraph, 3rd underlined sentence] . . . the undeniable lengthening of a person's shorter leg to the length of the longer leg.

Doland12: Let me tell you a story. When I still considered myself a Christian, I went to a "faith healing." This was sometime mid to late 80's. First thing the preacher did was a leg-lengthening. It looked pretty real. At the time, I wasn't quite sure what to make of it. . . . I didn't doubt that God "could" do that if He chose to, just wasn't sure if that indeed "would" be something God would do. In short, I was neither convinced it was real nor convinced it was fake. I didn't know.

From there, the preacher called to people in the audience that needed healing. One person came forward that was deaf in one ear. The preacher gave his "whammy" on the guy and claimed the deaf man could hear again. But the deaf guy said he was still deaf in that ear after the healing. The preacher said that sometimes your brain has gotten to where it doesn't expect input from a deaf ear, and it might take some time for his brain to readjust to his ear now working. He said he'll start to hear in that ear again in a few days.

Very similarly, a woman who was blind in one eye came forward. Surprise, surprise, she was still . . . blind after the "healing". This time the preacher said it was probably the eye that hasn't yet readjusted to working. It hasn't

had to do any focusing for a long time, so it may take the eye a few days to relearn how to focus. Surely in a few days she would have perfect vision.

One boy about 10 had asthma. He told the boy “you’re cured!” and told him to run around the congregation to show his asthma had left his body. The boy tried to run, and was obviously out of breath and couldn’t make it one lap around the room.

Then he did things like shout out, “Someone in the room has breast cancer! You’re cured! Someone has heart disease! You’re cured!”

One would think, at this point, ANY IDIOT should have been able to see this was all a sham. But, you see, he opened with his “best trick.” The leg lengthening bit looked good, and so the audience was sold on the show. So when everything else in the show failed to produce anything, nobody challenged him. People lapped up the show, even though it should have been patently obvious it was ____.

This healing was not at my church, a friend brought me to her church. After the events, I discussed this with my preacher from my church. I myself was still naïve at the time. The leg lengthening looked real, and I was too naïve to think it was an intentional trick. Yet the more I thought about it, the more unconvincing it was to me. So if I didn’t think it was an intentional trick but didn’t think it was real either, well, what was it? So, here is what my preacher said. He said he wasn’t prepared to say for certain it was outright fraud, but was forthright that was a likely possibility. He did know one thing, he knew he had never seen someone come out of a faith healing with a missing leg replaced. If God will lengthen a leg, why not replace one?

Given how naive I was, this was actually shocking to me. This friend of mine whom I considered a good Christian, and going to a good Christian church, and there was outright fraud? How could this be? I am glad that I had an honest preacher that knew ____ when he saw it.

Since that time, I have come to know that this leg lengthening trick is a well-known parlor trick. Google it. It's been debunked a thousand times over. Here's a YouTube vid on it: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKLemBlhEZO>

Now, you said something about an "undeniable" leg lengthening. I have heard that one woman has testified before thousands that it was real, her leg really was lengthened. I don't know if this is the "undeniable" event you refer to, but, I'll go ahead and make the guess it is. If so, as I see it, there are at least 3 possibilities:

1. God really did a miracle on this one woman.
2. She's lying for financial reasons – paid off.
3. She's lying for religious reasons – she thinks she is bringing people to Jesus.

Do you really think it is option 1? Do you really think that God would do as a real miracle one that is indistinguishable from a well-known parlor trick? Really, God would do that? Why not heal amputees instead? You might also watch this YouTube video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3VAEYEG53w>

Jensen13: A couple of things, Paul. First of all I was not presenting this as evidence. I said that *this person took it as undeniable* evidence. It convinced someone who didn't want to believe it. I doubt that I could go back to track down the people involved to use it as evidence and so I would not want to present it as evidence. Possibly, if the lady had before and after x-rays, this would give convincing evidence. But short of that, this kind of healing claim is much harder to verify, as you point out. If we only had the lady's testimony, then it would be good but possibly not sufficient evidence. Just as our legal system accepts testimonial evidence, so should we. I'm not sure what this individual saw that convinced him it was truly lengthened. If only the leg (from knee to ankle) were lengthened, we would have good reason to think it actually happened if we could see a change in

length from these two points. If the lengthening involved the thigh, then it would be much harder to verify. For someone with loose enough clothing we wouldn't be able to tell if they were merely changing the position of their pelvis, angling it more downward on the claimed shorter limb. I assume that is how the illusion works since the YouTube site you recommended didn't really say. Also, a trick like this should not be difficult to expose. If this is what you saw, why is it you felt so certain it was the real thing? If we have someone come to be healed who is wearing an elevated shoe on one foot and they are walking fairly normally, I would think that would be good reason to think they have legs of unequal length. But maybe someone with normal legs and with enough training could learn to walk with such shoes without limping or without it appearing in any way unnatural. We would have to ask a physician or other specialist. So maybe even that could be faked. But if the "healings" we saw on the video were the kind you witnessed, I'm surprised you fell for it. I certainly doubt the Muslim man I mentioned would have fallen for the ones on the video. They were just too patently unconvincing. He was so convinced that Christianity was true that he appears to have gone into a deep depression after this incident and as a result almost starved himself to death. Also, the context of the claimed healing you witnessed seems to suggest that it was fraudulent. Since other verifiable healings did not occur at this time, we would have better reason to doubt this one.

So we should admit that the particular experience I sited is unresolved. We just don't know enough about it and probably cannot go back to investigate it further. But again, don't forget that I never brought it up to be considered as evidence in the first place. In presenting my quotation you cut it out of the original sentence to make it appear as though I had presented it as "undeniable" evidence. If that was your intention then this is not the first time you've accused me of making claims I've never made. I recall saying that I couldn't imagine something occurring and from that you accused me of a logical fallacy, of saying that since I cannot imagine it, it must not be. But of course, I never made that conclusion. Is it that the only way you can

think of winning an argument is by pretending your opponent makes a claim they never made?

You ask why God would do a healing like this which is “indistinguishable from a well-known parlor trick.” Well, it’s not really a parlor trick; it isn’t something amateur or professional magicians would do. Atheists and other skeptics call a parlor trick to try to associate it with a magic show. Only people who claim God or some other spiritual being would heal people try to do it, magicians don’t. To be accurate, it should only be called a “trick” or perhaps an illusion, and then only when we are sure an actual lengthening has not occurred. But your point is still well taken that it is known that this is something that could be a trick or illusion. So why would God perform this kind of healing? Because God desires to heal. Whenever good is done, God’s kingdom advances. That seems to have been the point Jesus made when he healed people. Whether it’s verified to people other than the person healed is secondary to the point that something good is being done for this person who needs a healing.

So why then doesn’t God heal amputees if he just likes to heal? And for that matter, if God likes to heal so much, why doesn’t it happen all the time? Second question first: God doesn’t do it all the time because it would then be too obvious that God is really there. I’ve belabored this point previously in this debate and I’ve already repeated myself far too many times. So let me just say that we need to have a world in which we have the ability to choose against God and tell ourselves that we are intellectually justified in doing so even if we are not. The evidence must not be so strong as to force belief and commitment.

God heals amputees much less often primarily because of the above reason but also in part because this would involve what Jesus called tempting God. Remember the story of Jesus being tempted by Satan to throw himself off the top of the Temple? Satan even quoted a Bible passage in which God promised he would send angels to protect him if he fell. Jesus replied that to do this would be to tempt God and God

commanded us not to do that. This is essentially strong-arming God, telling God what he has to do in a matter that would take considerable supernatural intervention in the world. Thus God does not as often work miracles of this magnitude.

Yet there are at least accounts of such miracles, whether they can now be verified or not. If Jesus rose from the dead, this would be a similar kind of virtually irrefutable evidence to those who saw him die and saw him alive afterward. If such a miracle did occur and someone became a believer because of the overwhelming magnitude of the evidence, would this contradict my previous claim that God does not do such miracles because one's choice would be forced? No, some people come to believe prior to such an overwhelming experience and some have previously so closed their minds that no evidence would be persuasive. Such people could witness such an overwhelming miracle without it altering their beliefs. But what about those who would be persuaded by such very strong evidence? Why would God allow them access to such evidence? . . . Well, that's just my point. These are the ones who will *not* be allowed to witness such miracles. So the bottom line is that God does sometimes provide very undeniable evidence like this but this cannot be given to all people. [Paragraph shortened 27Oc14.]

One other point: leg lengthening is a kind of healing that could be investigated. If you know of someone who is holding healing meetings and has been known to do this kind of claimed healing, you should investigate. You should be a little more sophisticated in your observations than you were the last time, however. You might come up with some good evidence of fraud or, perhaps, of a legitimate healing. What you would need to do would be to wait until after the meeting and then talk to the person who claimed to be healed. Tell him or her that you do some investigative writing or research on healings and would like to ask them some questions. Don't start swearing once someone says something you don't like. And don't snicker if they say something you think to be foolish. You don't have to tell them you're not a Christian. If they come out and ask, tell them you're

searching and that this kind of a healing would possibly persuade you. (Or could you even honestly say that?) Ask if they have previous x-rays of their legs. Ask if they would see their doctor and get new x-rays done. Ask if you could have their permission to examine both sets of x-rays. Ask for permission to talk to their physician. See what the doctor's reaction is to this claimed healing. Comparing the x-rays will show you if the legs actually changed from unequal to equal length.

Now if the person who claimed to be healed is reluctant to give any of this kind of information, you'll know that this is probably a fraud. So you could potentially get good verification or falsification of the miracle claim.

Why God doesn't heal amputees video

The second YouTube video you mentioned was interesting. Did you notice that all of the objections raised in the video were answered in our debate? What I noticed was that though all of my answers were quite reasonable (and these are the same kind that are regularly available in scholarly journals, books, and on the internet), the video insisted that any possible attempted answer is obviously silly and cannot possibly be anything other than pure rationalization. I'm coming more and more to realize how true Paul's statement is in Romans 1 that people suppress the truth that they know about God to the point that they cannot think rationally. How else could I possibly explain such blatant disregard for and misrepresentation of the common Christian and theistic answers to their questions?

I think we've already talked quite a bit about Christians (or sometimes "claimed" Christians) who have done evil: the witch hunts and inquisitions, etc. So concerning the possibility that someone might lie about a healing in order to convince people to become Christians, I would just say, yes, Christians are tempted to do evil like everybody else and sometimes they fall to those temptations. They know God does not justify lying under these conditions. But also, there are many non-Christians who get into these scams simply because they are looking for power, money, etc. The faith-

healer you observed may have been one. Wasn't there some popular Pentecostal or Holiness preacher some years ago named Marjoe who later admitted he never believed anything he said and was in it just for the money? Con artists will go anywhere they can get a buck. That's hardly evidence against Christianity.

Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena, continued

Jensen5: I have pointed out above that a naturalistic explanation for repeatable phenomena is initially more likely than a theistic explanation if we have no other applicable evidence. I then said:

Jensen3: [From Jensen3 above under topic heading "Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena," second underlined sentence] This is because experience has shown us that such phenomena do usually have natural explanations (at least more proximate explanations).

Doland4: Correct. Except not "usually," the correct answer is "always" as far as has been able to be determined. Explain to me this: if God exists, has always existed, then presumably God has done countless miracles throughout time in all lands and for all peoples. And yet, the only miracles that Jensen accepts as having been validated are presumably the ones in the Bible. (Apologies if I'm incorrect on this assumption.) Were there any miracles in China over the last several thousand years? Why aren't they documented? How about in Russia? How about in the United States over the last few hundred years? None? Really? Very strange, no?

Jensen5: My first and simplest response is to say that Doland cannot claim that all phenomena that have been investigated have only naturalistic explanations. There are many biblical and non-biblical miracle claims that have not been determined to have only naturalistic explanations. His awkward qualification "as far as has been able to be determined" is

meaningless since for any determination of a naturalistic origin of a phenomenon there might still be supernatural origins farther back in the causal chain, and there are many phenomena that have been investigated that have not yielded a clear probability for a naturalistic explanation.

Now to answer Doland's claim more completely we first need some background discussion. I know I'll probably put Doland to sleep again (some of his recorded responses have consisted merely of "Zzzzzs"), but I don't think I can adequately answer this claim otherwise. [This paragraph revised and the previous paragraph added 14Feb09.]

There are a couple of different categories of divine interventions into the universe. Normally we think of miracles as special acts of God in history. God just chooses to do them for some reason but life would go on if they never occurred. But there might also be special events in the evolution of the universe that are needed and, because they require special intelligent supernatural intervention, might be thought of as miracles. There may be points at which we need special intervention because the universe just wouldn't be able to progress to a desired end without it; say at the origin of life, or possibly at major changes in the evolution of life. I'm not sure what to call this kind of miracle. Let's just call them "universe ordering miracles." Maybe such miracles are so significant because the universe couldn't have been set up to begin with laws and features that would be enough to produce the needed transitions. It could be that instead occasional intelligent interventions are needed. Or if it could have been set up without such divine intervention, without these "universe ordering miracles"; maybe it was just *easier* to intervene at certain desired points.

Easier? Isn't an omnipotent being supposed to be unconcerned about easier and harder? Doland might ask. Not necessarily. Suppose we think that God could set up the universe one way, say with numerous adjustments and special laws and features at the beginning just so that no special interventions are needed (call this "order 1" or O1). Should we assume that God would necessarily do so just to avoid creating the

universe in a simpler way (O2) that does, however, require some special interventions along the way every now and then? I know of theistic evolutionists who do claim that God would more likely create O1 because it seems to them more fitting to God's nature. It shows God's greatness more if the universe were so much harder to create such that God need never intervene in it. But isn't this assumption much more a matter of our own reading into God's nature what we think it should be? Perhaps God values simplicity more and would rather create a universe which is not as finely tuned as O1 but which needs occasional interventions [minor additions 31Oc14].

I know of people on the opposite end of the theological spectrum of the theistic evolutionists, the young earth creationists, many of whom will say that it is more fitting that God never use naturalistic processes. Should God create the earth from a solar nebula or the moon from a collision between the earth and a Mars-sized planetoid? No, they would say, God should just say it and there it is. I think much of this talk about what God should or should not do is very subjective. Why shouldn't God use natural process to create some entities? Why shouldn't God create any way God wants to create? If God wants to intervene in nature now or then, why should we think this diminishes God's greatness or intelligence or power?

Now in some areas I do have to admit that I often indulge in such thinking myself. I feel that God is more likely to do or not do certain things. I do this based on biblical teachings about God's nature as well as what we might call natural theology, what we learn of God by thinking about nature and existence. I think, for example, following from the former, we can assume that God cannot do evil, and, following from the latter, that it is very intuitively likely that God cannot do evil. This does not mean that God cannot allow undeserved pain, rather it means that it cannot be that God does not have good reason for allowing such pain and that no greater good will result.

Also, it seems to me unacceptable to say that God creates by just saying it and there it is. That is certainly the summary statement of what happens but it's not the entirety. If that were all there were too it, it would be more like magic than divine creation. Rather, God speaks and processes are set into motion that bring about the desired event or entity.

But back to my original question, it seems to me quite plausible that God might want to set up a simpler or “easier” universe (O2), a singularity that does not require all of the detailed complexity to be programmed into it to produce a given local effect billions of years later. God just makes the needed changes later on. This isn't necessarily an incompetent God who has to fix a poor design as the universe progresses. If time is of no concern to God (one of the most certain claims of the Bible), why would God be concerned about intervening later on rather than at the start? Let me emphasize that my claim is not certain, this is a matter that is entirely God's choice, not mine, and God may have reasons for one course of action rather than the other. And, of course, as I've said already, it just might be that by the very nature of creation God had to create so as to intervene at later points in time in the history of the universe.

The only way someone can say that there are only natural explanations is if they can show that all miracle claims are bogus. Indeed, they would also have to show that all claimed natural events are not really miracles unperceived. That is, some normally accepted natural phenomena might, in individual cases, be miracles. They might be events introduced into our world directly, or nearly directly, from a supernature. It may be that no one happened to have been in the right location to witness this intervention into our world from supernature. With no evidence that they are miracles we would normally just assume that they are not, though we couldn't really say that this is definitely true.

Also, some events might have natural causes for quite a number of causal generations (that is, if the cause of event A is B and the cause of event B is C, then each—A, B, C, etc.—is a generation and all together they go far

into the past). If God introduces a cause into nature far in the past and that cause eventually culminates in some event that on the surface does not look like an unusual event, should it be considered a miracle? I think we might think of this as being at least in the category of second order miracles (if we had reason to think there was this prior supernatural intervention). But some divine interventions, like the above mentioned “universe ordering miracles” might be so remote in the past that I wonder how useful it would be to call the current end event itself even a second order miracle. Some might speak of such events as providential events. Think about the parting of the Red Sea for example. This is a second order miracle because the text says a wind pushed back the sea. Much of God’s intervention could have been not that far in the past, say within the previous few days or months to build up a storm. Or it could have all been programmed into the very origin of the universe that this storm would happen to build up at this precise time to generate just the right kind of wind that would produce this effect on the Red Sea (this would be O1). Though I find the latter scenario hard to accept, I suppose it is possible. Assuming that the parting of the Red Sea did occur, however, and assuming either scenario, I think we should say this would definitely be a miracle since divine intervention is assumed.

Doland cannot preclude miracles by counting, by saying that all of the miracle claims we have investigated have been shown to have naturalistic explanations. If we were able to investigate most natural events and miracle claims and if we should discover that all that we have investigated have only natural causes (even going back to the very beginning of their causal chains at the origin of the universe), this would not disqualify the miraculous nature of the miracle claims that have *not* been investigated. I’ve already pointed out that in the particular theistic world view of the Bible, *most* events will be found to have such naturalistic explanations (going back only to the origin of the universe or at least to the “universe ordering miracles,” if there are any). Also, what investigation could go very far into the past to determine that there have been no second order miracles?

Some miracles may have supernatural causes far in the past recesses of the causal nexus.

I've shown that it is to be expected that miracles would be rare in history.
So Doland's litany of Where-are-the-miracles? is mere rhetoric.

Why would a God want to bring about a miracle? God may want to sometimes use miracles to make it known that God is really there. But then God doesn't always need miracles to provide such evidence. I've said that we should expect miracles to be relatively rare, but ultimately this is a matter of God's choice. Obviously they cannot be so common as to make a miracle unrecognizable, but up to a given point God may allow as many as desired. We simply have no way of knowing if God might wish to work no miracles for ten thousand years or a dozen every other day. All that we can do is to look at historical records and contemporary claims and even then we cannot claim that any of these are truly miraculous without good evidence. At any rate, it should not be considered at all strange if we happen to have no miracles or even miracle claims anywhere in the world for any amount of time. Notice also that if God wants to perform a miracle it might be for some purpose other than for people to see it. Thus there may be no evidence for that particular miracle. All that we can say is that given the possibility of a theistic world view, miracles could be possible; and if a miracle is claimed we should investigate it to our greatest ability. Short of the one limitation mentioned above (they must not be so common that they could not be recognized as miracles) and given a theistic world view, we cannot presume in advance just how likely they should be.

Now I do think that there have been miracles outside of the Bible as well as outside of Christianity. Miracles have always been claimed and I think there is sometimes good evidence for their having occurred. But these are historical events. You can't go back and easily examine them. Usually they are claimed to occur to relatively small numbers of people. If a number of people claim to experience them, the critics typically ignore the claims because they think testimonial evidence has no force. (Consider how

Doland dismisses the testimonial evidence I've presented for the resurrection.) Hume considered the claims that were popular at the time of the healings at Lourdes. He agreed with one physician who examined a number of healing claims. The physician discounted them because he said that such healings, and especially in the numbers accounted, just cannot happen. I can show you medical reports in which physicians today have claimed that healings they had witnessed were so impossible that they called them miracles. You see, much depends on what you will admit as documentation. Suppose a hundred years ago someone lost a foot and it grew back. (In fact, I can show you where this was actually claimed.) How could you document that so that the documentation has any validity today? All you would have would be some people's testimonies; the person and those who claimed they knew him when he had no foot and when he had one. Maybe you could have gotten photographs. Even then you could question which were the "before" and which were the "after" shots. So it is very difficult to talk about most historical miracle claims as documented. More importantly, it follows that this lack of documentation, or better, "ambiguity of documentation," cannot be used to suggest any evidence against past miracle claims or miracle claims per se as Doland claims.

Are miracles magic?

Jensen5: [second underlined sentence group in Jensen5 above] It seems to me unacceptable to say that God creates by just saying it and there it is. That is certainly the summary statement of what happens but it's not the entirety. If that were all there were too it, it would be more like magic than divine creation. Rather, God speaks and processes are set into motion that bring about the desired event or entity.

Doland10: Ah, that's the crux isn't it, it sure sounds like [magic] doesn't it? How is it any less magical if God speaks a process into action rather than

just speak a universe into being? It is STILL just [magic]. It is EXACTLY the same, it just makes you feel like it is less [like magic].

Jensen11: No, what I mean by magic is that no real causal factors are involved. You wave a magic wand and something happens with no true causal forces at work. Whether that is the best definition of magic or not, that's how I'm using the term. It's just the kind of impression I have when people sometimes describe how they think God creates or acts in the world. Rather, when God speaks a process into action, actual causal forces from God bring about effects that end up in the world or produce entities or events or even the very universe itself. If that's magic, then all causal processes in the world are magic. Show me a normal causal process that is not.

Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena, continued

Jensen5: [from third underlined sentence group in Jensen5 above.] I've shown that it is to be expected that miracles would be rare in history.

Doland10: No, once again you have made a CLAIM, you haven't shown anything. You said that God would want us to be able to distinguish between a miracle or not and therefore they would be rare. Did God tell you this? No, you just made it up. Who are you to say when or where God would or would not do miracles? Did he authorize you to speak for him? And why shouldn't Satan be doing dastardly supernatural feats continuously? Again, YOU HAVE NO BASIS for saying when or where miracles would happen, you just know that if they happened all the time then your religion is false, so, you have to come up with an ad-hoc excuse to claim otherwise.

Jensen11: Suppose in the last half hour I dropped a coin and it fell down, the second time I dropped it it fell up and a third time it fell an inch or so

and began flying in an increasingly large horizontal spiral? Suppose every time I dropped it it did something different. Suppose we know no magnets were implanted in the coins and surroundings and no human trickery has been involved. If similar physical behavior always occurred, we would never accept that there is any uniformity in nature. If we cannot accept that nature is uniform or follows laws, we cannot identify miracles. So I'm not saying miracles could not occur in such a world; rather, if there is any way we could exist as physical beings in such a world (which I doubt) we could never identify such events. All I'm saying is that we could never identify a miracle. If one reason God does allow some miracles is so that we could identify them, then they cannot be so common as my chaotic coin-dropping example. So it was not just a claim, I have shown that recognizable miracles do have to be rare enough that we can recognize uniformity in nature. God may still do some miracles which will never be known to be such in this life. But they must still fit what we see as the normal uniformity of nature.

As for Satan doing all the evil miracles he wants to do, notice first of all that since we recognize uniformity in nature, we see that Satan does not do so many recognizable miracles that uniformity in nature would be in question. Also, concerning his unrecognized miracles, if they make up most of the normal phenomena we observe, they don't usually have any clearly evil intent or consequences. So why would Satan even want to do them if it wouldn't help his cause? Clearly, we see strong reasons to think he does not do them.

I agree that I have no idea when and where a miracle will happen so long as they are unrecognizable. I don't know the mind of God. Well, I do have an inkling. Even unrecognizable miracles, since they are special acts of God, would not be common events. It is more likely that God would leave the universe to run on its own rather than to control every minute causal interaction. This would otherwise be a true God of the gaps.

Does the Bible say God is evil?

Jensen5: [From first underlined sentence in Jensen 5 above.] [Following the Bible] we can assume that God cannot do evil [and, following our knowledge of God in nature,] that it is very intuitively likely that God cannot do evil.

Doland10: “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.”—Isaiah 45:7

Yeah, I know other translations use words like “disaster,” “calamity” or “woe” instead of evil. But the Hebrew word is ‘ra’ and it is indeed used in the Bible to mean moral evil: <http://www.daylightatheism.org/2007/01/little-known-bible-verses-v-god-creates-evil.html>:

In Genesis 2:17, God instructs Adam and Eve not to eat from “the tree of good and ra.” The tree of good and disaster? The tree of good and calamity? Clearly not: it is the tree of good and evil.

In Genesis 6:5, God resolves to destroy humankind in the great flood because “the wickedness (ra) of man was great in the earth.”

In Genesis 13:13, the men of Sodom were “wicked (ra) and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.”

In Deuteronomy 1:35, a furious God threatens the Israelites, “Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil (ra) generation see that good land, which I swear to give unto your fathers.”

In Judges 2:11, “the children of Israel did evil (ra) in the sight of the Lord, and served Baals.”

In 1 Kings 16:30, the wicked king Ahab (husband of the infamous Jezebel) “did evil (ra) in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him.”

So, according to your Bible, God does indeed do evil.

The Bible also says that God deceives:

1 Kings 22:20-23. “And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?’ One suggested this, and another that. Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the LORD and said, ‘I will entice him.’ ‘By what means?’ the LORD asked. ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,’ he said. ‘You will succeed in enticing him,’ said the LORD. ‘Go and do it.’ So now the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The LORD has decreed disaster for you.”

Jensen11: I want to thank you Paul. Every now and then you give me something I can “sink my teeth into.” This is an extremely interesting and important issue though much of my answer repeats earlier statements.

I’ve said before, what is evil for humans is not always evil for God. That is why a word which basically means causing tumult or rage can be evil if a human expresses it but appropriate and just if God expresses it. For example, one person, under normal circumstances, does not have the right to take another person’s life. God always has the right to take any person’s life because God created us. Our spirit comes from God and God has the right to take it back. Likewise God has the right to inflict punishment on us for any evil we have done. Again, God has the right to allow us undeserved suffering and pain so long as God has good reason for doing so and so long as God provides compensation at least equal to the suffering received. We can imagine some things that if God could do them, they would be evil for God: e.g., consigning someone to eternal torment who does not deserve it.

Now the word translated in the King James as “evil” in the Isaiah passage does have the sense of creating disaster and calamity. If you insist that a moral aspect is carried over as well, I can admit that. But it is only the moral aspect of the word evil as it applies to humans. That is, humans can cause disaster like this and they are morally guilty. But there is nothing in this passage that indicates that God is guilty of anything or that God has done anything God has no right to do. The context and other passages indicate that God does have this right and God is not guilty of any wrong act. God can cause suffering and God can do acts that would be evil for humans to do, because humans have no right to do them and God does and God cannot do wrong (see Deuteronomy 32:4).

As for the passage about God allowing the evil king Ahab to be deceived: Romans 1 tells us that as people continue to do evil, God eventually gives them over to their desires and no longer speaks to them to repent. God eventually determines to bring judgment on the wicked. God wanted to bring judgment upon Ahab. Thus God wanted Ahab killed in this particular way so the prophecy would show that God had done this and had sealed him to judgment. So a lying spirit was sent to false prophets to deceive him. But if someone is sealed unto judgment, if their minds are set so that they can no longer hear God calling them, then spiritually, the only words they will listen to are lies. Thus lying spirits are given free reign for such individuals. Furthermore, God allows there to be lying spirits in our world so that all people will be tempted. Jesus said that temptations must come. All must be tested as to their choice to seek God and his ways or to reject God and seek some other life or spiritual goal. All must be given the opportunity to follow lies that they want to believe or to follow truths that they may not want to believe. All must be tested to see if they are honest enough to choose to seek the truth even when it is not wanted.

So is God guilty of deception for sending someone a deceiving spirit? No more than God is guilty of taking a human life when God so desires to do so. In this case, where one has demonstrated that they are not willing to hear the truth, God does have the right to deceive, though not directly since

God cannot lie. God's goodness would be impugned only if God would so deceive as to refrain from providing earnest seekers the truth of the knowledge of God and a relationship with God. The only deceptions God allowed the righteous in the Scripture are deceptions of not providing full information. For example, God promised Jeremiah that he would protect him from death. Jeremiah, after proclaiming God's message, was beaten and later kept imprisoned in a deep pit. He complained to God that God had deceived him, and in a way he had. But shouldn't Jeremiah have known that this is the cost to all who will obey God? Shouldn't he have known that any cost is worth paying if only one might have this? [added 1Nv14.]

Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena, continued

Jensen5: I stated that if a supernatural explanation accounts for a phenomenon better than a naturalistic one, then we should accept the supernatural one until a better naturalistic one comes along:

Jensen3: [From first Jensen3 above under topic heading "Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena," third underlined sentence.] But until then the supernatural explanation should be accepted because it is the more justified belief.

Doland4: Name one supernatural belief that has withstood the test of time—excluding the Bible. Name one. Just ____ one, okay? No? None? Amazing isn't it? Saying that the "supernatural is the more justified belief" has never been shown to be a true statement. Never. Period. So, what we actually have here is no justified belief in the supernatural. Jensen and other Christians simply manufacture an alleged justification because they have to, or give up their voodoo.

Jensen5: Exactly what Doland is trying to say by this first sentence is very difficult to understand. But looking at the context of our discussion I think he might be thinking about the history of naturalistic vs supernatural explanations for phenomena and entities, not merely supernatural beliefs per se. Perhaps then the best example to consider would be the old teleological argument and its expression today in biological intelligent design. In the past this argument said that features of the world, most notably animals and people, are made in ways similar to machines. Machines are made by intelligent beings and thus probably people are made by an intelligent being. The arguments of Paley and Butler made this argument very popular in the 18th century though it was around far earlier. But then Darwin gave a naturalistic explanation for the development of life that accounted for such machine-like features by chance processes. Maybe intelligent beings make machines, but so do chance processes if they are given enough time and material to work with. So the argument using analogical reasoning failed at this point. Today the intelligent design movement (ID) looks in more detail at Darwinism and claims that chance and natural selection fail to at least completely account for biology. I like Michael Behe's comments: "Because evolution doesn't explain everything does not mean it doesn't explain anything." Behe's point is that even if we do accept evolution, the evidence indicates that we need intelligent intervention to keep it going to reach the goal of intelligent, conscious life. He even accepts the possibility that all of the intervention occurred by tweaking the big bang to result in exactly the universe we have today. Behe emphasizes the irreducible complexity of microbiology for his arguments. Others look at other features of biology like the enormously improbable occurrence of multiple beneficial chance mutations in one generation for certain major evolutionary changes (e.g., I mentioned in the last response the change of the bird lung from the reptile lung). And I have mentioned other problems as well in my last response.

I would not be greatly upset if the ID arguments are eventually overturned in favor of a self-sufficient biological evolution. And I can't say that I am sure that the biological ID arguments are conclusive; there are many pros

and cons and they are often subtle and complicated. But though the teleological argument has had its ups and downs through history, its current state is very strong. Thus we find here our first good argument that has at least “stood the test of time,” as Doland says.

Let’s look at another: the origin of life. Theists have by and large assumed that biological life could never originate without supernatural intervention. Naturalists have in the past claimed that chemical life is a very simple substance that can develop very easily from non-life. Horsehair worms appear spontaneously in barrels of rainwater; maggots appear on meat. Spontaneous generation seemed very natural. Back then not enough was known about biology to answer these claims, so the theists would have responded that at least the matter itself could not have been so easily accounted for and the machine-like nature of the organisms implies a designer. The argument would have shifted to a cosmological and teleological argument. When evolution was not understood, theists would have claimed that at least humans do not come from inanimate matter and thus there had to be a divine origin to human life. Today with our knowledge of the complexity of life we have much stronger arguments that chemical life could not have originated without intelligent intervention. So here is another supernatural belief that has “withstood the test of time.” Certainly the arguments have changed over the centuries, but the conclusion is still the same. The arguments have changed with changing scientific knowledge.

The cosmological argument has been presented in various forms since at least the time of the ancient Greeks. This argument still explains existence as naturalism has never been able to do. (See **The Cosmological Argument** in the Tooley/Craig debate.) There are various moral arguments that have been presented over the centuries claiming that we cannot account for or justify morality without theism. I have presented one in my last response. This argument has stood the test of time. What about miracle claims? I have claimed that the argument for the resurrection has withstood the test of time. I’ve yet to hear a good rebuttal to my argument.

Doland did ask for examples outside of the Bible, so I suppose this won't count. Maybe he thinks that if he can preclude the best examples from consideration he can make it look as though he has a stronger case. I think the conclusion of this matter is that Doland's claim has been abundantly answered. So much for his "Name one. Just ___ one, okay? No? None? Amazing isn't it?"

Doland claimed that we should assume a naturalistic explanation even if at the moment we don't have a good naturalistic explanation for a phenomenon. He used the example of a levitating object. I responded in part with the following.

Jensen3: [From first Jensen3 above under topic heading "Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena," fourth underlined sentence.] Consider two possible scenarios: One, suppose the object began levitating for no known reason. Your book just rose off your desk and it's floating in midair. Two, you are talking with a friend who tells you, "look at what I can do," and some object begins to float in the air. In one, we should think the phenomenon has a natural explanation though we keep in mind that it is always possible it has a supernatural or a personalistic supernatural explanation.

Doland4: Notice that Jensen has to provide a hypothetical, because, outside of the Bible which we are debating, he has no actual. He has only hypotheticals. I, on the other hand, have countless cases of people thinking they had a genuine miracle on their hand only to find out otherwise. I have actuals, he has hypotheticals. I have countless actuals, he has zero actuals. Notice a trend here?

Jensen5: Notice also that Doland was the one who first used the hypothetical example of a levitating object. I kept the example to expand on it so we could see where his argument leads, not because I cannot come

up with actual examples. I agree that Doland can probably come up with a number of miracle claims that have been shown to have (at least proximate) naturalistic causes and which cannot be shown to be miraculous. Now I have given the example of Jesus' resurrection and a prophecy that Jesus is the Messiah. But Doland wants to exclude examples from the Bible even though he admits that this is what we are debating. (Whether it comes from the Bible or not, it is still strong evidence. So why is he afraid to consider it?) Well, I think I could come up with contemporary miracles that have good evidence. I've mentioned earlier that it is difficult to point to well evidenced miracles from the past because the evidence typically becomes more obscure with time, unless the evidence is very strong to begin with. Hand written testimonials that such and such an event occurred may be more accepted when we can talk with the witnesses directly, but when we have only the paper before us, we can question whether it might be a fraud. So there isn't much I can point to from Christian history that still has some evidential force. Perhaps I can point to the healings at Lourdes. Some of the testimonies in this web page have some events that might be considered miraculous. (see **Sample Topics, Life Experiences**). But I do think I could come up with more if that is what Doland would like to look at.

Now having said this let me repeat my claim from earlier in this response piece. I said that counting does not establish any likelihood of naturalism over supernaturalism. We should expect that most events have natural explanations (unless we might be able to search to the very remote past to the causal ancestors of the event). This is the biblical world view. And again, in the biblical view we cannot know when or if God will perform a miracle. We cannot say that there should be at least so many miracles every century. So if I cannot come up with any contemporary well evidenced miracles, it doesn't matter. If Doland has countless actuals and I have zero actuals; if we have, as he says, a definite "trend," it doesn't affect the arguments for or against theism or Christianity in the slightest.

Miracles and uniformity of nature

Jensen3: [From first Jensen3 above under topic heading “Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena,” fifth underlined sentence.] But uniform natural law is assumed under the biblical world view.

Doland4: Except of course when there is a miracle. In other words, nature is uniform except when its not. Logic only a theist could love....

Jensen5: No, nature is still uniform when a miracle occurs. Doland did not pay attention to my explanation of the nature of miracles. He will shortly take an excerpt from the same section this one was taken from. There I used the example of a chemistry student whose lab partner slips in at night to add some unwanted chemical into the student’s lab experiment. I pointed out that this is not the kind of miracle the biblical God would do because God does not capriciously interfere with the normal course of events of our world. But this same kind of act, adding chemicals into a lab experiment, is the same kind of thing we find in a miracle. No laws of nature are broken, nature is still uniform.

A more accurate example (though still not completely analogous) might be the flatland scenario. You or I might be able to introduce say a pin point into a flatlander’s world (remember this is a hypothetical world of two dimensional beings living on a flat surface). This will appear to the flatlander as a dot-like entity appearing out of nowhere. Or suppose you see someone in flatland about to drink poison. Remember that Jesus told his disciples that they would sometimes be forced to or inadvertently drink poison and it wouldn’t hurt them. So drinking poison with no ill effect would be a miracle. Now suppose you add a poison antidote into the drink the flatlander is about to take. No one can see you do it because you live in the three dimensional world and flatlanders can only see left, right, forward and backward. They cannot see up or down. When the flatlander suffers no

harm, wouldn't this be a miracle for the flatlanders? What laws are broken? How is nature not uniform when this happens?

Jensen3: [From first Jensen3 above under topic heading "Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena," sixth underlined sentence.] Does any honest (and sane) scientist really believe that we will someday know everything?

Doland4: Straw-man alert! No scientist needs to know everything to understand what does and does not fall within the reach of science.

Jensen5: Doland thinks I'm attacking straw men because he is isolating my statements out of a given paragraph (and sometimes larger statements) without taking the time to listen to my full statement. My point was that just because science might not be able to investigate a miracle (they might be able to do so only up to a given point) does not give any reason to reject the possibility of miracles. Some critics think miracles should be rejected because science cannot in principle fully investigate them. Science is not able to discover everything about the natural world either. That is no reason to believe that nature is not the proper realm of scientific investigation. Also, miracles are the proper realm of scientific investigation so far as they can be so investigated. And yes, I agree that scientists should be able to understand what does and does not fall within the reach of science.

If Doland is saying that the belief that miracles should be rejected because science cannot fully investigate them is the straw man, then I'm happy he rejects this belief. Nevertheless, this claim is very commonly presented by atheologians, deists, and others who reject miracles. Also, Doland gives no indication that this is what he considers to be the straw man he is concerned about.

False and capricious miracles

Jensen3: [From first Jensen3 above under topic heading “Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena,” seventh underlined sentence group.] Couldn’t any chemistry student claim their experiment failed because God (or the devil) added some extra chemical to the brew? Maybe under some very unusual form of theism, perhaps, but that isn’t something the Jewish and Christian God would do.

Doland4: How do you know? Because the Bible says so? First off, it doesn’t. It says exactly the opposite actually. This is from a Jewish site (<http://www.aish.com/jw/s/48892792.html>) explaining why they reject Christianity: “Judaism, unique among all of the world’s major religions, does not rely on ‘claims of miracles’ as the basis for its religion. In fact, the Bible says that God sometimes grants the power of ‘miracles’ to charlatans, in order to test Jewish loyalty to the Torah (Deut. 13:1-4).”

Jensen5: My first statement was simply that the Bible says God does not perform capricious miracles. And the Bible does say this. The Gospels record the story of Jesus being tempted by Satan. Satan tells Jesus he should force God to perform a miracle: jump from the top of the Temple so God will have to save him. Jesus says this is tempting God and we are commanded not to do that (Luke 4:9-12). So now Doland seems to think that I had claimed that the God of Judaism and Christianity will not allow deceiving miracles since he quotes Rabbi Simmons to the effect that for Judaism, at least, God does sometimes do so. On the contrary, I do completely agree with Rabbi Simmons on this point. I should add that in Christianity this idea is continued. God will allow a particular man to appear who is called the “man of lawlessness” who will perform “counterfeit miracles” which will deceive many (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, esp. 9-12). And the reason this man is allowed to appear is essentially the same reason God gives in Deuteronomy 13, to test our choice to love the truth, to love God. God allows false miracles, not capricious miracles.

I should comment that, though I had not said so, I do think that Judaism and Christianity are based on miracles. That is, by means of miracles the Israelites and the first followers of Jesus knew that this was true. Abraham believed God had spoken to him because he heard an audible voice when no one was around and because of other miracles (Genesis 15:8-12,17). Do you think he would have believed God had spoken to him and he would have been willing to kill his own son if it was just his next door neighbor (if he had one) who had been the one who spoke to him? The children of Israel saw the Red Sea part, they witnessed the plagues of Egypt, they followed a giant pillar of fire at night and a pillar of smoke by day, they watched the earth open and swallow those who rebelled against God's command through Moses. Whether these events actually occurred or this is just a made up story does not matter at this point. The point is that according to the Bible this is what they witnessed. Moses said this happened so that they would know that Yahweh is God and would covenant with God to be God's people (Deuteronomy 29:2-6, 10-13). Only had the stories been very different could someone claim that Judaism was not based on miracles. If the Exodus story had said that Moses became a popular leader among the Israelites in Egypt and he got the people to sneak out while Pharaoh was off on some war or maybe that Moses rallied his people to fight their way out, only with such a very different story would we be able to deny the miraculous basis of Judaism. The Gospels indicate that people followed Jesus and believed he was the Messiah because of his miracles and teachings. It also claims that the resurrection and miracles performed by the apostles brought more followers in.

Deuteronomy 13 simply says that false miracles will be allowed for a reason. The Israelites had first come to believe on the basis of the miracles. Once one has good reason to believe then one comes to have a relationship with this God. When we trust someone as a friend or loved one, the situation changes as far as trust is concerned. We should not trust a friend only to the degree the evidence tells us this friend is trustworthy. We do not (or should not) consider a friend as guilty of an accused crime

completely in proportion to the evidence. We believe in their innocence until the evidence is conclusive. With this kind of trust in God we consider contrary evidence against belief but it will not persuade us until our prior evidence for belief is completely refuted. If you come to “love the Lord your God with all your heart” (v. 3) you will not be persuaded by weaker contrary evidence to forsake this God. Once we pass the test, as this passage calls it, God will give us again resolution for the conflicting evidence. God will give us sufficient evidence to believe.

Michael Brown has a four volume set out responding to arguments like Rabbi Simmons'. His *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus* is very persuasive in arguing that any honest Jewish person should follow Jesus as the Jewish Messiah (Baker books, 2000, 2000, 2003, 2006). For more go to his website (<http://askdrbrown.org>) He there appeals to Jewish people to simply and honestly investigate. Do not listen merely to the antimissionary claims; also consider the views of Jewish scholars like Dr. Brown. I have also argued elsewhere that Jewish people have a special obligation to consider Jesus' claims. God spoke through Moses commanding the people to consider carefully and test the claims of anyone purporting to be a prophet (Deuteronomy 18). One has no right to reject that purported prophet and his claims merely because one's teachers and tradition say to do so.

Now to try to make sense of Doland's continuing response:

Doland4: So we see that Jensen's claim that utilizing false miracles deceptively being contrary to the Judeo-Christian God is factually in error.

Jensen5: I was initially talking about capricious miracles, not “false miracles,” by which I suppose he means miracles that lead to false beliefs. Deuteronomy 13 does indicate that God does allow such “false miracles” to test God's people, as we have discussed above. A capricious miracle is

one that occurs for no good reason, like messing up a student's chemistry experiment just for the fun of it. If God did these all the time we wouldn't have much reason to think nature is uniform and scientists would have reason to complain about such a theistic view. Scientists wouldn't be able to know if nature does follow uniform laws or if someone they cannot perceive or detect is just pulling pranks. At any rate this would be harmful to any hope for science to give us knowledge. But a miracle with the right conditions, like a prediction that some marvel would occur and then it does occur, would have evidential force for the claims of the apparent miracle worker. And of course such a miracle would have no force if this kind of thing happened all the time without such a prediction.

It appears that Doland goes on to ask that we assume, for the sake of argument, that the Bible teaches that only the miracles recorded in the Bible are to be accepted. But how do we know that that statement isn't a lie from Satan? he asks. Basically we accept whatever conclusion a miracle leads us to. This is because, *prima facie*, a miracle is good evidence to believe whatever it claims. If the first miracle we encounter is a "false miracle" like the Deuteronomy 13 passage talks about and if we have no reason to disbelieve this miracle (we have witnessed no other miracle or other evidence to contradict the claim of the first miracle), then we should still believe whatever it leads us to. We have no reason to accept a statement from the Bible to disregard such a miracle unless we have other evidence to do so. We do not accept what the Bible says just because it says it. We need to have evidence to believe.

Ah, but we have believed a lie, if we assume this scenario. Yes, but we can still get out of this false belief if we follow our most natural intuition. We can find the truth if we merely test a claim from the Bible. We can find the truth if we just ask God for the truth. Even an atheist can say, "God I want to know if you are really there. I'll follow you if you really are." Those who will do the will of God will know that my teachings are true, Jesus said (John 7:17). Those who seek will find; they will find who seek with all their hearts (Luke 11:9-10, Jeremiah 29:13). By mere circumstance of birth we may

grow up in a false belief and even observe miracles that persuade us of its truth (see for example Gyalsang's account of his own life, under **A Sherpa Tibetan Buddhist**). But likewise we can find people who have claimed that merely calling upon God has led them to truth (e.g., see **Native Religion, Ethiopian God Seeker**).

Doland says that Satan could have put in the Bible the statement that only the miracles recorded in the Bible are valid to keep people "from looking for his [God's? Satan's?] dirty deeds." If God performs miracles outside of those recorded in the Bible, why would they be thought of as "dirty deeds"? If they are Satan's, perhaps they do have some evil intent. And there are a number of such evil miracle claims in history. I can think of some such stories and I might even be able to provide some verification for some of them if I had the time to look. I think that Satan probably does work miracles for those who have given themselves over to him. This is something God has allowed Satan. It follows the notion found in Romans 1 of God giving people up to their desires and their desired beliefs who repress the truth they have about God.

But if there were a passage in the Bible saying that all miracles outside of those found in the Bible are false or deceiving miracles (it doesn't say this), we might think we have some reason to believe it because of the miracles that provide evidence to believe the Bible. But ultimately this wouldn't necessarily work to reject non-biblical miracles. If miracles provide our reason to believe the Bible, then non-biblical miracles (if they can provide evidence) must be weighed against those that substantiate the Bible. The stronger should win.

Some miracle claims in the Bible have been argued to be evil, like the plagues on Egypt, the Flood, the conquest of Canaan, the bear-mauling of the children who taunted the prophet Elisha, etc. I've spent a lot of time defending most of these (probably all of them) in the last response so it isn't at all clear that most of these were effected for evil intent or even that

some were enacted by God's will. The same might be said of any claimed miracle recorded in history.

How much supernatural intervention in the world?

Jensen3: [From first Jensen3 above under topic heading "Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena," eighth underlined sentence group.] The Christian God doesn't normally interfere in nature or allow Satan to control the normal course of nature.

Doland4: Unless Satan talks God into allowing it. Or when God decides to test your loyalty to the Torah. Thanks God, you're a pal!

Jensen5: When I talk about nature I mean the entire 13.7 billion year history of our entire universe. During that time we can assume that there hasn't been much need for God to interfere with normal natural processes. It might be that everything was set up from the beginning to develop to what we have now. I've also argued that there may have been points of special intervention, however, though those would have been extremely small points compared with the entire history. Genetic manipulation to produce simultaneous multiple beneficial mutations in a single individual organism can be very quick, for example.

Concerning human history, the story might be somewhat different. I've argued that the notion of Satan talking God into testing Job was secondary to God's uninfluenced decision to test Job. So that might mean that not only for Job, but for countless other righteous individuals throughout history, God has given Satan permission to test them with suffering. At least that seems to be the application and moral of the story of Job. So perhaps Satan is given permission to inflict people with pain just about all the time. Also, if we take the Bible as giving some indication of how God acts in history, there seem to be quite a number of miraculous interventions in

history. If we pray for some horrible suffering in the world or even some small suffering we are personally aware of, and God intervenes, or even if God does so without our solicitation, we still have divine intervention. But even here, the norm is nonintervention; the vast majority of everyday, unnoticed causal events involve no special divine intervention.

[5Nov14. Looking back on this paragraph, I would now want to deny that “Satan is given permission to inflict people with pain just about all the time.” I would rather put it that both the righteous and unrighteous are subject to suffering—perhaps from Satan’s hand—and that this could occur at any time and that it could be very great suffering. We have no calculus for determining who should receive what amount of suffering except that God will not allow more than one can bear without rejecting God (unless one has already irrevocably rejected God) and that the influence of others may mitigate or remove some suffering.]

But we still have Satan interfering to cause suffering. Wouldn’t that involve an awfully lot of non-natural processes? Maybe at first glance, but doesn’t it seem that the way the world just happens to be made facilitates such suffering very naturally? Do we really need Satan to interfere all the time? Clearly, all of the suffering in the world seems to occur because of chance processes (natural evil) and human free choice (moral evil). Natural evil occurs because we are finite creatures who fail to account for so much of the world (we didn’t know the ice was so thin until it was too late, we thought a hurricane would never reach here, etc.). This does not mean God cannot keep people from harm; in Eden God could have provided special protection before Adam and Eve sinned. So by letting the world be just the way it most naturally would be, God could allow the suffering needed to test us. Sometimes this testing must take special action or allowance of suffering as in the case of Job. Again, recall that Satan complained that God had put a special hedge of protection around Job. It took special action by God to protect Job from the suffering of this world. So most of the suffering God needs to allow in the world can be done by just letting nature and (fallen) human nature run its course.

Thus even though God's intervention in history might seem to be quite extensive if we follow the biblical accounts and teachings, remember that this is all against a backdrop of vastly more numerous normal self-continuing natural causal events. Maybe God would be more of "a pal" if God had not allowed so much interference in nature (by Satan) by allowing pain and testing. Or if God allowed us an Edenic world where we are shielded from all the pain, then too we might better think of God as a pal. But God certainly is not a pal. God is a smith who heats us in a fire of testing and hammers us on an anvil of affliction that we might be forged into something we could never be otherwise. Here our free choices are hard choices that determine us to be something new and strong and beautiful and worthy of our creator. God is a reluctant door keeper who allows in suffering to search our hearts as we endure pain and to test us as we contemplate the plight of others in their pain. As we let God's Spirit move upon our hearts, we gain God's passion and anguish for their suffering, and we find ourselves willing to do anything to alleviate it. In this we become more like God. Much better a real God like this than Doland's useless god/pal.

Natural vs supernatural explanations, again

Jensen3: [From first Jensen3 above under topic heading "Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena," ninth underlined sentence group.] What an honest scientific investigation has no right to do is to say that no matter how much we fail to find a naturalistic explanation we can never consider a theistic supernatural explanation.

Doland4: Because "science" and "supernatural" are fundamentally incompatible.

Jensen5: I take it that Doland means that an honest scientific investigation should never consider a supernatural explanation. Why does Doland make claims he cannot support? Let him give us some reason to believe this other than just telling us that he's right. Perhaps he is referring back to his previous statement: "Once you start allowing supernatural into the mix, you have NO justification for ever taking it out of the mix." But again he has given no good reason for this claim. He had just previously talked about how false miracles are allowed in the Bible but we've shown that this has nothing to do with the possibility of miracles and their having evidential force.

Jensen3: [From first Jensen3 above under topic heading "Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena," tenth underlined sentence group.] Just because all of our accepted investigations of nature have brought up naturalistic explanations is no reason to think there can be no exceptions.

Doland4: Translation: "Just because the supernatural has failed each and every ____ time, doesn't mean anything." It has been said that the definition of insanity is trying the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. This is what Jensen proposes.

Jensen5: But I have pointed out that we should expect that most phenomena would have only naturalistic explanations for their more proximate causes in a theistic world view, and that is all that science has ever investigated. It has come to some knowledge of the origin of the universe and other major transition points in the universal history, but it has not been able to investigate to discover only naturalistic explanations at such points. Indeed, for the origin of the universe, the origin of life, and possibly for points of major transition in the evolution of life, the best explanations so far appear to be theistic explanations. That is, the best

evidence appears to be that there was supernatural intervention (as we have discussed earlier).

To say that all that science has investigated so far (which have been proximate causes) has yielded only naturalistic explanation and therefore there are likely no supernatural explanations is to assume the naturalistic world view. This is question begging. The theistic world view says much the same thing about what we should find: it says we will only, or mostly, find naturalistic explanations or causes when we look at proximate causes only.

Now I have to qualify my last statement. There are miracles in history that likely have had divine intervention very close to the events themselves; that is, they have involved very proximate supernatural intervention. So I should not have originally said (in Jensen3 above) that “All of our accepted investigations of nature have brought up naturalistic explanations . . .” Indeed, if one looks at the original statement, one can see that it was meant to be read more hypothetically. We have strong evidence for miracles like the resurrection and certain biblical prophecies. Whether we have investigated proximate or ultimate causes, we still do not have uniform naturalistic explanations for all that we have investigated.

To summarize: the fact that most of our investigations have found naturalistic explanations for the phenomena investigated does not give us reason to think that likely all phenomena have only naturalistic explanations. It does give us reason to think most phenomena have proximate natural explanations. Biblical theism says we should expect most non-ultimate causes to have other naturalistic causes, that all ultimate causes are supernatural explanations, and that there will be some proximate supernatural causes.

Jensen3: [From first Jensen3 above under topic heading “Natural vs supernatural explanations of phenomena,” eleventh underlined sentence

group.] How can science be sure of learning anything new if all possible explanations are not considered?

Doland4: How can you be sure there isn't an undetectable alligator in your pants if you've never considered the possibility? . . . There will be things I will never know because I never even considered some possibilities. That's a limitation of being human.

Jensen5: The scientific method involves first developing hypotheses to explain the data and then testing the hypotheses by experiment. Scientists will not think of all possible hypotheses for the phenomena being considered but they will come up with many. There is nothing unusual about hypothesizing intelligent intervention for phenomena. We are not talking about excessively and unnecessarily specified hypotheses that don't explain anything, like Doland's invisible alligators.

Doland2: Let's say someone is accused of murder, and the defendant claims that he was framed by Satan. Satan put the defendant's fingerprints on the gun, and forged all of the other incriminating evidence. Should we consider this to be a member of the "pool of live options"? If not, why not? According to Christian thought, Satan is the second most powerful being in the universe. Certainly Satan is capable of committing this crime, is he not? How can we prove that the defendant is not telling the truth?

Jensen3: It would be interesting to compare this scenario with the story found at the beginning of the book of Job in the Bible. Evangelical Christians and Orthodox Jews and, I think, Muslims believe this did actually happen, or at least something very close to it. God gave Satan permission to have both natural disasters and enemies destroy or steal Job's possessions and kill his children, and then God allowed Satan to inflict a painful disease upon him. If there is a God who deserves our commitment who could allow someone to be tested in this way to see if they would

remain faithful to God in the face of pain, then it is not inconceivable that God might allow a similar testing to come upon someone else in the form Doland suggests, of being framed by Satan.

Job was able to tell immediately that his catastrophe was from God (it is not clear that he thought this was carried out through Satan) because he believed God did control such events and because of the marked contrast of his life before and after the events. But what of those who do not think they have reason to believe in God or who think that God allows such evils to come upon people more randomly? Would they have reason to think God or Satan planned such things? An observer would likely have concluded that at least a far greater than normal human intelligence or power had done this; whether they thought it was God or Satan depends upon their background knowledge or beliefs or some other evidence that might have suggested such.

In Doland's scenario, however, the person who does not believe there is a God has no such reason to believe this was from God or Satan or any other intelligent agency given the evidence at hand. The subject may know he is being framed because he knows he is innocent and all this evidence is accumulating that couldn't be there unless someone was framing him. As with a miracle, all of this evidences intelligent intervention, but only to the victim. But of course the victim does not know who could have framed him. There is no reason to assume it was God, Satan, or someone else. Only if the "set up" should appear to be beyond human capacity, should the defendant conclude that a greater than human intelligence/power really did frame him.

Of course the defendant could also think he is going insane since he is sure he did not commit the crime but all the evidence (which no one other than a superpowerful or superintelligent being could have set up) points against him. Did he really do it but his mind won't let him remember it? But to admit insanity is to admit defeat; it's to admit that we cannot investigate any longer. It's like the scientists Doland imagines who will not investigate

any more because they conclude that “God did it.” Though the possibility that one is going insane is an option someone in this state must keep in mind as a true, possible option, one must assume oneself sane and evaluate the evidence at hand to the best of one’s ability and accept the conclusion of that investigation.

So the victim of the frame up would likely be aware that he was framed. The nature of the evidence against him, if it was beyond any normal human power/intelligence to set up, would give him reason to believe a person with greater than normal human power or intelligence had done it. This could be the God of the Bible or just a human genius, or anything in between. The defendant just has no reason to know which unless the context provides more evidence. In a miracle like the resurrection, Jesus claimed he would be raised by the power of the God of the Jews, the God he called his Father. If we have good reason to believe Jesus was raised from the dead, we have reason to believe this claim because he would have known the source of the power of this phenomenon.

But now the defendant in the frame-up scenario, though he knows he is innocent and he knows someone with greater than normal intelligence and/or power must have framed him, cannot claim this in court. With the evidence at hand it is more likely that the defendant committed the crime. The court’s justified belief is that he is guilty, even though this belief is in fact false given this scenario.

If in our frame up scenario any normal person could have framed the defendant, then he would have no reason to believe that God or Satan had set him up rather than anyone else. Though it is an option that God or Satan had done this, it is not a live option for consideration unless more evidence is available (as was considered in the previous paragraph for the resurrection or in Job’s case). By not being a live option, I mean it is not one that we can seriously consider because it is not one we can investigate. It is possible but it is prima facie no more likely or unlikely than the possibility that someone else framed him.

If the court could determine that the person had been framed then it should make that judgment. Otherwise it should find the defendant guilty of the crime. The option that the defendant was framed by God or Satan or even that he was framed at all are not options that the court can consider without sufficient evidence.

Doland4: [Response to the first underlined sentence in Jensen3 above] . . . If you accept that the supernatural could be involved when the “set up” appears beyond the natural, then you have no justification to not accept it [the supernatural?] when it does appear natural, for any entity capable of doing supernatural events would be equally capable of making it look like no supernatural event took place!

Jensen5: If I might try to rephrase Doland’s claim, it appears that he is saying that if we have evidence that points to the supernatural, a supernatural conclusion must be rejected because if there could be supernatural intervention at all then it could actually be happening all the time. It could happen when it seems like a normal natural event and it could happen when it looks like a supernatural event. I do accept that in a biblical world view God may act or God may allow Satan to act in some way into causal events so as to leave no clue that God or Satan has so acted. I’ve claimed that normally that is not the case in a biblical world view, but that does not mean it doesn’t happen, all in all, maybe even quite a lot. We don’t know that for any particular phenomenon that involves supernatural intervention but possesses no evidence of such intervention that it would be different from what would have happened had there been no supernatural intervention. We would still be able to see which phenomena occur repeatedly under given conditions.

My problem is that however I struggle to understand Doland’s concern, I cannot see this as a problem. If we have no evidence that supernatural intelligent intervention has occurred to produce any given phenomenon, even if it did actually occur by supernatural intervention, we should conclude that it did not. If we have sufficient evidence that intelligent

intervention has occurred in a particular case, then even if it did not, we should believe that it did.

Scientists are not concerned about the possibility that a supernatural entity might interfere to produce natural processes. They have to go by the evidence they have. Imagine that God directly controlled every particle's gravitational behavior so that they all mimicked the laws of nature (object A with mass M traveling at speed S in direction D will begin accelerating at rate R at point P in relation to object B with mass M' traveling in direction D' at speed S'). God would have to think, "this particle is at this distance from that particle so I have to speed it up at this rate." And God would have to do this multiplied millions of times for every particle in the universe, and not just for gravitational interactions but also for magnetic and strong and weak nuclear force interactions. The laws of nature do it all on their own because the mass and speed and direction of movement of the objects all go to produce the same effect that we would expect for something given the intrinsic nature of the material entities. Because the latter is the simpler explanation, we consider it more likely. It seems unlikely that God would create a universe that must be so completely physically controlled in every individual part rather than a universe that could work the way it does because of its physical nature. But the God-controlling-every-particle view isn't obviously impossible. If this view were correct, the laws of gravity would still be the same. We could still send rockets into space because under either view the formulae for understanding such physical behavior would remain the same. Some people might think either possibility equally likely though I have claimed the natural explanation more intuitively likely. Even if the God-controlling-every-particle view is true, we would have no compelling evidence that it is true from the appearance of natural processes themselves. If some events occurred that indicated intelligent intervention, we must not hide our heads in the sand and pretend that they do not just because then everything else just might be directly and individually controlled by this intelligence. They might be so controlled even if we did not have such evidence that they were.

Doland4: [Response to the second underlined sentence in Jensen3 above.] I only have any hope of being right [making a reasonable judgment to come to a correct conclusion?] if I assume the supernatural doesn't exist—for the natural is all that I, as a naturalistic being in a naturalistic universe, can deal with. So, if my assumptions about the supernatural are incorrect and the Resurrection really did happen, I'm ___-outa-luck. How is this a crime?

Jensen5: It's a crime against yourself because you are being irrational. You don't know that this is a purely naturalistic universe. It is a physical universe and you are a physical being, at least in part, if that is what you mean. Nature is distinct from supernature. Supernature must intervene into nature. Nature does in some sense continue on its own. (Supernature may at a deeper level sustain nature. As I've conjectured in the last response paper, perhaps God keeps each string vibrating in its proper frequency so that the physical universe can continue; though even here, God more likely controls all strings of a given type through deeper principles rather than manipulating each individual string. In that nature may be intricately connected to supernature, this universe would then not be purely naturalistic.) But we have mentioned situations that would provide evidence of supernatural activity. To simply claim that such events provide no evidence for the supernatural would be irrational unless good reason can be given for doing so. Merely saying that you are a natural entity does not do it.

You are a naturalistic being in that your physical being is part of this natural physical world and fits this natural causal nexus. How does that keep you from being able to make an interference to the supernatural? If a supernatural explanation is better than any naturalistic explanation we can come up with, we should accept the better one. If a better naturalistic one comes up later, we should then change our conclusion. Example: **Daniel prophesied the date of the coming of the Jewish Messiah.** Jesus rode

into Jerusalem to the acclaim of the crowds on precisely the day foretold. It is far too unlikely this could have occurred by chance. The best explanation is that a far greater than normal human power and/or intelligence orchestrated this and that this is the foretold Messiah. We have to go by the best evidenced conclusion.

Do miracles need prediction?

Doland2: If Satan was indeed going to frame somebody for murder, wouldn't he do it in such a way as to make it look like no supernatural event took place? The only means we have to discern which option best explains an event are naturalistic—our senses. The very nature of supernatural events, if they happen, means that we cannot trust our senses.

Jensen3: Satan would likely make it look to the court as though there were no supernatural intervention, but not necessarily. The defendant might know there was supernatural intervention involved, however, and we have seen above how the individual would be able to see this without the court seeing it. Thus the court could carry out the sentencing and this would bring about a temptation or spiritual testing.

Now the means by which we would discern a supernatural event does involve the senses, as we have seen above. It involves considering the religio-historical context, as Craig says. If we try to specify more clearly exactly what this means, I think that this involves the claim made of the miracle before it happens by the apparent miracle worker or someone else. For example, Craig at one time used Hume's example of Queen Elizabeth I. If she died and then was seen walking around London, we would not assume a miracle, Craig says. Without the context of a prophecy that this would happen or a claim by the queen that it would happen by a particular means (e.g., God's power) we have no way of knowing the cause. We might eventually exclude all chance naturalistic explanations that we can

imagine and investigate, and conclude the likelihood of a greater than normal power or intelligence is evidenced, but we could never get any more definite than that without such a context.

With this we see that Doland has likely misunderstood Craig's understanding of "religio-historical context." Miracles that are found to have such a context within non-Christian religions should be judged to be genuine if we have adequate evidence for their occurrence. Satan, in the Judeo-Christian view, and so far as he would be allowed to participate in a supernatural event, may or may not do so within a religio-historical context. It all depends on whether the intention is to allow people to see that a miracle has happened or not. But there is nothing about a supernatural event that should cause us to distrust our senses.

Doland4: Again, Jensen makes the same mistake over and over again. Even if we have a "context," an alleged prophecy, that doesn't make it any more likely to be true. God if he exists is free to do miracles without any prophesy. God has no requirement to explain Himself. If God wanted to raise Queen Elizabeth from the dead, who are you to demand a reason for it? Who are you to disbelieve it just because God didn't write you a telegram telling you His reasons?

Jensen5: Yes, God could perform a resurrection without someone predicting that it would occur. I'm just saying that we would never *know* that God did this or even that it really is a miracle. The context of a prediction that it would occur does make it more likely to our knowledge that it is caused by the agent claimed in the prediction. But even without the prediction, it will at least be certainly known to be a miracle in the sense that it is the result of a greater than normal intelligence/power, since it is far less likely to occur by chance. [Last sentence added 23Mr09 and modified 5Nov14.]

Demons causing disease

Doland2: [Most people, including Christians] would scoff if a coworker reported: “Man, I was really sick yesterday. So I went to an exorcist to get the flu demon exorcised from my body. I’m much better now.” Yet many of the very same people insist that Jesus did, in fact, cure people by exorcising demons, as reported in the Bible. In other words, most people would scoff at the very things that they insist happened 2000 or so years ago.

Jensen3: Definitely in this country at least, most non-Christians would scoff at this idea and very possibly most Christians would do the same. The belief has always been that demons can cause disease though not all diseases are necessarily caused by demonic powers. Sometimes it was said that Jesus cast out demons and the people were healed; sometimes they regained their sanity; sometimes he healed people with no mention of demonic involvement. Today Christians accept that disease is caused by microorganisms or other physical mechanisms but they would say that if a demon causes a disease it will use such a mechanism. And of course, in Jesus’ time it was not known that microorganisms had part in the process. Today, as then, most Christians probably think that at least minor diseases are not caused by demons and even if they are they may not require removing a demon in order to be healed. But likewise, the Scripture gives us no reason to think that even major illnesses are all caused by demons.

But as to the flu-demon story, it is not inconceivable that even a minor disease could have demonic origins and one could be healed by an exorcism. We shouldn’t assume this without a special spiritual gift of knowledge however. Whether most Christian’s would reject this possibility does not matter. The fact is that the Scripture does leave this possibility open to us. And we certainly have no scientific evidence that contradicts this claim.

Doland4: [To the first underlined sentence in Jensen3 above.] So, by this, one would conclude that at least some disease is caused by demonic powers. And, by the way, this violates your claim that Satan isn't often allowed to do supernatural events. What percentage of disease is caused by demons would you say? . . . You have no ___ idea now do you? . . . But yet you would indeed scoff if someone claimed to be cured of disease via exorcism. Doesn't this tell you that you don't really believe this nonsense?

Jensen5: See my earlier discussion about how commonly we might say Satan is allowed to act in the world. No, I don't know how often demonic activity might cause sickness. The Scripture seems to indicate that it is caused sometimes with demonic intervention and sometimes without. So we can't say how much more is caused without demonic intervention. But I certainly do not scoff at anyone who says they were healed by exorcism (as Doland would know if he had read the rest of my response before writing this). And isn't it amazing how people call beliefs nonsense when they have no grounds to do so? Notice that Doland certainly did not provide us with any evidence for making such a claim.

Jensen3: Today Christians accept that disease is caused by microorganisms or other physical mechanisms but they would say that if a demon causes a disease it will use such a mechanism. [The second underlined sentence in Jensen3 above.]

Doland4: Does the Bible say this? By golly, no, it doesn't. Can you say ad-hoc? I knew you could. . . .

Jensen5: Our reason for believing that physical mechanisms cause diseases is that our current scientific knowledge tells us this. Jews and Christians have never, except for occasional extremist sects, denied that science can give us knowledge of the world. Our reason for believing that demons sometimes cause disease is that the Bible tells us this is so and because the evidence we have already considered gives us reason to

believe the Bible. I've pointed out the evidence for the resurrection and certain fulfilled prophecies and religious experience. Now if we have reason to believe that spirit beings can cause some disease and that physical mechanisms always cause disease, wouldn't it follow that when these spirit beings cause disease that they use these physical mechanisms? There is nothing in the Bible that says that they do not. There is nothing ad hoc about this belief. It's a simple logical conclusion.

Modern science in the Bible, again

Jensen3: And of course, in Jesus' time it was not known that microorganisms had part in the process. [The third underlined sentence in Jensen3 above.]

Doland4: And again, had Jesus actually told people that, and it was documented in the Bible, that might be some evidence for your side. The fact that your Biblegod doesn't display any better knowledge of anything beyond that would be known by the people of the time who wrote the Bible, one would think, would be quite sufficient evidence in itself to discount is [its?] alleged divine origin.

Jensen5: I've pointed out other places where the Scripture does give such information, like the origin and expansion of the universe. But if we have a book written for a people who would not understand many such claims, why should they be recorded? Or even if we had enough explanation that they could understand them, there still may be no point in recording them. The point of the book is to convey spiritual information, not necessarily scientific information. Admittedly it does so through the context of a large amount of factual historical information but often that historical information is important for understanding the spiritual information and/or providing evidence for that spiritual information. If some scientific information otherwise unknown until today slips through, that would be more of the

exception. The evidence for Christianity resides primarily in other areas like fulfilled prophecy and miracles. Basically the Bible was written to be understood by the readers of the time in which it was written. This does not discount the divine origin of the Bible if other evidence supports it. Doland's criticism amounts to claiming that God should provide a certain kind of evidence when God chooses to provide (primarily) another kind.

Scientific evidence for/against demonically caused diseases

Concerning the possibility that demons could sometimes cause an illness as minor as the flu I stated the following [The fourth underlined sentence in Jensen3 above under topic heading "Demons causing disease."]:

Jensen3: We certainly have no scientific evidence that contradicts this claim.

Doland4: Because there could be no scientific evidence that could contradict the claim, nor confirm it.

Jensen5: No, we could certainly imagine some such evidence: a vision of a demon, people performing feats or actions outside of their normal power or knowledge; an immediate healing or a healing of an untreatable and fatal disease when an exorcism is performed. And of course such things have been claimed throughout the world.

Historicity of the Gospels and evidence for the resurrection

Doland again quotes William Lane Craig:

Craig1: Regarding the central miracle of the New Testament—the Resurrection—there is a very good case for concluding with confidence that, yes, this is really an event of history. You see, the evidence for the Resurrection is much, much stronger than the evidence, say, that Jesus did a miracle by healing the blind man in John 9. You have a wealth of data concerning the empty tomb, the Resurrection appearances, and the origin of the disciples’ belief in the Resurrection (69).

Doland2: There is more evidence for the Resurrection than there is for the healing of the blind man? A more detailed biblical account of the Resurrection constitutes “much, much stronger” evidence for that event? Nonsense. There is one source of evidence for both events—the Bible. One sentence or a thousand pages is still the same amount of evidence! For example, the Koran has thousands of pages. Does that mean that the evidence for Mohammed’s claims are “much, much stronger” than they would be if the Koran was a short booklet?

Jensen3: Craig never claimed that it is the number of statements in the Bible that constitutes the evidence for the resurrection. The detailed “data concerning” the resurrection have part in supporting the argument, however. When historical claims are made, e.g., that Jesus was buried in a particular tomb, that certain women were the first to see him alive after his death, that so many people witnessed the resurrection, etc., and when the documents have good support for their historicity (using normal scholarly standards for determining historicity) we do have better evidence for the resurrection given the larger quantity of such data. For example, the biblical claim that Jesus was buried in a certain tomb gives evidence against the claim that he was buried in a pauper’s grave. This responds to certain points of argument against the resurrection. This is a very minor point but it supports Craig’s claim that there is a lot of evidence that accumulates from the Scripture to support the resurrection.

It is commonly accepted that over a number of years Mohammed dictated the few hundred pages (not thousands) that make up the Qu’ran. So if the

Qu'ran says that a given contemporary historical event occurred, we certainly have some reason to believe it. If the New Testament claims that a given contemporary event occurred, we have the same grounds to believe the event occurred. If we have two statements for one such claim in the New Testament that are likely from two independent sources, we have more reason to believe it. Some historical statements in the Bible appear to have this kind of support. Now when Mohammed said that God said such and such, we have little historical evidence from the Qu'ran that applies in any way to support this claim. We do have some, namely Mohammed's claim that an angel spoke to him these purported teachings from God. But no repetition of this claim by Mohammed will increase the evidence that an angel actually spoke to him. If we have reason to believe in Jesus' resurrection we also have reason to believe his claims that he received his teachings from God. So this would be stronger evidence than merely Jesus' claim that he received this from God. Doland's confusion involves a failure to distinguish the kinds of claims that are made and the type of evidence that applies to them.

Doland4: _____. By normal scholarly standards for determining history, the Gospels fail miserably. Again refer to my other articles or to my other sources.

Jensen5: Since Doland does not want to here present any arguments for his claims but wishes to merely make reference to other and outside sources, I will do the same. I believe the reader who carefully examines the various arguments for and against the historicity of the Scripture, and especially the Gospels, will find my claim verified. See the abridged references at the end of this paper.

Doland2: . . . Craig claims that the Gospels represent four independent accounts, and Paul's Epistles make for yet another account. Though there is debate as to whether the Gospels do indeed represent four independent accounts, suppose that we grant that we have a total of five independent

accounts. Then we merely have five believers testifying to the truth of their religion. I doubt that Craig or Strobel would find the testimony of five followers of non-Christian religions very compelling; yet we're expected to regard the over two-thousand-year-old testimony of five followers of Christianity as a great amount of evidence that Christianity is true?

Jensen3: The documents' independence support the historicity of the New Testament. If we had two or three independent sources supporting the historical statements of Tacitus or Seutonius, we would have no doubt as to their historicity. No one would say, "Hey, those confirming statements were made by people who liked Tacitus. Therefore they don't count as evidence." Also, the Gospels' mutual confirmation merely supports the mutual historical claims that are made. They do not thereby demonstrate the truth of Christianity. As it is now, even without supporting sources, Tacitus and Seutonius are not doubted in any significant manner anyway. There just isn't any reason to doubt them, since, like the New Testament, they were written so close to the time of the events recorded and using original sources or witnesses. Clearly this does not prove Christianity or the resurrection but it does support very strongly many of the unexceptional claims of the New Testament and to a lesser degree the exceptional claims. And as Craig pointed out elsewhere, even as skeptical a scholar as Bultmann saw the Gospels as giving good evidence that Jesus was seen as a healer and exorcist in his time and that his follower believed that they saw him alive after his execution. [Third through fifth sentences added 5Nov14.]

The central evidence for the resurrection is not that five but rather 500 witnesses claimed they saw Jesus alive after his death. Corinthians was written 23 to 25 years after Jesus' death. This is pretty uniformly accepted among historians. Yet here Paul claimed that over 500 witnesses claimed they saw Jesus resurrected (1 Corinthians 15). For Paul to make this statement to readers and listeners who could have easily searched out and questioned the witnesses would have been unthinkable had Paul been lying. The text indicates that Paul very much wanted to support his

authority to the Christians in Corinth since there appear to have been many who were questioning his authority as an apostle.

REASON #1: GOD MAKES SENSE OF THE UNIVERSE'S ORIGIN

Doland2: . . . As near as I've been able to discern, using God to explain the universe is merely answering a mystery with a mystery—explaining one imponderable with another.

Jensen3: No, this is the same kind of explanation much of science uses when it seeks to explain one mystery by something less mysterious. We hypothesize entities to explain phenomena and then seek empirical verification. Sometimes verification is not possible but we still accept the theoretical entities because they explain the phenomena so well. Everything from electrons to dark matter have at differing times been accepted without empirical verification. A universe that had a cause must ultimately have a cause that is not itself caused. So we have discovered this much about the mystery of God. This is very significant progress. Furthermore, to explain a complex universe by a simple creator is much more reasonable than accepting that the universe has always been. If this is explaining one mystery with another, it's an extremely reasonable explanation and we have progressed further in removing most of the mystery.

(For more discussion concerning **big bang cosmology and the cosmological argument** see Part 1 of the Craig/Tooley's debate in Issue 7 of this web site. More currently see **The Best Current Scientific Evidence for God** (<http://www.encounter1.org/11-2/>). See also the very extensive treatment of this topic in Craig and Sinclair's chapter (3) in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*; references at end of this webpage.)

REASON #2: GOD MAKES SENSE OF THE UNIVERSE'S COMPLEXITY

Is God or the universe simpler?

Doland2: My short answer to that [the extreme improbability of the existence of a universe allowing for life given the fine tuning of the laws and constants of nature] is analogous to my previous one: the universe's complexity is imponderable, but then so is God.

Jensen3: But God would be far more ponderable at least in this regard since God would be far simpler in being.

If Doland is claiming that God is more complex, we should ask why he thinks this. Why can a simple, changeless person not have always existed and timelessly (changelessly) chosen for plurality to come into being. Indeed, with the first change, the origin of time, comes the beginning of plurality. Originally, God does not need to possess the virtually infinite knowledge of the complexity of the universe or the knowledge of all that will ever be throughout God's existence. God can choose to have knowledge of the universe as God chooses to create.

We have a very simple and feasible source for a universe and that universe has an extremely specified complexity. That is, its complexity has to be precisely what it is now with very little possibility of variation for it to allow for chemical life.

Doland2: God, . . . [Hugh Ross] claims, operates "extra-dimensionally." But what is the probability that there is a being capable of operating "extra-dimensionally"?

Jensen3: Belief in more than three dimension (four if we count time) is still very speculative. Ross presents this as only a possibility. But if God could create three, or four, or even eleven dimensions or more, why should we think it unusual that God could act into those dimensions.

How can one measure the improbability of God's power or even suspect that the power of this simple being is complex or improbable? If I had the power to truly create something (not merely rearrange existing parts like a human might create, say, a diesel engine), it would have less power than I. Shouldn't we expect that God would not (possibly could not) create anything God would not have complete power over? And wouldn't that be called omnipotence?

Doland2: And suppose that science could tell us more about the nature of God? Wouldn't option 2 [that a God exists powerful enough to create the universe and chooses to do so] also take on the appearance of "one improbable thing after another"?

Jensen3: Not if science tells us that this being is simple in nature and that God's choice to create follows from God's nature or from God's free choice alone.

Doland4: Doesn't your claim here of something "complex" (the universe) coming from something "simple" (God???) violate your claims for needing a god in the first place? Is the entire reason for needing a god . . . an alleged need for a source for complexity? If complexity can come from simplicity, what need do you have for a god?

Jensen5: It is not the only reason a simple creator is needed but it is a very important one. The more complex the original starting material or cause of the universe might be, the more unlikely or intrinsically improbable it is. A

simple non-conscious entity cannot completely on its own become or cause something more complex. If the original universal singularity became our universe, it did so because it had within itself a force that could cause the big bang or something outside of it acted upon it to cause the big bang. If it did it all by itself, it wasn't so simple in itself at all. And if the singularity was the original uncaused entity that had always existed and possessed within itself this force that would cause it to explode, why did it not do so sooner? A simple changeless conscious entity could choose timelessly for change (time) to begin. It could be absolutely simple in itself.

But the important point is that any view that holds to a complex eternal past for the universe is not as intrinsically probable as a simple originating source of the universe (and that's only the first of its problems). A complex entity (say the universe) that has not always existed has to have a cause, it cannot just pop into existence from nothing. Also, no conjectured simple originating source of the universe works, other than a simple conscious changeless source.

Doland4: Besides, only a theist could posit an omnipotent, omniscient entity as "simple."

Jensen5: I've given reasons to think an omnipotent, omniscient entity is simple. If you were the only thing that exists and you are very simple in being, then it is very conceivable that you could know all there is to know about everything that is (yourself). As you choose for plurality to come into being, you simply know all that you choose to be. At present God's knowledge is very complex (unless the Thomists can give a good argument for God's continued absolute simplicity) but originally God's knowledge was simple. The important point is that we began with a simple entity. It does not matter what God has become by choosing plurality to come into being.

Earlier in this response I've also argued that God's diverse attributes may in fact be one. Modern physics might give an analogy that could help us to understand this better. Scientists used to think electricity and magnetism were two distinct forces. Now they know that they are really one. And the other three forces are becoming unified with electromagnetism as well. Shouldn't we think that the diverse attributes of God might be actually one?

Doland4: Only a theist could posit an omnipotent, omniscient entity as "simple." By that reasoning, I could posit the universe as "simple." If string theory is right, the universe is basically made of one thing, strings—just a whole lot of them. If string theory is wrong, then it is made up of a handful of elemental particles. Again, just a whole lot of them. Really simple actually. The fact that these few building blocks can form nearly infinite forms is no more "complex" than a god that can do an infinite number of things springing forth from his "simplicity."

If the theist can play word games and define his deity as "simple," so can I and define the universe simple too. All we have done is prove that we can play word games with "simple" and "complex." Woo-hoo! This is really useful. . . . Pick a new game Jensen; I'm kind-of bored with this one.

Jensen5: Doland's claim to a simple universe is here very different from my claim for a simple God. The proposal of a universe of numerous strings or elementary particles is just an attempt at a factual understanding of the nature of the universe. My consideration of how different divine attributes could be one and could be simple in themselves follows from an analysis of the possible nature of such attributes. Neither of us are playing word games.

Doland admits that strings or elementary particles must exist in very great numbers. As the number increases, the complexity increases. Drop a box of toothpicks on the floor and you end up with a complex chaotic structure;

much more so than we would have with a single toothpick. Drop more toothpicks and the structure becomes more complex. The more entities that exist, the more complex they must be considered together. Doland cannot get away with claiming simplicity for strings or elementary particles. Incidentally, this is one of the most significant problems for the multiverse view. The more universes one hypothesizes, the less intrinsically probable it is because the less simple it is.

Doland2: Craig correctly dismisses multiple-universe theories as unfalsifiable, as there is no way for us to know if there are other universes, at least at our current level of scientific knowledge. But introducing God to explain the mystery of the universe is no less unfalsifiable!

Jensen3: As Craig points out, theism is supported on other grounds; a multiverse view is not. Also, the possibility of a multiverse would multiply the probability against its originating without the agency of a simple creator. The more material we need to begin with, the more complex and unexplained is that material and the more likely is the possibility that it originated from a simple source. The multiverse view would in some ways solve the problem of the extreme fine-tuning of the laws and constants of nature for naturalism, but it would only create other problems that would make theism by far the simpler and more probable explanation.

(For further discussion concerning **the fine tuning and multiverse arguments** see Part 8 of the Craig/Tooley debate in Issue 7 of the website. in *Encounter* issue 7. Also see the arguments by Collins in the *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ch. 4; references at end of this webpage.)

REASON #4: GOD MAKES SENSE OF THE RESURRECTION

Jensen3: When Doland does not respond to an argument he will often refer the reader to another source or sources which attempt to answer the argument. Since the intention of this response is to interact with Doland's critique and because he has not responded directly to Strobel's discussion regarding the resurrection, I will likewise refer to other presented arguments for the resurrection. My own piece is found in this web page: "**Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection.**" Also at least some of the essential features of the evidence for the resurrection have already been discussed above. I have also discussed something of the logic of miracles in the context of the resurrection evidence and related issues on this website. The best and most comprehensive studies are, in my opinion, by Craig and Wright, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus and The Resurrection of the Son of God* (respectively); references at the end of this webpage. Doland's references are to articles by Jeffery Lowder (http://infidels.org/library/modern/jeff_lowder/strobel.html), a book by Earl Doherty, *Challenging the Verdict*, and Doland's own critique of Strobel's *The Case for the Real Jesus* (<http://www.caseagainstfaith.com/lee-strobels-the-case-for-the-real-jesus.html>).

REASON #5: GOD CAN BE IMMEDIATELY EXPERIENCED

Doland2: It's not my place to dismiss the religious experiences of Strobel, Craig, or any other Christian. Lacking their first-hand experiences, it would be presumptuous for me to say anything about what they have experienced. I can only speak for myself, and I seem incapable of "experiencing" God. Many Christians thoughtlessly blame me for this, claiming that I haven't had enough faith, didn't try hard enough, or wouldn't have accepted such experiences even if I had had them. All of these accusations are wide of the mark; they haven't walked in my shoes. They

don't know how many times I've prayed and asked Jesus into my life. Since I don't go around challenging the validity of Christians' religious experiences, I would appreciate it if Christians would refrain from passing judgment on my lack thereof.

Jensen3: Doland's point is well taken. I don't know his life well enough to say that he did this or that wrong. Of the many religious experiences I've heard recounted, it seems as though there can be a wide variety of types. Often the seeker will initially gain only an increased hunger for God which will lead to an experience of an awareness of God, of God's existence, of Jesus, etc. Some have recounted merely a sense of certainty that a belief is true. I think that as one looks at the epistemology of sense experience, one discovers this also to be the basic grounds for our acceptance of the veridicality of religious experience. Thus someone who has merely a "sense of certainty" type of experience is justified in so believing.

Some have had experiences almost immediately after beginning to seek, some have taken much longer. I know of one person who claims to have heard an audible voice immediately after asking God for the truth. A friend recounted how she was once at a point of extreme depression and about to cut her wrists. She told God that she had to know if it was real or not. She said she then sensed a presence in her room, nothing more nor less. This was enough to keep her from suicide and to begin, through other evidence, to come to an assurance of God's existence.

Ann Paulk who is involved in a Christian ministry to homosexuals related that at a point in her life she called out to God for the truth. Later, at a Christian organization on the university she was attending, she said she sensed a presence filling the room. "An incredible being, the Holy Spirit, had enveloped us in gentleness, kindness, authority, reliability, and credibility" and she knew she wanted this more than anything else, including her homosexuality. (Leslie Montgomery, ed., *Were it Not for Grace* [Nashville, Tn: Broadman & Holman Pub, 2005], 170.) She also knew that God had answered her prayer to know the truth.

Kevin Harris in conversation with William Lane Craig relates the story of a friend who grew up as a Muslim in Indonesia. At age fifteen he cried out to God, "I want to know you!" He said he clearly heard a voice saying "Get a Bible and embrace my Son, Jesus." (Reasonable Faith Podcast, 1Oc08.) Will Anderson (late husband of writer Ann Kiemel) took a Bible out to the woods and told God he would not come back until he was given the truth. He came back believing in Jesus. These are just a few examples I've run into. For a few more, go through the experiences recounted under "Life Experiences" under **sample topics** on the **Hot Topics** Page. [Last two paragraphs added 23Fb09.]

An important point I want to make is that if someone tells me that they have an experience like this, this should count as evidence for their claim.

But what of Doland's claimed inability to have a religious experience? Jesus claimed that anyone who would will to do God's will would know that his teaching is true (John 7:17). However, he didn't claim a time limit to attaining this knowledge, though most of the people whom I have heard sharing their experiences have claimed that it has not taken years and years. So Paul, I would encourage you to keep seeking. God may not give you an experience at all. God might give you simply new evidence, a new way of looking at arguments that have bothered you, new arguments.

But Christianity is deeply experiential. St. Paul talked about God giving us "an earnest" or "foretaste of our inheritance." Even if one does not receive an experience that would provide justification for belief, one should at least experience a more non-noetic type of experience such as comfort or peace or awe or exultation or joy. I hope It's clear that I am not saying that the seeker may not find justification for belief. Even though a non-noetic experience does not justify belief, one will definitely will find good grounds for belief whether it be through religious experience or exposure to evidence/arguments. [Minor alteration for clarification 3Mr15.]

One final point. I know of a Jewish lady who asked for the truth from God and happened to come across the Christian claims. She had never been exposed to this before and asked some friends what they knew about Christianity. The friends very strongly discouraged her from even considering such a thing. She did as they suggested and nothing more came of her religious search until years later when she cried out to God again.

A friend of mine (he calls himself a gay, punk rock zombie) held to, I believe he said, something of a neopagan or New Age belief and he appeared to have experienced some unusual phenomena that seemed to support his beliefs. I asked him if he ever simply asked God for the truth. He said he did but he didn't like the kind of new information that started coming his way.

My point is that we cannot be assured that the search will be successful unless we honestly evaluate whatever comes and unless we persevere in seeking. The John Lennons and the Ingmar Bergmans who expect God to answer immediately or don't really want to find God when they ask, likely will never find God, or perhaps will find but then rationalize away what they had found. And I'm not saying this is you, Paul. I'm just saying, be patient and do begin again to seek. But don't stop seeking.

The Christian view typically expressed is that if someone dies without believing in Jesus, they will be eternally lost. And I know we will get into this topic again soon, but I need to point out that this is an oversimplification. I do think the biblical view is pretty clear that anyone who knows that Christianity is true and rejects it is lost (John 3:18), but it also indicates that anyone who rejects Jesus and is unwilling to even seek the truth from God will also be lost. On the other hand, anyone who does seek God, as the passage mentioned earlier, John 7:17, points out, will not be lost. But is this so even if they do not come to believe in Jesus in this life? Jesus says here

that they will come to know that it is true and the implication is that they will believe. (If one wills God's will and then knows God's will, will they not do what they have discovered God's will to be?) But the problem is that it is not clearly stated how long it will take before one finds and believes. We generally think it will be within one's lifetime and this is probably the general sense of the passage, but this is not definite. We cannot exclude the possibility that one may seek and never discover Christianity to be true in this life and yet they will not be lost. They will find it is true in the next life. Other passages that say that those who seek will find would therefore make this same point.

I make this long commentary here instead of later where it more logically belongs because I want to make a somewhat more personal point. I do this because you could not help but begin this topic with some personal comments about yourself, Paul. My point is that if you seek and continue to seek God, even if you never do come to believe in Christianity or even mere theism in this life, according to the Christian view (as I have argued), you will not be lost. I for one will never be the one who tells you that because you don't believe in Jesus you will be lost, not if you do earnestly seek God and seek the truth from God. And of course, this is not merely a personal comment for you alone. There may be others who consider themselves in this same condition. I will refer back to these comments in our later discussion.

Sense of certainty type religious experience

Jensen3: [First underlined sentence in Jensen3 above.] Thus someone who has merely a "sense of certainty" type of experience is justified in so believing.

Doland4: The 9/11 hijackers had a "sense of certainty" that they would be rewarded by Allah. Sure, I know that using 9/11 is a cliché, but, it still

happens to be a valid one. The point is “sense of certainty” by itself, is meaningless. People have “sense of certainty” about all sorts of things. Just ask any alleged alien abductee.

Jensen5: I’m talking about the same kind of sense of certainty that accompanies sense experience, not the mere socially engrained beliefs the 9/11 conspirators held to. People grow up with beliefs that become lithified because they don’t want to think to question them. These are just unquestioned beliefs, not beliefs that come with a distinct sense of certainty. Those who have this kind of socialized belief don’t have any distinct experience by which they could say, “I have an awareness that this is certain and true.” [This paragraph revised for clarity 19Oc08.]

The problem for the secularist is that the only reason we can trust our senses is by means of the accompanying sense of certainty. Doland said he has absolute certainty that his wife exists. The only reason he can feel certain is because he trusts in his sense of certainty. He has no more (or less) reason to believe his wife exists than I do that my religious experience tells me that God is really there and that Jesus is Lord and Messiah. How does he know that his sense experience isn’t caused by Descartes’ evil demon? Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu asked (paraphrased), “If when I sleep I should dream I am a butterfly, how do I know when I am awake that I’m not really a butterfly dreaming I’m a man?” The veridicality of sense experience is obvious only to those who have not considered such problems. Those who have not thought through the major issues in the history of philosophy, glibly ignore such problems. Yet even today, movies like *The Matrix* trilogy bring them home again. Doland’s absolute certainty is nothing more than the sense of certainty that accompanies his sense experience.

Certainly some of our religious experiences can be falsified just as can some of our sense experiences. That does not mean we have no reason to trust our religious experience or our sense experience. Until they are falsified, we should accept them.

Doland should put himself in the shoes of those who claim they were abducted by aliens. If they have a sense of certainty that they were really abducted and can remember the actual experience, how is this any less certain than Doland's memory of seeing his wife yesterday? We have to trust our experiences. If someone has just taken a drug that they have heard sometimes produces an unusual visual or mental experience, they should then have reason to question the veridicality of their experience. That might be one means of falsification. (Though another hypothesis is that they may have opened the "doors of perception" to another world. So it is not obviously falsified.) [Sentences added 15Fb09.] Or if someone who claims an alien abduction has someone tell them they had been observed to be sleeping during the time in question, this too could be considered relative falsifying evidence. But we cannot reject experience claims simply because we don't think they are possible. Now there is some scientific evidence that aliens *cannot* visit the earth, simply because of physical limitation given the distances involved and the speeds that can be traveled. This too might be considered good falsifying evidence. But barring any falsifying evidence, we need to trust our religious experience just as we trust our sense experience.

Religious experience, continued

Jensen3: [Second underlined sentence group in first Jensen3 under "God can be immediately experienced" above.] A friend recounted how she was once at a point of extreme depression and about to cut her wrists. She told God that she had to know if it was real or not. She said she then sensed a presence in her room, nothing more nor less.

Doland4: And this doesn't just scream psychosomatic to you? Part of her didn't want to live, part of her did. So the part of her that did invented a reason to live. At least, that is very reasonable conclusion. Can I prove it

absolutely? No. I can't prove I don't have an invisible alligator in my pants either. I go by reasonable conclusions.

Jensen5: We can't just invent experiences like this. Well, maybe some of us can. But those who can and do usually have some incoherence or inconsistencies in their experiences that suggest non-veridicality. That's how we know when some mental illness or abnormality is involved. If you can't trust an experience that has no incoherence or inconsistency, you have no justification for claiming you should trust your sense experiences. You suggested a psychological explanation that fits well under a naturalistic world view. Her explanation fits well under a theistic world view. Neither explanation exhibits any incoherence that would suggest non-veridicality for the appropriate scenario or model. So what we are left with is that both explanations are each as likely as the other except for one deciding factor: my friend sensed that there was truly a presence next to her; she had a sense of certainty of the same kind that justifies our normal sense experiences. The same sense of certainty that allows you to believe beyond any doubt that your wife actually exists is also the same sense of certainty that allowed my friend to believe that there truly was a person, a presence next to her. We have to accept what our experience tells us until or unless we find an incoherence in the experiences that would lead us to another explanation for the experience. [Minor revision 17Ap10.]

Honestly now Paul, can you tell me that if you were in her shoes, you would not believe that the presence of some unseen person was actually there standing next to you? Not just because it would save your life, but because we have no choice but to trust our experiences unless we know that they are untrustworthy. You're about to cut your wrists and you tell God you have to know if God is really there or you're going to do it. Then you sense this presence. Isn't that one way God could show you it is real?

How else could God do it? Maybe God could find some other way. Maybe God could bring to mind the cosmological argument and you see a connection or a feature of the argument you had never seen before and

you are finally aware that you were wrong before and that the argument really does work after all. Well, maybe something like that happens for some people who are looking for God but are not in quite such dire straights. But I doubt that someone in a near suicidal state would be in the state of mind to think about the intricacies of the cosmological argument. It just seems to me that my friend's experience is the kind of thing one would expect for those who are crying out to know this God and who recognize that suicide is the only alternative. At least, for such a person, it is the kind of thing that would be expected from a God who is concerned about us personally, a God who seeks relationship with us, a God who wants us to know not by mere abstract reasoning but by relationship.

I talked with this person again recently about her experience. She said she just cannot believe this experience was an hallucination because she is just too rational of a person. She recently received her doctorate in physics at a major American university and is now starting postdoctoral work. Yes, I know, I've seen *A Beautiful Mind* too. I know that the most rational person can also have psychological illness, hallucinations, etc. But my point from my previous discussion still follows: we have to accept what our experience tells us until that experience claim is falsified. Otherwise we cannot trust any of our experiences. Trusting our coherent and consistent sense and religious experiences is the most reasonable conclusion.

What I find most disturbing about the common atheistic reactions to religious experience arguments is their inconsistency. Doland does not question that his wife exists because he sees her. He says he is absolutely certain that she is there. Yet a religious experience he will consign to the same category as other commonly accepted non-veridical experiences (e.g., alien abductions) without providing any argument. Both the sense and the religious experience have the same evidential credentials, Paul. Show me that they do not. [21Mr09.]

Jensen3: [Third underlined sentence group in first Jensen3 under “God can be immediately experienced” above.] I asked [a friend] if he ever simply asked God for the truth. He said he did but he didn’t like the kind of new information that started coming his way.

Doland4: You can’t do any better than lame anecdotes? Go to an alien abductee web site, and you’ll get all the anecdotes you could stand. Same for Elvis-is-alive sites, etc. You’ve got to do better than anecdotes. Too bad you can’t do any better, for you have nothing else to offer.

Jensen5: But anecdotes make up testimonial evidence and are very powerful. You can’t just wash away testimonial evidence by calling them anecdotes. Otherwise you will undermine the largest part of the evidential foundation of our legal system. As for the Elvis-is-alive experience claims, isn’t this something that should be expected? Should some people see someone who looks like Elvis walk out of a 7-11 at 2 in the morning, and they’ve heard about other people making these claims, wouldn’t they claim to have seen Elvis too? In a country as large as ours, it should not be at all surprising to find people who look very much like any given individual. So those experiences are very understandable and indeed likely veridical as to the appearance of the person experienced. They usually actually do see someone who looks very much like Elvis. And of course, the Elvis sighters cannot claim anything more than this. The religious experience “anecdotes” which claim so much more than this are quite sufficient to establish the truth of Christianity. Just look through my list of “life experiences” on this website (look at the **sample topics** at the **Hot Topics** page). [Minor additions 3Mr15.]

Desire for/against belief

Jensen3: [From the fourth underlined sentence group in first Jensen3 under “God can be immediately experienced” above.] I do think the biblical

view is pretty clear that anyone who knows that Christianity is true and rejects it is lost.

Doland4: Anybody that thinks Christianity is true should be a Christian! Who could possibly say, “Eternal bliss? Nah, no thanks”?

Jensen5: C.S. Lewis once asked, Do you really think Stalin or Hitler would actually desire the God of the Bible to be there? To give up some illicit pleasure now for the sake of doing what is right or doing what God desires one to do: that can be very difficult for some people even if they really believe Christians will have eternal life in heaven. I think Doland knows this is a very real feature of our human experience. He thinks religious people can ignore or suppress strong evidence for atheism and yet he won't admit that atheists can do the same for religious belief.

Some who seek will find in the next life

Jensen3: [Fifth underlined sentence group in first Jensen3 under “God can be immediately experienced” above.] We cannot exclude the possibility that one may seek and never discover Christianity to be true in this life and yet they will not be lost. They will find it is true in the next life.

Doland4: You can claim that the Bible doesn't specifically rule this out. Maybe true, but, there are an infinite number of things the Bible doesn't specifically rule out. The point is, does it specifically state so? No. Besides, if your speculation is correct, you've obviated any need for this life. I believe most theologians would agree with me on this point, by they way. Most theologians say you get this life to decide what path to take and that's that. That's the whole purpose of this life. Your speculation is required simply because you realize that can't be fair, so you have to speculate an “out.”

Jensen5: But I do agree that everyone will only “get this life to decide what path to take and that’s that” (unless they die too young). The distinction I’m making is between choice and knowledge. If one chooses to do God’s will and to seek God, one will find the knowledge that Christianity is true. For the few, that knowledge may come in the next life. And there is still a need to have this life since it is here that one decides which path to take.

The Bible does not preclude the possibility that some who do not believe in Jesus in this life and yet who seek God will not be lost. But if this fact is coupled with the passages I’ve cited that state that those who seek will find, it is a necessary conclusion that they will find in the next life. If you can show me an earnest seeker who on their deathbed still does not trust in Jesus, then we should assume that they will discover the truth of Christianity after death or perhaps at some twilight point between life and death (if the Bible is true). Of course we don’t really know any person’s mind and so we will never be sure this is a sincere seeker. But at least hypothetically, if there is truly someone in this situation, we know they will not discover Christianity is true in this life. I would say that my claim is the clearest implication of the biblical teaching.

It is of course possible that every earnest seeker will discover Christianity is true before death. This claim I cannot definitely disprove because, as I’ve said, we cannot with certainty know the minds of all who claim to be sincere seekers of God. But it simply seems unlikely that of the millions of people who profess other religions and non-religions, many with no access to even a knowledge of the Christian claims, that we should expect God to reveal the truth to every seeker among these groups before death.

(For more discussion see **The Evidential Value of Religious Experience** in the Tooley/Craig debate in *Encounter*, part 4, issue 7.

OBJECTION 3: EVOLUTION EXPLAINS LIFE, SO GOD ISN'T NEEDED

Doland2: Let us. . . grant that everything which [Walter] Bradley has to say about abiogenesis [the origin of life from nonliving matter] here is true, and that scientists are utterly clueless about the origin of life. Nothing which Bradley says makes a good case for a divine origin. For one, as noted in Objection 2, lack of a good explanation is not sufficient cause to invoke the miraculous. If we viewed everything that ever defied explanation as miraculous, the true natural causes of phenomena would never have been discovered.

Jensen3: But lack of a good naturalistic explanation is good reason to conclude a supernatural explanation if the supernatural explanation is simpler and more plausible. It is simply an unwarranted prejudice to say that, given equal evidence or equal lack of evidence, that one explanation must be assumed rather than another. I have pointed out earlier that in the history of science, discovering naturalistic explanations has worked primarily for proximate causes, not the ultimate and closer to ultimate causes. By ultimate causes, I mean original causes. We have also seen that the biblical world view certainly holds that God created nature to follow natural laws and for these laws to be and remain unchanged (Jeremiah 31:35-36). Thus nature will generally follow understood patterns and work on its own without supernatural intervention. But that does not mean that there cannot be discernible exceptions of intervention. These would occur rarely through history but more often at the origin of the universe and at other major points of change in universal history, if they do occur.

The origin of life may itself result from a chain of natural causes going back to the origin of the big bang at the time of (I would claim) God's input of information into the singularity. (Thus the ultimate cause of the origin of life would be supernatural.) By causing the big bang to have the precise characteristics it had, life was a natural and inevitable result billions of years later. A second possibility is that God's input was at different points in creation and that the origin of life was one of them. Scientifically, at least, it

certainly looks as though the origin of life was a point almost radically different than any preceding arrangement of matter. The complexity of any so far imaginable earliest and simplest life form is so very complex that it is difficult to conceive of any possible naturalistic explanation for life.

It makes perfect sense in a theistic world view to think of God creating a universe that runs generally on its own without constant divine intervention. There might be a sense in which God upholds all creation such that should God's hand be withdrawn, all would cease to be. In string theory, for example, matter exists in its various forms only because tiny strings are vibrating in specified patterns or rates. If God keeps the vibrations going but then stops them, all would end. Now string theory is very speculative, but it suggests one way that God might sustain existence. Or it might be that God has created the universe to be such that no sustaining activity is carried on at all.

But back to my point: there is a sense in which God can let the universe run on its own without intervention given either scenario. If this is what happens, then scientific investigation should expect to be able to trace back causes to previous natural causes (usually) until one reaches very far back to the origins of the universe. God's direct intervention into nature may also have occurred at the origins of life. At such a point science will find it can go no further because it has reached the point of material or informational input by God.

So if we should expect science to discover natural explanations for the causes of lightning and volcanos, it does not follow that we should necessarily expect it to find the origin of the big bang or possibly even life. Science should certainly continue to look, but if it cannot find a feasible explanation it should consider the simpler theistic explanation more likely. One can believe the theistic explanation to be the better explanation given the evidence at hand and still look for naturalistic explanations on the chance that one might need to change one's mind. True science must never be satisfied with accepted explanations; it will continue to investigate

and question even when given theories and laws appear to be virtually unquestionable.

Theism is certainly not a hindrance to scientific inquiry. History has shown us that our greatest scientists were Christians and theists who believed that God created an investigatable universe and gave us the challenge to understand it (Proverbs 25:2). If God's glory is revealed in the universe, then one understands God and perceives the glory of God better as one understands nature better (Psalm 19:1-4).

The fact that we have in the past generally found naturalistic explanations for whatever phenomena we have investigated has no bearing on this argument whatsoever. Science has investigated only the more direct and proximate and not the distant causes of a phenomenon under consideration. (And typically, it has not been able to investigate miracle claims because they are not repeatable). We must ask, What is the better explanation now: a naturalism that has no way of explaining and cannot come close to conceiving a possible explanation for life without positing multiple universes, or a theistic explanation that provides a far greater simplicity (with or without multiple universes) as well as an intelligence that accounts for the specified complexity of the life?

In 1988 origin of life researcher K. Doss said concerning RNA/DNA formation which is needed to originate life that "the difficulties that must be overcome are beyond our imagination." ("The Origin of Life: More Questions Than Answers," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 13.) In 1986 researcher Robert Shapiro argued that all current theories are "bankrupt" (*Origins* [New York: Summit Books]). The late Leslie Orgel was a pioneer and leading researcher in the now dominant "RNA world" view of life's origin. In 2002 he said, "It would be a miracle if a strand of RNA ever appeared on the primitive earth." ("The RNA World and the Origin of Life," lecture, ISSOL 2002.) [Last two sentences added 18Ap09.]

Probability of abiogenesis and the multiverse

Jensen3: Researcher Eugene Koonin has recently offered a multiverse scenario to resolve the problems of abiogenesis. If we have enough universes then the very improbable events leading up to the origin of life must happen somewhere. Once we have life, natural selection can kick in and evolution is very easy in Koonin's view. In his final response to peer reviewer Eric Baptiste, he says, "In a solitary universe, as depicted by the classical Big Bang model, anthropic principle [the force or, more accurately, 'nonforce' driving prebiotic molecules to the first life] would amount to enormous luck; that, indeed, would be a Panglossian world." In an appendix he produces a toy calculation of the probability of the emergence of life in a single observable universe. He concludes,

"In other words, even in this toy model that assumes a deliberately inflated rate of RNA production, the probability that a coupled translation-replication [a state necessary prior to evolvable life] emerges by chance in a single O-region [an observable universe, a volume limited to only all that we can observe, also called a Hubble Volume] is $P < 10^{-10^{18}}$ [the probability is less than minus $10^{10^{18}}$, an unimaginably low probability]. Obviously, this version of the breakthrough stage can be considered only in the context of a universe with an infinite (or, in the very least, extremely vast) number of O-regions." (<http://www.biology-direct.com/content/2/1/15>).

Without resorting to multiple universes, the theistic explanation is simply the most likely. There certainly is some mystery left with the theistic explanation, but there is no explanation that is completely devoid of mystery. Something is always left unexplained in any scientific explanation. All that the naturalist can do at this point is to attempt quite arbitrarily to set up some limit as to what constitutes enough of an explanation and what does not and to make sure they carefully adjust the line so that their explanations pass the limit while theistic explanations do not.

Doland4: Koonin must be a moron. . . . You have to have all the variables defined before you can do a probability equation. I doubt he could possibly have all the variables defined, given that nobody has defined all the variables.

Jensen5: I might add two other quotations, one from Eric Baptiste who reviewed Koonin's paper and part of Koonin's response:

Baptiste5: Worse: what guarantee do we have that there won't be ID [intelligent design] people to claim that, as the very important evolutionary biologist E. Koonin showed, Darwinian selection is a secondary player in cosmology? . . .

Koonin5: The possibility that the ID crowd interprets this paper as support for their cause is one of Baptiste's main concerns. Will they, actually? No doubt they will! However, the only way to prevent them from doing so is to stop publishing research on any hard problem in evolutionary biology and somehow declare these problems solved. . . . I believe evolutionary biologists should not and actually cannot worry about this, only about their own papers being correct and coherent.

Jensen5: Only Paul Doland would have the presumption to call Eugene Koonin a moron.

Incidentally, Koonin almost gleefully notes the irony that though the ID people might try to use this as evidence against a naturalistic origin of life, his argument from multiple universes absolutely destroys ID. Indeed, given a large enough number of multiple universes, one of ID's strongest arguments would be destroyed or at least diminished. But as I've pointed out elsewhere, multiverse arguments fail on the grounds of their complexity. The more universes that are needed to allow a good probability of life, the more complex the multiverse must be and the less intrinsically probable the multiverse would be. A simple explanation like a simple creator would be enormously more probable.

Some people think theoretical considerations make a multiverse more likely than a single universe. If this is so (and many scientists strongly contest this claim), my argument would still hold. If we think scientific work indicates that we have to have a multiverse, then it is extremely complex and a simple cause for the multiverse, God, is much more likely than that it could come into being by natural processes alone. Any previous state of a multiverse must possess the same quantity of matter/energy; something cannot come out of nothing. Also, Robin Collins points out that currently the best of the multiverse models still require fine-tuning (*Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, 262-5). [Last sentence added March 2010.]

Doland2: If evolution provides a naturalistic explanation for all life since the first living things emerged on Earth, does it really require a great leap of faith to believe that the first life-forms also had a naturalistic origin? I suppose that Strobel and Bradley would disagree. But it doesn't look like a giant leap of faith to me.

Jensen3: I think that to say this simply misunderstands the enormous problem abiogenesis presents. The previous quotations begin to give us an understanding of how most workers in the field see the problem whether they will honestly admit it or not. A single simple living cell today is comparable in complexity to a factory the size of a city. It is difficult to imagine that a cell with less genes could survive to reproduce. Koonin claims that we need molecules of a very great complexity which could only have been produced by chance before natural selection can kick in. Once we have this self-replicating structure of molecules, he talks as though evolution is child's play.

Now there are certainly problems with Darwinism, but it seems at least feasible if we don't get into all of the technicalities (like the difficulty of having such a large number of animal phyla appear within a relatively few

million years in the Cambrian explosion, or the sudden appearance of new species after mass extinctions, or the multiple simultaneous mutations required to change from a reptile to an avian lung, or the problems Behe points out concerning irreducible complexity, or the fact that we have no empirical evidence for macroevolution despite thousands of generations of mutated fruit flies or E. Coli, etc.). Naturalistic evolution seems feasible because on the surface the idea of gene mutation and natural selection appears to make sense as a mechanism for evolutionary change. Whether it really does work or not, at least it seems that it should. So the intuitive feasibility of one, evolution, is very strong; the other, abiogenesis, is difficult to even imagine.

Doland4: First off, this is called an “argument from incredulity.” Jensen can’t imagine it, so it must be false. Secondly, you ever hear of a _____ virus? How about a prion? . . . Entities far less complex than cells exist today. . . .

Jensen5: But they cannot reproduce on their own. They need other independent life to avoid extinction. There is one possible exception (discussed below) but even it does not avoid the problem.

Researchers have conjectured that there could be simpler cells than our currently existing simplest one-celled organisms. So I think I did make a misstatement. Still the simplest possible organism is very complex. The smallest independent life likely needs at least 1500 gene products to survive. Evolutionary biologist Colin Patterson estimated 1700 as “perhaps close to the minimum necessary for independent life.” (*Evolution*, 2nd ed. [Ithica: Comstock, 1999], 23.) So it isn’t merely I who have difficulty imagining that simpler entities can survive to reproduce. (And I did not present an argument from incredulity because I did not claim any conclusion other than my statement that it is difficult to imagine it. So Doland is again attacking a straw man.) Parasitic bacteria need less but cannot live independently. They need a source of sugars, nucleotides, amino acids, and fatty acids. Theoretical and experimental estimates place

the minimal gene set for parasitic microbes around 250. (Hugh Ross and Fazale Rana, *Origins of Life* [NavPress, 2004], 163.) Biophysicist Herbert Yockey calculated that for one protein or gene product to come into existence by mere chance mixing of appropriate components would be one chance in 10^{75} . With just 250 gene products, that would be one chance in 10^{18750} that all the genes would be produced virtually simultaneously (*Origins*, 164). The numbers get enormously greater as we get up to the needed 1500 and 1700 gene products and then try to account for the proteins, cell walls, and cell membrane.

Of course naturalists claim we have a gradual progression to these very simplest organisms. Though much work has been done to discover or determine possible prebiotic chemical pathways (pathways by which simpler naturally occurring chemicals might be shown to progress to more complex molecules needed for life), Koonin claims that you just cannot get to this starting stage for life by such known and conjectured pathways. If some are feasible, altogether they require enormously unlikely chance processes. Attempts to avoid such calculations like Koonin's by playing with the rules of probability or applying rules that do not apply in all cases turn out in the end to be nothing more than hand waving, just pretending the problem isn't there.

Whether viruses are actually alive is a question of great controversy among biologists. They cannot survive without ultimately independent cell life to live off of. There is one case of a viral RNA replicated in "a chemical broth containing Qb replication enzyme and salts, and an energized form of the four bases that make up the building blocks of RNA." (Paul Davies, *The Fifth Miracle* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999], 127-128.) And viruses normally don't just use other cells as a food source; the host cell has to provide genetic and cellular material to be used or copied or altered so more viruses can be produced. So normally, if viruses were the only "organisms" around, they wouldn't survive. For the viral RNA, if you didn't happen to have the right complex chemical broth, you couldn't get any self-replication. Just getting the "broth," not to mention the viral RNA itself,

requires complex chemical pathways that are extremely improbable. And the broth replication always reduces the genome to its smallest possible components. There is no easy progression to more complex forms as, in theory, evolution allows. It is more likely that viruses came into being as a result of biological processes among already existing independent life forms. With the virus alone, we are not yet at the stage at which evolutionary processes work. You can't start with a virus. [Paragraph altered 8Dc14.]

A prion is merely a protein complexed with a small DNA molecule; they're just chemicals, they're not alive. Bob Bateman notes that "the prion protein does not 'replicate' except to interact with other prion proteins to pass along its pathogenic information. It does not 'replicate and spread' like a virus. It only spreads through preexisting prion proteins. This is completely different from short 'self-replicating' peptides" (www.asa3.org/archive/asa/200001/02333.html).

Probability of fine tuning of laws of nature

In Doland's third response he claims that theists' use of probability to claim a greater likelihood of divine creation is flawed:

Doland6: If he wishes to claim that life as we know it is extremely improbable naturalistically, I'd be the first to agree. The problem is, it is a meaningless claim. The odds of any specific set of numbers coming up in a state lottery is on the order of one in 15 million. If the numbers were say, 1, 10, 11, 26, 30, 49, would you not believe it happened naturalistically since the odds of it happening are 1 in 15 million so it must have been a miracle? Low probability doesn't necessarily bear any useful information on whether something could have happened or not. The low probability of the lottery numbers being 1, 10, 11, 26, 30, and 49 bears no relevance as to whether those numbers could have been picked or not.

The point is, no matter what the universe is like, the odds of it being exactly like it is are infinitesimal. But that doesn't make our universe any more or less likely than any other possible universe.

Jensen7: If we have a lottery in which someone has to win, then some extremely improbable number will have to turn up. We are never astonished when a lottery is won so long as we have enough people drawing random numbers to overcome the odds. If the odds are one in 15 million as in Doland's example, we wouldn't be surprised when someone wins if 15 million drawings are done. Now if someone should win with one million drawings, we would likely be pretty unbelieving. But if only 15 drawings were made and someone wins, we would be very unreasonable if we thought it wasn't rigged. Doland's point is that the universe is like a lottery in which someone has to win. Sure, it has to end up one way or another. Why are we astonished that it ended up this way? If it ended up as a cold, dead expanse of diffuse gas, as it easily could have done had it expanded too quickly, wouldn't that particular state have been just as extremely improbable as the state we find ourselves in now?

At least this is what I understand Doland to be saying. If I'm wrong and Doland does not care how many draws are made or if he admits that it is not likely or "necessary that someone wins," then he is wrong. His statement that "the low probability of the lottery numbers being 1, 10, 11, 26, 30, and 49 bears no relevance as to whether those numbers could have been picked or not" would be completely false. If, say, only one person has one chance to guess the above sequence of numbers, then this has all the relevance in the world as to whether those numbers will be guessed. This would be like saying that there is one chance in a million that there would be a universe as opposed to no universe. On the other hand, if we have someone drawing numbers for each of the million draws and someone has to win, then we would have the universe turn out to be one way or another. [Last two sentences added 21Nv14.]

So then, let's give Doland the best reading and accept that he is assuming that "someone has to win the lottery," as it were. Several years ago I created a little dialogue in my book, *The Endless Call* (Savage Mn: Lighthouse eBooks, 2006, 51-54, OOP), to answer the same claim Doland makes above. In fact, I think I can make Doland's argument a little stronger, or at least clearer, by elaboration through the words of one of my characters:

"All right then," the gray man said, "let's take a look at your imagined retreat of atheism. You said that the only reasonable conclusion for the cosmic coincidences or the fine-tuning argument is an intelligent designer. You made two errors here.

"First, you assume that a universe with conscious intelligent life is somehow different and unique from all other possible states. Obviously, a universe with intelligent biological life is different from all other possible universes lacking it. But so what? Any other variation makes it different as well. Two, you don't seem to realize that we have to end up with some state or other; someone has to win (as it were).

"Let me illustrate: Suppose we had an annual lottery that covers every adult on earth. Suppose the chance of winning is one in a few billion. The winner of the first lottery is Joe Schmoe of Hoboken, New Jersey. We ask Joe how it feels to win the World Lottery; say it's a hundred million dollars. With a tear in his eye, Joe says, 'Now I know there has to be a God. How else can you explain the fact that of all the people in the world, I won the lottery? This just couldn't have happened by chance.'

"The second year the new lottery winner is Sister Egara Louise of Turin, Italy. We ask her how it feels to win and she says the same thing. 'God has done this just to give me assurance that he really is there,' she says. 'Isn't this absolute proof for God's existence? Of all the people in the world, what is the chance that I would have won had God not done this?'

“Do you see how absurd your argument sounds?” Arthur sneered. “Should we be any less astonished at the cosmic coincidence had the universe disintegrated into a flash of light in the first second of its existence? Yet that is exactly what would have happened had one of the constants been only very slightly different from what it actually turned out to be. The cosmic lottery could have ended with that state just as it could have ended with any one of untold millions of other possible states. What is so special about ending with a universe that allows for intelligent chemical life? Our universe had to end up one of these ways.”

“Let’s carry your illustration a little further,” Jonathan answered. “Suppose we find out something no one else in the world knows except the winner and the director of the lottery program. We find out that the winner is the illegitimate son of the director. The mother has died and never disclosed who the father is. The son is in dire financial straits and would do anything to get the money he needs. The director loves his son and sincerely wishes his son could have the money he needs. The director doesn’t want to give his son money lest some connection between the two be discovered. Also the director doesn’t have enough to meet the son’s needs. The director has access to the mechanism of the lottery program and has the power to determine who will win each lottery without being found out.

“Now under these circumstances, shouldn’t we conclude that it is much more likely that the director rigged the drawing so that his son would win rather than that the son would happen to win by chance? Under these circumstances, the chance hypothesis fails.

“By the same token, shouldn’t we conclude that it is more likely that there is an intelligent designer who arranged the universe to be the way it is such that intelligent chemical life could occur rather than that the universe should just happen to be this way by chance? Intelligent life is something we should expect from an intelligent designer—or at least an intelligent designer who desires relationship with his/her/its creation.

“Because it is very probable that such an intelligent designer would create a universe like this if there is such a being and because it is very unlikely that a universe like this would occur by chance, the more likely explanation is that there is an intelligent designer who brought this world into being.

“Or think of the story of the ingenious merchant. ‘Mok Cho had been seen to keep his thumb over a small hole in a robe of embroidered silk.’ [In *Universes* (Routledge, 1989), 6; John Leslie repeats this illustration by Earnest Bramah.] A merchant’s thumb has to be somewhere, doesn’t it? Should we think it unusual that it happens to be placed over a hole in a garment he is attempting to sell? Or shouldn’t we think that the better explanation is that the thumb is placed over the hole intentionally? Just as the latter is obviously the better explanation, so intentional design is a better explanation than chance for a universe that must be highly fine tuned to account for chemical life.”

So Doland’s attempt to dismiss the probability argument fails. The above discussion also answers Doland’s continued exposition regarding probability. The reader might profit by reading Doland’s full argument and then reading the above. But at the risk of belaboring the obvious, let me comment on one or two of his statements to clarify or further substantiate my claim:

Doland6: There simply is no way to calculate the odds of the universe coming out the way it is naturalistically.

Jensen7: Yes there is. We can make some calculations that indicate probability for certain features of a life supporting universe. That’s enough to show that it is very improbable that such a universe could come to be by chance. Were the strong nuclear force 2% weaker or 0.3% stronger, protons and neutrons would never stick together or they would never stay alone (respectively) (Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos* [Colorado

Springs, Co: NavPres, 2001], 146-7). If the coupling constant for electromagnetism were 4% larger or smaller or the coupling constant for the strong force were 0.5% more or less, likewise, any possible form of life would be impossible (*Creator*, 148). These are just a couple of examples of numerous constants and quantities which together decrease the final probabilities to extremely small numbers. I believe that I've also mentioned the space-energy density term or dark energy, which cannot vary in its value by one part in 10^{120} .

Doland6: Let us suppose you could calculate the probability of “life, universe, and everything” existing naturalistically was 1 in a billion while the probability of everything existing via supernatural means was 1 in a million. If you could do that, well, then you'd have something. You could say the supernatural is 1000 times more likely than the natural.

But obviously you can't. You can't calculate either. But, I can concede that . . . there are at least some methods to calculate at least some elements of the naturalistic universe. So, you wind up with a seemingly impossible probability of the world exiting naturally, and conclude “therefore God.” But that is akin to my analogy of concluding that the lottery must have been 1, 10, 11, 26, 30, and 49 because the odds of it being 1, 10, 11, 26, 30, and 48 are 1 in 15 million.

. . . While there are some methods to calculate the odds of some portion of the natural universe, there is no way to calculate any odds at all on supernatural alternatives. None at all.

Jensen7: Notice that when Doland says “you can't calculate either” he follows it with “there are at least some methods to calculate at least some elements of the naturalistic universe.” So his “you can't calculate either” becomes a red herring. All that we are concerned about are those elements

of a naturalistic universe that show its improbability, not every element and feature of the universe.

On the theistic side, we do not come up with a probability like Doland's hypothetical one in a million for supernatural creation. We simply note that a universe with conscious chemical life as we find it here is something we would expect from a creator who seeks relationship with such conscious, free, intelligent creations. And an absolutely good God would seek that more conscious creations would find the highest good, the greatest joy, of knowing that relationship with God. A deistic God, say one who creates and doesn't even care enough to stick around to see what happens to its creation, would admittedly be less likely than the theistic God described. Both have the ability to create, as chance under the naturalistic hypothesis does not. The deistic hypothesis might be more likely than the chance hypothesis since it has at least a mechanism for creation; however, it does not provide a motivation for doing so. Of course we can always find some motivation. Maybe the deistic God was just bored. Or maybe it was just curious as to how it would all turn out if such a universe were created. But notice that as we seek to find some motivation for a deistic creation, it becomes a little more feasible. Our original deistic God doesn't really care to know what happens to the creation. Maybe it does not allow for freedom or any other form of contingency and already knows how it will all turn out. For such an uncaring (should we say, autistic?) deistic God, we just cannot ascribe any probability that it will create. The theistic God, the God who loves the creation because the value God has is given it, has a perfect motivation for creating. If such a God exists, it is very likely such a God would create conscious beings; much more likely than any of the deistic Gods we have considered.

But Doland is saying that we don't know how probable it might be that there is any uncaused first being called God. He might also say that we do not know how probable such a being exists as opposed to an uncaused material universe, whatever its eternally varying past forms might have

been. Here we are dealing with the question of intrinsic probability and here our conclusions will always be more intuitive.

In response, shouldn't we first see that, *prima facie*, the existence of an uncaused material universe is at least no more likely than the existence of an eternally existing God from whom could come a material universe?

If that is all we start with, then the probability considerations we have been discussing with the fine-tuning argument would make a theism or deism more likely than naturalism so long as the creator has a motivation or reason to create. But a *good* theistic God who cares about us would be more likely than an indifferent deistic God. We are more likely to get a theistic God to create than a deistic God.

That said, the issue of simplicity will be our next important consideration. Apologists for atheism often claim that a complex universe is more intrinsically probable because it is simpler than a God whose mind at least contains the entirety of the knowledge of every particle of that complex universe. I have argued earlier that God as a simple, timeless being did not have that diverse and complex knowledge but came to possess it as God chose to know and cause it to come into being. So with this, God would be the simpler explanation.

So a simple theistic God who cares about the creation is a better explanation for the universe than the self-existence of the universe itself. It can explain what naturalism cannot. Remember that that is often all that we need for many scientific claims. Why is the claimed existence of dark matter so widely accepted? Because its existence would explain galactic and galaxy cluster gravitational structures and patterns better than other explanations. We are beginning to get more direct verification of the existence of dark matter, but that has not always been so. String theory is another example. We have no verifiable empirical evidence for it but it explains so much so well that it has a dominant place in theoretical cosmology.

Finally, we should see that it is more intrinsically probable that God would be good and thus would have a motivation to create intelligent, conscious beings. It is not merely that we should accept this explanation as being more likely because this possibility can explain what naturalism cannot. My reason for this claim is as follows:

The primordial source of all that is created is the source of all that has value. If this being is aware of all that is, this God would know that all that has value should be valued. As God knows that he possesses worth and must value that worth, so God knows he must value all that he has created that has worth. If God should fail to value that which has the worth he has given it, God contradicts his own value. To be or to do good is to value that which has worth as it deserves.

All of the accusations atheists make concerning the problem of evil amount to a claim that God has not appropriately valued creatures who have worth. They do not deserve this evil. The answer in the book of Job rather says that God has not failed to value us as we deserve by allowing us to endure evil but rather will, after our time of testing is over, show that he has valued us as we deserve. For now we endure what we do not deserve to endure but after the purpose of this suffering has been fulfilled we will be given as we do deserve. Undeserved suffering is only for now and soon will be no more. If undeserved suffering were never to end and never to be compensated, then God would fail to value the worth God has given us.

Before ending our response, we should look at Doland's last paragraph for this argument:

Doland6: Lottery day comes along and the computer picks out some sequence. Whatever sequence it picks, the odds of that specific sequence would be 1 in 1,000,000,000,000 raised to the 1,000,000,000,000. That's a

probability so small as to make the numbers that Creationists pull out look like sure things. Did that mean it was an act of God to come up with that sequence? No. It doesn't matter how small of a probability you calculate, it doesn't lend even the tiniest of evidence towards a supernatural explanation. . . .

Jensen7: Here it is not at all clear what Doland is saying. Is he saying that by the computer picking a number which is one out of a trillion a trillion times we have something theists would think in itself requires a divine act? That is what it sounds like he is saying. If so, he is very confused and it is little wonder that he thinks the probability argument does not work. Theists rather say that if these sequences are selected by the computer, and, say, one person selects that particular number sequence from an urn that has all the possible sequences of numbers that could be generated given the above mathematical constraints (it's a very large urn, indeed), and if a computer reads and confirms that the same number sequence is truly selected, then this would be an enormously unlikely event. With that, they would say that it would be much more probable that intelligent intervention was involved to select this number sequence (which corresponds to the number sequence picked by the computer) than that this happened by chance. In this case, the issue of divine intervention would not be involved at all. But they would also say that this probability scenario could be compared to the probability of a life supporting universe coming to be by chance as opposed to coming to be by intelligent intervention. Intelligent intervention would be the more likely and reasonable explanation of such a universe. And since this intelligence would have to be extremely great and have enormously great power, it would fit some of the most rudimentary characteristics that define a God.

Probability of abiogenesis, again

Doland2: After a few pages of argument by one person (credentialed or not), it is simply disingenuous to lead the reader to believe that he now knows everything that he needs to know about abiogenesis.

Jensen3: Typically, as one comes to better understand life's highly specified complexity, the more overwhelming the difficulties appear. But the central points are not that difficult to convey and I think one can thereby appreciate something of the enormity of the problem. So I think that a few pages are enough to get a good enough grasp of the problem to know at least enough of what one needs to know about abiogenesis. Certainly the reader who wants to be intellectually honest needs to look at more than just one side of the argument. If Bradley has given his argument well he should seek to answer opposing claims and arguments as well. But whether he has done so or not, one can never be sure without looking at the arguments given by proponents of the opposing views and by looking at the further responses. One should ask if such opposing responses adequately meet Bradley's arguments, and if they do appear to do so, inquire for Bradley's further response. One should reach the point at which one has a good grasp of the best arguments of both sides of the issue.

Doland2: If the study of abiogenesis is as bankrupt as Bradley would have us believe, wouldn't scientists have given up on it?

Jensen3: No, a scientist, whether a theist a non-theist, would (or should) continue to investigate just in case it does have a natural cause as theistic and naturalistic evolutionists believe. This is not something one assumes one way or the other but one continues to investigate even when one view is very strongly established. Those theists who feel sure life was directly produced by God by fiat should not cease to investigate either, for only thus could they discover as much as they can of the natural processes involved

and the causal factors that have led up to the origin of life; they should do so until they can search no further and they should be open to discovering that they could be wrong. And of course, many non-theistic scientists continue to seek a naturalistic answer because they assume that there is no other possible answer. No matter how strong the evidence is against their assumptions, they quite irrationally refuse to consider an alternate explanation. Sadly, many are closed to theistic explanations because of bad or inadequately examined reasons.

Inconsistent answers in creationism

Doland2: I find intelligent design creationism unconvincing for one simple reason: it doesn't provide consistent, compelling answers to the questions it seeks to answer. . . .

Jensen3: There are evolutionists who have many different opinions about various issues in their study. For example, there are gradualists and there are others who accept punctuated equilibrium. They disagree with each other and we have no problem listening to their arguments for their respective views. These disagreements give us no reason to reject evolution, we simply evaluate which, if either, view is better. We have no right to reject a position simply because its differing advocates do not "provide consistent" answers with each other.

Here Doland notes the difference between two schools of Christian thought, one claiming the universe was created six to ten thousand years ago in six 24 hour days, young earth creationism (YEC); the other accepting the standard scientific view that the universe originated about fourteen billion years ago, old earth creationism (OEC).

Doland4: True, there are disputes about details. There is no serious dispute about the basic fact of evolution however. But young-earth [YEC]

vs. old earth creationism [OEC] aren't in the same ballpark. Regardless of whether gradualism or punctuated equilibrium is correct, the majority of what the other side believes isn't falsified. On the other hand, a great deal of what a young-earther believes is falsified by old-earth creationism, and vice-versa.

Jensen5: No, both YEC and OEC hold to the same biblical account. There is no serious dispute about the basic fact of creation. God has still created one way or the other. Just the details are in dispute as to how God created. Sure, some things YEC believes are contradicted by OEC and vice versa. But some things gradualists believe are contradicted by punctuated equilibrium advocates and vice versa. If you've ever heard these two schools of evolution fight, you would get the distinct impression that they certainly were major issues. If difference of opinion among creationists is reason for distrusting either view (it isn't), the same should be said of evolution.

But even if Doland is right about the YEC and OEC differences being majors and the evolutionary schools' differences being minors, his complaint still has no force. He says that because of the differences they "provide [no] consistent, compelling answers. . . ." A compelling answer should have nothing to do with what another view claims. Judge the arguments by their own merit. A consistent answer shouldn't depend on someone else's view either. Show that the OEC view is unbiblical or that the YEC view is refuted by scientific evidence but don't pretend that they are both refuted just because one disagrees with the other. What kind of logic is that?

Young vs old earth creationism

Doland2: The OEC adherents' arguments for rejecting YEC are generally sound. The scientific evidence for an ancient universe is very compelling,

and OEC adherents have good science behind them on this issue. On the other hand, YEC arguments do, in my view, make a good case that the Bible teaches that the earth is young.

Jensen3: Here I wouldn't be able to adequately respond without hearing Doland's argument that YEC presents a better case that the Bible teaches their view. I think the evidence is far stronger that the Bible teaches that the creation days of Genesis are definitely not 12 or 24 hours. If this is so, Scripture thus leaves it open to later scientific investigation to determine exactly how long they were. I might mention some of the reasons I think OEC the more likely biblical view:

Notice first of all that the word for "day" in the Hebrew Scripture is often used for more than 24 hours. There is simply no grounds to claim, *prima facie*, that Genesis 1 used it in one way rather than the other. Secondly, if Moses wrote both Genesis and Psalm 90 as Jewish tradition claims, he said that the creation days were of an indeterminate length. Psalm 90 says a day to God (let's call them "God's days") is like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day. Since no humans were even around until the sixth day, shouldn't they be thought to be "God's days." Thirdly, consider the fact that during the sixth creation day or shortly after, Adam was told that on the day he eats the forbidden fruit he would surely die, and yet he lived 930 years. Fourthly, notice that Genesis 2:4 calls the full week of creation "the day" in which God created. Yet this is the same word for day that was used in Genesis 1 for each creation day that made up that week and which YEC advocates insist must mean 12 or 24 hour days. These are just very brief summaries of the arguments I find most convincing and there are many others. Hugh Ross goes into some of these in greater detail in *A Matter of Days* (Navpress, 2004).

Doland2: Moreover, as YEC adherents point out, a universe that is billions of years old makes little sense if God's primary plan was to create a home for man.

Jensen3: A home for humanity but not only that: It had to be a place in which one could find good evidence for God's existence or one could feel assured that there is no God if one did not want to believe. I wonder if it would be possible to create everything up to humanity in 144 hours without it being obvious that God did it all. Sure, God could create everything so it would appear old, but doesn't that sound more like deception? The God of the Bible does not deceive us through nature. And this kind of deception would be on an enormous scale. As we saw earlier, the Scripture does pretty clearly claim that our scientific investigation of nature gives us accurate information. The biblical God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19).

But there is an even more conclusive answer to Doland's claim: time for God isn't like time for us. As was mentioned when we considered Psalm 90, a billion years or a nanosecond make no difference to God. We might wonder why it should take so long to create but that's only because time bothers us; we notice if something seems to take too long just as we might feel equally annoyed if something enjoyable seems to pass too quickly. A trillion years, like a trillion light years, just doesn't mean anything to God in that regard.

Young earth creationist critique of old earth creationism

Responding to my claim that I would not be able to respond to Doland's claim that "YEC presents a better case that the Bible teaches their view" [first underlined sentence in first Jensen3 under "Young vs Old Earth Creationism" above], Doland cites a YEC web page from an organization called *Answers in Genesis*. He quotes from an article by Don Batten

claiming that the OEC view is unbiblical (note: **the original link** Dolan provided no longer connects to Batten's article, 23Fb15):

Batten4: According to the evolutionist's (and progressive creationist's) understanding, fossils (which show death, disease and bloodshed) were formed before people appeared on earth. Doesn't that mean that you can't believe the Bible when it says that everything is in "bondage to decay" because of Adam's sin (Romans 8)?

Jensen5: Romans 8 (19-22) does not say the earth's bondage to decay occurred because of Adam's sin. It's just not there.

Batten4: And if death and suffering did not arise with Adam's sin and the resulting curse, how can Jesus' suffering and physical death pay the penalty for sin and give us eternal life, as the Bible clearly says (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive")?

Jensen5: Human death and the dominant suffering we face did arise with Adam's sin and this is what Jesus' death and suffering paid for (add Genesis 2:17 and 3:16-19 to Batten's Scripture quotation). (I have also argued that there would still be suffering in the world without the Fall.) Animal death and the earth's bondage to decay is hardly the same as the curse of human death.

Batten4: How do you understand the goodness of God if He used evolution, "nature red in tooth and claw," to "create" everything?

Jensen5: How do you understand Psalm 104 which depicts "nature, red in tooth and claw" as part of God's beautiful creation? It can even be

extended to speak of the prehistoric mass extinctions and mass recreations as portraying God's wisdom and glory.

24 How many are your works, Lord!

In wisdom you made them all; . . .

27 All creatures look to you

to give them their food at the proper time.

28 When you give it to them,

they gather it up;

when you open your hand,

they are satisfied with good things.

29 When you hide your face,

they are terrified;

when you take away their breath,

they die and return to the dust.

30 When you send your Spirit,

they are created,

and you renew the face of the ground.

31 May the glory of the Lord endure forever;

may the Lord rejoice in his works—

TNIV

The horror of animal death some atheists finds so appalling is an illusion in the biblical view. Pain for animals is not like pain for us. We do not know how much they feel, but it is not enough to compare to human pain or to consider evil. Doland will curse me and scream his obscenities but he will not be able to demonstrate that I am wrong. But Batten who claims to be a Christian will be hit a bit harder I would think. He knows this is God's word I'm quoting and he knows this is the biblical view of animal pain and death.

Batten4: Concept violated: the straightforward understanding of the Word of God. If the Genesis account does not mean what it plainly says, but must

be “interpreted” to fit an evolutionary world, how are we to understand the rest of the Bible? How are we to know that the historical accounts of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection should not also be “reinterpreted”? Indeed, can we know anything for sure if the Bible can be so flexible?

Jensen5: All Scripture (and any other writing) must be interpreted. To interpret something means to understand what it most clearly means. But some texts are not obvious as to their meaning. Do the YEC’s not “interpret” the Scripture when they say, “Oh, when Adam was told he would die on the day he ate the fruit, that means he died spiritually. It doesn’t mean what it most obviously means: physically.” If physical death is the normal meaning of the term throughout these chapters in Genesis, how are they taking the text “to mean what it plainly says”? Some will say Adam started to die physically on the day he ate the fruit but death finally took hold over 900 years later. But that is certainly not what the text says.

Do you want me to go on? Do you want to tell me why you don’t take the word “day” in Genesis 2:4 to mean “what it plainly says”? If you do take it for “what it plainly says,” then all six creation days took place in *a total of 24* hours. If that is so, then how could each creation day take 24 hours? So the YEC’s interpret Scripture just like everyone else does. The question is which is the better interpretation. The OEC interpretation says that because “day” can mean a long period of time elsewhere in Scripture as its literal meaning, it could mean the same here. *Prima Facie*, and looking at the Scripture alone, the YEC and OEC views are not one more likely than the other until you have to deal with some of the problems with the YEC view I’ve brought up here and in my last response. These make the OEC position the better interpretation.

If for the sake of the argument we concede that the literal meaning of the term “day” cannot be “a long period of time,” then a good case can be made for the first chapters to be taken as other than literally. The symmetry and order of the first chapter makes this a genre of literature unique in the Bible called prose-poetry. This suggests that the days not be taken as time

periods at all. More likely the objects created form categories of existence rather than an actual chronological sequence.

Batten4: Concept violated: the creation is supposed to show the hand of God clearly. Dr. Niles Eldredge, well-known evolutionist, said: “Darwin . . . taught us that we can understand life’s history in purely naturalistic terms, without recourse to the supernatural or divine.” (*Time Frames—The Rethinking of Darwinian Evolution and the Theory of Punctuated Equilibria* [London: Heinemann, 1986], 13.) Is it not philosophically inconsistent to marry God (theism) with evolution (naturalism)? If God “created” using evolution which makes Him unnecessary, how can God’s “eternal power and divine nature” be “clearly seen” in creation, as Romans 1:20 says? Evolution has no purpose, no direction, no goal. The God of the Bible is all about purpose. How do you reconcile the purposelessness of evolution with the purposes of God? What does God have to do in an evolutionary world? Is not God an “unnecessary hypothesis”?

Jensen5: We should first recognize that a great deal of scholarship indicates that though evolution is true, it does still need intelligent intervention to work. I’ve mentioned Michael Behe’s work. Michael Denton had covered other areas in addition to microbiology in his *Evolution, A Theory in Crisis*.

But secondly, if evolution is able to adequately answer these objections and Eldredge is right, then we simply see that here God has chosen not to reveal his nature and power in the way Batten assumes God must do. Indeed, the case might equally be made that God’s power is better displayed by not interfering in nature. Does God not display a much greater power and intelligence by creating a universe that is so precise and well formed that no intervention is needed to reach its final goal? The secular view of evolution is that it has no purpose or goal. But this is merely reading into their experience of nature what they think it must be. Since evolution

has resulted in intelligent conscious beings, would it not have been more likely directed to this end? This is very likely the case given the extreme fine-tuning of the universe. The universe could not just happen by chance to be the way it is now such that chemical life is possible. The improbability is astronomically great. And as Hume said (and as Scripture has always affirmed, e.g., 1 Thessalonians 5:21), we should apportion our belief according to the evidence. Evolution is not purposeless, it is God's tool for creation. The fine tuning as well as other evidence like that of the absolute beginning of the universe might be the only kind of evidence God wants us to be aware of from nature. The hand of God can hardly be clearer. God's existence as creator could also be clear if there were some evidence that the universe were 6000 years old. But since there is none, God's existence is evident but not as evident in cosmology as it would be given YEC assumptions. [Last four sentences added for clarity 19Oc08 and paragraph revised 19Ap10.]

Batten4: Concept violated: the need of restoration for the creation. If God created over millions of years involving death, the existing earth is not ruined by sin, but is as it always has been—as God supposedly intended it to be. So why then should He want to destroy it and create a new heavens and earth (2 Peter 3 and other places)?

Jensen5: Romans 8 portrays something more of a resurrected creation than a new creation after the old is destroyed. Also 2 Peter 3:12-13 is not incompatible with this idea, so a resurrected creation is probably the better understanding. Creation is indeed groaning to be free from its bondage to corruption, but that too is part of the original good creation. And God also originally created animal death (not human death) as part of the good creation. God did desire for sin not to occur (this was God's lesser intention) which brought human death and ruined humanity as it did. (God's greater intention was that we have the freedom to frustrate his desire that we not sin.) The earth is cursed in that with the Fall it will not yield for

humanity its full bounty and we must endure special hardship and suffering but it is not cursed in its tendency toward corruption and heat death.

The original good creation that was in bondage to corruption was not God's final goal, however. Nature was made to be this way until humanity could be tested, as occurs with each generation. I do not know exactly what would have happened had Adam and Eve not fallen to temptation. I think humanity would still have had to face the temptation to sin. Job tells us that even the innocent must be tested with suffering. So had the first couple not fallen to sin, I think they would then have been only the first to be tempted with suffering. After the testing is done and God calls out a people who have passed the test and chosen to follow God and God's way (by either falling and accepting redemption or by not falling at all), then there will be no longer a need for a corrupted nature. As we will be given new incorruptible bodies, so nature will be given a new incorruptible body.

OBJECTION 5: IT'S OFFENSIVE TO CLAIM JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY TO GOD

Doland2: Is it unfair for Christians to claim exclusive knowledge of religious truth? According to Ravi Zacharias, since most religions claim such exclusivity, to single out Christianity and fault it for this is unfair (149).

Jensen3: But also we should note that atheism also claims exclusivity. It claims there is no God when many other religions disagree. So it seems enormously hypocritical when atheists bring this up as an objection to Christianity.

Doland2: When asked specifically if Gandhi was “redeemed,” Zacharias responds that Gandhi’s fate would be up to God. Naturally, he has to give deference to God to be the judge. But his response conveniently avoids answering the question, and his reluctance to “speculate” forces one to wonder if what Zacharias thinks that God did in Gandhi’s case was truly right.

Jensen3: I find it completely gratuitous to “wonder” whether Zacharias thinks God might not be just. He had just claimed pretty emphatically that this is one of the most important teachings of Scripture. And wouldn’t it be very foolish to speculate about someone’s fate when we have so little information about the person’s mental and spiritual life and God’s means of judgment in such circumstances?

Doland2: Zacharias says: “God . . . puts us in a position where we might seek him. We are clearly told that wherever we live in whatever culture, in whatever nation—he is within reach of every one of us” (161). But if God is within everyone’s reach regardless of culture, then what was the purpose of

Jesus' death and resurrection, the biblical account of which evidently is not available to everyone who ever has or shall live?

Jensen3: The New Testament account tells us that the purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection is that we might be brought back to God. This does not mean that everyone must hear of this event but that this event must occur; it provides the metaphysical means by which one can be "saved," as it were. As I said earlier (Objection 2, reason 5), one is condemned who knows Christianity is true and rejects it or who knows the Christian teaching, rejects Jesus and is unwilling to even seek the truth from God. We do not know if Gandhi was in either of these categories. If it is claimed that one cannot be accepted by God without having heard of Jesus, then it seems necessary to believe that all those Old Testament heroes the Bible usually presents as righteous and accepted by God—people like Abraham, Job, Enoch, Daniel—are condemned.

Almost without exception, God does desire that all people hear of Jesus and what he has done. He desires that they hear and come to be accepted by God through believing in Jesus in this life. But God will not force us to make sure everyone hears of Jesus. God desires that we desire what God desires and seek to make this desire a reality. By our choice we can take this good news to all people and by their choice they can accept it. Though some may be saved without having heard of Jesus in this life, still God desires that all hear and know the means by which they are saved and in gratefulness and adoration (and before death) bow to the one who has sacrificed himself to redeem them. It is not *necessary* that they do this before death because those who seek God and seek God's will shall certainly and willingly so bow after death. God desires that all people worship God in spirit and truth. [Minor revision 17Fb15.]

God's Spirit draws all people to seek God. Those who do not seek God who never hear of Jesus and what he has done will be lost just like those who do hear, do not seek God and do not believe. What of those who do not seek God who hear the Christian message and believe. Should they be

saved who have not sought God while others who have not sought God are lost? But recall that it is God's Spirit who draws people to seek God and to believe what they have heard of the gospel. It is resistance to God's Spirit that condemns because ultimately we know we are resisting something we are obligated to do: to seek God or to believe something we believe we are justified in believing. As for those who cannot feel they are justified in believing, they can at least recognize that they are justified and indeed obligated to seek.

Missionary Don Richardson (in *Eternity in Their Hearts*) told the story of a tribe of people who believed that once in their history they knew the true God. But as a nation they committed a sin that bound them to spirits of the land and they were separated from God. Throughout their history they longed to find God again. Prophets from their own people came and told of white strangers who someday would come with a book that would tell them how they would be brought back to God again. When Buddhism spread throughout Southeast Asia it spread rapidly among neighboring peoples, but it hardly touched this nation. They knew what they were waiting for and this was not it. Eventually the Christian missionaries did come and now this people group is predominantly Christian.

I bring up this example because this people group did not hear of Jesus until almost nineteen centuries after the time of Jesus and because they were clearly seekers of God and accepted by God (at least for a major portion of the society). This seems very clear in the accounts they gave of their longing for reunion with God and the stories of how God had promised to return to them. God usually would send the good news much sooner to those who would seek God. But for this people, God had reason for delaying. It is not always necessary to have heard of Jesus to be accepted by God, but for those who do seek to know God, it is such a wonderful gift once that knowledge is given.

Cat Stevens' religious experience

Doland2: Zacharias recounts the story of a Muslim woman who, without understanding why, called out to Jesus, then later converted to Christianity (161). I take it that Zacharias counts this rather atypical occurrence as evidence that God transcends religious and cultural barriers. Of course, one can find similar examples preceding conversions to other religions: Cat Stevens, for instance, claims to have heard Allah before converting to Islam. Such anecdotes hardly constitute evidence of divine action, however; people convert from one religion to another (or to or from atheism) all of the time.

Jensen3: Why shouldn't the story of the Muslim woman count as evidence? Stevens' experience might count as evidence as well, so we should examine it to see if it does. There are important factors we need to consider when we make such an evaluation. What exactly did the voice say to him? Did he have any predisposition to believe in Islam or was he neutral or opposed? Did he call upon God, a God who deserves to be sought after, for the truth? Now none of these factors determine an experience to be veridical or nonveridical but they are important to consider.

After I wrote the above paragraph I took some time to see if I could find Steven's (now Yusuf or Yosof Islam's) account of the experience. I found that he became a Muslim after reading the Qur'an and coming to believe that it made sense and did not fit the prejudices he grew up believing about it. He did mention an incident before his conversion in which he was swimming in the ocean and found himself being swept out to sea by the current. He cried out to God saying he would work for God if God would save him. Just then a wave caught him and pushed him back enough for him to swim back to shore. If Stevens had heard a voice, he didn't recount it in the particular autobiographical sketches I have found. Because he included enough detail in this account to cover the most important aspects of his experiences, I tend to think that he never did claim to hear God

Speak to him. Of course it is possible that I did not dig deeply enough and Doland or one of our readers may be able to direct me to this story. But for the moment I think this is likely just another rumor that has circulated enough to become accepted.

Merely because people convert to different religions or atheism is certainly no evidence for those beliefs, but if they had experienced something that had caused this conversion, that might constitute evidence.

Doland4: This was the incident I had heard about and was referring to. I may have misspoke when I said that Cat Stephens claims to have heard Allah. But I think we are splitting hairs here. He clearly recounts this story as part of his reasoning to accept Islam, whether he claims to have heard a voice or merely got a small miracle of a wave pushing him back to shore.

Jensen5: This is hardly hair-splitting. I find that atheistic argumentation very often must rest upon such ambiguity to come up with its conclusions. Like Doland's argument against free will, with a little clear thinking and closer analysis, their arguments turn to mist. Notice that a voice could have directed Stevens to Islam, Judaism, Christianity, or any of a number of different theistic views. Recall Doland's original statement: "Cat Stevens, for instance, claims to have heard Allah before converting to Islam." When it is claimed that someone hears Allah's voice before converting to Islam, one will assume that some kind of direction toward Islam is given by this experience. In fact, merely being saved from drowning in the context given will provide one reason to believe God has answered one's prayer, but it does not give one reason to accept one theistic belief over another. If there is any reason for believing in Islam, the only reason Yusuf gives is his reading of the Qu'ran and realizing that it did not fit his past misconceptions of it. The near drowning experience may have motivated him to seek spiritual truth more seriously, but it did not, as given, provide him evidence for Islam over any other theistic beliefs. Yet Doland originally claimed that Steven's experience pointed him to Islam over any other religion. Doland did also claim that hearing God speak does not constitute evidence for

divine action. He did not show how this does not constitute evidence for divine action, for it very obviously does.

Doland2: Zacharias appears forced to assert ultimately contradictory ideas: on the one hand, that Christianity is the only real truth, and that no other religion even comes close to being the real truth; and, on the other hand, that those raised in non-Christian cultures nevertheless have access to “the truth.” I do not see how these ideas can be reconciled.

Jensen3: Zacharias does not say that “Christianity is the only real truth,” if by that one means that all other religions have absolutely no truth content. His claim that Christianity has ultimate truth and that other religions and ideologies, or at least the adherents of those beliefs, have access to sufficient truth are hardly contradictory. As Zacharias says, “Every human being will know enough truth so that if they respond to that known truth, God will reveal more to them. Does that mean they have to have as much of a volume of truth as someone in another setting does? I don’t believe so.” (227, 2000 edition, likely between 160 and 165 in Doland’s copy.) If I grow up and live my life believing false ideas, could God not give me enough knowledge upon which I could make an eternal decision? As I make the right decisions, God may give me more knowledge. I might even leave the false beliefs entirely. But then again there is no reason to assume that I necessarily will. And it is not even necessary that God give me any knowledge. God need only whisper in my ear, “What if I really am here? Would you believe in Me? Would you seek Me?” How I respond to this determines my relationship with God and thus my salvation.

As I’ve pointed out already, God does desire that all people come to know the truth of how God acted in the world through Jesus. But there are reasons this message does not reach everyone. One major reason we

have already considered is the failure of Christians to obey, their failure to do God's will.

Doland2: This lack of consensus among Christians is particularly damaging to the Christian case. For it implies that God cannot effectively communicate the most important thing that a person needs to know—how to avoid Hell—to even His own followers.

Jensen3: This is simply not true. The Christian message has always been very simple and straightforward: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,” Paul said to his jailer in Philippi. Now this does assume some things that might be overlooked. One believes in Jesus (trusts in him) to be accepted by God. To be accepted by God is salvation. Furthermore, though one can never live completely without sin in this life, one cannot live in open and continual unrepentant sin. Those who believe in Jesus cannot live any way they might want to.

Though the one who believes in Jesus will be saved, some details, implications, and modifications are presupposed or added on. One important point that we have discussed already is this: Just because one will be saved who believes in Jesus does not necessarily mean that all who disbelieve in him in this life will not. It is not entirely impossible that there are some who will earnestly seek God and seek the truth from God but who will never in this life come to believe in Jesus. Now it may be that there is no one who will not find Christianity to be true in this life who seeks God, but this we cannot know for certain. The key seems to be this notion of seeking that finds such predominance in the Bible. “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved,” Paul says quoting one of the Hebrew prophets. (Romans 10:13, Joel 2:32). Zacharias quoted Paul when he spoke to the Athenians. It seems quite appropriate that when speaking at the greatest center of learning in the ancient world, Paul would address the most universal issue, the question of what people in all ages would need to

do to be accepted by God. Speaking of God's dealings with the nations, Paul said, "God did this so that people would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him." (Acts 17: 27).

I've said that it is the same Holy Spirit who calls people to seek God who also calls people to trust in Jesus for salvation. Is it possible that God would call people to believe in Jesus without drawing them to seek God? No, for the desire for God must be present for one to want to believe in Jesus to find God.

Doland2: But what does Zacharias think is required in order to be saved? All that he says which is even remotely relevant to an answer is: "The worst thing to do is to say to God that you don't need him. . . . So the question is, [. . .] 'Have I come to the realization that I've fallen short of God's perfect standard and, therefore, apart from the grace of God, I have no possibility of being with him in heaven?' " (159). As poetic and comforting as that may sound, what does it really mean? I honestly do not know. For one, if the main criterion for attaining salvation is recognizing that one falls short of the perfection of God, what is the purpose of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, which the Methodist, Lutheran, and Catholic services I've attended underscore?

Jensen3: Zacharias is saying that one must realize that one needs God but he isn't saying that this is what one needs to do to be saved, it's only an important precursor. For the one who has found (or God has given) good reason to believe Christianity to be true, that person needs to believe in Jesus. This includes the person who feels existentially "compelled" to believe, as some have said, or who feels merely a sense that they should believe. (The same applies to other religions as well; if someone feels they have good reason to believe it, they should. If their choice is wrong, God will show them as they continue to seek God.) That one who has good reason to believe should do so is something that was assumed throughout

the book and hardly needed repeating. If Zacharias happened to have stated as much, Strobel might have left it unstated because there was no need to include it. It is the somewhat special cases like Gandhi (who possibly did not know that Christianity was true and who may or may not have been a seeker after God) and those who have not heard of Jesus, who were under special consideration here. But the conclusion of Zacharias' statement seems equally obvious (it's something he has emphasized over and over again): if you realize that you have this need you should seek God, and if you seek you will find. And when you find, you will trust in Jesus' sacrifice. [18Fb15 last sentence added.]

Why do people follow other religions?

Doland2: Strobel's next question is why, if Christianity is true, it hasn't "triumphed" over other religions (163). Unfortunately, Zacharias' response is both arrogant and pretentious, boasting his religion's superiority over all others while essentially painting the members of other religions as cowards for failing to accept Christianity. Any follower of any other religion would likely be highly offended by Zacharias' condescending attitude.

Jensen3: Doland has neglected to mention that Zacharias also tacks on some flattering comments for some of the other religions. And his mention of geopolitical considerations for Islam is hardly offensive. I think sociopolitical considerations should be recognized as having more influence for most world religions. To become a Christian for many is to reject one's culture, ethnic group, family, sometimes even one's nation. At least that is what they think whether it is true or not. Many cultures, both religious and anti-religious, deny the individual the right to religious inquiry and evaluation entirely.

As for Zacharias's criticisms of other religions, this is hardly pretentious, condescending, or arrogant. These are simply honest criticisms. If it is

arrogant to critique a religion, then is Doland's critique of Christianity less arrogant, condescending or pretentious? If he thinks it is less, he should point out how his critique is different than Zacharias'.

Zacharias' criticism of the moral failings or deficiencies of some religions also applies to atheism. For example, it is difficult to deny that many people do not consider Christianity simply because of its moral demands. I know of some people who have stated bluntly that they had become convinced that Christianity is true but they were unwilling to accept it because of moral issues, because of relationships or attachments they are not willing to give up. With such moral constraints and the social constraints mentioned in the previous paragraph (not to mention the ultimate spiritual roadblock: bowing to God as Lord and master of our lives and dethroning ourselves) it certainly is difficult for many to be willing to embrace Christianity.

Jensen3: [First underlined sentence in Jensen3 above] I think sociopolitical considerations should be recognized as having more influence for most world religions.

Doland4: But God wants people to be Christians right? And He's omniscient and omnipotent, right? And yet He is limited by "socio-political considerations"? Hmmm...

Jensen5: But as I've said earlier, God also needs to have people choose freely without being unduly influenced toward belief. God allows people to be influenced by socio-political factors just as God allows them to be influenced by pain as an emotional (not rational) influence against belief.

Jensen3: [Second underlined sentence in Jensen3 above] As for Zacharias' criticisms of other religions, this is hardly pretentious, condescending, or arrogant. These are simply honest criticisms.

Doland4: His arrogance and pretentiousness comes from his assertion that it is just so much easier to be a follower of various other religions. THAT is —.

Jensen5: There are features of some other religions that make them in some ways more difficult than Christianity. But there are some features of Christianity that make it more difficult. I've mentioned a few. This is not arrogance. But suppose it is claimed that in all cases and under all circumstances it is easier for people to follow other religions and ideologies than to follow Jesus. If this is what Zacharias is claiming then it might just be the conclusion of an honest assessment of those religions and non-religious beliefs and how people respond to such systems. Dawkins and other fundamentalist atheists makes degrading and condescending statements about why people accept religious beliefs. Should they be considered arrogant, pretentious, and patronizing? If they have no good evidence to support their claims, they should be. Likewise Zacharias' statement should, but to a lesser degree, be considered arrogant if he cannot support his claim. But Dawkins' claims are so much more degrading that if unsupported they should be more definitely and loudly rejected and denounced for their greater arrogance.

Atheistic literature is filled with claims about how all religious people are such ignorant, irrational, gullible buffoons. If Christians are offensive for criticizing other religions, atheists must be more offensive because they criticize all those same religions plus one more, Christianity. Of course, Christianity (and other religions) criticize atheism too, so that might even it out. But my point must stand: atheism cannot claim to be less arrogant than Christianity if simply criticizing a belief or the reason people believe is taken as arrogance. [21Mr09.]

Doland2: Zacharias can't actually say that Gandhi is currently rotting in Hell (or will do so after Judgment Day). But that is a clear implication of his theology.

Jensen3: It certainly is not! He has said nothing that would require such a thing.

Doland2: [Zacharias'] implication, then, is that if Gandhi was "really" spiritual, and really could pass muster as a tough Christian, he would have converted to Christianity.

Jensen3: Oddly, Doland admits that this claim he makes is a non-sequitur, a conclusion that does not logically follow from the premises he had just mentioned. These premises were that those who seek God will find God, that Christianity is the truth, and that many people are not willing to accept what they find (in Doland's words, "how 'easy' it is, by comparison, to follow non-Christian religions"). With these premises, several possible conclusions could follow: 1) It could be that Gandhi was not willing to follow his search through to its conclusion (a form of the conclusion Doland says does not logically follow from the above premises), 2) that he never did really search for God, or 3) that he did honestly search and was willing to take whatever he found but he did not find the truth in this life but he did in the next. If Doland should protest that conclusion 3 follows theological views that Zacharias does not even mention, I would reply that this is simply a possibility that follows from his above stated premises.

Concerning possibilities 1 and 2: Doland implies that Gandhi must have had great "spirituality and strength of character." This is something we just do not know to be true. All that Doland can say is that "Zacharias gives us not reason to doubt" it. By "spirituality and strength or character" I assume we mean that Gandhi was willing to accept anything God might show him, whatever the cost. If we do not know that he was willing to do this or even

that he did earnestly search for the truth from God (a God who does deserve our highest commitment) how can we conclude, as Doland claims, that “Zacharias’ arguments must be wrong”? Perhaps someone who has studied Gandhi’s life more than I or Doland have can tell us more about his spiritual life. Possibly that would influence our arguments. We may then have to reject possibilities 1 and 2. But notice that even then, conclusion 3 would still be open to us.

(For more on the claim that **Jesus is the only way to God**, see my discussion with Muslim scholar Gary Miller.)

OBJECTION 4: GOD ISN'T WORTHY IF HE KILLS INNOCENT CHILDREN

God's cruel executions

Doland2: [Norman] Geisler responds: "The Bible doesn't have any cruel and tortuous executions that God commanded" (116). I find myself wondering if Geisler has a Bible. . . . I will cite . . . a few examples of "cruel and tortuous executions" commanded by God: . . .

Jensen3: Doland then cites Joshua 11:20 where God is said to have hardened the Canaanites hearts to war with Israel; Deuteronomy 20:14-18 where God says to completely destroy everyone and everything in certain cities but in other cities they could take women, children, livestock, and material goods as plunder; Numbers 31:14-18 where Moses commands the killing of captive women and children except for the virgin women. Yet none of this mentions any cruel or tortuous executions. A sword to the neck can be very quick and in fact almost painless. Yet amazingly, after citing these passages Doland goes on to say, "So when Geisler says that [Thomas] Paine is 'factually wrong' about the Bible recounting God ordering cruel executions, how am I supposed to take anything else that he says seriously?"

Doland4: True, I cannot think of a specific example of torture, per se . . . [But] if I killed your family, even if quickly and painlessly, would you not consider me "cruel"?

Jensen5: If we deserved it, it would not be cruel. If some of my family did not deserve it, as we have discussed, then God always compensates for any undeserved suffering. For the innocent ones who die prematurely, this would simply be a means of bringing them to a new world, possibly back to this world, to try again at what was missed when their first life was cut short. And lest it be forgotten, remember that I claimed that no human on

their own has the right to take or to command someone to take an innocent life. God alone has that right. So if you did this and they did not deserve it, I really wouldn't want to be in your shoes.

Did God order genocide, rape, and infanticide?

Doland2: In the Joshua account, God Himself forces the Israeli enemies to wage war, so as to give Himself an excuse to “exterminate them without mercy.”

Jensen3: But the entire conquest needs to be seen in the context of Genesis 15:16 where God promises the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants. He cannot have the land yet, God told Abraham, because the wickedness of the people was not yet bad enough. Four hundred years later their wickedness had progressed to the point that they should be exterminated. With this it was not at all improper or unjust of God to harden their hearts so that they would fight the Israelites and perish.

Geisler also points out that the Canaanites could have fled before the conquest began, that most of the women and children would have fled before the actual fighting, and that God gave the people opportunity to repent during the centuries before the conquest. Only the third claim is certain given the teachings of Scripture. The people of Nineveh at Jonah's time and the people before the flood were clearly given opportunity to repent, so it seems to be a principle in Scripture that God does always give this opportunity. God did not harden their hearts so that they would not repent; they were quite able to do that all by themselves.

Doland4: Why not just make them disappear? . . .

Jensen5: Then justice would not have been done and it would have to wait until the next life. True, it could have waited, but the Scripture seems to

indicate that God typically seeks to carry out justice in this life for evils of this magnitude. This also has the effect of stopping the evils of a group of people from continuing for future generations when such evils have become ingrained in the culture.

Doland2: In Deuteronomy, God tells the Israelites to take women and children as “plunder” to be “used.” . . . Clearly, this at least refers to slavery. And implicitly, God approves of rape as well—of women and children!

Jensen3: Yes, it does refer to slavery, but no, it does not refer to rape, and especially not the rape of children. The law of Moses does not condone rape and so it would not condone it in this case either. Rape was punishable by death unless the victim was unmarried or not betrothed. In the later cases the rapist would have to marry the victim and pay the bride price, and he could never divorce her—that is unless the victim’s father (and apparently the victim) refused to have him marry her (Deuteronomy 22:22-29, Exodus 22:17). Likely other punishment might be given the rapist as well since much was left in the hands of the judges and rape was considered a serious offense. Jacob’s sons killed the man who raped their sister even though he wanted to marry her (Genesis 34). If a woman was taken through warfare, the man could take her to be his wife but if he wanted to divorce her, she was then a free woman (Deuteronomy 21:10-14). It appears that a woman taken through warfare as merely a slave would become a concubine if the master or his son (never both) had sexual relations with her. Or, as mentioned above, she could become the wife of either if either should so choose. But it cannot be claimed that rape was allowed at such times.

Doland4: Hmmm. Note that the Law also does not condone murder, and yet murder is directly ordered by God.

Jensen5: The Hebrew Scripture clearly distinguishes between murder and killing a person in war, in capital punishment, and in similar cases. Doland might as well say that our country condones murder because it condones capital punishment.

Doland4: Jensen is making a common error, and that is, assuming that the Law applies equally to Jews and non-Jews. This is clearly not the case. The Ten Commandments are laws for Jews only. Non-Jews aren't considered "really" people, and therefore the rules don't apply. This is quite obvious when you consider how much God orders the Jews to break the law against murder. So, with this in mind, you cannot say anything about what the Jews might have done to female captives as far as being allowed or disallowed by the Law of Moses as it is inapplicable.

Jensen5: Non-Israelites visiting or living in Israel did not have all of the same privileges and obligations as Israelites, but they were to be treated equally under the law (Deuteronomy 1:16, Leviticus 24:20-22). Under the law non-natives were considered people like anyone else. I've shown that God did not order the Jews to break the law against murder. So Doland has no grounds to claim that the Law of Moses did not apply to the treatment of female captives. He's making more accusations he cannot support.

Doland2: In Numbers, Moses orders the killing of the boys and nonvirginal women, but tells his soldiers to keep the virgins for themselves. Again, the Bible implicitly approves of rape.

Jensen3: No, we have seen that this only indicates that they were taken as wives or concubines.

Doland4: Oh, c'mon! You're not really this naïve now are you? What choice as to whether or not to be a concubine would be available to a woman whose family has been killed and she has been taken captive? Do you REALLY think she has much of a choice? . . .

Jensen5: No, of course the woman had no choice in the matter. What does that have to do with my statement that rape was not condoned? If you define being forced to become a concubine or wife as rape, then okay, that would be rape. But that's quite a bit different from the normal use of the term. The husband could never divorce this wife or she would be free. As a concubine she had considerable rights and freedom. As a wife she had even more.

Doland2: Geisler tries to sweep all of this under the rug, arguing that a biblical account of some event doesn't imply that God condones that event. But this is completely disingenuous, as atrocities are often specifically ordered and condoned by God; I only included a couple of examples above. Frankly, attempting to sweep this under the rug should embarrass Geisler.

Jensen3: But the examples raised only show God's justice upon a people that were so evil that God had determined to completely exterminate them. Those not so evil might be allowed slavery. Geisler was merely referring to other examples of evils that are mentioned in the Bible but not condoned by God.

Here we might mention that there are some Mosaic laws concerning women, slavery, warfare, and possibly other issues that do seem to be unjust when considered in some of their details. For these we should recall that Jesus taught that some laws were allowed because of the hardness of the people's hearts (Matthew 19:8-9). God made some concessions simply because the people were not willing to live as God wanted them to live.

Some of the evils Geisler might have in mind could be in this category as well. I think that my comments mitigate some of the evils Doland claims, like the special rights of slaves, war captives (as above), etc., but my comments cannot completely justify all of the Mosaic laws and commands of God. It is here that we should recognize that many of these laws and some aspects of other laws were allowed simply because of the hardness of the people's hearts.

One other issue that has not been explicitly raised as of yet might be assumed in some of Doland's criticisms. What of the innocent children who were slaughtered by the Israelites? If the people were evil, surely the children were not. The same might be said of God's destruction of humanity by the Flood. I will address this issue shortly.

Doland4: There is a Bible quote that I should have used. I don't remember it exactly. . . . But . . . one of the towns God ordered destroyed, their only "crime" was denying passage of the Jews through their land. No wickedness, no other crime. They just had the nerve to say "___ you" to the Jews, and God orders them killed. Great moral God you got there, Jensen.

Jensen5: The Edomites denied them passage (Numbers 20), but God commanded the Israelites not to retaliate because of this. The Amalakites were the first to attack Israel on their journey (Exodus 17) and God did curse them to eventually be completely destroyed (Deuteonomy 25:17-19). The Amalakites also attacked the fringes of the mass of traveling Israelites, the weary and weak who became partially separated from the group. Like the Edomites, the Amalakites appear to have been descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. However, the Amalakites might have also made up a larger group of nomadic people from the Negeb and Sinia. So they could have been part of the population that Israel was to destroy because of their wickedness. Other than these two possible groups of people, I'm not sure who Doland might be thinking of. Figure it out and let me know who you had in mind, Paul, and I'll respond again. Until then, you don't have even a complaint much less an argument.

Doland2: The Deuteronomy account reveals something else: God says that He orders killings because He is afraid that the Israelites will learn their enemies' evil ways. Whatever happened to free will? I thought that God's people were expected—no, required—to resist the influence of evil. Here God doesn't trust His people to resist evil, and finds that a good reason to exterminate other people!

Jensen3: God's people are expected to resist evil and the temptation to evil will always be with us no matter how good a society might be. But sometimes it can be so bad that people will not have anywhere near the full freedom to choose that they would otherwise have. But it was primarily because of the wickedness of the people that they were to be exterminated, not because their evil was contagious. If God didn't really care about judging them for their sin, they could have been moved to some more inaccessible part of the world. But of course then they would just contaminate their new neighbors.

Doland4: So now [in the third underlined sentence] you're saying their evil was contagious. The previous paragraph you said it wasn't contagious. Which . . . is it?

Jensen5: No, it was not the previous paragraph; it was in a previous sentence, the first of my underlined sentences above. To say that one reason is *primary* does not exclude another reason.

Doland2: Strobel questions Geisler about how a “merciful” God could order the genocide of the Canaanites, and “put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys” (119). Geisler responds that the mission of the Canaanites was the genocide of the Jews,

and that “the destruction of their nation was necessitated by the gravity of their sin.”

Jensen3: I don't think that it's just because the Canaanites wanted to totally exterminate the Israelites that they were evil. What should we expect? They knew the Israelites were set on totally exterminating them! But it was because of the other evils Geisler mentions like child sacrifice, bestiality, cruelty, incest, and cultic prostitution that God determined to destroy them.

But why should innocent children be killed? Geisler says the children could not hope to grow up any less evil in a society as corrupt as this. He also claims that such children would immediately go to heaven. This second point is difficult to accept, however. Wouldn't abortion physicians and child killers then be Christianity's most effective evangelists? Geisler responds simply that the Bible condemns such acts. But wouldn't Christians at least inwardly applaud such actions?

The core scriptural teaching as to why we are here in this kind of world is so that we can choose whether we will seek and serve and commit ourselves to God or whether we will reject God. The stillborn child who is never given that chance must be given it in another life, either by returning to this world or to another with the same opportunity of choice.

Many Christians will reject the former possibility because the book of Hebrews says that it is appointed to humans once to die and then they will be judged. And the context of the passage does pretty clearly exclude reincarnation. So we can't just respond to this passage by saying that God's judgment upon a person might require reincarnation. But this passage seems to be speaking only of those who have done something worthy of judgment. So I don't think it applies to those who have died before the age of accountability (if that is the point at which one makes such eternal decisions). Now I do accept the doctrine of original sin, meaning that all people have inherited a sinful nature. But the only way it

makes sense to understand original sin is to say that if we are all guilty in some inherited sense of guilt, salvation must be accessible to all people. God would not be good or just if this were not so. (More on original sin shortly.)

One of the most certain teachings of Scripture is that God is just. So for any undeserved suffering one receives, God gives equal recompense. The innocent child who died at the conquest of Canaan, or at the time of Noah's Flood for that matter, will receive back good equal to their suffering.

An important point Geisler makes is that since God gave us life, God has the right to take it back at any time God chooses. This applies to the young and the old, to the most righteous as well as the most wicked. It is simply God's right. In fact, even if death is a true annihilation of consciousness as most atheists believe, this is still God's right. So it is actually very foolish to think that anyone has an inherent right to live. One does not have the right to take another person's life except under special conditions (war, capital punishment for appropriate crimes, etc.) but God has the right to take a life at any time. In the proper context, a person has an obligation to obey God if commanded to take such an innocent life. Of course one must have undeniable evidence that God has commanded this.

One final point. When a child was killed in such ancient societies, the parent suffered as well. Above all else, these societies valued progeny. One wanted one's lineage to continue, to have a name that would go on forever. So part of their judgment consisted in the ending of their lineage as well as the taking of their lives. Sometimes God will say, because of the wickedness of a given people, say the children of Cain prior to the Flood, I will cause this tribe to cease. No more shall their name be known anywhere on earth.

With these several points in mind, how might we now answer the question of how a good and just God could command the killing of innocent children? Because of the wickedness of a tribe or nation, God has decided

to judge them by killing all the guilty adults as well as the innocent children. The entire clan is thus eliminated and the evil of this society cannot continue on. The children, whether they had suffered greatly or little during this extermination will receive back good for whatever undeserved pain they had endured. It is not as though these children were cut off from the joy of life that everyone else has the opportunity of experiencing. Death is not the end. It is simply stepping through a door to another life. For a child, it may be a return to a different life on earth, or it may be entering another life in another world.

Doland4: [To first underlined sentence group in Jensen3 above.] . . . You disagree with Geisler, and say that the children would still have to choose later—not get a “free pass” into heaven. But you can’t really win either way. Geisler’s view obviates any need for this life; but so does Jensen’s. Why not have everybody decide in some other world?

Jensen5: Because this world was made for that purpose. It is only necessary that one enter another world to face the most important eternal decisions, what one will choose concerning God, etc., if one cannot stay in this world. And that world will either be this one to which one returns or another world which is very similar. In either case it will be a world of pain and without initial religious certainty. So there is no special or better reason for everybody to “decide in some other world”; that is, decide what they will do with the God who deserves their highest commitment.

Jensen3: [The second underlined sentence group in Jensen3 above] The stillborn child who is never given that chance must be given it in another life, either by returning to this world or to another with the same opportunity of choice.

Doland4: Funny that Geisler doesn't know this is what happens. Maybe he was absent that day in theology class? Be sure to correct Geisler so that he doesn't make this error in the future, okay?

Jensen5: In fact I studied under Geisler a number of years ago. Our classroom discussions sometimes became quite animated and there was often much disagreement. Much of theology and apologetics involves merely finding the best possible explanation for biblical and natural and other data. We reason to the best explanation. We will always have disagreement among theologians in these areas because of the amount of data to reconcile. In this case we consider that biblical data of God's goodness, justice, the issues considered, our purpose in existence, God's means of salvation; scientific knowledge of human nature at given ages, and natural spiritually directed knowledge of God's nature and goodness. We look for the best explanations that will take into account these various issues.

Jensen3: [Third underlined sentence group under Jensen3 above.]
Because of the wickedness of a tribe or nation, God has decided to judge them by killing all the guilty adults as well as the innocent children.

Doland4: And you call this "just"? . . . What a crock of

Jensen5: I wasn't going to respond to this answer since I had done so already in my discussion following my above statement and elsewhere in my last response paper. Doland has not responded to this answer. I would encourage the reader to look over this response again. Both Doland and I have, for most of the topics discussed, begun to repeat ourselves. In the following dialogue there may be more such statements I will not even repeat simply because they have been adequately answered already. It is the reader who must determine who has given the better response. I will summarize my last answer once more:

I admitted killing the innocent involves undeserved suffering. But it is not unjust of God to allow or even dispense such suffering so long as at least equal compensation for the suffering is provided and so long as God has good justifying reason for dispensing this suffering. I have claimed that the justifying reason for most cases of undeserved suffering has been the testing of our faith or the testing of our choice concerning God, and the testing of our choice as to how we respond to others who suffer. In the case of the Canaanite children, the reason has more to do with using this as a means of punishing the adults and causing their lineage to cease. Again the victims, the innocent children, lost nothing in the long run. God will give them opportunity to fulfill the reason for their existence; they will have the chance to choose for or against God and all undeserved suffering will be compensated. [Small additions in this paragraph for clarification, 23Fb15.]

Doland2: He [Geisler] argues that the Canaanites were simply beyond salvation. This seems to contradict what I understand to be two fundamental tenants of Christianity—that everyone is loved by God, even if He hates their sin, and that everyone has the potential to see their sins, repent, and be saved. I don't see how Geisler's view can be reconciled with the Christian view.

Jensen3: Many Christians hold that people who continually reject God's calling may reach a point of reprobation, a point at which God gives them over to their evil desires and they are no longer free to choose other than to continue in their evil and in separation from God. Romans 1 appears to teach this. Whether the Canaanites were truly in this state or not does not affect the argument. It is not out of the question that God may determine to bring judgment upon an evil people even if they had not all of them reached this point of reprobation. So even though God does love everyone and yet hate their sin, it doesn't necessarily follow that everyone is given opportunity to avoid judgment even if they do have opportunity and ability

to repent before they die or are otherwise judged. Had some inhabitant of Jericho repented before judgment came, God would have likely allowed them opportunity to escape before the city's destruction. After a given time, there was no escape no matter how much they repented. [Paragraph altered 20Ap10, 27Fb15.]

Doland2: I also find myself wondering—regardless of how bad the Canaanites were—what their “cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys” could have done to warrant their slaughter. And why is a miracle-working, Almighty God unable to find a better solution than slaughter?

Jensen3: My initial reaction is that this seems a very strange question. Animals are slaughtered for food in every corner of the earth and yet we know that they have not done anything to deserve this. Would Doland honestly try to argue that killing animals for food is wrong? If not, then is this in principle any different? No, just as animals are killed for food, or, in a sense, “dedicated to us” for a given purpose, so the animal possessions of the Canaanites were “dedicated to God” for God’s purpose.

But what was God’s purpose? Certainly God could have killed the animals without any human help just as happens every day in the wild. But part of the point was that people had to kill these animals. They had to have part in the “dedication to God” of a people who were so evil that not only did they have to die, but their children, their animals and even their possessions had to be destroyed. One Israelite who secretly took some of the possessions was executed. The city of Jericho was even cursed with the intention that it never be rebuilt (Joshua 6:26). The man who later ignored the curse and did rebuild it, did so at the cost of the lives of his firstborn son and his youngest son (1 Kings 16:34). The only thing this can conceivably mean is that the evil of this people was so great that God determined that not only the people but even their possessions and city should be completely removed from the face of the earth. Every vestige of this people must be

destroyed. The Israelites had to take part in the destruction probably to drive home the point of how God sees evil and how much more God abhors evil of this magnitude.

Doland4: Jensen's argument, summarized is, "its okay to kill an animal for food, therefore it is okay to kill an animal for any old reason." Non-sequitur.

Jensen5: If it is acceptable to kill an animal for one reason, for food, it could also be acceptable to do so for other reasons. If an animal is "dedicated to God," that would be a very important reason. If the magnitude of the sin is so great that even the possessions of the people are to be seen as contaminated, that would be a very important reason.

Doland2: And if God wanted the Canaanites dead, why didn't he just strike them dead Himself? Again, it seems like God Almighty had plenty of other, better options.

Jensen3: God did act directly during the Flood and with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Why should this be considered a better option than using a nation to destroy another? If we do not consider it inappropriate for a given person or persons to punish, even execute, other persons because they are judged to be criminals worthy of such judgment, why should it be considered evil for God to bring judgment on people through the actions of other people?

Doland4: Because, among other reasons, it's allegedly a crime to kill other people. You have heard of the Ten Commandments, right? You yourself said that the children were innocent, and should by any rational thought be protected by the Ten Commandments. Until, of course, you realize that Biblegod is a war-god invented to allow the Jews to justify their own wars and therefore never made their God's rules apply to any non Jew. Then, of course, it all makes perfect sense.

Jensen5: But why is it a crime to kill other people? Because this is something no human has the right to do to another by their own authority. All people are equals. Since God has the right to do that to people, it also follows that God has the right to ask a person to do this. Whether God kills people directly or through a command to a person or group of people shouldn't matter.

I've already discussed and given reason for the killing of innocent children in the conquest. I've argued that the law against murder did not apply in this case, and that the Law of Moses did apply to non-Israelites. Therefore we have no reason to believe the God of the Bible was invented to justify a war. Doland's view simply has no justification. A biblical view makes much better sense.

Doland2: Also note that Geisler's argument appears inconsistent with Kreeft's earlier arguments. In Objection 1, Kreeft argued that God uses apparent injustice to realize some eventual greater good. But if so, why did he command the needless slaughter of the Canaanites, no matter how evil they might have been?

Jensen3: In Kreeft's argument he was not talking about the injustice of evil people getting away with their crimes but of the innocent receiving undeserved suffering. So it was hardly a "needless" slaughter of the Canaanites; God ordered the killing of evil people because it is always better that justice be done for the unrepentant. True, it is better that mercy be given the repentant rather than that justice be done, but mercy is not better when the people are unrepentant. There are, indeed, times when God will allow evil people to get away with their wickedness to see how others will respond and to give the wicked time to repent. But justice will be done eventually. God had already given the Canaanites time to repent and the point of seeing how the righteous would respond was not significant

enough to outweigh the need for justice. The surrounding nations, including the Israelites, had been aware of the growing wickedness of the Canaanites for centuries.

Terms of peace: slavery or death

Doland2: Geisler gives some more excuses: “Under the rules of conduct God had given the Israelites, whenever they went into an enemy city they were to make the people an offer of peace” (122). Well, let’s look at that offer of “peace”: . . .

[“]When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. When the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it.[” Deuteronomy 20:10-13 NIV.]

My, what a generous peace offer: “Be our slaves or die.” God actually orders slavery! It’s little wonder that Geisler omits this part of God’s “rules of conduct.” Though Geisler repeatedly claims that God is always ready to spare the just, as when He spared Lot, no such condition is given in the Deuteronomy passage above.

Jensen3: But notice that these cities were not the cities of Canaan that the Israelites were told to completely exterminate. Israel was not to make war against anyone other than the people of Palestine because this particular land was given to them when the inhabitants became so evil that God determined to wipe them out. So the cities and nations in the above passage are the ones who are from outside of Canaan who initiate aggression against Israel.

It may have been that at this time in history the only way to deal with aggressors like this was to completely kill the men if they would not surrender and to enslave the population if they did. It may be that if they were to remain they would continue to attack Israel every time they could muster another army. This seems to have been something of a pattern in the warfare of Israel and Judah's later kingdom history. They either would not completely destroy an opposing army and subject its people or they could not. (Remember that Israel was only promised victory at all times if they would be completely faithful to God, and this they did not always do.) And then they would have to face the same enemy again the next year.

Also notice that slavery was meant to be more humane in Israel than it was elsewhere. If the people had followed God's commands, slavery, even for foreign slaves, would have been not much worse than lifelong employment, though of course the employment would have involved no pay and often strenuous labor. (Israelite slaves were generally just indentured servants who were freed after six years.) How many times did God tell the people, "Be compassionate to your slaves, remember that you were once slaves in Egypt" or "Do not mistreat the foreigners in your midst, remember that you were once foreigners in Egypt"? (Deuteronomy 15:12-15, 24:17-18, Exodus 22:21, 23:9, etc.) Notice also that under Jesus' teachings, slavery could not in principle be allowed at all, except under the most extreme "lesser of two evils" circumstances.) The principles of compassion and humane treatment of slaves were deeply engrained in Israelite society through their wisdom literature even though the Israelites did not always follow these teachings. Job is recounted as saying,

If I have despised the claim of my . . . slaves
When they filed a complaint against me,
What then could I do when God arises?
And when He calls me to account,
what will I answer Him?
“Did not He who made me in the womb make him,
And the same one fashion us in the womb?”

Job 31:13-15 (NASB)

So it may be that the “be our slaves or die” policy was the most humane policy possible. It may have prevented more deaths and suffering in the long run. But I cannot say for certain. If our modern ideal of humane warfare could have worked back then, and I would like to think that it could have, we should consider that this might be one of those laws which God had allowed “because of the hardness of the people’s hearts.”

God is usually willing to spare the just. But under God’s plan, undeserved suffering must sometimes occur. The people of these cities had the opportunity to repent and refrain from attacking Israel. For those whose resistance to an evil regime would have been useless (like those of Nazi Germany who were drafted to fight on penalty of death) there may or may not have been opportunity to flee. When we discussed undeserved suffering earlier, we saw that there is good reason for it occurring and God does provide equal compensation for such suffering.

Jensen3: [First underlined sentence in Jensen3 above.] So the cities and nations in the above passage are the ones who are from outside of Canaan who initiate aggression against Israel.

Doland4: First off, it doesn’t say that they did initiate aggression, at least not in all cases.

Jensen5: Reread my prior sentences giving my argument that this passage only applies to aggressor nations. You have not answered this argument.

Following his last statement, Doland continued with the following:

Doland4: Even if they did [initiate aggression], so what? I don't believe Iraq instigated our war against them, but, if we assume they did for sake of argument, that doesn't (or shouldn't) mean the US has the right to exterminate everybody in Iraq. . . .

Jensen5: No we don't. I went through a long discussion as to whether ancient societies had any recourse but to follow such a course of extermination in this kind of situation. I pointed out that it may be that this is one of those laws that God allowed because of the hardness of the people's hearts.

Slavery in the Law of Moses

Doland4: Jensen quotes a Bible passage teaching compassion to slaves by slave-owners:

Jensen3: [Second underlined sentence in Jensen3 above.] How many times did God tell the people, "Be compassionate to your slaves, remember that you were once slaves in Egypt" or "Do not mistreat the foreigners in your midst, remember that you were once foreigners in Egypt"?

Doland4: But the Bible also says this: "When a man strikes his slave, male or female, and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be punished. But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be punished; for the slave is his property." [Exodus 21:20-21.]

Jensen is just doing selective quoting. Truthfully, so am I. I'm selecting quotes that support my position as does Jensen. But, like it or not, it is fair for me to do so. For it matters not to me if some of the Bible is sensible. It only matters to me that some of it is not sensible. For Jensen, the onus is on him to make it all look sensible, but he can only do so via selective quoting. I legitimately get to selective quote, and Jensen doesn't. . . .

Jensen5: But I accept that onus. I just have to suggest a good reason for this passage or any other problem passages Doland might find. So if the problem passages have good answers and if other passages, like the one I first cited, show higher ethical standards in Israel, then ultimately Doland has no argument. I do not answer a problem passage by quoting other passages that support my view; rather, I show how the problem passage is not a problem after all.

As for this passage, notice that this is a significant advance for ethical slavery laws in the ancient Middle East. For slavery to work, the slave owner would have to have the power to punish a slave; otherwise the slave could just refuse to work. This law said you can't just kill your slave (unlike the laws of surrounding nations) but the slave can be punished. It seems to indicate that if one strikes a slave so harshly that the slave dies immediately, this is intent to kill, not punish. If the slave survives a few days, this should indicate that the intent was just to punish.

So for the passage to say that a slave is someone's property means merely that the master has a right to require the slave to work. It means punishment is the master's right. If it meant that the master owns a slave categorically, it would never have said the master should be punished should the slave die immediately.

But even with this, it seems very clear that slavery was never God's intention. Jesus indicated that some practices God allowed in ancient Israel and at the time of the patriarchs because of the hardness of the people's

hearts. Slavery is intrinsically incompatible with Jesus' teachings. If you love your neighbor as yourself and you do to others as you would have done to yourself, you cannot be a slave owner. It was the Christian ethic and teaching that was ultimately most responsible for eventually making slavery and the slave trade illegal in England and America.

Original sin and realistic imputation

Doland2: How can being born with a “propensity” to sin—or worse, a guarantee to sin, as all men are sinners—be my fault? Perhaps it is Adam and Eve’s fault—but even so, it hardly seems fair to blame me for their mistake. Indeed, why should God design human beings to inherit original sin in the first place? In His limitless power and infinite wisdom, He could have designed them otherwise, could He not? But, so the story goes, He did not, and yet blames human beings for being sinners. Blame the victim! None of this makes any sense.

Jensen3: The doctrine of original sin makes sense only under the view called realistic imputation. One’s sin nature is passed down because we are “in Adam” in some realistic sense of being a part of Adam. Adam is not merely our representative, for what sense does it make to speak of a representative we’ve never chosen? We are not exactly identical with Adam but we have part of him, part of the part of him that committed evil, passed on to us. We are almost “little Adams,” Adam divided into billions of people. So we are guilty because we did actually sin when Adam sinned; his choice was our choice because we were not then differentiated into the many we are now.

Could God have made us without this sin nature? I don’t know. Does it matter? Not really. If God creates billions of little Adams, God would still provide a means of redemption available to all just as it was made available to the first Adam. And even without Adam’s first sin, there would still have

been undeserved suffering in the world. This seems very clear in the book of Job.

Doland4: And who came up with this plan? Who decided that part of Adam's evil gets passed on to us? . . . You know, if I was designing human beings, and I didn't like evil, I think I'd probably not pass evil on down to every human being. Why didn't God think of that?

Jensen5: But then because it would be you or I who would be doing the designing, we likely wouldn't know enough to determine how humans should best be made so that all in all the greatest good might occur. We have seen that the greatest good could not occur without there being pain in our world. Pain is used to test us that we might become beings we could never be otherwise. Because God is absolutely good, God would create so that there would be the least pain to attain the greatest good. Since God did create us so that the sin nature is passed on given the choice of our first ancestors to sin, God must have deemed this necessary to attain the greatest good in this situation. This is one of those things God could not have done in any other way to attain the greatest good. Omnipotence is constrained by logical necessity.

Now I cannot demonstrate logical necessity as I have done in earlier examples, nor can I show the intuitive likelihood of logical necessity as I have also done earlier with other examples. But I don't need to do either. Logical necessity or impossibility is not always easy to track. Merely the possibility that an action must occur of logical necessity that a given end be attained is enough to show that Doland's accusation has no force. Why didn't God think of creating people without this inherited sin nature and thus (likely) less suffering? Because this was the only way a greater good could occur.

It is disappointing that I have had to repeat this point so often. This is simply a point of logic Doland does not seem to be able (or perhaps willing) to comprehend. If he thinks omnipotence means the ability to do anything,

like create square circles, then fine, let him think anything he likes. But this is not what I mean by omnipotence and it is not what orthodox Christianity has for centuries meant by omnipotence.

I do want to retract or at least modify one other statement I made in my last response. I said that it does not really matter that God did not make us without a sin nature because God would still provide a means of salvation for all of us as was made for Adam and Eve. It is not entirely true that it does not matter. Without a sin nature we would surely have less suffering. That does make a difference. Rather, even though it would make a difference as to the entire amount of suffering in the world, the important reason God needed to make this sin nature inheritable is that all in all the greater good might occur. All undeserved suffering will be compensated and all are given the opportunity of reconciliation with God.

We do have some hints as to why it may have been necessary that a sin nature be inherited. It could be that without this we would be too alienated in nature from our progenitors and each other. Without this notion of an inherited sinful nature it is simply too difficult to account for our human nature: How can it be possible that everyone is free yet no one is without sin? Unless there is something within us that causes us to at some time or other in our lives do something evil, we should be able, by our choice, to live without sin. Yet no one has been able to do this other than Jesus.

The age of accountability , maturity, and eternal decisions

Doland2: If you are over 30 years old, . . . think back to when you were 18. Do you recall doing things then which you now realize were just boneheaded? Were you really mature enough then to make decisions with eternal consequences? Indeed, is anyone ever that mature in this lifetime?

Jensen3: I doubt that maturity really has anything to do with it other than to provide an initial ability to freely choose. One is free and can clearly understand the choice and the reality of good and evil. In fact I know of one Christian view that has it that even the fetus, if destroyed by miscarriage or abortion, is given the ability to choose and must make the eternal decision for or against God before death. I do not accept this view but I do not think it contradicts any essential biblical teaching. The point is that maturity does not matter; all that matters is that we are sufficiently aware of the choice before us and the good and evil that choice entails, that we are able to make the eternal choice and that we do so.

Doland4: Isn't any other significant decision you make in your life impacted by your maturity?

Jensen5: The important point is simply that we have sufficient intelligence concerning an issue and sufficient awareness of the ramifications of the question being decided. If one has that awareness, even if the decision is being made while one is still in the womb, then that would be enough to make a person responsible for that decision. Now I don't like the idea of someone having that awareness at that stage, so I have difficulty believing the fetus can make an eternal decision, if I might call it that. But if God can give the fetus sufficient awareness, then I cannot say that it is impossible. If God judges justly, then each person will be fully aware of all that they need to be aware of when they make an eternal decision.

Any greater maturity is simply unnecessary. The development of "maturity" is often influenced by cultural and other less than rational factors. Decisions at differing points of maturity often differ greatly. Often maturity develops in different directions for different people. Two people may at similar points of their lives think sufficiently alike to make the same decision concerning a given issue. Yet as they "mature" they may come to very different conclusions and decisions. Or one person may, for example, thrive on dangerous and even life threatening activities while young and another live quietly and virtually hide away from any danger. When the first person

matures he thinks his past way of life immature and childish and pursues a contemplative life. The second person also rejects his past, holding that he has come to see that we must seek excitement and “live for the moment.” “Maturity” is too subjective a notion to require for the most serious decisions of life.

Devaluing life by offering heaven

Doland2: And if there’s any circumstance in which killing a child would be better than letting that child live, what does that say about the value of life on Earth? Christians frequently claim that atheism degrades the value of human life. But isn’t that precisely what this theology is doing?

Jensen3: No, it is better in some circumstances for a child to die than to grow up in a depraved society, though we could never have the ability on our own to make the decision to take such a life. It does not degrade life on earth to say that there is a better life to come. Life is still valued whether it’s on earth or elsewhere. But under atheism how can life be valued at all? What value can complex machines have? How can we be anything more?

Doland2: Doesn’t it imply that children—indeed, everybody—would be better off with no life on Earth, just a better life in Heaven? So isn’t it inescapable that Christianity devalues life on Earth?

Jensen3: Imagine that Mars were a lush uninhabited paradise that we could colonize. Would it devalue life on earth if we all wanted to go to Mars and did so?

Doland4: Life on a lush, uninhabited, paradisiacal Mars, while perhaps involving some adjustment, would still be fundamentally akin to living on

earth. There would still be death and disease. There would still be pain and injustice. Further, the process of living would still be roughly the same. You'd still go to bed at night to sleep. . . . Go to work. Have lunch. Come home. . . . What of any of these things would you be doing in heaven? None of them. We are talking about a fundamentally different plane of existence.

Jensen5: So? Doland's previous point was that if life is better in heaven than on earth, then this devalues life on earth. He didn't say it had to be on a "fundamentally different plane of existence" to devalue life. He just said that if killing a child is ever better than letting that child live, that devalues life on earth. Well, suppose you had to die to go to even this flawed paradise on Mars. It would be better than life on earth; so how does that not devalue life on earth?

If Doland still does not see what I'm saying, let's look at this question in increments. First look at the paradise Doland imagines. If we all wanted to go to that kind of paradise (P1), that's okay; that wouldn't devalue life on earth he claims. This is a paradise that can be changed very easily into a hell of oppression and injustice and violence since people are fundamentally the same everywhere. Even in a world where we could have all we want, we could still have evil people who will enslave and oppress others. Let's assume there is plenty of room for everyone in P1 and the only way to oppress others is to do so out of sheer greed, lust, and hunger for power.

Let's go to the next step. A little closer to my own image of paradise, suppose we still have this potentially evil paradise but we can get rid of some of the features Doland accepts as given. Though we do still have an aging process and eventual death, suppose we have no disease. Suppose we don't have to work but can simply go out and pick or gather our food at our leisure. We don't need shelter but can easily make it if we want to. Clothing can be easily made as well. Call this P2. Would our wanting to go

to this paradise devalue our life on earth? Presumably not if Doland doesn't think P1 would do so.

For our next paradise (P3), let's have very long lives (like in the old Shangri-la movie, *Lost Horizon*). But let's also get rid of people who will oppress others. Now we still have pain, just not a lot of it. Would wanting to go to P3 constitute devaluing life as we know it now on earth? If so, why?

For P4, let's get rid of pain and death entirely. P4 isn't much different from the traditional idea of heaven (except that God, the source of joy in heaven, is missing). Being so much like the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist (e.g., the Pure Land), and other traditional views of heaven, perhaps here Doland will insist that desiring such a state will devalue life on earth. So now, the big question for Doland is, What is it that makes this devalue earthly life? It cannot be merely being better off than you were on earth; P1 provides that. Exactly what it is, Doland expects us to know without telling us. What change in the character of paradise between P1 and P4 requires us to say that life is devalued once we desire it? What is the particular change that puts one paradise on a "fundamentally different plane of existence" and how do we devalue life once we cross this line but not before?

Salvation before age of accountability?

Doland2: Of what possible value is living beyond the age of accountability? Of what use is life on Earth, if it only amounts to a risk to lose salvation? Consider my own deconversion. I find it impossible to have faith in a God who chooses such a bizarre method for determining who goes to Heaven or Hell.

Jensen3: I've stated earlier that I disagree with Geisler's view at this point and largely because of the reasons Doland gives. Every person must have

the opportunity to choose for or against God. It isn't as though one has the chance of losing something one already had. God doesn't give us a chance to choose and if we make the right choice take us straight to heaven on the chance that we may choose against God if we had a little or a lot more time. In fact, that is exactly what would be bizarre. All of our lives, whether they're short or long, are our choosing periods, our testing time which determines our ultimate salvation, though one's last free choice may be most important. Doland's inability to have faith in God should be removed once he recognizes that it is more likely that God offers salvation to all and that all have sufficient opportunity to respond. [Modified paragraph 12Ja15.]

God's right to take any life

Doland goes on to quote Geisler:

Geisler1: People assume that what's wrong for us, is wrong for God. . . . God is sovereign over all of life, and he has the right to take it if he wishes. In fact, we tend to forget that God takes the life of every human being. It's called death. The only question is when and how, which we have to leave up to him (121).

Doland2: But as Keith Parsons points out in "Why I Am Not a Christian," God has no such right:

"It strikes me as monstrous to suggest that God would have the right to do anything whatsoever to us. What would give him that right? Surely not his omnipotence, since might does not make right. Is it the alleged fact that God created us? Suppose I were to create a race of sentient androids, fully as capable of suffering as humans. Would I then have the right to inflict capricious cruelty upon them?"

Jensen3: But we cannot create sentient androids. We could imagine ourselves being able to create androids but we cannot create sentience. What arrangement of matter could ever produce sentience or awareness? It cannot be done because it is categorically different from matter.

But let's assume the usual naturalistic claim that consciousness will occur quite easily and naturally when matter reaches a given complexity. Arrange matter in a certain way and consciousness just inevitably occurs. Here naturalism sounds more like magic than rationality, but be that as it may, let's assume that it is true. We have created our android. With centuries of study of human anatomy and physiology we have come to understand it sufficiently to reproduce a workable android. And somehow we have arranged some of the components to be such that consciousness has occurred.

Would we have the right to destroy this creation? No, because it is a being with the same capacities we possess. We cannot determine that it is any different. Suppose it has only the intelligence and sentience of an animal (assuming that some animals have sentience). Perhaps then we might have the right to kill it but not to cause it suffering. We would have the same relationship we now have with animals. We would not have the right to kill or inflict pain on a conscious, intelligent, android we had created even though we had given it consciousness only by chance. We are (assuming naturalism) by nature the same as it is, chance created machines which happen to have attained consciousness and intelligence. In fact we cannot be said to have actually created something, we've just rearranged matter in such a way that consciousness happens to occur. As such we have no right over the android greater than that which we now have over any other equal. Even if we had been created by God, we would not have the right to take the life of an android we had created by simply putting together parts and by the chance production of consciousness. (In the above discussion we are assuming the normally accepted rights of humans without bringing in the problem of the justification of ethics given naturalism.)

Now if our consciousness did not come into being through a chance arrangement of matter (and it is extremely difficult to imagine how it could have), then consciousness must come from someone or something that possesses it already and innately. If we in our mental being came from God (Ecclesiastes 12:7, Genesis 2:7), then God has the right to take it back and even to cause us to cease to exist. So ultimately we would belong to God, not ourselves.

To anticipate a common objection, let me say that the idea of our coming from God does not imply pantheism. I believe it was C.S. Lewis who said that the great miracle is not that God created but that God created that which was other than God. If God created us by means of our coming from God, we could still be given an existence distinct from God.

Also, God has both the right and, being good and just, the obligation to judge the evil and the good by inflicting pain or bestowing good. God would also have a right to inflict undeserved suffering upon this creation if there was good reason for it and if God provided equal compensation for it. God does not allow “capricious cruelty” or gratuitous evil because there is no suffering that does not occur for a reason.

Making minds from matter

Jensen3: [From Jensen3 above] We could imagine ourselves being able to create androids but we cannot create sentience. What arrangement of matter could ever produce sentience or awareness?

Doland4: The same kind of arrangement of matter that is in our brain, presumably. . . .

Jensen5: Here Doland cites a web page that argues for the dependence of the mind on the physical brain. But even if it were demonstrated that minds

need matter to exist (which cannot be done, see **Minds without Bodies**), this has nothing to do with my claim. You can't produce awareness by merely making machines more complicated. I've already argued for this in my last response (to which Doland has not offered an argument in response) but for more see my discussion in **Minds from Matter**). Better still, see J.P. Moreland's argument from consciousness in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (282-343).

God sanctioning the Canaanite genocide and 9/11

Doland2: I assume (or hope) that most of the readers of this critique reject the view that God sanctioned the September 11th attacks. But why should I expect this? Because we really know that if God is good, then He could not possibly have ordered the September 11th attacks. But by the same reasoning, He could not possibly have ordered the genocide of the Canaanites, either. If we don't concede this, how can we say that Phelps is wrong [who said that God did allowed or caused the September 11th attacks]?

Jensen3: If the American people as a whole (or even merely the inhabitants of New York City) are as wicked as the Canaanites of the time of the Exodus, then it is not at all impossible that a good and just God could order the 9/11 attacks. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that in such a case God would not bring about such judgment. I sincerely doubt that enough Americans are truly so evil. But to parrot Doland, I assume (or hope) that most of the readers of this critique reject the view that a good God can never bring judgment to the wicked.

THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE

Doland2: Geisler. . . offers a few reasons why he feels that the Bible is a reliable source. First, he appeals to archaeological confirmation. . . . To someone living a few hundred years from now, a recently discovered video of the movie Titanic might look like a documentary, since many of the events depicted in the movie could conceivably be confirmed by historical records and archaeological evidence. Nevertheless, it would be an error to conclude that all of the events depicted in the movie are historical.

Jensen3: But this claim assumes we have no historical context for the biblical documents, that they appear to us *de novo* and we know absolutely nothing more about them. But we know that much of the historical writings of the Hebrew Scripture, for example, were derived from royal court records; or the Gospels were written by followers purporting to provide accurate accounts of Jesus' life. E.g., Luke (1:1-4) and John (21:24) state this explicitly and the other two share so much source material with these two (more Luke than John) that these must be considered as attempting to present historically accurate information. The evidence for the Gospels is usually much better evidence than what we have for other accepted ancient documents that claim to provide historical accounts of the time. (F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable?* 15.)

We have good evidence that the first three Gospels were written in the 60s to early 70s and the last one likely in the 90s. (Bruce, *Documents*, 12). We also have good evidence that passages from every New Testament book except Jude and 2 John were either quoted or alluded to between AD 90 and 110 in some early Christian writing other than the New Testament (Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* [IVP, 1986] 38-40).

About 108, Ignatius spoke of "the gospel" as authoritative and probably was speaking of all four Gospels (Bruce, *Documents*, 23).

Papias (130, a student of John or those who had studied under John, who in turn was a disciple of Jesus), named Matthew (a disciple of Jesus) as the a writer of the first gospel (*Against Heresies*, 3.1.1, cited in Barnett, 101) and Mark (a follower and interpreter for Peter, a disciple of Jesus) as the writer of the second (Quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:39; cited in Barnett, 81).

The gnostic Gospel of Truth, possibly written by Valentinus (140-150), interprets Matthew, Luke, and John and most of the New Testament allegorically. But a writing was not so treated unless it was first considered authoritative (F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* [IVP, 1988], 146-8). This indicates that most of the New Testament was accepted as the defining teachings of the church, as well as those groups that tried to appear to be Christian, well before the middle of the second century.

Justin (150) said the “memoirs of the apostles” were written by the apostles and their followers and he called them gospels. He also cites matters found in each Gospel and considered them accurate and authoritative (*First Apology* 66.3, 67.3; cited in Bruce, *Canon*, 126-7).

Justin’s disciple, Tatian, wrote the *Diatessaron* about 180. This was a combining of all four Gospels into one narrative. This shows that these were likely the same Gospels Justin had in mind that he called the memoirs of the apostles (Bruce, *Canon*, 127-8). Again, we see that the Gospels were fully accepted as authoritative and accurate before the middle of the second century.

Around 180, Irenaeus (a student of Polycarp, a student of John) named all four Gospels as authoritative. He virtually repeated Papias’ claims for the apostolic authorship or sources of Matthew and Mark. Luke (Paul’s follower), he said, wrote the third, and John (Jesus’ disciple) the fourth Gospel. He compared them to the four winds and the four corners of the earth (unquestionable fundamentals of the natural world) to establish their authority and necessity. This shows that these were long and universally

accepted as authoritative. He wouldn't have spoken so strongly of their absolute authority had they not been likewise accepted even far beyond the churches he communicated with (*Against Heresy* 3.1.3, quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.2.-4; *Against Heresy* 3.11.18; both cited in Bruce, *Canon*, 174-5).

The earliest still existing Gospel fragment we have comes from John's Gospel and dates to about 130. The oldest nearly complete manuscript we have is of John and dates about 200. The oldest complete manuscripts of all of the Gospels and Acts date 200-250 (Bruce, *Documents*, 17,18).

This supports the historicity of these documents for any normal non-miraculous events that are recorded and to a lesser degree it supports the claim of miraculous events. That a well attested historical document claims that specific miracles occurred is not enough evidence in itself to believe it, but this does provide support that may be used in conjunction with other evidence.

Doland2: But it is notable that Geisler concedes the circularity of concluding that the Bible is the Word of God simply because it says that it is the Word of God, but nevertheless says that biblically attested-to miracles "prove" that the Bible is the Word of God. In other words, by his own definition of a circular argument, that is indeed what he offers!

Jensen3: No, he said that the historicity of the Bible attests to the fact that the claimed miracles occurred and the attested miracles give evidence that this book is the Word of God. That is not circular. Notice, however, that I have just claimed that the established historicity only supports and does not fully verify miraculous claims.

Doland4: And where is the evidence of the Bible's alleged historicity? The Bible. That IS circular.

Jensen5: No, he never said that the Bible's claim to historicity is grounds for claiming historicity. A book's self-claims have a bearing on its historicity, but it is not sufficient in itself to establish historicity. Doland is attacking straw men. The historicity of the Bible consists in the historical statements of people who made claims about the various books of the Bible and of whom other historical writings attest their knowledge of the origins of these books. It also consists of archeological and paleographic studies of documents and other artifacts to determine the age, sources, and other historical features of these documents and artifacts.

Doland continued with the following claim:

Doland4: Yeah, yeah, I know you quoted a number of sources in order to allegedly support historicity of the Bible. But do you have any evidence that they had any evidence besides the Bible? No, you don't.

Jensen5: The individuals I had cited had some or most of the books that constitute the New Testament, and they also had the Hebrew Scripture. Now these are people who lived very close to the time of the writing of the Gospels, from 20 to 120 years. Essentially they said that the Gospels were written by individuals who were direct followers of Jesus or who interviewed or were closely associated with such followers. They were saying that because these were written by such direct witnesses and researchers, these testimonies are trustworthy.

Now what are we to make of Doland's statement that I do not "have any evidence that they [the sources who support the historicity of the Bible] had any evidence besides the Bible"? Is Doland thinking these people had a book or possibly even several books from the Bible that they were attempting to attest to; they looked at the book, read some statement that

this was written by disciple so and so and believed it? Maybe they were trying to give more support to the claim of the book.

Their statements would certainly give such support. Historians must always assume that they wouldn't give such a statement without good evidence. If Papias claimed Matthew and Mark wrote their respective Gospels, and if he studied under another apostle or student of an apostle who knew Matthew and Mark, and if Papias wrote just 60 to 70 years after these Gospels were written, this would be good reason to think they really did write these books. Sure he could be lying about what he knew but so could any historical witness. Historians always have to assume that when you have written attestation like this, you have to accept it. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to accept any ancient histories or biographical accounts. Also, some biblical books do not say who wrote them. The earliest surviving attestations would then provide evidence that they were written by the individuals claimed.

Doland4: While there are some secular references to Jesus within a century of Jesus alleged life, these secular references do not validate any miracles. . . . for any of the claimed miracles, all you have to attest to its alleged historicity is the Bible itself—circular.

Jensen5: Most of the miracles in the Bible do not have any direct historical attestation. Virtually all that we have are some of the biblical prophecies and the resurrection; these are the miracles that have good evidence. Such evidence does not consist of merely the Bible saying that these events happened or were fulfilled. The evidence for the resurrection consists of some biblical statements in conjunction with some well evidenced historical events. The prophetic evidence consists of evidence that certain prophecies were made at a particular time long before their fulfillment, that they were fulfilled, and that their fulfillment could not have occurred by chance or without far greater than normal human power or intelligent

intervention. I've given evidence for these miracles earlier. We are not claiming that because the Bible or any particular book or books of the Bible have good historicity that these miracles occurred. And we are definitely not saying that the evidence for a miracle is the fact that the Bible says it happened. Once the resurrection and prophetic evidence establishes Jesus' authority, his statements attesting to his followers' claims support those claims, including their claims that the various other miracles occurred that are mentioned in the Gospels.

Evidence that Jesus existed

Resurrection vs Caesar crossing the Rubicon

Historicity of Gospels

Doland4: There is not one solid shred of evidence that Jesus even existed. There is some circumstantial evidence that may or may not be deemed good enough to accept. But there is not one single contemporary reference to the life of Jesus.

Jensen5: It would be interesting to see what evidence Doland would accept as "solid evidence" for Caesar's existence (any of the Caesars) or anyone else in ancient history Doland is sure actually existed. I doubt that he would be able to find anything better than that of Jesus' existence. (There are surely many more such references to Caesar, but are any of them qualitatively better?) Most ancient biographical and historical accounts were penned at least a century after the events recorded and yet no one holds this as reason to doubt such writings. The earliest Gospels were written between 30 to 40 years after the events, given both conservative and liberal estimates. It would be interesting to see what he considers an adequately evidenced "contemporary reference to the life" of any such historical figures. I may be wrong here, but I honestly doubt that he will be able to find anything that is equal or better than what we have for Jesus.

Doland6: As a matter of fact, yes, they are indeed qualitatively better. This is a frequent allegation of Christians, and it has been examined by Richard Carrier. In the following passage by Carrier, he isn't specifically talking about Caesar's existence vs. Jesus', it is comparing Jesus' alleged Resurrection with Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon. It isn't exactly the same as per Jensen is asking, but it is analogous:

Carrier6: Christian apologist Douglas Geivett has declared that the evidence for the physical resurrection of Jesus meets, and I quote, "the highest standards of historical inquiry" and "if one takes the historian's own criteria for assessing the historicity of ancient events, the resurrection passes muster as a historically well-attested event of the ancient world," as well-attested, he says, as Julius Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon in 49 B.C. Well, it is common in Christian apologetics, throughout history, to make absurdly exaggerated claims, and this is no exception. Let's look at Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon for a minute:

First of all, we have Caesar's own word on the subject. Indeed, *The Civil War* has been a Latin classic for two thousand years, written by Caesar himself and by one of his generals and closest of friends. In contrast, we do not have anything written by Jesus, and we do not know for certain the name of any author of any of the accounts of his earthly resurrection.

Jensen7: The first question we should consider is how certain we are that Caesar wrote *The Civil War*. It is not disputed by historians but that does not tell us what we have for evidential support. If we only have Suetonius' word, about 165 years after the likely time of the writing if Caesar was its author, is that better than the support we have for the Gospels? Also, the fact that *The Civil War* has a distinct style does not provide sufficient reason to think Caesar must have written it.

Repeating some information given in my first response to Doland, some of the basic attestation for the Gospels is as follows: Papias (130 CE), just 60

to 70 years after Mark's Gospel was written said Mark wrote Peter's account of Jesus' life and teachings. Justin (150, just 80 to 90 years after Mark was written) spoke of the Memoirs of the Apostles which he calls gospels and makes special mention of the Memoirs of Peter. The latter is likely Mark and the former likely all of the canonical Gospels, given that Justin's disciple, Tatian, wrote a harmony of the Gospels using these four books. Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria (~180, 190) also claimed of Mark's Gospel that Mark recorded Peter's remembrances; again, they wrote 110 to 130 years after Mark wrote. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, the Anti-Marcionite Prologue, and the Muratorian Canon, 110 to 130 years after the writing (less if Luke was written later than 70), all claim Luke wrote his Gospel. Papias (130) and Irenaeus (180) said Matthew wrote a Gospel and by Irenaeus' time the first Gospel in the New Testament was definitely assigned to Matthew. Their similar descriptions of Matthew's writing indicate they both had the same book in mind. At the very least, Papias had an early form of Matthew's Gospel. Much of Mark was at some time added to Matthew (90% of Mark makes up 50% of Matthew) though it is very possible this was done by Matthew himself. John of Theophilus (180), the Muritorian Canon (180-200), the Anti-Marcionite Prologue (180-200), and Irenaeus (180) all say John wrote his Gospel, and these would all be 80-110 years after John was written. Irenaeus spoke of the four Gospels as though they had all long been universally accepted as authoritative and unalterable. So unless we have other attestation for *The Civil War* than Suetonius and until we run into other evidence to the contrary, it looks like the Gospels have far better attestation. Here my conclusion is tentative until I find more complete information concerning the attestation of *The Civil War*.

What about the claim that in *The Civil War* we have Caesar's literal words but we do not have Jesus' literal words in the Gospels? Well, if Mark took Peter's first hand account of Jesus' words and the events of his life, this should be considered virtually his literal words. Even if Peter paraphrased Jesus' words (or portions of them), we still have essentially Jesus' teachings. The apostles very possibly did not consider having Jesus' literal

wording in all cases a necessity. John's Gospel (90-100 given both liberal and conservative estimates) claims to have been written by an eyewitness, which would certainly be the case if the apostle John wrote or dictated it. One early writing, the Muritorian Canon (180), claims John was aided by other apostles and elders who were either also direct eyewitnesses or hearers of eyewitnesses. Luke is normally assumed to have been written after Mark, and Matthew after Luke. Luke (60-67 conservative, 80-84 liberal estimates) claims to have researched his Gospel and Acts from the most original witnesses he could interview or sources he could copy (Luke 1 and Acts 1). Matthew (late 60s-74 conservative, 86-90 liberal) would contain direct eyewitness accounts if it or much of it was written by the apostle Matthew. Ninety percent of Jesus' teachings in the Gospels are written in an easy to remember form using figures and styles of speech common to Hebrew poetry. Translating some of his words in the Gospels back into Aramaic shows a rhythm and pattern that would be more easily memorized. So, like other Jewish teachers of his time, it is likely he intended his teachings to be memorized and, in fact, he stated as much. Some words were recorded in the Gospels in the original Aramaic Jesus spoke, indicating in those cases to have his literal wording. It is even possible that his teachings were recorded in a kind of shorthand that was popular among scribes at the time. Matthew might have had the education to take such dictation of Jesus' words and teaching. So whether we have written dictation, precisely memorized teachings, or merely paraphrased sayings and accounts, (maybe some of each) we would in any case have virtually Jesus' own words and teachings. Also, in the Epistles, we have Paul's account of the resurrection that he had received from eyewitnesses (1 Corinthian 15, written 20-25 years after Jesus' death and from sources far earlier). With three Gospels by eyewitnesses (considering Mark the dictation of an eyewitness), and a fourth (Luke) containing research that records eyewitness accounts of events and teachings, we have more and far better sources than Caesar's one book, even if it was an accurate dictation of his very words.

Let's get back to the original argument (http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/gospels_merkley.pdf) Carrier considers to be so "absurdly exaggerated." Paul Merkley, history professor at Carlton University at the time of the following writing, may have been the first to have stated it. Commenting on how Caesar-crossing-the-Rubicon has become a "standard of reliability of historical evidence" among contemporary historians, he notes that they could hardly have made a worse choice. "And the fact that it has become conventional to place this event in tandem with the matter of the resurrection presents a perfect occasion for reflecting on the extent to which the matter of historical reliability has become a business of rumor rather than of actual experience." Merkley continues:

"The fact is that no one even knows where the Rubicon river is! (In contrast, the site of the crucifixion and the gravesite of Jesus have never been really in doubt, having been pointed out continuously to visitors since the day of the events in question.) Any one of several widely-separated streams might have been the actual frontier between Caesar's province and Italy. There are no firsthand testimonies to Caesar's having crossed the Rubicon (wherever it was). Caesar himself makes no mention in his memoirs of crossing any river. Four historians belonging to the next two or three generations do mention a Rubicon River, and claim Caesar crossed it. They are: Velleius Paterculus (c.19BC-. . . 30 AD); Plutarch (c.46-120 AD); Suetonius (75-160); Appian (second century.) All of these evidently depended on the published eye-witness account, that of Asinius Pollio (76 BC-c.4 AD)—which account has disappeared without a trace. No manuscript copies for any of these secondary sources is to be found earlier than several hundred years after their composition. This contrasts dramatically with the situation with respect to the New Testament documents. Reliable and nearly complete manuscripts of the New Testament are extant from the mid-fourth century, while there are fragments of such quantity, quality and variety from as far back as the mid-second century as to make it possible for us to say that 'the interval between the dates of the original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that

Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.’” (Paul Merkley, “The Gospels as Historical Testimony” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 58.4 [1986], 319-21; last internal quotation is from Frederic Kenyon, *The Bible and Archeology* [New York, 1940], 288.)

In Merkley’s argument he does not doubt Caesar’s account in his memoirs, *The Civil War*. It is not in question that Caesar invaded Italy. Rather he says that Caesar does not mention crossing a river at all and we do not know where the Rubicon is. It may have been necessary to cross the Rubicon if Caesar traveled with his army between Ravenna and Rimini as he said he did. However, if any of the possible candidates for the Rubicon were short enough, it may be that Caesar’s army could easily have gone around it. If it was not possible to avoid crossing the Rubicon to invade Italy, then we would have to admit *The Civil War* as evidence that Caesar did cross the Rubicon. So if *The Civil War* clearly implies Caesar crossed the Rubicon, then we have more evidence that he did so than Merkley’s argument suggests. But even so, we still have far less evidence than we do for the resurrection. Four to five secondary sources based on one written but now lost eyewitness account plus one other first-hand account still do not equal at least three eyewitness accounts and likely more through secondary researchers. For example, if Luke interviews an eyewitness to the resurrection, should this not be considered virtually equivalent to Caesar dictating his memoirs to a scribe? Thus we may have evidence of an eyewitness through a secondary source in a way that we do not have for a secondary source who only has a written document before him, e.g., Plutarch accepting the credibility of Pollio’s eyewitness account.

Doland8: [In response to the underlined statement in Jensen7 above.] First, you’ll notice Mark never said that. If this is what Mark did, you don’t think he’d like, maybe MENTION IT?

Jensen9: No! There is absolutely no reason for Mark to mention that he wrote this Gospel. He just handed it over to the people who were asking for these memoirs. They know who he is; they know he was with Peter copying down all these stories; they're the ones who were asking for these stories and teachings in writing; that's all Mark would have thought to be needed. By the middle of the second century the Gospels all had these writer's names affixed to their works because it had never originally been questioned who wrote them but the identity of the writers was needed for new readers or listeners. When the people who asked Mark for these memoirs started copying them, they may have affixed Mark's name as well, unless the people the copies were going to already knew Mark wrote it and that it came from Peter's preaching. But there is still a good likelihood Mark's name was added as a title or at the end even when it was well known that Mark was the author. But that title was understood not to be part of the work itself. This shows that this Gospel was highly esteemed from virtually its origin. Mark's name, added when there might have been some possibility that the recipient of the book would not know who wrote it, was clearly distinguished from the writing itself. The person who added Mark's name wanted to be sure no one thought this addition was part of the holy book itself.

Now the account of Mark writing this work was passed on in writing or by mouth or both until Papias, 60 to 70 years later, repeated it. Papias is significant at this point only because we do not today have any of the earlier written statements recording that and how Mark got this from Peter: Papias' words are the earliest witness still existing. This early external evidence should be enough to establish that Mark wrote this Gospel and that he got it from Peter. Certainly Paul and other New Testament writers signed their letters, but these were "mailed" as it were, they weren't just handed over to people who know who you are. [This and the previous paragraph edited 16Mr09.]

Now when we get into the second century we do start to get stories that in the text itself claim to be written by some prominent apostle, or even Jesus

himself. When people write bogus accounts which they want to be accepted, they try to claim explicitly that this was written by the highest authority they can imagine. If Matthew or Mark or Luke, say, were intentional fictions, they would have given some well known apostle's name like someone from Jesus' inner circle (Peter, James, and John) or some other well known like Thomas or even Phillip. They certainly wouldn't pick a minor disciple like Matthew or a non-apostle like Mark or Luke. We only know of Mark and Luke from their involvement in the early church in the book of Acts as well as other later accounts. Now this is only circumstantial evidence. It is not necessary that a writing be unsigned to be by a given writer. But the anonymity of the four Gospels and the ascription of less than superauthoritative authorship to three of them does count as evidence for the claimed authorship of the Gospels.

Doland10: [To the first underlined sentence group in Jensen9 above.] How do you know that there were people asking for the memoirs? How do you know that he "just handed it over" to these people? . . . You don't know any of this, its just pure guesswork.

Jensen11: Sure I do. Clement of Alexandria (ca. 180) said "When Peter had preached the word publicly in Rome . . . those who were present . . . besought Mark since he had followed him for a long time . . . to write out the things that had been said; and when he had done this, he gave the gospel to those who asked him." (Cited in Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesia*, vi. 14. 6f.)

Now even if we did not have this record, just the possibility that something like this could have happened, that someone asked Mark to write it out and he did so, is enough to refute your claim that Mark must have signed his work if it really was from Mark. It was you who were claiming that we do not have good reason to believe in Mark's authorship if it wasn't signed. All I need to do is show a not unlikely situation in which we can have good evidence of a given authorship without a signature. Again, Doland has misplaced the burden of proof to make it appear that he has an argument.

Doland12: Okay, you have a reference to your position. I'll have to clarify. Let's see what we have as to what the early church fathers say about Mark. We'll start with Papias:

Papias (ca. 60-130) (*History of the Church* 3:39:15)

“Mark the interpreter of Peter, wrote down exactly, but not in order, what he remembered of the acts and sayings of the Lord, for he neither heard the Lord himself nor accompanied him, but, as I said, Peter later on. Peter adapted his teachings to the needs [of his hearers], but made no attempt to provide a connected narrative of things related to our Lord.”

Where Papias got his information was, according to him, a “presbyter” that was unnamed and unknown. From there, we see that each of the later Church Father[s] took Papias’ statement as the starting point and simply added their own embellishments to it:

Irenaeus (ca.130-200) added that Mark wrote his Gospel “after the departure” (i.e. death) of Peter.

Clement of Alexandria (ca.150-215) (quoted in *History of the Church* 6:14:6-7) contradicted Irenaeus and added his own statement that Mark wrote his Gospel while Peter was alive and when he (Peter) heard of the Gospel “he neither directly forbade nor encouraged it.”

Origen (ca.185-254) (quoted in *History of the Church* 6:25:8-9) said that Mark “composed it according to the instructions of Peter.”

Eusebius (ca. 260-c340) who faithfully recorded the witnesses above, followed Clement’s account but then added that when Peter heard about the Gospel he “was pleased with the zeal of the men, and that the work obtained the sanction of his authority for the purpose of being used in the churches.” (*History of the Church* 2:15:2-6.)

Jerome (ca. 342-420) in his letter *To Hedibia* (Letter 120) mentioned that Peter narrated while Mark noted down what he said.

So, the story about Mark authorship goes from “Mark wrote it of what he remembered after Peter died” to “Peter was alive but had no specific participation of the writing of the Gospel” to “it was composed according to the instructions of Peter” to “Peter was narrating while Mark wrote.” Each step of the way, there is just one more step of embellishment. Obviously this is simply embellishment of a legend. No references are given to the information, nor is it particularly likely that people writing later would have better information than people writing earlier, particularly when the later authors contradict the earlier ones without any providing supporting evidence.

So what you produced as “evidence” for your side is a quote by Clement of Alexandria which contradicts earlier church fathers. You ain’t got ____.

Jensen13: You have just provided an excellent example of how different accounts of an event can be taken by simple minds as being self-contradictory when in fact no contradictions are present. Irenaeus does not contradict Clement since Peter’s departure could refer to his leaving Rome if he was at one point released by the Roman authorities. I noted earlier that it is possible that he later returned or was recaptured to be executed under Nero. Also, it is possible Peter visited Rome, say between 55 and 60, and then left Rome later to return. Mark could have taken notes from Peter’s preaching in Rome when he was there the first time. Peter could have been somewhat indifferent to the publication (Clement) until he saw the “zeal” of the people who were working on it, as Eusebius claims. At that point Peter may have provided instructions and suggestions for Mark as Origin points out, though “instructions” might mean merely his public preaching. [First sentence added and other minor paragraph revisions 15Fb15.]

Another possibility is that Mark made notes before Peter's death and did the bulk of his writing after Peter's death. Peter could have even been aware of Mark's note taking and his intention to publish. He may have been indifferent to the project at first. Possibly this discouraged Mark and delayed the book's completion. Possibly Peter later encouraged it (seeing the "zeal" of those who wanted it published) and even gave Mark suggestions.

I couldn't find the passage in Jerome you mention, only the statement: "Mark used to serve Saint Peter [as an 'interpreter'], with whom he wrote his Gospel." So if Jerome elsewhere said Peter narrated, I do not know whether the term might indicate nothing more than his public preaching or a special dictation to Mark. If the passage I cite is the one you refer to, then it would likely mean his public preaching. No more can be said about this point unless you can give a more precise quotation. For Jerome to say that Mark wrote his Gospel with Peter might mean nothing more than that Peter was Mark's source. And of course when we get to someone as late as Jerome, we would begin to have a problem of oral tradition becoming distorted by possible legend and myth. So except for when Jerome's statements correspond to earlier tradition or unless he names his sources like Eusebius does, I would think his statements would be questionable.

So you have no grounds to claim any embellishment in our primary sources. But notice that even if you do, we still have a strong historical core of agreement among these several sources. If it is not certain that Mark wrote before or after Peter died or whether Peter participated or was indifferent to Mark's work or had no idea that Mark was doing this, we still have Mark being the author and Peter being his primary source. If you insist that the various sources make too many contradictory statements to be trusted, then you should remember that we find the same problem in unquestioned ancient secular historians. Remember that you were not willing to reject the accounts of Caesar crossing the Rubicon simply because one writer said Caesar saw a Roman god on the river urging him on while others gave no such account. You merely excised the portions of

the stories you thought were myths. (Needless to say, your demythologizing is quite arbitrary. It could be that the more historically trustworthy account has Caesar seeing the god while the other historiographers omitted the story because they didn't think such a thing could happen. Remember that some, or at least one, gave another reason for Caesar crossing the river.) When we have strong agreement among all of our sources over core claims (that Mark wrote from Peter's teaching), if we have disagreements over secondary points, these may be accounted for by later attempts to fill in the details. Nevertheless, I think I have shown that all of the differing statements concerning how Mark wrote his Gospel can be easily reconciled. Even Clement's claim that people were asking Mark for a written account of Jesus' life (the issue you were initially contesting) does not even apparently conflict with any of the other accounts of how Mark wrote his Gospel. Whether people were asking Mark to write (in Jensen¹¹ above) says nothing about Peter's attitude toward the project, whether he published it before or after Peter died, or whether he had direct help from Peter or he just listened to his public preaching. [Minor revisions in paragraph 15Ja15.]

And sufficient references definitely were given. Remember that Papias said he got this information from the "presbyter" or "elder." He was likely a direct witness to the events of the publication of Mark or the he got this story from other direct witnesses. Because Papias was constantly looking for the most direct witnesses and because this source was so highly esteemed, we know the elder probably knew one or more of the apostles and he was a trustworthy source.

Doland¹⁰: [To the second underlined sentence group in Jensen⁹ above.] In other words, you just conceded you have no evidence, we don't have the earlier statements. And, if I recall correctly, we don't even actually have Papias' words on the subject either, we have [Eusebius] who quoted from

Papias. And [Eusebius] elsewhere criticized Papias as being unreliable in his view! (Correct me if I'm wrong on this, this is what I recall on the issue.)

Jensen11: We don't have any earlier written statements that have been preserved. And of course it may be that there were no earlier written statements. There possibly were some that were lost. But how much closer to the events do you need? Papias seems to have liked oral sources better than written sources so he more likely talked with a leader in the church, whom he called the Presbyter, or he studied under him. The Presbyter in turn likely got this information directly from Mark or those who received the Gospel from Mark. But you can dare to say this is no evidence? When can you ever get this good of evidence from secular historians? [Paragraph revised 21Ap10.]

Yes we do have Papias' words. Eusebius quoted him. How does that constitute not having Papias' exact words? Paul, you're grasping at straws.

Eusebius thought Papias had a weird and maybe extreme view of the Millennium so, without good reason, he thought Papias had only a mediocre intelligence. But that does not mean he thought Papias got his quotations wrong or used weak sources.

Doland8: [Continued from the above Doland8.] Pretend for a moment that Christianity is false. Don't you think people who believed Christianity would embellish in order to add credibility? Don't you think Muslims embellish Islam's claims? So, Christians saying that "oh, yeah, we got all the goods right here" isn't particularly compelling. Just like to you, the signed affidavits in the *Book of Mormon* saying "yeah, we got all the goods right here" isn't compelling to you.

Jensen9: If we have an account written 25 to 35 years after the death of the main character when other eyewitnesses were still around who could

be consulted, and if we know that main character taught a very high ethic espousing (at least) honesty and truthfulness, and if this account is from someone who claims to be one of the closest followers of that main character, and if this follower had been repeating these same stories about Jesus ever since Jesus died and rose from the dead, then, no, we should think that no embellishment was involved. Certainly it is *possible* even Mark's Gospel had "embellishments." But then you have no grounds to accept any other historical document that claims to account for events that occurred that recently. Even Caesar's memoirs could have been embellished and completely inaccurate. Caesar could get away with it and no one could complain until after his death. And even then he was so idolized that few people would complain if it was inaccurate or the complaints would never remain long in any written records. The Synoptic writers had plenty of people around who could complain about inaccuracies. Pollio's account probably accorded with Caesar's *Civil War* since what we have of it from Paterculus, Plutarch, and Suetonius that it accorded with Caesar's writing. But likewise the Gospel accounts sufficiently accord with each other to support their accounts.

I don't think the early Muslims embellished Islam's claims. If they were sincere followers, wouldn't they have wanted to have as accurately as possible exactly what the Qur'an said? There isn't a lot in the Qur'an that most people back then would want to change. Oh, maybe the polytheists might want to stick in some additional gods, maybe some of the old gods. But everyone knew from the beginning that Islam was exclusively monotheistic, so there was no way to make that kind of change. Some might have liked to remove the prohibition against alcohol. If you had been there back then, you might have liked to get rid of God entirely. But I believe there were a number of people memorizing the Qur'an even while Mohammed was alive. If this is true, no substantial changes could be made. Some different editions started circulating early on. It is doubtful the differences were very significant. This was fixed by ordering all but one edition burned. [However, I have recently heard some claim evidence that the Qur'an originated after the time of Mohammed. So this is something I

will need to look into (note added 16Mr09).] Now later Muslims did developed traditions and stories about Mohammed but these do not have the same authority as the Qur'an. As for the *Book of Mormon*, I've pointed out that there are problems with these witnesses we don't have for the resurrection witnesses or the Gospels. Basically, the Mormon witnesses just said that they saw some golden tablets with unknown script on them. Even if they did see this, these could have been just manufactured props. Some said they saw angels. But again, there were other problems with this claim I've mentioned previously.

Carrier thinks embellishments can be seen in even the Synoptics and even more so in the later Gospel of John. Mark is certainly the earliest and simplest account. If it came from Peter's preaching, then we should expect it to be closer to a facts-only account. Now we aren't sure who wrote next, Luke or Matthew, so of course it is claimed that Matthew must be later since he elaborates more than does Luke. But this is just question begging. So in fact there is no evidence of a development of "embellishment" in the Synoptics. Mark wrote first and the others used Mark and added detail from their own memory and other sources (e.g., Matthew using various sources like the information from the guards at the tomb and Luke using various sources he interviewed while in Jerusalem when Paul was imprisoned there for two years). John can't even be used as evidence for embellishment since it is more likely that he just wanted to give information missing from the other Gospels. We get some pretty clear embellishment in the second century, but the Gospels were just too close to the time of Jesus. Typically, the examples given of embellishment in the Gospels amount to minor variations and additional descriptions and comments.

If any of the Gospels were partly or largely or entirely fictional accounts, why do they lack the features that we would expect of fictional accounts? If Peter or any of the other apostles wrote or dictated these fictions, why did they paint themselves as such failures and fools? If others made up these fictions, wouldn't they portray the first church leaders, those who followed Jesus directly, as heroes? Peter cursed and denied Jesus after he swore he

never would deny him. We see him almost babbling incoherently after he sees Jesus transfigured. The disciples seem to spend much of their time arguing about who will get to be the greatest in Jesus' coming kingdom. More than once they witness a small amount of fish and bread multiplied to feed thousands and then they go off talking and arguing about insignificant issues to the point that Jesus reprimands them because they still don't "get it" concerning who he is and the power he has (e.g., Mark 8:14-21).

What about the "fictional" account of Jesus himself? Would someone make up a story about the saviour of the world being humiliated, mocked, whipped, and dying a slave's death, a death on a cross? A third century Roman graffiti shows a donkey hanging on a cross with a human figure worshipping it. The writing says, "Alexamenus worships his god." Evidently someone was having fun ridiculing a local Christian. It certainly did not fit the mind-set of the time to claim your god or savior had died on a cross. Cicero said that no Roman should even think about crucifixion much less mention it, it was such a degrading and ignoble death. Not only in Greek and Roman cultures, in Jewish culture anyone who hung on a tree was considered cursed (Deuteronomy 21:23). For many Jews, that Jesus was crucified was proof that he was a false prophet. Only the evidence of a resurrection from the dead could overcome this assumption and show how he took our curse or became cursed in our place. Without a resurrection, Jesus' cult would have quickly died just as it has died for every other messianic claimant when they were killed. But Jesus' cult would have died even more quickly because he was killed by crucifixion. This is why Paul said the preaching of the cross is foolishness to the world. And you think someone just made this story up?

What about the embarrassing statements in the Gospels? Would the early church make up a statement that some people listening to Jesus would not die before he returned to the earth in the clouds? If this were written after that generation had passed, the writers would know it to be obviously false. If written earlier, how could they dare to make up such a prediction to put on Jesus' lips which was so likely to be proved false? The problem with the

passage itself can be answered by looking closely at the Aramaic language Jesus likely originally used, but that does not negate the fact that in the common meaning of the words in Greek, it sounds as though Jesus made a false prediction.

What about the realism in the Gospels? In the *Gospel of Peter* from the second century a talking cross walks out of the tomb with Jesus and two angels and they are so tall their heads are in the heavens (Jesus' head is above the heavens). In the canonical Gospels the witnesses sometimes at first don't even know it is Jesus they meet and sometimes individuals whom they later realize to be angels appear as normal people. What of the "we/they" statements in Mark? There are many statements of a form something like, "they went out and did such and such" which can easily be changed to "we went out and did such and such." It sounds as though Mark was just repeating Peter's account and changing "we" to "they." Many of these same accounts that Luke and Matthew took from Mark have been altered or restructured so that the same term replacements do not work in their Gospels. Mark mentions groups like the Herodians who are not mentioned in other Gospels (except where they are taken from Mark), geographical details, and people whose existence are supported by non-Christian sources like Tacitus, Josephus, and Philo. It is filled with picturesque detail, some of which would be unnecessary for a simple telling of the story but which would have impressed an eyewitness. The writer of John's Gospel knew the topography, towns and their locations, and other sites in relation to their surroundings. Some of this information would have been lost after the destruction of Jerusalem and Judea. Descriptions are added to many place names to provide precise locations and avoid confusion. Someone unacquainted with the area would not add such descriptions. He adds detail that would not be expected of a fiction. He says 153 fish were caught in one incident when they saw Jesus after the resurrection. There was no reason to give this number. It was probably just something that stuck in his mind after the fish were all counted. This wasn't a professional historian who knows not to mention unnecessary detail or a fiction writer who wouldn't think of adding such made up detail. This was just a witness,

probably someone who catches and sells fish for a living and is normally very conscious of this kind of detail, telling what he saw.

If the later church made up the Gospels, why didn't they have Jesus talk about any of the issues that were important during their time like circumcision for Gentiles, allowing Gentiles in the church, eating meat sacrificed to idols? Why do we get the distinct impression in the Gospels that Jesus' teachings and ministry is just for Jews? He is even remiss about casting a demon out of a Gentile because, he says, we shouldn't give the children's bread to dogs. Would a Gentile church or one open to Gentiles have Jesus say such a thing? Why don't we see parables used in the early church? Why doesn't Paul use them? If they did use them, we could see them putting them back on the lips of Jesus. Why don't we hear much about the Kingdom of God in the teachings of the early church? Instead it's almost exclusively Jesus who talks about it. Why would they put such teaching in Jesus' mouth if they were not concerned about it? Why would this later church have Jesus talk about disputes in Jewish law when they had no concern about such laws? Could it be because such disputes were common among Jewish teachers at Jesus' time and Jesus really did talk about them? What of the dominant teachings we find in Paul's writings, concepts like "the body of Christ" or "righteousness by faith"? Why are such concepts not found on Jesus' lips if the later church made up Jesus' memoirs? Why does Paul take such pains to distinguish his words from Jesus'? He said, "the Lord said . . . this I say. . ." (1 Corinthians 7:10, 12, 25). He wouldn't be so concerned to make such a distinction if he made up some of Jesus' teachings himself.

Matthew and Luke handle Mark's material, which they absorb into their writings, generally very carefully. If the early church felt free to create teachings they claimed to be Jesus', they wouldn't have been concerned to preserve other accounts. Jesus commanded his disciples to learn certain lessons and to transmit these to others in the missions he had sent them on and at other times. This is so common in the Gospels that it is very unlikely he did not do this. Craig Blomberg points out that "almost all

teachers in the Jewish and Greco-Roman world gathered disciples . . . to perpetuate their teachings and life-style. . . ." (*The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*. [IVP, 1987] 28). If Jesus was believed to be the Messiah by his followers and since the Messiah was believed to be a prophet like Moses with the same authority as Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18), his word would have been revered and accurately transmitted to new followers far more so than for any other rabbi of his time. The sayings of Jesus in Q were likely written earlier than the Gospels—probably around 50. With 17 to 20 years separating the writings and the events, it is even less likely that inaccurate teachings could enter this writing. And these teachings were not merely constantly repeated to new followers (and old) from the beginning of the church, they were very likely also written down from the very beginning. Traditional rabbinical method from at least 70 CE on expected precise and accurate memorization and transmission of a rabbi's teaching. This expectation must have had origins far earlier than 70 and in some form must have been part of the mind-set of Jesus' disciples.

Doland10: [To the first underlined sentence group above.] Answer me a simple question: how many people claim to be close followers of Jesus but actually embellish or are otherwise not completely truthful? Lots right? So, you are refuted.

Jensen11: No, I don't think there would be many at all. The closer you are to the original teachings as they came from Jesus, the more likely you will want to keep those words exactly as you heard them; the more you will value those very words as almost the words of God himself. In Jewish thought the Messiah was to be a teacher of righteousness. Since his first followers thought he was the Messiah, they would have highly esteemed his teachings. We don't have his words so meticulously memorized that the Synoptics have exactly the same words, but they are close enough that the essential teachings and recorded events are the same. You just can't get stories significantly embellished this soon after the events described without numerous original witnesses objecting.

Doland10: Since I happen to believe the story was actually intended to be read as fiction, there would be no witnesses to consult because it was intended to be fiction! Now, I concede I can't prove that. But, it is really in your court to prove your side. You need to prove that there were witnesses to be consulted, for example.

Jensen11: But there had to be witnesses around because Jesus didn't go preach to the trees. Somebody heard him. If he never did preach or if he never lived, people from the purported time of Jesus would have protested once these fictions were published. There is nothing about any of the Gospels that indicates the writers intended them to be read as fiction. Luke clearly says he followed normal procedures of historical researchers of his day and that this work is intended to tell his reader clearly what happened. John claims to provide accurate direct testimonial evidence. Mark and Matthew likewise say very straightforwardly, this is what happened. They were written just 30-40 years after Jesus' death (John, 60-70). Then the first recorded attestation of the earliest Gospels was just 60-70 years later. That's better than any secular works of the time that you would never question. If the Gospels were intended to be taken as fiction, then you have no grounds to say that any of the great historians of the time, Tacitus, Josephus, etc, were not intended to be taken as fiction. Why this double standard? Why this intellectual hypocrisy?

If the Gospels were written 30-40 years after Jesus' death, how could these "fictional" accounts be accepted by the church? If Jesus did live and have followers, some of them would still be around to say these accounts were fictional. These original followers who heard Jesus directly would be known and revered as elders and apostles. No one would accept these writings. How do we get four accounts that are so much alike in their description of what happened and what Jesus taught that are just fictions that all just came completely out of the blue? After Jesus' death the church grew explosively. You think the first direct followers of Jesus wouldn't have taught

the new followers anything about what Jesus did or taught? Since they obviously did, a core of oral teaching must have become deeply established from the beginning. How could that be displaced by these “complete fictions”?

Doland10: And by the way, society then wasn't exactly like society today. People didn't have newspapers, TV, internet. Who do you think was really going to spend the time investigating every claim of every religion? For the most part, non-believers didn't do this because they were doing things like trying to live. Your average Roman citizen didn't have the time to go chasing every claim of every religion. And believers didn't because they had “faith.”

Jensen11: At the beginning when it was all confined to Jerusalem and vicinity it would have been very easy to investigate. The followers of Jesus were going around saying they saw Jesus alive after his death. People who would want to ask more people would just ask them who the other witnesses were and go talk to them too. That wouldn't have been that hard to do. Since newspapers, TV, and the internet are so notoriously second hand and untrustworthy, they would have been lucky to be living at this time and be able to consult direct eyewitnesses.

Then as Christianity spread throughout the world it wouldn't have been quite as easy to investigate, at least as to the resurrection claims. But this still could and probably had been done. This was a religion quite unlike the other ones that were around. Here were claims that could be directly verified, not vague spiritual beliefs that couldn't be tested until after death or untestable moral philosophies. These other traditional religions and philosophies didn't really have much to investigate at all; you would just listen to them and see if you liked what you heard. Christianity, or the Way, as it was first called, was a religion people would have been more apt to want to investigate. The Book of Acts indicates that many believed because

of miraculous signs as well. Whether true or not, at least it is clearly denied that people believed because of any kind of blind faith. The same is true of the original disciples: the Gospels say that no one believed he had risen until they saw him (John was the only exception I remember; he said he “believed” when he saw the empty grave clothes). Jews living in the Gentile world often came to believe because of arguments involving messianic prophecy as well as the resurrection claim. The average Roman citizen certainly did have the time to go chasing after every new religious idea. Some, whether Roman or not, did just that (see e.g. Acts 17:21). Others, whether of the leisured class or not, would at least be interested in investigating such a unique religion; one that was new and testable, one that said its leader had risen from the dead, one that claimed signs and wonders as verification, one that showed marked changes in the moral lives of its followers, one that had followers so sure of their beliefs that they willingly faced persecution, scourging, even death rather than renounce it.

When Paul or any of the other early missionaries and evangelists would preach in a given city and a group of new Christians would form a church, someone from the group might be selected to go back to Jerusalem to investigate these resurrection testimonies further. That way the slaves and the poor who couldn't do it themselves, as well as others who wouldn't have done so because they had too many other obligations, could benefit from their investigation. Christians could tell their non-Christian friends that so and so had returned from Jerusalem after his investigation. Often not even that was needed. First of all those like Paul who first proclaimed the gospel were themselves witnesses to Jesus' resurrection and anyone going to Jerusalem to investigate would have been merely seeking to further substantiate the testimony they had already received. Also, many times because of persecution in Jerusalem, original eyewitnesses would travel throughout the Roman world. Of course they would want to visit the groups of new believers in the towns they passed through. Usually visiting new churches was their sole intention. Acts says this happened to Peter. Herod almost killed him in Jerusalem and he had to leave town. So claimed

original eyewitnesses would sooner or later show up at churches all around the Roman world who could be questioned as to what they saw.

Jewish believers would have made up a large proportion of the earliest churches in the Roman world. Because they would regularly make trips to Jerusalem for the annual feasts this would provide perfect opportunities to question those who claimed to be eyewitnesses to the resurrection and to return this testimony to their home churches. This would also allow them to confirm that their account of Jesus' life and teachings was the same as that which they had received. [Paragraph added 15Fb15.]

Jensen9: [The second underlined sentence group in Jensen9 above.] If any of the Gospels were partly or largely or entirely fictional accounts, why do they lack the features that we would expect of fictional accounts?

Doland10: You mean like people getting out of their graves and walking around? Or reports of things with no witnesses at all? Or mentions of virgin birth that couldn't possibly be validated even if it did happen? OF COURSE there are OBVIOUSLY FICTIONAL elements!

Jensen11: It sounds as though you are saying that because a miracle is claimed it is obviously fictional. If that is actually what you're saying, then you are letting your naturalistic bias distort your ability to distinguish fiction from nonfiction. This is sheer question begging. If theism is true, there is no reason to think a miracle claim cannot be part of a trustworthy historical account. I've given numerous examples of features in the Gospels that we would not expect of fictional accounts.

You may also be referring to the story in Matthew 27 where it is claimed that graves were open at Jesus' death and some of the righteous dead came to life after his resurrection. This account is sometimes rejected because it is only found in Matthew's Gospel and we have no other

historical account of this event. We have just seen that it is not possible for the Gospel writers to have made up at least the bulk of their stories about Jesus; I think we should be able to see that it is also likely they did not make up even the more difficult individual stories within the Gospels. Matthew said these resurrected people appeared to many people in Jerusalem. That means there likely were people who claimed to be witnesses from whom Matthew got the stories and, indeed, he may have witnessed this himself. Whether these witnesses (like any other witnesses for any other claims in the Gospels or in any secular writings) just made it up or not we do not know with certainty. Historiographers simply have to accept the accounts that claimed witnesses give unless there is good reason to doubt them. But the point is that it is likely that they did claim to be witnesses. Some stories, whether directly witnessed by the writer or whether they came from other witnesses, need not have been widely disseminated. Luke and Peter (Mark's source) and Mark didn't need to have recounted this story or even to have heard of it. For many witnesses such appearances may have been very fleeting, and they may have seemed little more than ghost stories when these witnesses first recounted them. Perhaps some of the witnesses were reluctant to repeat their stories after such reactions. After they heard of or discovered that some of the tombs of the saints were broken open, they may have come to understand that these were the first to be resurrected after Jesus and thus the story became more repeated. By this means the story would not have been as widely known in the early church. There may be a better explanation for this story being less well known, but I think the possibility of my scenario shows that it is very feasible that the story was true and still not widely known in the early church.

Now none of this is good reason to believe this miracle actually happened. (This kind of evidence would, however, be enough to give good reason to accept accounts of non-miraculous events.) This or other possible scenarios only show that there is nothing intrinsically unfeasible about this story. We cannot say that it is unlikely that this happened merely because some would think that such an event would be more widely known in the

early church. Once such objections are removed, the evidence that this event actually took place follows from the evidence that the resurrection took place. The resurrection is supported by much stronger historical evidence. For one thing, if the resurrection occurred, it is not at all unlikely that other miracles surrounded Jesus' life. But more importantly, we should consider the following line of argumentation: If Jesus rose from the dead and if he had previously claimed that he would do so, we have reason to believe his other claims as well. Since we have good reason to believe that he said his disciples would be led into new spiritual truth and that they would be led to recall past events of his life (John 14:26), and because we have seen that it is likely that Matthew wrote the canonical Gospel that bears his name and that he was one of those disciples Jesus spoke to, we have good reason to believe Matthew himself either recalled this event himself or he recalled hearing the story from another claimed witness or witnesses. Even if Matthew had merely heard it from someone else, since Jesus said Matthew would also be led by God's Spirit into the truth, we have reason to accept that Matthew was led to accept this story as true.

Some miracle stories did not indicate there were any human witnesses for the events. Some stories, such as when Jesus was alone and tempted by Satan in the wilderness, may have been related to the disciples by Jesus. Even if you can find some stories that couldn't have had a human witness, John 14:26 and our previous argument shows that we have reason to accept it if given by a disciple of Jesus.

As for the virgin birth, since both Matthew and Luke claim this occurred, it is likely they got it from witnesses like Mary and/or her family (who originally must have gotten it from Mary). Mary definitely knew that it was or was not a virgin birth. Joseph had good evidence that it was truly a virgin birth and he might have also been a source of some of this information before his death. Why do you say this could not possibly be validated? Wouldn't their testimony provide some kind of validity to the claim? You say that there are obviously fictional elements in these stories but you have not shown any. There is nothing obviously fictional about a virgin birth.

Jensen9: [Third underlined sentence group in Jensen9 above.] If Peter or any of the other apostles wrote or dictated these fictions, why did they paint themselves as such failures and fools?

Doland10: BECAUSE THE APOSTLES ARE FICTIONAL TOO! Or at least, that is my best guess. It's a tried and true plot device of a fictional moral story for the characters to be "failures and fools" so that the audience can learn from the failures and foolishness of the characters. Isn't that obvious?

Jensen11: But if Peter or any of the disciples who are depicted in the Gospel stories are fictional then you have to admit that not only the Gospels but also Acts and the historical statements in the Epistles are fiction. But if you do not accept Acts as generally historically accurate, then you simply have no grounds to accept any of the secular historians of the day. We have Paul writing that Peter and other original disciples did and said certain things. We have Acts claiming that these named disciples did other things. You're just wiping away all of this testimony for no adequate reason. You say you reject it and consider it to be fiction because of the miracles. Well, we talked about a miracle story in Suetonius. You didn't dismiss the entirety of Suetonius just because of that. You said you would reject that particular story and accept much of the rest as solid historiography. But you don't do that for the non-miraculous portions of the New Testament. Your double standard is showing.

So because we see that the apostles are the likely sources of the Gospels and because they did show themselves to sometimes act foolishly and often fail, we see here good reason to believe that they wrote what did actually happen. They wouldn't have done so if they were just making this all up.

But now suppose that someone other than the first disciples and other eyewitnesses wrote or provided the basic content of these Gospels. Suppose they made it all up. We might think the writer would create stories about certain characters he didn't like as being fools and failures. Maybe the "bad guys," the Pharisees for example, would be good to paint that way. But oddly, we don't see much of that. Jesus does sometimes tell them that they are foolish, but more often he simply tells them they are evil. And he does so for practices and beliefs they are known to have valued and held. If our hypothetical fiction writer wanted to depict someone as a fool or failure to make a moral point, to show the audience what you look like when you do such foolish things, wouldn't he have picked someone other than the fictional leaders of the early church? They must have been highly esteemed, even if the only way they were known was from the "fictitious" New Testament books. So all in all, it is very obvious that even a fictional account of the life of Jesus would never portray the purported first church leaders and followers of Jesus as failures and fools.

And where do you get this idea that it is a tried and true fictional plot device to portray individuals as fools and failures to make a moral point to an audience? Show me a first or second century moral story (CE or BCE) that uses this technique. Show me one from any time in history. Maybe you're right, but I just don't recall any such stories in ancient or modern history. (And don't beg the question by giving stories which you claim to be fiction but which are purported to be true.) [Paragraph added 21Ap10.]

Jensen9: [The fourth underlined sentence group in Jensen9 above.] Would someone make up a story about the savior of the world being humiliated, mocked, whipped and dying a slave's death, a death on a cross?

Doland10: James Holding asks: "Who on earth would believe a religion centered on a crucified man?" Well, the Sumerians perhaps. One of their top goddesses, Inanna (the Babylonian Ishtar, Goddess of Love and

“Queen of Heaven”), was stripped naked and crucified, yet rose again and, triumphant, condemned to Hell her lover, the shepherd-god Dumuzi (the Babylonian Tammuz). This became the center of a major Sumerian sacred story, preserved in clay tablets dating over a thousand years before Christ. The corresponding religion, which we now know included the worship of a crucified Inanna, is mentioned by Ezekiel as having achieved some popularity within Jerusalem itself by the 6th century B.C. The “women weeping for Tammuz” at the north gate of the Jewish Temple (Ezekiel 8:14) we now know were weeping because Inanna had condemned him to Hell, after herself being crucified and resurrected. So the influence of this religious story and its potent, apparently compelling allure upon pre-Christian Judaism is in evidence.

Even so, my point is not that the Christians got the idea of a crucified god from early Inanna cult. There may have been some direct or indirect influence we cannot trace. We can’t rule that out—the idea of worshipping a crucified deity did predate Christianity and had entered Jewish society within Palestine. But we don’t know any more than that. Rather, my point is that we have here a clear example of many people worshipping a crucified god. Therefore, as a matter of principle—unless Holding wants to claim that Inanna really was resurrected—it appears that people would worship a false crucified god.

Jensen11: Let’s start by just assuming that what you are saying is true about there being precursors to various elements of Christianity in earlier religions and other beliefs. I don’t think it would be entirely unreasonable to think that God might allow such in order to prepare the developing cultures, ethos, and thought patterns to be ready for this new belief. Back in C.S. Lewis’ time it was much more widely believed that many earlier religions did have dying and rising gods, etc. Of course this is much less accepted in scholarly circles now, as Strobel shows in his *The Case for the Real Jesus* (see 160-61).

If such beliefs do predate Christianity, they certainly do not find any ground in first century Judaism. After the Exile, Judaism became very intolerant of any deviation from the Torah and conservative Torah commentary. Beliefs from pagan religions would have a hard time creeping in. The idea of the resurrection did develop in the intertestamental period but the resurrection was only believed to occur at the end of the age. There are Jewish traditions in which it was thought that there would be a second Messiah other than the Davidic Messiah (and sometimes even another). This second Messiah was called Messiah the son of Joseph (Yosef). Isaiah 53 greatly initiated this idea. Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, suffered greatly only to later triumph. Messiah ben Yosef suffered and died. There are Jewish traditions that said he would die only to be raised back to life by Messiah ben David, the primary Messiah anticipated by traditional Judaism. In some traditions Messiah ben David is said to suffer though we have no traditions of him dying. (Michael Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids Mi: Baker Books, 2000], 220-31.)

If you've seen *Shadow Lands*, you might remember a scene where C.S. Lewis as a young atheist (or he may have been a philosophical Idealist by this time) is on a walk with his friend J.R.R. Tolkein and Lewis complains about Christianity being just another dying and rising corn-god myth. Lewis finally finds himself taken aback as Tolkein keeps pounding home his point, "Yes, it was a corn-god myth, but it was a myth that entered history."

Now assuming your story about the Sumerian religion is correct, you point out that people do sometimes worship or esteem gods and mythical figures who have suffered and perhaps even have died and risen from the dead. If we have an established religion, then yes, it is possible for the myth-makers to add stories like this, and the stories come to be a part of the accepted worship. But that is just a change in an established religion. If you want to start one brand new and you don't have an established population which is obligated to accept your new stories, you will try to create myths that will be easily accepted. A myth involving the humiliating death of the

esteemed or even worshiped semi-divine or divine figure is just not something one would make up to spread a new religion.

As to whether your claim about Inanna-Ishtar and Dumuzi-Tammuz is true or not: Edwin Yamauchi comments (in *The Case for the Real Jesus*) that it is the resurrection of Dumuzi by Inanna (176) that has been commonly assumed and you say it's a resurrection of Inanna. Now it may be that there is also a resurrection of Inanna that he does not mention here. I would have to track down Yamauchi's original article to see if he has more to say about this. He notes that the best understanding is rather that Dumuzi was not resurrected but sent to the underworld as Inanna's substitute. Also this story is tied to the seasons and vegetation cycles, it's part of a nature religion. None of this affects your basic claim, however, that there are mythical figures who have been humiliated and killed and who were worshiped. It would affect the claim that there are precursors to Jesus' resurrection in ancient myths. And again, no one would start a religion by creating a myth about a humiliated and killed savior unless they have good evidence for it. You can only create a fictitious humiliated savior story if you are plugging it into an already accepted religion.

Doland8: [Continued from the above Doland8.] If the guy who wrote [Mark] didn't feel it important to tell us that he used Peter, how do you really think people living 50 years or more later have [a] good scoop on this information? They didn't, or at least, we don't have any good reason to think so. Your evidence is nothing.

Jensen9: But Papias said how he had access to this information. To deny this as good evidence for his claims is to apply skeptical standards to the Gospels that no historian would apply to any other historical document. Papias had access to oral or possibly written accounts of how Mark wrote his Gospel. He may have sat under the teachings of the apostle John (according to Irenaeus) but possibly only those "presbyters" who sat under

the apostles (see Eusebius' discussion and direct quotation of Papias in *Church History*, iii.39). He had a special interest in finding sayings from Jesus that were not included in the written Gospels so he said he sought out the most original sources he could locate. So Papias' description of how Mark wrote his Gospel following from Peter's preaching is very well established.

It is interesting that Irenaeus (a student of Polycarp, a student of John the apostle) and Clement of Alexandria (both ca.180) confirm this. (Clement claimed sources from the "earliest presbyters" as did Papias, [*Church History*, vi.14]). I've also mentioned that Justin (150) spoke of the "Memoirs of Peter" which along with other "Memoirs of the Apostles" he said were called "Gospels." And I gave evidence that the memoirs of Peter was the Gospel of Mark. These additional individuals, with sources going back to the apostles, further substantiate Papias' claim.

Doland10: Take a look at this book at Amazon: http://www.amazon.com/Greek-Roman-Historians-Information-Misinformation/dp/0415117704/ref=sr_1_2

It's a purely secular work, about secular Roman historians. The author argues that at times, Josephus and other Roman historians distorted their histories for an agenda. I'm not going to argue for or against his hypothesis. I'm simply pointing out that yes, all historians apply criticism to all sources and consider all sources to be potentially false by either accident or intent. This is INDEED how history works! Deal with it.

Jensen11: It is widely accepted that ancient historians usually wrote with other purposes in mind than merely to tell what happened. Some, for example, had moral intentions as they depicted corruption in societies and rulers. Different Gospel writers likely had differing emphases and wrote to different communities with different needs. Different emphases do not indicate distortion. We can question some details of any secular historian of the time and still accept most of what they claim. But we have to have

some reason to question a statement by an historiographer. I don't know if the book you mention above takes an excessively skeptical approach; some writers do so. A good approach to ancient history accepts any writer who claims to have good sources (and is not known not to) and does not present statements we otherwise have reason to doubt. There may be questionable statements that may be analyzed and finally accepted or rejected or held with differing degrees of probability. The writer still could be accepted for his/her other historical claims.

So let me add one qualifying word to my above response. "To deny this [Papias' claim to good sources] as good evidence for his claims is to apply skeptical standards to the Gospels that no *good* historian would apply to any other historical document."

Doland8: And, even if Mark did write based on Peter, you still can't be serious. If I was a traveler with you, and then wrote of our experiences years afterwards, do you REALLY think I'd have it down to be so close as to be "virtually your literal words"? Please. Sure, you might say that Peter placed high importance on the teachings and therefore took extra care to remember them properly. Unfortunately, that doesn't help significantly. Studies of memories of people like holocaust survivors, who had strong emotional ties to the events, showed they didn't have particularly good memories. Indeed, the emotions can *hinder* correct recall! And, by the way, this much is not some peculiar bias against your religion. If some secular source made claims that they recalled exact or near exact words from twenty years earlier, I wouldn't buy that either.

Jensen9: What's this "twenty years earlier" stuff? Papias just said that Peter spoke according to the needs of his hearers and Mark wrote it down (obviously only when it involved Jesus' teachings or events of Jesus' life). He likely wrote it down in the evening after he had helped Peter with his speaking engagements for each day. He could have even taken notes

while Peter was talking and this could have been going on since Mark first started traveling with Peter. Remember that Mark was likely in the early Jerusalem church since it's beginning. He likely picked up these teachings from the start. Clement of Alexandria said Mark wrote this because people knew Mark had accompanied Peter for a number of years and so they asked him to write it all down for them. He even mentions that when Mark showed his work to Peter, he neither commended nor discouraged the work. This is one of those interesting asides that would very likely not be included unless it was true. One would not expect such a specified statement of indifference from someone just making up a story about how we got the Gospel of Mark. One would probably expect some enthusiastic endorsement by Peter. So, yes, Mark's Gospel is likely "virtually his [Peter's] literal words."

Now when we talk about Peter repeating the stories and teachings of Jesus accurately after 20 to 30 years, then we are talking about what they call oral tradition. But this characterization oversimplifies and misrepresents the situation. This is something Peter was constantly repeating to new followers and old all his life. This was not just recalling some vague event of 30 years ago. Also, in the early church there were always other witnesses around who would correct him if he made a misstatement (or he would correct them when they taught). So there was usually a self-correcting mechanism for error. When Peter went off on his own and there were no other old disciples and other witnesses around (if this were ever his situation), then that check would be gone. But again, the more Peter repeated these stories and teaching, the more unalterable they would become in his own mind. I know that sometimes when I want to memorize something, I just repeat it again and again. [A following paragraph is omitted since it repeats material discussed earlier.]

As far as memory studies go, I would think that we should anticipate that holocaust survivors would be less than the best study group. Just a rudimentary knowledge of general and abnormal psychology tells us that it is very common to repress painful memories. I remember a story of

someone who could no longer see the color red after witnessing a particularly gruesome, bloody scene. Also we would have other witnesses who can substantiate or correct statements in the Gospel accounts. In holocaust studies, we should not be accepting the word of Nazi captors. Only if we have other surviving prisoners repeating the same stories would we have corroborating evidence. But single witnesses could still be credible witnesses of horrible crimes even if the mind erases some details. Of course I don't know exactly what study Doland is referring to, so I will wait to pass judgment. But my above misgivings would tend to make me think such a study will not be as useful a comparison to the accuracy of oral tradition. [Minor alterations 16Fb15.]

One might think that these holocaust studies would at least be comparable to people's memories of Jesus on the cross. Both were emotionally wrenching to the witnesses. Some watchers might have been so traumatized by Jesus death that they could not afterward remember the look of his face or the blood flowing out, etc. I can imagine that.

But some of the witnesses provided very precise detail: blood and water flowing out at the piercing of Jesus' side, the words he spoke, the specific incidences that occurred. This corresponds to the kind of precise detail that often accompanies recollections twenty, thirty, or even more years after some very significant event in a person's life, and even without significant repetition of any narrative of the events to others: Kennedy's assassination or John Lennon's death, for example. You may be able to tell me exactly where you were that day and what you were doing all day or much of the day, and what people around you or those involved in the events said and did.

For many people, a traumatic experience like this may make the details all the more graphic and the memory more extensive. I was in high school when the former event occurred. I remember details from that specific high school day which I know I would not have remembered otherwise. I would tend to think Jesus' death was more like this to most people. Even if those

who saw Jesus die did not repeat the story to new listeners (which is extremely unlikely), these memories would be events burned into the minds of the witnesses. This would be something constantly brought back to mind, at first as a reminder of how their hopes and dreams were dashed, but then, after the resurrection, as a constant reminder that Jesus had conquered and that they have hope and a reason for living, and a task, a goal before them. This would be a joy mixed with a deep sorrow, something one would never forget.

Craig Blomberg points out that the more comparable studies of oral tradition are quite close to what we find in the Gospels, and the accuracy of the former is significant. For long repeated stories (100,000 word epic stories repeated by Yugoslavian folk singers) there is a 10%-40% variation in the precise wording from one performance to another. More significant errors would be rarer and corrected by those in the audience who know the story. This variation is much the same as we find in the Synoptics. Also, as with the oral tradition of the folk epics, when the stories of Jesus were repeated to new hearers and converts, there were always those in the audience who could correct any more significant error. And as the errors might be thought to be more significant, they would also be much less likely to be repeated.

Now we are talking about the time between the death of Jesus and the first written Gospels. For at least the basic understanding of Jesus' life and teachings, this would be the maximum amount of time for oral tradition to be working. If Jesus died between 30 and 33 and Mark was written between 58 and 63, we have between 25 and 33 years separating them. And then we have mentioned that Jesus' teachings were likely written about 10 years earlier, giving them a 15 to 23 year separation from Jesus' death. During the 25 to 33 years (or the 15 to 23 years for just the teachings) of oral tradition, as with the folk epics, there would be minor variations in the stories. As Blomberg says, "There is every reason to believe that many of the sayings and actions of Jesus would have been very carefully safeguarded in the first decades . . . , not so slavishly as to

hamper freedom to paraphrase, explain, abbreviate and rearrange, but faithfully enough to produce reliable accounts of those facets of Christ's ministry selected for preservation." (*Historical Reliability* [1987], 30-31.)

Some scholars do not like applying an oral model to this period before the Gospels because some portions of the Gospels drew from written sources. Indeed, we cannot preclude even written notes being used throughout this time and even when Jesus himself was teaching. Recall that not only was memorization commonly used by students of the rabbis of this time, but it was also common to use a popular shorthand of the period. But until the last Gospel was written, oral tradition still had an influence on shaping the stories and teachings that were not yet written.

All this accords with the statement by the famous Roman historian, A.N. Sherwin-White, that the amount of time is just too short in the case of the Gospels for accurate oral tradition to be displaced by inaccurate tradition.

Doland10: [To underlined sentences above.] First, you are accepting that Papias was 100% correct, without any evidence other than taking Papias' word. Or rather, I believe you are taking Eusebius' word on Papias' word. And then, based on assuming Papias is 100% correct, totally making stuff up about when it was written down.

Jensen11: Yes, I do accept Papias' word because we have no good reason to question it. That's what historians do. He was very close to the time of the writings, he claims to have received this information from good sources, and he hasn't said anything that should be considered questionable. He claims Mark "wrote down accurately, . . . [and] made no mistake in writing down certain things as he called them to mind; for he paid attention to one thing: to omit none of the things he had heard and to make no false statements." We don't have Papias' complete work but we do have this portion of it recorded in Eusebius. Does it matter that we only have Eusebius copying Papias rather than Papias' full or partial text copied by

some other copier? Students of ancient history virtually never deal with the original first text.

Finally, I'm not making up anything about when Papias or Mark were written. These are dates determined on the basis of internal evidence and statements by those whom good historians consider normal credible witnesses. There is just no good reason to question their credibility. What I am "making up" is just some of the possible details of how Mark might have carried out his work. I'm merely pointing out how Papias' description of Mark's work could fit a very accurate dictation or paraphrase of Peter's words. Papias may have had these details and neglected to mention them because they were not needed. Since he accepted Mark's account as accurate he must have accepted the details I presented above or something similar. All that I am doing is presenting a very feasible scenario that would allow Papias' statement to be accurate. Unless you can show that it is not feasible that Papias' claims would be true, we should accept them as we would for any other such witness.

Doland8: You mentioned rhyme and meter. Which can indeed be a memory aid. It can also be an artistic tool of an author! The fact that some of what is attributed to what Jesus said has rhyme and meter, that doesn't mean that what he actually said did! And even if it did, that only includes his teachings. Events like the alleged virgin birth, (which nobody could know whether it is true or not) and the alleged Resurrection have no relevant rhyme, meter. So, even if you could argue that a fair amount of the teachings could be memorized, you still have lots of stuff you can't apply your argument to.

Jensen9: But the rhyme and meter occurs when we translate the written Greek back to the Aramaic Jesus spoke. So it wasn't the artistic tool of the writer. It is found in the original language spoken. I suppose it is possible that the first Christians shaped Jesus' words into a form that could be more

easily remembered, but it is more likely that that is how Jesus gave it to them. Now Papias did say that Matthew wrote his Gospel in the Hebrew dialect, probably meaning Aramaic. The problem is that it is difficult to find translation Greek in Matthew as we now have it. So Papias might have been referring to only portions of the Gospel, perhaps a sayings portion. Or it may have become known that he wrote an earlier Aramaic edition of the entire work for the Jewish believers in Judea. In either case, if there are any distinctly poetic forms found in sayings translated back into Aramaic in Matthew, it is possible that Matthew put them there as an artistic tool, as you say. But isn't it more likely that he simply passed these on as he remembered them and heard them from other original listeners? Aren't there more effective artistic tool for writers? How does it happen that such a tool just happens to be a powerful learning device?

No, I don't think the rhyme and meter applies to the narratives. I've given other reasons to accept their historicity. As for the virgin birth, Mary certainly knew whether this actually occurred. We can know as well if we thought we had reason to believe Mary, the ultimate source of the story. I think we do have reason to believe her. I've given reasons earlier to accept the miracle stories of the Gospels that do not in themselves possess direct evidence for their historicity.

Carrier6: Second, we have many of Caesar's enemies, including Cicero, a contemporary of the event, reporting the crossing of the Rubicon, whereas we have no hostile or even neutral records of the resurrection until over a hundred years after the event, which is fifty years after the Christians' own claims had been widely spread around.

Jensen7: But an enemy of Caesar would be less credible than a friend in this case. To say that Caesar unlawfully crossed the Rubicon to attack the rightful Roman government would be what we should expect of someone

who would be out to malign him. So there is certainly no benefit for the evidence in having an enemy claim this.

On the other hand, for Caesar to admit that he did this would also be expected without it adding credence above any normal eyewitness. Caesar gave his defense of his action: among other reasons, his life was in peril had he not . . . attack[ed] Rome. [Note: I omit the following words I had included originally: “crossed the river to.” We must not forget, as I had, that in his *Civil War* Caesar never said he crossed the Rubicon.] But in any case, he was the emperor when he wrote this so he had nothing to be afraid of by saying virtually anything he wanted to say.

Now if we had some enemies of Jesus claim the resurrection was all a fraud, and if they had some evidence to support their claim, then we would have some good counter-evidence. We should expect them to say it never happened; that alone is not good grounds to show that it did not occur unless they gave some evidence. For example, suppose we had the testimony of a guard at the tomb who says nothing happened for over a week, so the authorities finally disbanded the watch. Or suppose we had someone’s testimony that Jesus’ followers just claimed a spiritual resurrection occurred as opposed to the common and otherwise unanimous Jewish understanding of a bodily resurrection of a physical corpse.

Suppose an enemy or neutral party said that there was evidence of tomb robbing. That would be good counter-evidence against the resurrection. Now they can’t just say it, they need evidence; say, note several other accounts of grave robbing in the area in the previous month. Just to say, “Oh, the body’s missing, somebody must have stolen it,” is no evidence it was stolen, but it is evidence that the body was missing. Or suppose an enemy became a follower of Jesus because of the evidence of the resurrection, that would be good positive evidence. [One unnecessary sentence removed 15Jan15.]

Well, suppose as Carrier claims, we have none of this kind of evidence for the resurrection. In that case we would have no greater evidence for the crossing than for the resurrection in this regard. The enemy-testimony evidence for the crossing has no greater value than any other testimonial evidence and all we have is Caesar's statement and the second-hand evidence from the four historians.

But in fact we do have evidence that an enemy of Jesus became a follower because of the resurrection evidence. Paul said that on the way to Damascus to persecute believers he saw Jesus in a bright light, spoke with him, and thus became his follower. He depicts this as of the same kind of visual experiences the other disciples had before Jesus' ascension. This is something he said his companions heard and saw as well though they only saw a light and heard a sound or voice they did not understand. So this was not just a vision. (Acts 9:1-7, 22:2-10, I Corinthians 15:5-8). Also, from his subsequent encounter with the other apostles (if not sooner) he heard their accounts of the earlier resurrection appearances.

We also have evidence of a non-believer (James, Jesus' brother) coming to believe in Jesus because of a resurrection appearance (Mark 3:21, 6:3, John 7:3-5, 1Corinthians 15:7). One of Jesus' followers (Thomas) did not believe in his resurrection until he physically encountered him (John 20:24-29). Can Carrier or Doland give any good reason to reject these (including Paul's experience) as evidence for Jesus' resurrection?

We have no evidence of Jesus' enemies leaving negative evidence for the resurrection. Possibly, like James or Paul, anyone he appeared to came to believe in him. Matthew does give a story of angels appearing to guards at the tomb and moving the stone. They report this to the chief priest and religious leaders who give them money to say that they slept and the disciples stole the body. We are not told that they saw Jesus resurrected but the tomb was clearly empty (Matthew 28:2-4, 11-14). Carrier does not accept this account because it is found in Matthew's Gospel, though he provides no good reason to reject Matthew's historicity. This does provide

good evidence that the body was missing and that the common response by Jesus' enemies was that the body was stolen.

We shouldn't expect Jesus' enemies to have left written accounts denying or even mentioning the resurrection claims. With the destruction of Jerusalem there is a good possibility that any such accounts would not have survived. And there is certainly no reason to think the Jewish church was so small that the Jewish authorities were hardly aware of it. Tacitus indicates that there were large numbers of Christians in Rome in 64 when Nero burned Rome and started persecuting the Christians. Suetonius even leads us to believe there were large numbers there in 49. The entire Jewish population was expelled from Rome because of one "Chrestus" (Life of Claudius 25:4). This probably referred to "Christ," indicating discontent between Jewish Christians and non-Christian Jews. This was too serious of a punishment, involving as it did the entire Jewish population, for this to have involved a small number of Christians. This fits the description in Acts of large numbers of Christians being added to the Jerusalem church from its beginning (2:44).

Doland8: Reading Josh McDowell I take it? THIS CLAIM IS COMPLETE GARBAGE! First, McDowell, and his copycats, assume that Suetonius misspelled "Christus". There is NO EVIDENCE that Suetonius misspelled Christus, it is just assumed. Furthermore, Chrestus was a common name of the time, so, it is most probable that Suetonius was in fact talking about somebody named Chrestus and not Christus. And for the icing on the cake, look at the actual quote of Suetonius: "As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome." Since nobody believes Jesus was in Rome in 49, it is IMPOSSIBLE that Suetonius was talking about Jesus! You made a claim that the history about the crossing of the Rubicon was just based on rumors, and then you offer up this "evidence." What a crock! What hypocrisy!

Jensen9: My you can fight hard for such a small gain in ground. Suppose the expulsion of the Jews from Rome had nothing to do with the Christians.

what would that do to my argument? It would mean that I could still claim there were a large number of Christians in Rome fifteen years later (see my previous sentence). Fifteen years is that important to you? It certainly does not affect my claim that there were probably a large number of Christians in Jerusalem from the church's beginning.

Whether or not I have much to gain from "McDowell's" claim, this is much too interesting a topic for me to resist replying. First of all, it was not Josh McDowell who came up with this idea. (I think he would be flattered that someone thought this of him. I certainly would be.) I ran into it first in F.F. Bruce's *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*. But Robert Van Voorst points out that this "elusive sentence" has generated "a small library" of analysis and commentary (*Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 31). Of these numerous secular and biblical scholars, he says, "the near-unanimous identification of him [Chrestus] with Christ has made the answer to this question possibly too settled. For example, A.N. Wilson has recently written, 'Only the most perverse scholars have doubted that "Chrestus" is Christ.' " (*Jesus Outside*, 32; Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* [London: Norton, 1997] 104.)

Van Voorst claims that this is not certain, however, but only probable. Be that as it may, the evidence is quite persuasive. In Acts (18:2) we hear of Aquila and Priscilla, two Jewish Christians from Rome, who moved to Corinth because of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome. With this we turn to Suetonius' statement. The difference of pronunciation of the two names, Christus and Chrestus, was very small and easily missed, as is exemplified by the discovery of a number of such misspellings. Chrestus was a common name for slaves and freemen (slaves who gained their freedom). We have no record of a Jew with that name though numerous catacomb inscriptions and other sources of Jewish names have been analyzed. So tell me, How would some Gentile without political power be able to incite Jews in Rome to riot? Furthermore, the word "Christus" was new to the wider Roman population as a name or religious title. It would have suggested the medical term "anointer" or the construction term "plasterer,"

thus prompting a tendency to misread or mispronounce it as the more familiar Chrestus. So when Suetonius searched the old police records, he likely found talk of a disturbance because of one Christus, misspelled in the report to Chrestus since it was misheard because it was taken to be someone's name. We do not know whether there were simply no better records to be found, whether Suetonius was dismissed as secretary to Hadrian before he could search the records sufficiently, or whether he simply did not care enough to do good historical research. Likely it was at least the first, but possibly one or two of the others as well. Despite Carrier's high praise of Suetonius among the leading historians of the time, he is known for his carelessness and uncriticalness. From the *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*: "Suetonius followed whatever source attracted him, without caring much whether it was reliable or not." (M.C. Howatson, ed. [2d ed, Oxford: OUP, 1989] 542.)

Just because no one today thinks Jesus was in Rome in 49 does not mean Suetonius couldn't have thought such a thing. At the very least, Suetonius could have thought that this instigator was there without his knowing who he was or that this had anything to do with Christianity. And I've never said Caesar crossing the Rubicon was just a rumor; it's just that the evidence isn't as good as the resurrection evidence. I think the evidence for the crossing is quite good enough to believe. So no hypocrisy is involved in my claims.

Doland10: [To the first underlined sentence in Jensen9 above.] I can't figure out which "previous sentence" of yours proved large numbers of Christians in Rome, unless you refer to the part in Acts. How come no other historian took note of the Christians? None.

Jensen11: There isn't any "part in Acts" that says there were large numbers of Christians in Rome in the 60s unless you mean the evidence I cited showing there were large numbers there in 49. This is the statement in Acts 18:2 coupled with Suetonius' statement. Even if the Jews were expelled in 49, many would have likely returned to Rome fairly quickly after

Tiberius died. This could be taken to imply a multitude of Christians in Rome in the seventh decade.

My statement (in Jensen7) to which you responded (and to which I in turn responded in Jensen9 above) was “Suetonius even leads us to believe there were large numbers there in 49. The entire Jewish population was expelled from Rome because of one ‘Chrestus.’ ” The “previous sentence” you couldn’t locate, my statement *exactly* prior to this statement in Jensen7 I just quoted, was “Tacitus indicates that there were large numbers of Christians in Rome in 64 when Nero burned Rome and started persecuting the Christians.” There is no ambiguity in Tacitus’ statement. You didn’t know Tacitus said this? So no other secular historians took note of the Christians?

Jensen9: [The second underlined sentence in Jensen9 above.] Of these numerous secular and biblical scholars, he says, “the near-unanimous identification of him [Chrestus] with Christ has made the answer to this question possibly too settled.

Doland10: Don’t give me the *fallacy ad populum*, give me the evidence.

Jensen11: This is not an argument, this is a summary statement of the current state of belief in the scholarly community. It is not at all uncommon or illegitimate to give such a summary statement prior to giving an argument, as I have done. It is simply nice to have this relevant background information prior to hearing an argument. Notice that I did give the argument shortly after making this summary statement. Since Doland saw my argument and did not retract his complaint against my presenting a *fallacy ad populum*, it is obvious that he added this barb for rhetorical purposes only and is not being intellectually honest.

Doland10: [To the third underlined sentence group in Jensen9 above.] So, let me get this straight. You find Seutonius to be unreliable, was wrong about Jesus being Rome, misspelled Chirstus, and yet you say it is “probable” that he was talking about Jesus and this is good evidence of Christianity. WHAT DRUGS ARE YOU ON? You’ve said that everything Seutonius has said about the incident is wrong, and yet this is your evidence?

Jensen11: There were disturbances in Jerusalem that were similar according to Acts and Josephus. It was almost entirely a Jewish issue for some years until Gentiles began increasing the ranks of believers. Some Jews were very strongly opposed to Jesus while others strongly followed him. This kind of discord was bound to flare up anywhere the two groups of Jews were found together. Acts records numerous such incidences through the Roman world. So some kind of disturbance was bound to happen in Rome, since so many Jews lived there. We know of no other issue so dividing the first century Jews of the Roman world. Now the police investigate these riots among the Jews in Rome and everybody is talking about somebody named Christus. If the riots resulted from the followers of Jesus claiming he was the Messiah, the Christ, then of course the main culprit for these disturbances would seem to be this person called Christus. But that isn’t a name, that’s a kind of title, at least in the common Roman thinking. Now Chrestus is a common name. It’s very close to Christus, much closer to Roman ears than even our modern pronunciation would suggest. We have no other accounts of anyone named Chrestus causing trouble or starting riots in the Roman world of this time. It is just too likely that the investigators mistook the title Christus for the name Chrestus. (Also recall the other points I brought up earlier supporting this conclusion.)

I hope the reader will not be too impatient with my having to spell out something most people will find to be fairly obvious. Those who have closed their minds to the obvious need this kind of detailed explanation. Of course it isn’t obvious that they will even then perceive the obvious.

I don't think Suetonius is completely unreliable. My quotation shows that it is commonly accepted by contemporary historians of antiquity that Suetonius is not fully trusted even though his statements are normally accepted unless we have reason to doubt them. And that's how I see Suetonius as well. Carrier admits Suetonius' failings and yet he praises him when he does good work. My tentative questioning of Suetonius' credibility does suggest the scenario I've presented. The fact that the first Christians in Rome were Jews, that there was contention between Jewish followers and opponents of Jesus, that the common Gentile name Chrestus was likely assumed because the police officials wouldn't have known what to make of a name like Christus—all this makes it most likely that the riots resulted from opposition between Jewish followers and Jewish opponents of Jesus.

Now if Suetonius were an exemplary historian, we would come up with the same conclusion. It is not necessary that Suetonius misspelled the name Christus as Chrestus. This very possibly occurred on the police records, as I've argued above. It is not at all necessary that Suetonius connected this particular incident with the Christians. With our hindsight and our broader understanding of the historical context, we can see that the expulsion was most likely tied to the Christians. I think my above argument or something very close to it is quite persuasive, and evidently most classical historians agree. Perhaps Doland thinks most modern historians of classical history are on drugs too?

I ask the reader to think through my argument as I've given it above and not to pick and choose features of the argument to focus on as Doland has just done. I recall a debate between Vic Stenger and William Lane Craig. Craig presented the argument for the resurrection, among other arguments. Stenger responded to one of Craig's points, the evidence for the empty tomb of Jesus, that if a body is missing, we will usually assume it has been stolen. Well, if Craig's argument consisted of nothing more than the evidence for the empty tomb, then Stenger's statement would have

completely defeated Craig's case for the resurrection. But Craig's argument was more involved. To fully confront the evidence for the resurrection, one needs to deal with the evidence of the witnesses as well as Craig's several other points that follow from the historical context. Together, his case is very compelling. Likewise, Doland's response has force only if the other points of my argument are ignored.

Doland8: You had said Cicero might lie for the purpose of placing more crimes at the feet of Caesar. But you have already conceded that Caesar DID move the army, taking one route or another wouldn't make any difference as far as the crimes of Caesar. So, Cicero would seem to be without motivation to lie about the path he took.

Jensen9: But Carrier's point was that to have an enemy report an event carries more weight than for just anyone else to say it. He made the point that there were no enemies or neutral parties who claimed the resurrection but that we have here an enemy saying Caesar crossed the Rubicon. My point was that given the context, Cicero's claim (given to us through second-hand sources) had no more weight than anyone else's. I've also claimed that we do have the testimony of enemies of Jesus that he rose from the dead.

Doland10: You have no such thing. You have claims that there was such testimony. That is NOT the same thing.

Jensen11: I certainly do. Paul said Jesus appeared to him and that he, Paul, sought to destroy Christianity (1 Corinthians 15:8-9, Galatians 1:13). I don't know of any serious scholar who actually questions that Paul wrote these things. Also, the claim that there is such testimony definitely is testimony in itself; it's testimony because someone is witnessing that they know that someone else has seen Jesus alive after his death. They either heard him (James, for example) claim to have seen Jesus or they were

with James when he had this experience or they had heard someone else claim that they had heard James say that he had seen Jesus.

James the half brother of Jesus might be said to have opposed him at first; he at least did not follow Jesus or accept his teachings (John 7:3-5) but Jesus appeared to him after his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7) and he became the leader of the Jerusalem church (Galatians 1:19, 2:9, Acts 15:13, 19, Josephus *Antiquities* xx.9.1). Thomas, one of Jesus twelve disciples, did not believe Jesus rose from the dead and said he would not do so unless he put his hand in Jesus' side wound. Jesus appeared to him and he did believe in him (John 20:24-28). Now James and Thomas were not strictly speaking enemies of Jesus and they did not themselves testify of their eventual belief (unless they were sources for some of the above references, which we just do not know). So I should modify my statement to say that we have the testimony of one of the enemies of Jesus that he witnessed Jesus risen from the dead; we also have good testimonial evidence that James and Thomas, who either disbelieved in Jesus' resurrection or rejected his claims and teaching, came to believe after seeing Jesus alive after his resurrection. But furthermore, it is also possible that there were others if Paul and James changed from opponents to followers and claimed that Jesus rose from the dead.

Carrier6: Third, we have a number of inscriptions and coins produced soon after the Republican Civil War related to the Rubicon crossing, including mentions of battles and conscriptions and judgments, which provide evidence for Caesar's march. On the other hand, we have absolutely no physical evidence of any kind in the case of the resurrection.

Jensen7: These only provide evidence of the war, which is not in doubt, not the crossing.

Carrier6: Fourth, we have the story of the “Rubicon Crossing” in almost every historian of the period, including the most prominent scholars of the age: Suetonius, Appian, Cassius Dio, Plutarch.

Jensen7: But these all come from the account by Asinius Pollio which we no longer have. Also these historians are two to three generations removed from the events. The earliest Gospels, which are or include large portions of eyewitness accounts, were written 40 to even 30 years after the death of Jesus, possibly even less. Eighty years separate the crossing and the earliest written account of the crossing that has not been lost, that of Velleius Paterculus.

Carrier6: These scholars have a measure of proven reliability, since a great many of their reports on other matters have been confirmed in material evidence and in other sources.

Jensen7: J.P. Holding (<http://www.tektonics.org/qt/rubicon.php>) points out that so do the Gospels, most notably Luke. Also, since Luke’s account is made up of much material found in the other Synoptics, this substantiates their material as his source material.

Doland8: Luke is still far from a “critical historian.” The following [are] a few paragraphs by Suetonius reporting on the birth of Caligula: . . .

Jensen9: Here Doland quotes a long excerpt by Suetonius cited in an article by Carrier. The quotation describes how Suetonius weighed and compared evidence for the birthplace of Caligula, what various sources claimed and why some were accepted and why some were questioned. “In that article,” Doland says, “Carrier compares how a valid historical record compares with how Luke is written.” The following are from some comments Doland has selected from Carrier.

Carrier8: This is how a critical historian behaves. His methods and critical judgment become transparent and laid out for the reader to see. He names—or at least mentions or describes—his sources.

Jensen9: Then why did he so often fail to mention sources and, as Howatson relates, appear to many times care little about reliability? Mentioning sources is not always necessary if you know your sources are good and find no conflict in their accounts. Just naming your sources does not make you a better historian than someone who does not. It is something other historians would like; it is useful to better understand how a claim came to be made, the conflicts (if any) that surround the claim, and to better test the credibility of such claims for oneself. But when a good historian like Luke finds so much uniform testimony from mostly direct eyewitnesses, this is not needed.

Doland10: What you are saying is, even the best historians of the time were not always great. And Carrier agrees with this. And this is why we do indeed often doubt reports by secular historians on secular events. And if you don't think that naming sources is important, try taking a class at a local community college and see how far you get when you turn in papers without sources.

Jensen11: No, what I'm saying is that good historians do not need to always provide their sources. We should doubt their reports for other reasons, not because they fail to mention their sources. As for modern standards of providing references, we are now aware of how useful providing such sources can be. Remember there were no public libraries, at least none open to all people, in ancient societies and not everyone could read anyway. If references were included, not everyone could easily check them out if they wanted to. So ancient writers would have left only

incomplete references (by modern standards) if they ever did so and they would not always consider it necessary to do so.

As for the Gospels, most of the references would have been not to writings but to witnesses. Even if some written sources were available, they would have likely thought in terms of the original writers as witnesses and not of the writings themselves since the Gospels were so close to the original events recorded. If Luke had left footnotes like we do today they might have looked something like the following: “Personal interview, Mary the mother of Jesus, Nero’s third year.” Biblical historians today would give their first born child for a reference like that. But as I’ve said, the Gospel writers, as well as many classical writers, simply saw no need for such. For the Gospel writers especially, there was seen to be no need of such references since so much of the information was taken from eye witnesses or remembered by the writers themselves. So what we rightly consider important today for scholarly references, given our very different social situation, was not recognized in ancient times by historiographers as important at all.

Carrier8: [Continuing from Carrier8 above.] Luke does none of these things. He never even mentions method, much less shows his methods to us, or any critical judgment at all.

Jensen9: Normal critical method was known to historians of the time. There was no need to repeat this. Critical judgment is needed to test between conflicting sources, not when no such conflicts are present. It is needed to discern good sources, but this is obvious and needn’t even be mentioned by Luke.

Carrier8: And Luke must surely have known there were conflicting claims, yet he never tells us about them, but instead just narrates his account as if everything were indisputable, never once telling us how or why he chose one version or detail and left out others.

Jensen9: If it is so obvious that there were conflicting claims, why does Carrier not mention any? If there were no significant conflicting claims, there would be no reason for Luke to mention any.

Carrier8: For example, though Luke copies Mark, he never tells us he did, much less for which material, and he changes what Mark said in some places. This entails either that Luke is fabricating, or preferring some other source that contradicted Mark.

Jensen9: Mark was simply one of Luke's sources. Again, there was no need to name this eyewitness source (through Peter) or to say why some of Mark was used but not other material. Luke might have received Mark's material when he was with Paul and Peter in Rome early in the 7th decade. He might have even selected material from Mark's notes and unfinished manuscript if it wasn't published yet. What Luke changed of Mark was usually only the form or wording, if that. Sometimes the Synoptic writers had slightly different stories: one had two angels at the tomb, the other had one; one had a Jarius tell Jesus his daughter was dying, the other had him say she was already dead, etc. All this fits the permissible degree of variation that was accepted as historically accurate by the standards of the time. No one would have considered such to be a contradiction but rather a variation that keeps the essential story the same. In some cases a writer might not have differing accounts to choose among but would present only the information given by one source (sometimes himself). In other cases a writer would choose between sources. And sometimes a writer would simply summarize someone else's longer story. Luke was not fabricating since, as he said, he used material from credible sources and followed the

entire account of Jesus' life. Again, Carrier says the alternate accounts contradict Mark but is not able to show any contradiction. Making minor changes in wording or minor and insubstantial changes in accounts does not entail fabricating or using contradictory sources. [Revised 22Ap10, 15Ja15.]

Carrier8: Likewise, it is impossible to believe that Luke “closely followed everything” and yet had never heard of the alternative nativity account presented in Matthew (unless, of course, Matthew wrote after Luke and made it all up).

Jensen9: It could be that Luke had heard of Matthew's additional information but simply did not choose to repeat it. If Matthew or an early version of Matthew had already been published and known to Luke, Luke might have thought it unnecessary to include this. For the most part, as far as the material that is missing in Luke is concerned, Matthew includes the story of the visit of the Magi, the flight to Egypt, and the return to Nazareth. Both have the account of the virgin birth. Luke and Matthew possibly got their information from Mary directly or Mary might have passed on this information to others who later gave it to Matthew and Luke. Likewise, if Matthew had Luke's account, he might have thought it unnecessary to repeat his information.

Notice the biased claims Carrier makes against the Gospel writers he would not dream of stating concerning his secular historians. And yet he praises his historians simply because some of the time, some of them cite their sources and explain their reasoning for us. He assumes that if Luke were as accurate an historiographer as he claims he would have used Matthew's account had he heard of it or that Matthew wrote later and “made . . . up” his account. Do historians never select out material that has already been given? Or is it inconceivable that Matthew knew Luke's account but wanted to add something that was missing and omit part that

was already known? Carrier has no reason to think, or at least has not given any good reason to think, Matthew or Luke any less capable than any of the secular historians he has cited.

Doland10: Bzzt, wrong! He does indeed criticize secular historians. I simply didn't quote far enough down. If you read the entire article, you will find Carrier agreeing with you to some degree. Here is what he says:

“And yet Suetonius is notoriously regarded by modern historians as an often-unreliable gossip-monger. Therefore, a fortiori, we have every reason to expect Luke was no better, and probably worse, when it came to critical acumen.”

You think you . . . can expose him [Carrier] for being a totally biased secularist buying into everything every secularist has ever said. When in reality, you show your own bias against Carrier for the charge is totally false and you base it purely on reading some few snippets of what he has written. It is your own bias you expose, not Carrier's.

The way history actually works is to be skeptical of all claims. As George W. Bush might say, historical research is hard work, you need to stay the course and keep making progress. Historians don't buy into third hand reports, and then [make up claims] . . . to fit a preconceived idea like you do.

Jensen11: Yes, Carrier recognizes the failings other historians have seen in Suetonius and criticizes him, but from your earlier quote he also praises him as an exemplary historian. But if Suetonius at his best is the best ancient history can give us, why does Carrier not say the same about Luke? So, yes, I will continue to maintain that Carrier criticizes the Gospel writers in ways he would not dream of doing concerning secular historiographers. From your own quotation, he says that if Suetonius is unreliable, then Luke should be considered at least as bad or worse. Yet he gives no good grounds for his claim. Luke has continually been supported

by archeological findings. Titles and terms believed to be nonexistent and made up by Luke—just because we have had no record of them in other writings, inscriptions, etc.—have again and again been found to have been used in the first century.

The way historical study works is *not* to be skeptical of all claims. It is to accept what we have good evidence to accept and to be skeptical of what lacks good evidence. And Paul, when have I ever bought into a third hand report and then made up something to fit a preconceived idea? What are you talking about?

Carrier8: He [Luke] never . . . shows much concern for establishing a precise chronology (essentially giving us only a single date in 3:1, which is tied only to John and is thus ambiguous as to any event in the life of Jesus).

Jensen9: So? He and the other Gospel writers are not concerned about precise chronology, that's not their purpose. Their concern is to let people know that these events happened and this is what Jesus taught. No one cares about precise chronology extensively throughout a work except historians who make that their business and people who like to piece together what happened in what order and for how long. Luke had enough of a knowledge of historical writing of the time to include a precise chronological anchor like this from which the rest of the story could hang, but that was his only obligation in his view. We know John and Jesus were virtually the same age (because we know Elizabeth and Mary were both pregnant at the same time) and that they both started their preaching near the same time (John just a little sooner), and we have Luke 2:1-2 providing an only slightly less detailed chronological marker for Jesus' birth.

Carrier8: Compare the difference between how the Gospels present the virgin birth versus how Suetonius reports on the birth of Caligula. The alleged virgin birth is reported in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which present the virgin birth as fact without providing any evidence—despite the fact that there is no possible way for the writers to check whether it actually was true or not. While Suetonius reporting on the ordinary birth of Caligula lays out what he knows and doesn't know and how. So, no, the Gospels do NOT represent good historical reporting, not even for their era.

Jensen9: Caligula's birth involved disagreement that needed to be evaluated. There was no controversy from the original witnesses as to the virgin birth so there was no need of comparing sources and claims. There was no need to provide sources when the information obviously came through Jesus' mother. There was no way to test whether the virgin birth actually occurred after Jesus death and resurrection other than through the testimonial evidence—which should be considered good evidence in this case as much as in any other. I find it amazing that Carrier considers this as good reason to even compare Suetonius with Luke and Matthew as to their historical reporting.

Carrier6: And they show a desire to critically examine claims for which there is any dispute.

Jensen7: Then why didn't Suetonius say why his account and his proffered reason for the crossing were different from Plutarch's? Why doesn't Plutarch claim the belief later offered by Suetonius that Caesar saw a god on the river playing a reed pipe and this was his reason for crossing? (For some historians, the claim of seeing such a supernatural being would be sufficient to consider the account discredited. . . thus they reject the Gospel accounts. Why do they still consider Suetonius a solid historical record?) Some of the differing descriptions of Caesar crossing the Rubicon amount to outright contradictions if taken at face value.

Doland8: First, be honest, you also doubt Caesar saw a god on the river playing a reed pipe? Right? And yet you probably would have to concede that some of what Suetonius said was correct. Right? I'm doing the exact same thing in regards to the Gospels as you do with Suetonius' report—accepting the probable and discarding the improbable. EXACTLY the same. Now, that said, a historian may well accept Suetonius' report that Caesar thought he saw that, or claimed to see that. And I'm willing to accept that, at least possibly, the Gospel writers thought they saw the things they wrote. I happen to think it being intentional fiction, at least in the case of the first Gospel of Mark as being more likely, but, I don't pretend to be able to prove it. So it is possible that the authors thought they saw what is reported. Just like it is possible that Caesar thought he saw what Suetonius said.

Jensen9: But don't you see your double standard? Your final belief is that the Gospels are all intentional fiction but when you have to compare them to accepted secular histories of the time you admit that there is reason to accept some parts of the Gospels, "accepting the probable and discarding the improbable." So you are not doing "EXACTLY the same" for the ancient secular historians as you do for the Gospels. [Paragraph added 22Ap10.]

You say that we both accept the probable and discard the improbable. Then I would say that you should look at what we both accept as probable in Suetonius and accept the same type of statements in the Gospels, Acts, and historical portions of the Epistles. Only then would our procedure be, if not "EXACTLY" the same, at least close to it. (I don't reject everything you claim to be improbable. But more on that below.) Don't just reject the whole thing as intentional fiction, otherwise you have no reason to think Suetonius was not entirely intentional fiction or was repeating earlier intentional fictions. Most biblical scholars, liberal and conservative, do at least accept that the disciples actually *believed* they saw Jesus alive after his death. And people like myself find that to be all they need to build a case for the resurrection. [Paragraph revised 22Ap10.]

It is not so much that I doubt or do not doubt that Caesar saw someone on the river who at the time would normally have been taken to be a god. Given the nature of the story itself, I don't know and therefore I leave it to the historical evidence to persuade us one way or the other. Going further than just the story itself and on to the fuller context of evidence, the fact that it does contradict Plutarch's account does cause me to doubt it. (Though we should also keep in mind that it may be that Plutarch wanted to omit any supernatural element had the river-god story been in his original source or sources.) I do concede that much of Suetonius' historical writings was probably correct. But I do not go around rejecting one portion of a writing because it does not fit my world view, as many secular historians do. If you don't think miracles are possible, don't use that as reason to reject miracle stories, be they in Suetonius or the Gospels or anywhere else, unless you have very strong evidence against their possibility.

Carrier6: If that wasn't enough, all of them cite or quote sources written by witnesses, hostile and friendly, of the Rubicon crossing and its repercussions.

Jensen7: We have already seen that it is virtually irrelevant for the crossing episode whether friends or enemies said the event occurred. On the other hand, it makes all the difference in the world if enemies of Jesus admitted that the resurrection occurred. Again, one of the Gospel writers (Luke) says he did thorough research investigating everything; the other Gospel writers didn't need to cite sources if much or most of their works were their own original eyewitness accounts as later witnesses claimed. Also, I'm seeing only very rare and occasional quotations and citations of sources in the Roman historians. Most of the material presented by these writers seems to be narrative, just as we find in the Gospels.

Carrier6: Compare this with the resurrection: we have not even a single established historian mentioning the event until the 3rd and 4th centuries, and then only by Christian historians. And of those few others who do mention it within a century of the event, none of them show any wide reading, never cite any other sources, show no sign of a skilled or critical examination of conflicting claims, have no other literature or scholarship to their credit that we can test for their skill and accuracy, are completely unknown, and have an overtly declared bias towards persuasion and conversion.

Jensen7: What grounds do we have to claim that these direct witnesses were less qualified than an established historiographer? Luke's literary style shows considerable scholarly skill and background. He shows extreme concern for accuracy and detail and his accuracy has been abundantly vindicated by historical and archeological research.

Sufficiently skilled examination of conflicting claims for the resurrection are mentioned in Matthew. The issue is not so complex that anything more is needed.

The Gospel writers are not unknown. Their identities are known to us from witnesses not many decades after the time of their writings. Features internal to these writings also substantiate the claimed authorship. The identities of the five Roman historiographers are no better known.

The Gospel writers do have a bias towards persuasion and conversion. They had become fully convinced of the truth of their claims. If you research a well evidenced event in the amount of detail Luke or Mark had done or if you are a direct eyewitness to the events, then you will be persuaded. The evidence that the resurrection did occur would cause any honest witness or researcher to believe and seek to persuade others.

The normal motive for ancient historical writers was not to simply reproduce accurate history. Historical writing was intended to promote some believed good cause. Leading Holocaust researchers and writers definitely believe this event occurred and seek to provide information with a definite motive, to be sure it does not happen again and to be sure the world knows what happened. Do such motivations and beliefs negate their objectivity or remove them from the realm of credible witnesses? Of course not.

Doland8: Luke is better than the other Gospels. But, there are historical errors in Luke: **“The Historical Reliability of Luke/Acts.”** [Doland’s original link is no longer active. This is likely an article on Carrier’s web page.]

Jensen9: There are no claimed historical errors in the Synoptics that have not been adequately answered; see Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, ch. 4, references at the end of the webpage.

Jensen13: I take back my above statement after having read Blomberg’s book again after a number of years. There are errors as modern historians would count errors, but not as would be considered by ancient historiographers. Most importantly, the errors are insignificant to any understanding of biblical teaching as well as to the events described.

Carrier6: Fifth, the history of Rome could not have proceeded as it did had Caesar not physically moved an army into Italy. Even if Caesar could have somehow cultivated the mere belief that he had done this, he could not have captured Rome or conscripted Italian men against Pompey’s forces in Greece.

Jensen7: The existence of the war or invasion of Italy is not in question, just the crossing.

Doland8: You miss the argument entirely! Carrier had claimed that there was no other route to take. I see that your source disputes this, claiming that there were other routes. Though I tend to think that Carrier probably knows what he is talking about, your source could be right for all I know, I'm not an expert on the terrain. So, can we compromise on a weaker claim that crossing the Rubicon was a reasonable choice given the need to move the army? If so, we have these pieces of evidence accepted:

1. Caesar moved his army.
2. Crossing the Rubicon was one reasonable way to so.

Just these two pieces of information BY THEMSELVES make Caesar having crossed the Rubicon a high-probability proposition. So, even if Caesar was lying, Cicero was lying, and the historians all were working from poor sources, we STILL have the crossing as being a high-probability event!

Jensen9: You move from "Crossing the Rubicon was one reasonable way" for Caesar to move his army, to Caesar crossing the Rubicon being "a high-probability proposition." Isn't that a bit of a jump? Perhaps you see these terms as more synonymous than I do. At any rate, just to be accurate, why don't we just say nothing more than that we both admit that crossing the Rubicon was a "reasonable way" for Caesar to move his army.

I think that Merkley must have been entertaining the possibility that there might have been other ways to enter Italy from Caesar's position in Gaul. So even though crossing the Rubicon was reasonable, entering Italy some other way from Gaul might also have been reasonable. Maybe it wasn't as *reasonable* as crossing the Rubicon. And I think Merkley admits that the other sources, the second-hand documents of the historians Carrier thinks so much of, and inferences from Caesar's *Civil War*, do provide some evidence for the Rubicon crossing claim. So if it is more reasonable that Caesar crossed the Rubicon than that he did not, where does that put our argument? It puts us back to our original claim that it is not unreasonable to

think that Caesar crossed the Rubicon but it is more reasonable, given the documents we have, that Jesus rose from the dead.

Carrier6: On the other hand, all that is needed to explain the rise of Christianity is a belief—a belief that the resurrection happened. There is nothing that an actual resurrection would have caused that could not have been caused by a mere belief in that resurrection.

Jensen7: This would explain the rise of Christianity but not the documents. The documents—the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles—and their dates and the implications of the statements in those documents, provide the evidence for the resurrection. Now the early widespread belief in the resurrection does provide supplemental evidence for the resurrection. How else could such extensive belief come to be without good evidence that it did? Certainly through history there have been social factors (like revitalization movements) that might account for similar phenomena, so this argument is not conclusive. Also, Acts indicates that other factors like healings and other miracles appear to have persuaded many.

But that there was good eyewitness testimony for the resurrection seems to be very likely a very strong factor resulting in so many coming to believe it. Every time the book of Acts records more than summary statements of the proclamation of the gospel, it claims the resurrection occurred. These proclamations were usually the testimony of eyewitnesses. When they weren't, there was always the tacit assumption that there were eyewitnesses available who could easily be questioned. It is widely accepted by biblical scholars that the first followers of Jesus truly *believed* they saw Jesus alive after his death. Even as skeptical of scholars as Rudolph Bultmann admitted this. Paul said that over 500 people witnessed the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15). This testimonial evidence is the strongest evidence for the resurrection. The rapid expansion of the early church is secondary evidence.

Carrier6: In fact, when we compare all five points, we see that in four of the five proofs of an event's historicity, the resurrection has no evidence at all, and in the one proof that it does have, it has not the best, but the very worst kind of evidence—a handful of biased, uncritical, unscholarly, unknown, second-hand witnesses. Indeed, you really have to look hard to find another event that is in a worse condition than this as far as evidence goes.

Jensen7: These claims have all been refuted above. I might summarize some points that would be good to emphasize however. The Gospel writers were biased but only because they had become convinced by the evidence. They were highly critical. Luke, at least, had a scholarly background. The other writers simply reported what they directly saw and heard of Jesus' life. We do not know the extent of their educational background except that it was routine for all males at the time of Jesus to have substantial educations in reading, memorization, Scripture, and writing. Matthew, a tax collector, may have been more educated than the others. He may have taken down Jesus' words in a kind of shorthand common to the time. Others may have memorized his teachings, as was more common in Jewish circles for popular teachers.

These writers were not unknown. To call the Gospel writers unknown is like saying Columbus discovered America. Native Americans had discovered it thousands of years earlier. The New World was only unknown to people in the Old World. The Gospel writers were well known in the Christian church. That is why their works were so early accepted as authoritative. The ancient secular scholarly world only gradually became aware of them as the church grew. Some New Testament writers were "second-hand" witnesses, as were the four Carrier touts as the "most prominent scholars of the age" who said Caesar crossed the Rubicon. But some were themselves also likely eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection.

Doland6: The above [the portions by Richard Carrier] is taken from “Why I Don’t Buy the Resurrection Story” (http://infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/resurrection/rubicon.html). Note that J.P. Holding wrote a rebuttal to that (<http://www.tektonics.org/qt/rubicon.php>) to which Carrier wrote a more extensive response “The Rubicon Analogy.”

Jensen7: It also appears Holding has added responses to Carrier’s last response.

Jensen5: [This is from the last Jensen5 above.] Most ancient biographical and historical accounts were penned at least a century after the events recorded and yet no one holds this as reason to doubt such writings.

Doland6: This is simply not true, on many levels. For one, no, something written a hundred years after events, without any traceable source, is not, and never has been acceptable historical record. If I wrote a book on the Civil War and I had events in my book but no mention of these events are known prior to my book, and I had no traceable evidence to back up my claim, would my report on the Civil War be accepted? No. Obviously not.

In the case of Caesar, no doubt some parts of his history are more well documented than other parts. And therefore some things that we think we know about Caesar are more certain than others. This is the nature of history. But, there is NOTHING about Caesar that we take as fact that the only evidence for it comes a hundred years after his life with no supporting evidence. That just is not how historical research works.

Jensen7: True, but I’m not saying there is no connection whatsoever. Rather, an historian will have a document he or she believes is from an eyewitness or a hearer of an eyewitness and repeats it here. The historian

will look for those most likely to be eyewitness accounts and go to the more secondhand accounts only if nothing better is available. If the historian is good, he or she will note when the sources are questionable (unless no sources that are used are questionable). For example, if Paterculus had Pollio's eyewitness account of the crossing before him, he could accept it if he had good evidence that he was truly an eyewitness. He may have just had Pollio's claim that he was there and that he saw it. Paterculus was about 24 when Pollio died so it is possible but doubtful that he questioned the eyewitness himself. But it is very possible that there were witnesses around who spoke of Pollio's writing and vouched that he was as he claimed, an eyewitness. This would have to have been long before Paterculus wrote his work since that would have been 80 years after the crossing. Or these witnesses for Pollio could have left letters or other documents claiming this. Thus we can have a separation of a hundred or more years between an event and its recording simply because the intermediate documents have now been lost or the witnesses the historian has consulted are gone, and this would still be a credible recording of the event.

The first document claiming Caesar crossed the Rubican was written 80 years after the event and that document is now lost. There is a good possibility the source of its claims came from an eyewitness since that claim was passed on from that writing (supposedly) to much later accounts.

How much better are the Gospel accounts which were written as early as 28 to 33 years after Jesus' death (with portions like some of the teachings of Jesus being written even earlier). The Gospels were written by eyewitnesses and researchers who took their information from eyewitnesses. The most important historical documents evidencing the resurrection were even earlier (1 Corinthians and the source of the tradition stated in chapter 15). [Paragraph added 23Ap10.]

Doland6: Second of all, what Jensen implies, that there is historical writings about Jesus a hundred or so years later is also wrong! There are a few small references, such as the disputed Josephus accounts. But there is NOTHING of any substance written about the history of Jesus that doesn't directly come from the Gospels, even if you include stuff written hundreds of years later. . . . There simply is NO evidence for this Jesus character at all, other than the New Testament.

Jensen7: From the nonbiblical historians like Josephus (90s, the undisputed portions), Pliny the Younger (112), Tacitus (110), and Suetonius (120) we do get some basic information. These are less, some much less than a hundred years after the events. We see the early and rapid spread of Christianity through the western world (Tacitus, Pliny, and Suetonius); we see Jesus worshiped as a god before the end of the first century (Pliny); we hear about John the Baptist, Jesus' brother James leading the church, and Jesus early on being believed to be the Christ (Josephus); we see "Christ" executed as a criminal in Judea under Pilate during Tiberius' reign (Tacitus).

But Doland will surely notice that most of my arguments with Carrier were meant to establish the historicity of the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles as better than the leading Roman historians of the time for all but the most firmly established events of Roman history. So even if Doland were right about nonbiblical historians giving us no information about Jesus (I've shown that he is not), he has not even begun to deal with my argument for the historicity of the New Testament. And that is all I need.

Responding to my critique of Carrier generally, Doland stated the following:

Doland8: I will concede that at least some of your counter-arguments to Carrier sound reasonable. And this proves what? It proves that history is hard! . . . Every single datapoint on any historical event can have multiple

explanations. The trick is to find the most likely explanation that explains all of the evidence. [At this point Doland went on to argue several points placed earlier in this text.]

BIBLICAL CONTRADICTIONS

Doland2: Geisler approaches errancy by assuming that any explanation which might explain an apparent contradiction in the Bible, no matter how contorted, dissolves that contradiction. The problem with this is that one can always come up with some explanation to dissolve any apparent contradiction. An adequate consideration of errancy, therefore, must do more than show that it is possible that an apparent contradiction isn't really a genuine one. It must show why an explanation dissolving an apparent contradiction is a better explanation than taking that apparent contradiction to be genuine. Consider the apparent contradiction as to whether there was one angel or two at Jesus' tomb. Geisler says that if two angels were present, then it's true that one angel was present. That's technically correct: it's possible that two angels were really present, but Matthew only mentioned one. But until Geisler demonstrates that it would be likely for Matthew to report only one when two were present, his explanation isn't better than simply conceding a contradiction between Matthew's report of one angel and John's report of two.

Jensen3: Geisler has no burden of demonstrating the likelihood of Matthew reporting the presence of only one angel when actually two were present (as John, and Luke for that matter, record). He need only show that it is not unlikely. If his explanation is not unreasonable or improbable given the knowledge we have, then it should be taken as dissolving the criticism. John's account of two angels being present (20:11-12) could have been of an event that occurred later than the appearance of the one or two angels in the other accounts. But the appearance of two angels in Luke (24:4)

seems to be the same event Matthew (28:5) and Mark (16:5) indicate as an appearance of one angel. One can see this by comparing the similarity of the accounts. (I would recommend Kurt Aland's *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* [United Bible Societies, 1985] for such a study. It allows one to see and compare all of the relevant passages together.)

The events recorded in Matthew 28:2-4 may not have been observed by the women but rather by the guards. If some or all of these guards later became followers of Jesus, which is not at all unlikely if this is truly what they had observed, they might have added this account to the record of the early church. Matthew's wording leaves open the possibility that after giving the guard's account, the women's account (starting verse 5) records the angel in the tomb and his message. This corresponds to Mark (16:5-7) and Luke's (24:3-7) account.

Now as to the problem of whether there were two angels or one in the tomb: If one angel is more dominant than the other; if, for instance, one stands back and the other does all the speaking, then it wouldn't be difficult to imagine that one or more of the witnesses focused more on the speaker and hardly noticed the second person. This would be all the more likely given the unusual circumstances. The women are surprised by the open tomb, the guards gone, the two men (angels) in the tomb with their astonishing message, the body missing; all this when they expected to see nothing unusual. It is also very possible that one or more of the witnesses did not lose track of the fact that there was a second person standing more in the shadows. Thus we can see how one source might record the presence of one angel while another might record two.

We do not need evidence from the various narratives that this particular arrangement, one angel being more dominant or noticeable than the other, was what likely occurred. We only need to see that it is a good possibility and that there is no good reason to think that it did not occur.

If someone responds that because this is an account of a miracle, the same standards of historical examination do not apply, I would reply that we are not here using this account to provide evidence for the resurrection. We are simply showing that no inconsistency can be found in the various accounts. Were such an inconsistency to be found, this would count against the historicity of the narrative. With no inconsistency in the narratives, evidence for the resurrection can be brought forward.

I should clarify that what I mean by inconsistency is an apparent inconsistency that cannot be reconciled as I have the problem of the number of angels at the tomb. I should also modify my above statement to say that even if such an inconsistency can be found that cannot be reconciled, this would not necessarily affect the historicity of the basic content of those accounts. Shouldn't we expect that for any two or more accounts of a particular event we might have some disagreement concerning minor points? If we had several people witness a crime and they all agreed on the basics of the crime but disagreed about some minor point, the courts would still take it as good testimonial evidence for the agreed events. [Paragraph added 23Apr10.]

The statements in the several accounts might best be pieced together as follows: The guards witness an angel moving the stone, see the body missing, faint in terror and then leave once they compose themselves (Matthew 28:2-4). Mary Magdalene then goes to the tomb (John 20:1) and finding it empty she leaves there and meets the other women coming to the tomb. At the tomb they witness it empty of the corpse but see two men in it (whom some may not have taken to be angels at first) one of whom tells them that Jesus had risen and that they should tell the other disciples. They leave in fear and as a whole do not tell the disciples immediately (Matthew 28:1, v5-8a, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-9a). But Mary does then go immediately to the disciples (John 20:2). The statement in Matthew (28:8b) that suggests that the women went immediately to the disciples might be referring to Mary specifically. The corresponding passage in Luke (24:9b) might be referring to all of the other women once they regained their

composure from this frightening event or it might be referring to Mary alone as in Matthew. Perhaps not completely understanding or believing the angel, Mary tells Peter and John that someone has taken the body and with that they all go to the tomb. Peter and John examine the empty tomb and leave but Mary stays, speaks with two angels (taken as men) whom she sees in the tomb, and then she meets Jesus (John 20:2-18).

There are other attempts to harmonize the several resurrection accounts but I think the one I have presented is quite adequate to show that there is no good reason to claim the accounts to be inconsistent. There are also other possible explanations for other claimed errors in the Bible. Some involve understanding the language that was used, some the culture, some the possibility of transcriptional errors (especially numbers), some the type of literature involved (e.g., don't interpret poetry literally), some the fact that some claims should be interpreted phenomenologically (as it appears to the writer, not as it would be described scientifically).

Unlike Geisler, I'm willing to admit that there could be factual errors recorded even in the original documents so long as they are not errors in the teaching of the writers. Suppose Paul's statement to Timothy that he left his coat in Troas was mistaken. Would God be obligated to reach down and correct him every time he made such a mistake in a matter that does not affect us spiritually or in our spiritual understanding? Why should God be concerned? No, to claim that God must watch and correct or prevent every such error is to take an excessive view of inerrancy that doesn't make sense biblically or rationally.

Doland4: I'll concede that the number of angels, by itself, is fairly trivial. Perhaps I should have picked a more glaring issue, such as perhaps the fact that the cleansing of the Temple comes at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in John, but at the end of his ministry in the Synoptics. At any rate, if there are no inconsistencies in the Gospel accounts, then Jensen should have no trouble answering Dan Barker's Easter Challenge: <http://www.ffrf.org/books/lifif/stone.php> [URL no longer active, 23Fb15.]

Jensen5: Actually the cleansing of the Temple is much easier to answer than the number of angels issue. I think it took several paragraphs for the latter. The cleansing of the Temple will only take me several sentences. The quick answer is, it happened twice. Jesus drove out the money changers in the Temple early in his career. He didn't try it again for several years because the Temple authorities were watching for him after the first try. Only after a couple of years or so would they have forgotten about the earlier event and let down their guard. I don't think it is at all unreasonable to think that only for a limited time after the first cleansing were guards posted whenever they thought Jesus might be in town.

The reason the Synoptics never mentioned John's account of this event is because it might have seemed unnecessary or redundant to recount an event that was so similar to one that had already been known in oral tradition. John didn't mention the earlier cleansing of the Temple because one of the purposes of his Gospel was to include material that was left out of Synoptic accounts (or at least Mark's Gospel if he did not possess the others).

Now this view is certainly not accepted by all biblical scholars; even many very conservative scholars have other views. But my point would be that since this is a good and feasible explanation, it is sufficient to answer Doland's accusation. [This paragraph added 19Oc08.]

Barker's challenge was to give an account of the resurrection narratives that accounts for every detail of difference. Doland notes that J.P. Holding does attempt to answer it: [<http://www.tektonics.org/qt/rezrvw.php>] but fails. Doland does not tell us how he fails. Perhaps he could provide this information so I could fill in the missing answers. If Holding has done most of it already, I'm certainly not going to repeat everything he has stated. Gleason Archer also gives a good harmony of the resurrection accounts in his *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. John Wenham devoted an entire book to the claimed discrepancies (*Easter Enigma*, Zondervan, 1984). I honestly

doubt that there is any detail Wenham has not covered unless it is so insignificant that only an atheist could see it as important. I see that I have already answered some of the first objections Barker raises with the partial harmonization I had given in my last response. My point would be that until Doland can show that Holding or Archer or Wenham have failed to answer Barker's challenge, I do not see the need to answer myself. Bring up some specific problems and I will respond or show how they fail. [Paragraph updated 4Jul09.]

Also recall that I do not believe that every statement in the Bible (even in the originals) is necessarily inerrant. Some statements not involving spiritual teaching might be so insignificant that it is difficult to imagine that God would be concerned to make sure they are without error.

The logic or absurdity of atonement

Doland4: It is my personal opinion that the idea of a deity sacrificing himself to himself to change his own rules is absurd and not worthy of serious consideration.

Jensen5: God does not sacrifice "himself to himself." God becomes a sacrifice by God's choice, not to change God's rules but because this fits God's rules. The rules are the rules of justice; they're the rules of how the universe is and they are intrinsic to God's nature. The sacrifice was a substitution, an act that accommodated justice and yet allowed for mercy, to produce a means by which we could be reconciled back to God.

Doland6: Translation: God sacrifices Himself to Himself. And, yes, it is a change of rules, the Old Covenant Law is much different than the New Covenant.

Jensen7: No, substitution simple means one person takes upon oneself the guilt and judgment another deserves. The New Covenant is one of substitution but it assumes the rules, the basic law of justice. The Old Covenant assumes those same laws. It does add on some secondary rules that do not follow intrinsically from that basic law, but those secondary rules substantiate and point to the basic law. Animal sacrifice was required because it teaches the necessity of substitution. Sabbath laws were needed because they provided for our wellbeing. To disregard such a rule was to rebel against God's command, as given to a particular group of people. If God makes even a completely arbitrary command, we are obligated to obey it simply because God deserves to be obeyed.

THE PAIN OF ANIMALS

Jensen3: Doland mentions Geisler's partial response to the problem of animal pain, that animals originally did not eat other animals. It is difficult to see how this significantly mitigates the problem however. In the young earth (YEC) view, animals had only been around for one or less than one literal day before the Fall when they began to die. Since then, animals have been dying for six to ten thousand years of earth history. Most or all of that time they have been eating each other. [Correction: they have been carnivores since the Flood in this view, which, modern YECs have traditionally believed, was almost 2000 years after the time of the creation (7Mr09).] Now under the old earth view which follows the now commonly accepted scientific view, animals have been carnivores for virtually all of the millions of years of their existence. The YEC view merely reduces the amount of time animals have died. In either case the problem remains that animals seem to suffer for no apparent reason.

Did animals eat only plants before the Flood?

Genesis 1:29-30 does say that God gave the animals green plants to eat, but it does not say God gave them only plants to eat. It simply does not follow that animals didn't kill other animals before or after the Fall and it definitely does not say they did not die before the Fall. Since plants are at the bottom of the food chain, making up the most important layer because of their necessity for animal life, God may be saying that ultimately all animals depend on plant life; ultimately, their food is plant life. Or it might also be emphasizing the need for responsible stewardship, responsible caretaking; because of its most important function we should not misuse or mismanage our care of plant life.

Doland4: Here is the Scripture:

“Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.’ ” [Genesis 1:29-30.]

Ask ANY reputable theologian, and they will tell you that means everything was originally herbivorous. It's pretty obvious to anybody not trying to twist it to suite their agenda that God is giving plants and only plants to eat. If He meant plants and animals, why didn't He say so?

Jensen5: I can give you a number of reputable theologians who agree with my claim. Notice first that this passage was spoken to the humans, not to animals. Only the last sentence applies to animals, the first two only to humans. So it's not as though God is repeating this command to apply to the animals. What we end up with is the following statement to apply to animals:

“And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.”

It is not at all obvious that they can only eat plants if it does not say, “You can only eat plants.” Read the sentence again with that in mind. Plants are certainly the primary food source; that may be one reason God does not mention the other foods available to them. It doesn’t mention mushrooms (which are not green plants), does that mean animals were not to eat them? As the foundation of our food chain, all animals do depend on plants and directly or indirectly eat plants. So as their primary food or foundational food source, Adam and Eve are told that animals are given green plants to eat. It doesn’t mention animals eating other animals because there are a lot of things that are not mentioned in the Bible. It doesn’t mention dinosaurs because there was no need to know about dinosaurs. If animals were to only eat plants, why didn’t God say so?

Doland4: And if this isn’t enough, Genesis 9:3-4 states explicitly that the allowance for meat is new:

“Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.”

Jensen5: This is God’s allowance after the Flood to humans, *not animals*. I’ve never denied that humans were originally commanded to be vegetarian. Probably people did eat meat before the Deluge, but that was always in disobedience to God’s command.

The Fall of Adam and animal pain

Doland2: According to Geisler, Romans 8 reveals that the fall of man caused the change in Creation (126). In other words, because Adam and Eve made one mistake, the entire animal kingdom has to pay the price. But why would God punish or corrupt every form of life on Earth because man erred?

Jensen3: Romans 8 only tells us that creation has become subject to decay and that this will change. It does not indicate that animal death entered the earth at any particular point in time. But whether animals came to endure pain through Adam's Fall or they were created originally with this characteristic does not matter. In either case we need to see if we can find a reason God would "punish" animals, as Doland says. If animals suffer pain anything close to that which humans suffer, there needs to be good reason for it. I don't see that Geisler has answered this problem. [Minor change for clarification, 17Fb15.]

The Scripture seems to indicate that the cycles of life, an ecology involving carnivorous activity, even the cycles of mass extinctions and the genesis of new species, are good and beautiful (Psalm 104). With this I take it that we might be subtly anthropomorphizing animals when we think that suffering is as bad for them as it is for humans. At the very least we know that because of brain size even the highest animals likely suffer less than do humans. At the most, it may be that they do not suffer at all.

The revolution in microbiology has shown us that life is an extremely complex mechanical process (whether or not human life might be more than this). For the lowest life forms it is hardly imaginable that they are aware of anything. If an organism can be described as a purely physical entity functioning by purely mechanical processes, it is difficult to understand how sentience can enter such a process. And if higher animals are even more complex machines, we don't know whether they have even sentience.

We think they do because of their similarity to humans and we know that we have sentience. Begin to pierce a dog with a scalpel and it will whimper and cry just as a child would. But this doesn't truly prove that the animal is even sentient. It could be merely a survival mechanism. A certain one celled organism is programmed to spin its flagellum to travel in one direction. If it gets close to a substance that would be poisonous or harmful, it absorbs some molecules which trigger the flagellum to begin spinning one direction, then the other direction, then the other again. This makes the organism turn until it faces the other direction when it then begins traveling straight again (keeping the flagellum rotating in one direction). This animal does not feel pain but it reacts to stimuli with behavior that is similar to our reaction to pain.

I could set up a fire alarm in my house so that if sufficient heat is sensed by a thermostat a loud speaker will blast out a recording, "Help, I'm on fire, I'm on fire." The house does not feel anything but a child (or anyone who doesn't know much about houses and fire alarms) passing by might think it does. As with the one celled organism, this is just a good survival mechanism. Likewise we don't know if the dog pierced by the scalpel is even sentient. If the reader thinks sentience in higher animals is just too difficult to deny, we at least do not know if they feel pain. Even if an animal is sentient, it might not feel pain but only react to harmful stimuli automatically and unconsciously. The reaction might be a response programmed into the animal like the flagellum movement of our single celled animal.

So consider the possible alternatives. It might be that, 1) no animals are sentient; 2) some animals are not sentient while others are but do not feel pain; 3) the sentient animals do feel pain but the pain is not displeasing or is hardly displeasing (here, as with the possible animals that feel no pain, the apparent pain responses are merely survival mechanisms that occur automatically and unconsciously); 4) at least some animals feel almost as much as do humans.

My point would be that if any of these possibilities except the last one are true, we wouldn't have a problem with animal pain. And we have seen that it is not at all implausible that any of these first three are true.

Now if the reader finds it inconceivable that at least higher animals do not feel highly displeasing pain, then we should consider what possible theistic response might be put forward. As we claimed with human pain, I think God would have to have good reason for allowing it and God would have to provide compensation equal to the pain endured. What that good reason might be, I have difficulty imagining. Perhaps we could fall back on the argument discussed earlier by Peter Kreeft: we don't know and, God being God and we being us, we shouldn't expect to know. As I mentioned earlier, I think Kreeft's argument is irrefutable. Nevertheless, if I were able to understand it, I would, of course, like to know what that reason is.

Doland2: Here we find an interviewee answering Strobel's question in terms requiring YEC, while other interviewees' responses presuppose OEC. And, as before, Strobel says nothing about the inconsistency.

Jensen3: Strictly speaking, denial of carnivorous activity before the Fall is not necessarily YEC. OEC could hold to it though it is almost impossible to believe given our current scientific knowledge of pre-human history. Typically, however, YEC does not believe in carnivorous activity or, for that matter, even death before the Fall and OEC believes in both. I cannot speak for Strobel, but even if he were using mutually inconsistent or even contradictory arguments, the fact that Strobel did this is not evidence against Christianity. At worst it might indicate dishonesty on Strobel's part and a need to jettison the offending argument; at best, it might express a view he truly holds: OEC without carnivores activity or possibly even without animal death before the Fall. I can't recall for certain, but I believe

Geisler is an OEC. If this is so, this means that he, at least, holds these two views without any inconsistency. But the most important point is that whatever the views of Strobel or Geisler or anyone else, any inconsistency or even dishonesty on their part does nothing to the argument. To honestly seek the truth we need to judge the arguments by their own merit, not by the character of their advocates or opponents.

Doland2: I didn't know whether or not there was a God, but if there was, I concluded, He must find factory farming abhorrent. I was comforted to find some Christian and Jewish literature claiming biblical support for such a position (including some of the same Scripture Geisler quotes). But I knew that most Christians and Jews believe that either God doesn't care what we do to animals, or that He actually encourages us to use them however we see fit. This incongruence was probably one of the more prominent reasons why I stopped struggling to accept Christianity.

Jensen3: I find it amazing that Doland would use this as a reason to reject Christianity. As a vegetarian myself with a strong sense of repulsion at animal abuse, I can identify with Doland's moral sensibility. But to say that just because some Christians hold to views that are opposed to scriptural teaching (as Geisler points out) does not give one reason to reject Christianity; it should rather give us more reason to better exposit the Bible in the churches. The question is whether Christianity as defined by the Scripture is true, not how some who profess to be followers of Jesus live or what they believe. To repeat the ending of my last paragraph, "To honestly seek the truth we need to judge the arguments by their own merit, not by the character of their advocates or opponents." Likewise we cannot judge a belief by the character of its adherents. If all Christians beat their dogs (assuming they all had dogs), this would say nothing about the truth of their beliefs. If Hitler said "Two times two equals four" would we have reason to disbelieve it because of who said it? Of course not!

I don't think there is an inconsistency between my claiming that it is possible that animals feel either no pain or too little pain to be considered such (remember that there were other options I presented) and my condemnation of animal abuse. I certainly hope that animals feel little or no pain, as I am sure Doland does as well. But I cannot take the chance that I might be wrong in this regard.

OBJECTION 6: A LOVING GOD WOULD NEVER TORTURE PEOPLE IN HELL

Doland2: . . . By definition “the worst possible situation” [J.P. Moreland’s notion of hell,] entails that any other situation would be better. Intentionally and unnecessarily putting a person in the worst kind of harm’s way simply cannot be “merciful”; these notions are contradictory.

Jensen3: Granted, God cannot be merciful to someone insofar as they are enduring the worst possible situation. Thus we should in part redefine hell as the state in the afterlife in which one receives in justice exactly as one deserves. God’s mercy is primarily in effect before we enter this state and it is intended to persuade us not to enter there. If hell is of a limited duration, it may be that God’s mercy is also in effect after this time of inflicted justice to call the lost to seek and find God. If it is unending, God’s mercy might be effected by diluting, as it were, the punishment over infinite time. Of course, it is difficult to imagine that if one deserves a finite amount of punishment that this suffering can be extended over an infinite time without it becoming no punishment at all. Moreland comments that our offense against God is an infinite crime and thus deserves punishment of infinite duration. But a good God would not allow anyone the ability to commit such an offense given the possible consequences.

With these comments I’m hinting at my own view of hell which I should now make clear. I think that there are three possible biblical views and some minor variations of one or more of these three. First is the Eternalist view Moreland presents that says that suffering continues forever. Second is the Annihilationist view mentioned in Strobel’s book which says that after a period of punishment the lost will cease to exist. Evangelical scholars John Stott and Clark Pinnock, are two leading representative of this view among others.

Third is the view called Potential Restorationism. The great Church Father, Origen, taught that after a period of punishment the lost will be reconciled

back to God. If this view is considered, I would merely add that it is not inevitable that the lost be restored. The necessity of free will requires that it be possible that some will not be restored to God even if they are for eternity offered this choice. The lost would be offered redemption after they had exactly paid for or suffered for all the evil that they had committed. But one sin would not yet be paid for. The one eternal sin, the sin of rejecting God, of scorning God's offer of reconciliation, can only be paid for by eternal separation. One endures this punishment so long as one continues to reject God and God's offer. But this punishment must be much different from that already endured. [These last two sentences I would amplify because I have slightly changed my views in recent years. See my book *Flirting with Universalism* to see my current views (<https://books.google.com/books?id=YSGQBAAQBAJ&pg=PP1&dq=flirting+with+universalism&hl=en&sa=X&ei=wmLyVNbnCsPjsAS1yICADw&ved=0CB8Q6wEwAA#v=onepage&q=flirting%20with%20universalism&f=false>). One part of the second phase of the punishment of the lost involves being punished eternally without enduring any physical or psychological suffering. Thus I would agree with my above statement that "this punishment must be much different from that already endured" 18Fb15.]

Some philosophers speak of a state many experience called existential despair. We are aware of our emptiness, of our meaninglessness in the world as we find it. Even if we were to live forever, this would not remove the problem, as so many in the East have seen. The lost who continue to reject God through eternity endure the pain of that separation from God. Only a relationship with God can remove this despair because only God, the source of all meaning, provides meaning to existence. Just as we in this life may sense this despair without turning to God, so it may be for some of the lost through eternity. Perhaps this state will be similar to that of the lost in C.S. Lewis' Grey City in *The Great Divorce* or in Charles William's *Descent Into Hell*. Perhaps it will be a life similar to our present life on earth though lacking any pleasure or pain. When one is truly aware of this despair, one cannot be aware of any pleasure. It may be that out of mercy God will reduce the awareness of the pain of this state. Certainly one would

be more like an animal than a human if one would have this awareness anesthetized.

Contrary to Moreland, I think that all of these views are compatible with Scripture. (For a defense of Annihilationism see Clark Pinnock's arguments in *Four Views of Hell*, Stanley Gundry, ed. [Zondervan Pub., 1996].) But not all traditional Christian views of hell are compatible with our biblical understanding of the moral goodness and justice of God. That God is good and just is more certain in Scripture than any teaching about the state of the afterlife.

We should see that the Eternalist view only makes sense if it is the same as Potential Restorationism with the one exception that the lost will never be offered the possibility of reconciliation with God. Remember that in Potential Restorationism the state of the lost after they had endured complete punishment for all they had done other than rejecting God was a state of sheer separation from God. I had offered that God may anesthetize the lost to the full awareness of the anguish of this state if this punishment is too great. The same must be true of Eternalism. At this point it is difficult to say which of the three views considered is more merciful. The pointless and meaningless existence of the lost is hardly any different from simple annihilation.

I cannot say which of these views is correct. I certainly would hope that the Restorationist view is correct. At this point it will be clear that I cannot give a full defense of all of the doctrines advocated in Strobel's book. Someone else will have to do that. But with this background understanding of the various possible and morally permissible biblical views of hell, let's go on to see how further objections might be answered. I will skip some objections which simply do not apply or which have already been answered.

Doland4: [To first underlined sentence in Jensen3 above] Oddly, . . . this may be consistent with "all-just" but contradictory to "all-merciful" for to be merciful means to give out less punishment than is deserved. Therefore

God could not be both “all-just” and “all-merciful.” Besides, who are you to “redefine hell”? Where does the Bible say this is what hell is?

Jensen5: Mercy and justice are not mutually exclusive and God is described as just and merciful throughout the Bible. God offered mercy; if it is rejected one will receive justice. God’s mercy is possible because God took the justice we deserve. By becoming our substitute, mercy and justice have kissed, the medieval theologians have taught us. I redefine hell from the definition Moreland offered. Hell is defined in Jesus’ teachings as a place of punishment for whatever evil we have done and a place of separation from God. My partial redefinition accepts and affirms this. My presentation of the different possible views of hell merely applies our biblical knowledge of God’s justice, mercy, and love as I think it would best fit the scriptural data. [Paragraph modified 25Ap10.]

Jensen3: [Second underlined sentence in Jensen3 above] I think that there are three possible biblical views and some minor variations.

Doland4: Why is God so incompetent that He can’t explain how things work?

Jensen5: It’s just that we are told some things but not everything. We are told all that we need to know, basically. But to evaluate the goodness of God we have to sometimes consider the various possibilities. We are free to speculate about what we are not told. I have argued that the Scripture is not clear about whether hell is of a limited time duration or whether it is forever. So we have to take into account both possibilities and see where they bring us.

Jensen3: [Third underlined sentence in Jensen3 above] The pointless and meaningless existence of the lost is hardly any different from simple annihilation.

Doland4: C'mon, you don't think people spending say, a trillion years in boredom and/or despair or whatever wouldn't rather not exist at all?

Jensen5: But I've also talked about the possibility of God, out of mercy, eventually taking away our awareness of our condition.

Doland2: How could it possibly be "merciful" for God to eternally foreclose the possibility that a person may change his mind? In any other human endeavor or interest, we leave this possibility open. But God does not. If you don't want to be with God at the moment of your death, then you can never be with Him. How is this "merciful"?

Jensen3: Incidentally, there are many human endeavors in which one cannot change one's mind; I can think of anything from buying a house (in some situations) to jumping into a very deep pit with no one around to rescue you to committing suicide.

Perhaps God could make us to be such that we would forever be free to choose. And I have toyed with that idea concerning possible states for Potential Restorationism in the afterlife. Nevertheless, I would argue that at death, if one has had sufficient opportunity for choice, one has sealed ones fate for at least the first phase of the next life. Might it be that after so many choices against God that God should say, "enough is enough!" and give us as we choose. Don't we treat people as adults when we tell them that their choices really do count? Don't we treat people as children when we tell them that they can make a choice but if it's a choice that we don't like then it doesn't really count until they make one we do like? What kind of free choice is that?

Well we might think that we can allow their choices to count but that they are also allowed to change their minds. But that is exactly what God gives them (us) in this life. After years of choices, of changing our minds as much as we want, doesn't it seem that we have had sufficient chances to make our choice final? If God never allows our choice in this life to be final, then God is not allowing us the dignity of responsibility. The point of having free choice is that we can be responsible.

Doland4: [To both underlined portions in Jensen3 above.] All one can do is alter future course. . . . God, being non-temporal per Jensen's own arguments, has no such limitation. I suppose [that we treat people as adults when we say their choices really count], but only because for us humans, all choices really do count, as we can't ever undo what is done.

Jensen5: But my point was that sometimes we can take actions which determine our future course and we cannot change that. And we treat people as adults when we say their choices for the future do really count. I did not claim that God is nontemporal after the creation of time. But being temporal or nontemporal does not matter. God still cannot change the past.

Doland2: A loving God would allow those who do not want to be around (or serve) Him to do something else, not force a false dilemma: "Either be in my presence and serve me, or experience eternal shame, anguish, and regret with no possibility of escape."

Jensen3: There is no possibility of escape from the first phase of hell because this is the state in which one receives exactly as one deserves. One endures shame, anguish, and regret because one has acted in such a way that it is only right that one receive this. In the second phase of hell, in the Annihilationist view, of course one will not experience anything. In the second phase of the other two views, as we pointed out earlier, the

awareness of one's anguish, shame, and regret might be diminished. At best, only those in Paradise will be aware of the shame of the lost. In Potential Restorationism there is a possibility of escape in the second phase. But in none of the views considered can one be content doing "something else."

God cannot create us to be able to live without God without anguish, unless our awareness of our despair is removed or at least diminished. But we only experience such a spiritual lobotomy to a degree in this life and possibly for the second phase of hell in all but the Annihilationist view.

My distinction of different phases of different views of hell is becoming a bit awkward. So hereafter let me call the first phase of hell "H1," and the second phase "H2" so long as all of these three possible views are being considered. "E1" will be the first phase of the Eternalist hell, "E2" the second phase, and "E" will be both considered together. "A1" will be the first phase of the Annihilationist hell, "A2" the second phase, and "A" will be both considered together. "PR1" will be the first phase of the Potential Restorationist hell, "PR2" the second phase, and "PR" will be both considered together.

Doland2: If those in Hell are those who would rather be in Hell than with God in Heaven, then what is the point of evangelizing in order to "save" them? Why try to talk [to] people who don't want to be with God into being with God?

Jensen3: Because what we want is in this case a matter of choice. We may choose, for example, to desire to live for pleasures here that God says we should avoid or we may choose to seek a God who deserves our love. An evangelist is someone who works with the Holy Spirit to persuade. Sometimes just being aware that there is good reason to believe Christianity is true will motivate a person to consider making this

commitment. If there were no evangelists, the Holy Spirit would do this all without any help. God doesn't really need our help but we find part of our fulfillment in being used by God.

SUBOBJECTION 2: WHY DOES EVERYONE SUFFER THE SAME IN HELL?

Doland2: According to Moreland, while there are different levels of suffering in Hell, all suffer mightily there. Since the justifiability of *any* amount of horrific suffering in Hell is what is problematic, however, this entire discussion seems rather pointless.

Jensen3: But Moreland's point is that everyone gets exactly as they deserve (whether his particular view of hell is truly compatible with that claim or not). Whether it is "horrific" (in H1, the first phase of any of the possible views of hell) or not depends upon what justice requires. And since this occurs only for a given amount of time in H1, it is not problematic. In H2 (the second phase of hell), if the lost continue to exist at all, they merely endure, at worst, the anguish of their awareness of their emptiness. This, again, is as they deserve.

Notice that Doland wouldn't consider this entire discussion "rather pointless" if Moreland had agreed that everyone does suffer the same in hell. For then he could add to his objections the complaint that someone who just never cared about "religion" endures the same punishment as Hitler. [Paragraph added 23Mr09.]

SUBOBJECTION 4: COULDN'T GOD FORCE EVERYONE TO GO TO HEAVEN?

Doland2: Here Moreland repeats his assertion that God doesn't want to force people to be with Him if they don't want to. But, again, this contradicts the notion that those in Hell are unhappy about being separated from God.

Jensen3: No, they are unhappy about suffering the punishment they deserve; they're not unhappy about being separated from God. They would surely be willing to be with God, as uncomfortable as they might think this to be, so long as their punishment would cease. But for the unredeemed to be in God's presence would be a pain far worse than what they otherwise would endure in Hell (H1, the first phase of any of the possible views of hell). Also, because of God's absolute holiness, the unredeemed could not be allowed to be in God's presence.

Those in hell are not unhappy **about** being separated from God but they are unhappy **because** they are separated from God. That's just the way we're made and God couldn't have made us differently insofar as we are fully human. Only by removing something of their awareness of their condition can this anguish be diminished.

And God does not want to force people to be in relationship with God who do not want to. This is not the same as somehow being with God in some insignificant social sense, like when Homer Simpson walks with god back to the cafeteria in heaven (that is, Matt Groening's subanthropomorphized god). To seek, to love, to desire a relationship with our source and creator, the one who is infinitely deserving of our love: that, many people definitely do not want. C. S. Lewis explored the psychology of God rejection in *The Great Divorce*, (MacMillan Company, 1946). For example:

"Milton was right," said my Teacher. "The choice of every lost soul can be expressed in the words 'Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.' There is always something they insist on keeping, even at the price of misery.

There is always something they prefer to joy—that is, to reality. Ye see it easily enough in a spoiled child that would sooner miss its play and its supper than say it was sorry and be friends” (69-70).

SUBOBJECTION 6: HOW CAN HELL EXIST ALONGSIDE HEAVEN?

Doland2: If Heaven is a place with “no more tears,” Strobel asks, why are there no tears for those in Hell (185)?

Jensen3: This is a problem for any view of hell so far considered except Origen’s Restorationism; and that still in part faces this problem. Ultimately the answer must be that we must respect a person’s decision. If your son or daughter, someone you love more than anyone or anything else, should refuse to ever see or speak with you, what would you do? You wouldn’t want to force them to love you even if you could. How can God endure such separation since God loves us much more than we could love anyone? Perhaps God endures such pain by somehow removing the worth the person possesses. But we cannot really know how God can endure this separation, we only know that somehow God is able. As for ourselves, perhaps God can take away the memory of the person who has chosen to be eternally separated from ourselves and God. That’s the closest I can come to answering this question unless PR, Potential Restorationism, is true. With PR the redeemed in heaven will always have a hope of possible eventual redemption for their loved ones. But that alone does not remove the anguish of knowing that for the time being this loved one is lost and enduring punishment or at least the anguish of separation from God, and that, indeed, they may continue to choose to be separated from you (and God) forever. [My current view, Semi-restorationism, is described in my book *Flirting with Universalism* and does more adequately resolve this problem; 18Fb15.]

SUBOBJECTION 7: WHY DIDN'T GOD CREATE ONLY THOSE HE KNEW WOULD FOLLOW HIM?

Jensen3: Suppose it is not impossible for God to refrain from creating someone God foreknows would reject God. God would so refrain unless God would know that a greater good could come from so creating. We cannot know that God does not have good reason for creating those who will turn against God, so we do not know that Doland's critique is sound. But it is difficult to imagine what that reason might be. Be that as it may, the most significant problem with Doland's critique is simply that it *is* logically impossible to foreknow a free choice without that event occurring.

A free choice is something only the agent of that choice can make. If time is tensed, then the present alone is real; the past and future do not exist. If the future does not exist, then that future choice does not exist to be known. The future agent of that future choice does not exist as that person at that future point in time. Even if the agent exists in the present, he or she could make a completely different choice at that future time than they would make now since a free choice is not determined by one's past choices. Since a free choice is impossible without the agent of that choice existing to make that choice and the agent does not now exist as the future agent of the choice, there exists no choice to be known.

God can certainly track the deterministic lines of causal events to know all that will happen in the future so long as free choices are not involved. And God's knowledge of the future can work around all such contingencies of free choice insofar as free choices are involved. God can say, "I know that x will happen in the future if free agent A chooses b. If A chooses c then y will occur." Given both possibilities, God can know everything else that will happen under either choice. Thus God knows all future events given all possible choices by all agents but God only knows these as possible worlds that may occur. Given a tensed world, a tensed or dynamic view of

time, God does not know which world will be actualized until the choices are made.

This is a category of possible worlds which is distinct from all other possible worlds. Given the possibility that God created a lifeless universe, for example, that would be a possible world outside of the possible worlds that we as free agents create. Given all that God has actually created, the latter are the worlds any one of which actually may occur. It is up to the free agents taken as a whole to determine which possible world will be actualized. God cannot foreknow the exact final world that will be actualized. Possible world 1 with person A in heaven could have been possible world 2 with A in hell. Which it will actually be God cannot know until A chooses.

If time is tenseless, then all of time is presently, at once, occurring. Since Einstein, this “block universe” has been probably the most popular view in physics. As such, the future choices are seen as they occur in the future but they are seen by God in what we could call the present. Nevertheless, even in this tenseless world, no freely chosen event can be foreknown without it occurring.

God can still determine the course of history even with the contingencies of free choice. God can determine that Jesus would be born at a given time and die as our sacrifice. Had Mary been unwilling to bear the child or had she chosen against God’s will at other earlier points in her life, God could have chosen someone else for this task. Had Judas chosen to do God’s will at certain points earlier in his life, he would not have been chosen to betray Jesus. Often people make choices for evil so many times that eventually God gives them over to their choices so that they cannot choose good (at least for certain important choices). This is the sense of Romans 1. Egypt’s Pharaoh during the Exodus is a good example. Several times we read of Pharaoh hardening his heart when Moses would ask him to let the children of Israel leave. We read that eventually, however, God hardens Pharaoh’s heart. It might have been that Judas was free to refrain from

betraying Jesus since some of Jesus' words might be taken to give that impression. If this were so, had Judas not betrayed Jesus, someone else would have been chosen and tempted to do so.

Doland2: Moreland speculates, for example, that whether or not his father got a job in Illinois might determine whether or not he would have been lost, but also whether or not five other people would be saved: . . .

[“]. . . When God chooses to create somebody, he or she has an impact on other people's choices and it might be that they have an impact on their decisions to trust Christ or not. . . .

[“]When God is making these judgments, his purpose is not to keep as many people out of hell as possible. His goal is to get as many people in heaven as possible. And it may be, sadly enough, that he's going to have to allow some more people who will choose to go to hell to be created in order to get a larger number of people who will choose to go to heaven[”] (187).

Jensen3: Here I must agree with Doland that such a utilitarian appraisal must certainly be rejected. And I say this though I respect Moreland as one of Christianity's greatest contemporary thinkers. God does not weigh the creation of a certain number of people whose lives will be of a certain type and who will believe, against those whose lives will be of a different kind and who will not believe, to produce a world where more will believe. No, the answer must be that God gives everyone sufficient opportunity to choose and God does so without outside environmental factors determining or unduly negatively influencing the decisions.

Can God foreknow free choices? (again)

Doland2: Why did God create this world at all? According to Moreland (and, I believe, most modern Christian apologists), God has known for all eternity who would be saved, and who would be lost. . . . God could have simply created those very people directly in Heaven, since He already knows who they will be.

Jensen3: The book of Job and other examples throughout Scripture show us that our choices that determine our destinies in the next life are things that God just **cannot** know without their occurring. Satan went to God and said “Look at Job, how faithful to you he is. Let me touch his body and then you’ll see just how much he loves you. He’ll curse you to your face and you know it!” (my paraphrase). If all of these modern Christian apologists Doland alludes to are right, shouldn’t God have said, “Wait just a minute, Satan; here, let me show you what Job will do.” And then some cloud or mist appears and we see Job enduring his painful disease and arguing with his “friends” about why God allowed all of this. At the end of it Job remains faithful to God and God says, “See, I told you he’d stay faithful to me.” But Satan says, “But he never endured this suffering!” God replies, “But this is what he would do if he were to endure it, and that’s what you wanted me to know.” Wouldn’t that have been the dialogue in Job 2 if God really does know such future choices without their occurring?

Another example: God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, and stopped him just before he was about to thrust the knife. Because Abraham was willing to do this, God told him, “Now I know that you fear God,” (Genesis 22:12). To fear God in biblical terminology means to hold God in highest awe and reverence and, to a degree, fear. If God just wanted to know if Abraham would do this and it was not necessary for the event to occur, wouldn’t God have just foreseen what he would have done and never have asked him to do it? This was something God desired to know and God could not know it without it happening. So much of the Bible makes no sense whatsoever if God could foreknow morally significant

human choices without the choices occurring. [Slightly revised for clarification, 20Fb15.]

Doland4: Correct. This is among the reasons we can reasonably conclude that Job is a *story*. It is fiction.

Jensen5: No, this gives us no reason to conclude it is fiction. It is merely good reason to suppose that God cannot foreknow freely chosen actions without their happening or until they happen if one accepts the truthfulness of the Bible. There is nothing about the original story that tells us it is fiction. Is this what common atheistic arguments amount to? Claiming that because a story has God and Satan in it who act in human affairs that it cannot be true? That's an argument? Because other than this, Doland has shown us nothing about the story that makes it look like fiction.

SUBOBJECTION 8: WHY DOESN'T GOD GIVE PEOPLE A SECOND CHANCE?

Doland quotes Moreland:

Moreland1: This question [Why doesn't God give people a second chance?] assumes God didn't do everything he could do before people died, and I reject that. God does everything he can to give people a chance and there will not be a single person who will be able to say to God, "if you had just not allowed me to die prematurely, if you'd have given me another twelve months, I know I would have made that decision." (188.)

Jensen3: Whether this claim contradict Moreland's previous utilitarian scenario as Doland claims, Moreland will have to argue for himself. It would be too far from the point of this paper to take the time to analyze this possibility. My only comment at this point is that now Moreland has given

us a substantial answer which Doland cannot refute. He does try the following:

Doland2: According to Moreland's own theology, if those who accepted Christianity today had died yesterday, they'd be in Hell. So how can Moreland justifiably claim to know that no one has ever died prematurely?

Jensen3: Now I have claimed that it is not necessarily the case that all who die without believing in Jesus will be lost and the reader will have to look at our previous discussion to understand under what conditions that would be the case. But I admit that many people are lost until they do accept Jesus' atoning death. So Moreland claims to know that no one could ever say they have died prematurely as far as one's salvation is concerned. He might mean that God knows what their future free choices would have been had they lived longer and God knows they would never have chosen for God. This I have argued to be impossible. But his statement (that no one can claim to have died prematurely) is also compatible with my claim that neither God nor the individual can know what their (the agent's) future free will be. Since this is not something that can be known, no one can claim that they died prematurely.

Notice that Moreland's statement is a bit different than Doland's paraphrase. Doland has Moreland claiming to know that no one has ever died prematurely. What Moreland actually claimed to know was that no one can claim to know that they have died prematurely.

No one can know that they would have made the decision for God had they been given more time. After so many choices against God, God gives them over to their choices and closes the book. There is no point in giving someone more chances. (There may be a point in giving more chances after PR1 is past if PR is true.) God is not concerned about the possibility that someone might turn to God a month after the point God has chosen to close out their life. God say, "No, you've had enough chances, that's it." [Jensen3 modified 25Ap10.]

The reason for life on earth

Is there sufficient reason to believe or to disbelieve?

Doland2: If God gave people another chance after death, Moreland asks, then what is the point of life on Earth? Good question! What is the point of life on Earth? A billion years from now, are Christians going to be sitting in Heaven discussing their earthly lives, such as the time when an aunt died? How could brief mortal experiences be useful in any way to an immortal being in Heaven?

Jensen3: As I have said earlier, the point of life on earth is to have a place, an environment, in which one can choose for or against God without being forced by the evidence to believe or disbelieve. There is sufficient evidence for one to be justified in believing and sufficient to allow one to persuade oneself to disbelieve if one does not want to believe. Soul building can only occur in such an environment because only here can we be tested and refined into creatures who take on more of the image and nature of God or tested with the option of choosing against God. Moreland's point is that the purpose of life on earth is to have such an environment in which we could so freely choose. Doland chooses to ignore this quite obvious point and assume there is no purpose to human life on earth given the Christian view.

Doland4: Translated into English, there is insufficient evidence, period. And it's not a crime if I want more evidence for something than you do.

Jensen5: No, that's not what I said. I did not say that there is insufficient evidence. There is enough evidence that any rational person should believe. But if you don't want to believe, there is enough lack of evidence that one can take it as insufficient evidence to believe, though one cannot do so rationally. It may not be as much as some people would want but it is still sufficient for any rational person to believe.

There is sufficient counter evidence that is ambiguous enough that those who desire to see it as sufficient counter evidence for belief can do so. But one is not rationally justified in taking it as sufficient counter evidence. One has to persuade oneself that it is, but not on rational grounds. Doland may claim that he has insufficient evidence for belief, but he cannot claim that I said that. See our original discussion on “God condemning intellectually honest believers” and its further discussion.

SUBOBJECTION 9: ISN'T REINCARNATION MORE RATIONAL THAN HELL?

Doland2: Moreland objects, for instance, that transmigration between species denies that any property makes human beings distinctively human: “Just like being even is essential to the number two, so being human is essential to me—and reincarnation says that what is essential to me isn't really essential at all” (190).

However, the same point undermines belief in any sort of life after death. For if what is “essential” to human beings is our biological, mortal nature, then there would be nothing to recognize as our immortal selves after death.

Jensen3: The identity of a person consists in their consciousness as it continues through time. One's awareness might in some instances be diminished to the point that one is merely sentient, aware of one's sensed environment or mental images or other sensations from memory, but nothing more. That is, one is unable to process words or thoughts or to reason or generalize concerning the images. And one is not aware of oneself as the recipient of these images. Even sentient animals (assuming they are sentient) have a limited ability to generalize concerning images and other sensations, though this might be done unconsciously. The rabbit

senses a shape (say of a wolf) which fits a generalized shape which has been established by instinct or learning to stimulate the rabbit to run. (The following assumes that at least some higher animals are sentient; but see our discussion of animal pain).

A person's awareness in a coma might be diminished to a level of sentience even lower than that of some higher animals. We do not think that because they are not self-conscious, they are no longer the same person. It is still the same "I" who is aware of whatever mental images might be appearing during that time of diminished mental ability. If no sentience is occurring at all and the individual is completely unconscious of thoughts, images, etc., then they are no longer persons. This does not mean they have no longer the right to live. Otherwise someone in a deep dreamless sleep would not have the right to live. (Incidentally, this is the reason I believe the human embryo has the right to live; by normal natural processes it will shortly be a conscious, feeling organism just as the sleeping person will soon wake up.)

So I don't think it is inconceivable for a person to be reincarnated as a lower animal. If I were to reincarnate to a fish I would be the same individual though lacking mental abilities I now possess. The sensations I would have as a fish would be experiences of the same individual who was once a human just as I once had the diminished mental abilities of a newborn. Likewise when God became a man, God gave up the divine powers and knowledge to be aware of only that which a human is aware of. More than that, God became first an unconscious embryo and then a fetus only aware at first of vague sensations of touch and then sounds. Stories about John the Baptist leaping in his mother's womb when the pregnant Mary came to visit must reflect an added awareness given the fetus. If John was the reincarnation of Elijah as some Scriptures seem to indicate, then this might have something to do with an unusual and temporary awareness given to the fetus.

Finally, this shows that a person can in principle survive death to become a person with expanded mental abilities as well as other characteristics not possessed previously. To critique this possibility one would have to show that one's identity cannot survive the destruction of one's body. But consciousness is so radically different from any physical entity that it is difficult to see a necessary connection to a physical body. Even if it were conceded that a consciousness needs a body, Christians claim that in heaven people will have resurrected bodies. And though orthodox theology maintains that God has no body, it is not clear from Scripture that God's existence is necessarily devoid of any physical nature. We are told that God is Spirit, but it is not unquestionable that Spirit must have no physical characteristic whatsoever. Nevertheless, a God of pure mind and no physical nature is not inconceivable.

Doland2: Moreland is silent about whether reincarnation (between humans) would be a better option than Hell, the very question he was supposed to answer.

Jensen3: If the point of reincarnation is to reach enlightenment (an awareness of one's divine nature or one's unity with all things or one's unity with God or an attainment of a superhuman nature such as the Buddha-nature or attainment of Nirvana, etc.), then we should question whether almost any of these goals should be attained. If by reason and whatever evidence we have at hand we do not see good reason to believe that such a goal will or should be attained, we should reject that as a goal and believe that we will never attain it. If we in fact go through numerous reincarnations and eventually discover that one of these enlightenment goals is attainable and should be attained, then so be it. But for now I would claim that the evidence we have indicates that most of these should not and will not be attained. (Under "sample topics," see "**Should we seek God or seek to become gods?**" "**Loss of self in the great void?**" "**Buddhism: finding completeness in emptiness?**") Nevertheless, it is

not in principle necessary that reincarnation occur to attain any of these goals, whether they should be rejected or not.

With the doctrine of karma as it works in reincarnation, one receives exactly as one deserves. But with any of the doctrines of hell discussed above, the same result is attained. And there is no need for numerous lives for a person to choose for or against God if it can be accomplished in one life. There really is no special reason for numerous lives unless it might facilitate any of the spiritual goals commonly advocated in the East.

With reincarnation there is always the possibility of redemption, of eventually winning no matter how far one falls or fails. Of course what is won is always a questionable spiritual goal like Nirvana (extinction of self) or merger with God or the All. So we first have to ask if the desired spiritual goals are truly what we should be after before we can call this “winning.” If the PR (Potential Restorationist) view of hell is correct, we also have the possibility of “winning,” of redemption, after the period of punishment is past; though the goal of this present life in the Christian view is relationship with God. The Christian goal is at least intuitively more likely the source of our fulfillment than most of the Eastern goals mentioned above.

The other views of hell considered do not have this intrinsic hope, however. Though their end is not the traditional Fundamentalist “eternal torture,” still here one can never be said to “win.” Perhaps this possibility should make us take the spiritual choices before us more seriously. By our choice, some may claim, we can truly lose eternally.

There is simply no need for reincarnation. Perhaps there isn't really any reason for it, but, as Doland claims of life itself, “it just is.” We should note that in the East, reincarnation is not a very appealing doctrine as it sometimes is taken to be in the West. The goal is to get off of the wheel of samsara, not to remain carrying the tedious burden of life after life after life.

So if reincarnation just “is,” without any hope of it ending or attaining any truly beneficial spiritual goal, maybe our existence truly is hell on earth.

Doland2: I can only conclude that any God who sends people to Hell is unworthy of worship.

Jensen3: With all three of these biblical views of hell, we see that God is just and good and worthy of our worship. God offers us a means of attaining a relationship with God such that we can have fulfillment that is not attainable by any other means. By our free choice we find ourselves to be creatures who sin and are thus separated from God. If we reject this offer of reconciliation, we endure exactly what justice requires of us. And our continuing anguish at our alienation from God may be removed if we are given again the choice of reconciliation (after PR1, the first stage in the Potential Restorationist view); or it will be removed in A after A1 by annihilation; or this anguish may be diminished because of God’s mercy as one continues forever in E2, the second stage of the Eternalist view. Likewise as one continues to reject God’s offer of reconciliation in PR2, God may out of mercy diminish the anguish of alienation from God.

The biblical doctrine of hell is a hard doctrine because of its image of extreme punishment, of a fire and worm that do not die and weeping and gnashing of teeth. And this certainly is the point of H1, the first stage of any of the three views of hell considered. But this (H1) is a period of limited duration. This is the punishment of which one receives exactly as one deserves. This is the place that Scripture indicates one would certainly leave if one could. It is in the second phase of hell (E2 specifically) that, as C.S. Lewis says, the door is locked from the inside out. Here, at it’s worst, it cannot be like the torment of H1. It may be no more than the barely conscious existence of an animal, or Charles William’s “X-men,” or the state of the lost in Lewis’ “Grey City.” Only in PR2 is it possible that some

might unlock the door. And on A, there is no second phase; A2 is extinction.
[Paragraph modified 4Jul09.]

A biblical argument for and against Annihilationism

Jensen3: Moreland brings up an argument against Annihilationism that I would like to comment on. I would like to defend Annihilationism since I have claimed that it is one of the three views permissible in the Bible. Strobel cites the eminent Evangelical scholar, John R. W. Stott, who says that the flames of hell are said to be unquenchable but that it would be very strange to think that anything cast into this fire would not be consumed. Moreland responds that we are using figurative language and the lake of fire merely stands for judgment. Hell and death are cast into this lake but they can't burn, can they? Yet Moreland admits that by this act, hell (as a state of the lost prior to the judgment) and death come to an end. So even with a symbolic or figurative understanding of the lake of fire, he has to admit that its clearest meaning is that it brings about destruction to anything cast into it (257-8; 2000 edition). And since human souls are cast into the lake of fire, wouldn't the clearer meaning be that these souls are eventually destroyed?

OBJECTION 7: CHURCH HISTORY IS LITTERED WITH OPPRESSION AND VIOLENCE

Doland2: Like most apologists, Woodbridge excuses Christianity for the evils performed by misguided Christians, while simultaneously giving Christianity full credit for any good that happens to have been done by Christians. Likewise, he blames atheism for the evils of a few atheists, while never crediting atheism with any good that atheists happen to have done. Such a blatant double standard marks the height of hypocrisy to me.

Jensen3: Now many Christians will profess (or others may notice this if they examine these Christians' lives) that they have made changes in their lives for the good that are fully the result of their Christian beliefs. I just do not know of any atheist who has claimed such a thing in becoming an atheist. I do know of atheists who have said that they have felt a release or new sense of freedom after having given up their old moral constraints. So if we are to have a moral comparison of the good done under both, we need examples presented by both sides. Doland's claim of hypocrisy may rather be rather a lack of awareness. Next, Doland sounds as though he recognizes that "a few misguided Christians" should not be blamed for evils they had done if likewise a few (misguided?) atheists should not be blamed for the evils they have done. But perhaps blame (or praise) should be ascribed to one rather than or more than the other as we examine both systems.

Should "full credit" be given Christianity for good they have done and should atheism be likewise credited if good comes from it? The fact is, if the basic Christian teachings, namely the Bible and especially the teachings of Jesus, are conscientiously followed, one does live a better life in one's treatment of others. Jesus taught us to do unto others as we would have done to ourselves and to love our neighbors (which meant everyone). Christians for centuries have sought to live up to those teachings. At least they knew when they failed to do so. There may be some atheistic ideologies that have good moral teachings and atheists may have

attempted to live by those standards. But it is difficult to think of any that have had any significant impact on the world. Usually atheists who have lived good moral lives have done so pretty much on their own and as a result of a natural awareness of what is right and wrong. Sometimes they have done so having learned and established their moral way of life from a Christian upbringing.

So if good is done by Christians, the credit should more likely go to the teachings of Jesus and to this system that encourages adherence to those teachings. But no special credit should go to atheism since it can end in so many different moral views. Whatever good comes from atheism will be expressed by most anyone else who lives by the moral law they know quite naturally and innately. It is in Christianity specifically that the need to follow the moral teachings of Jesus are so highly valued. We are taught that we are pleasing to God when we do so. An atheist can be an ethically conscious humanist or an ethically indifferent Marxist.

And it is difficult to try to hold that Christianity has not changed human lives for the better: the mafia hit man who gave it all up to follow Jesus, the ex-gang leaders like Nicky Cruz, the Christians who hid Jews during the holocaust because they said God expects this of them, the priest at Auschwitz who volunteered to die in the place of another man who was arbitrarily picked for execution, the slave trader who repented of his evil life and later wrote "Amazing Grace." We hear of stories like this every day.

On the other hand we find problems inherent in atheism. Brother Andrew lived for years imprisoned in the Soviet labor camps. One man who was responsible for torturing prisoners said that he thanked God, in whom he did not believe, that he could do the kind of work he was doing. He just enjoyed torturing people. Because he believed there was no God, he believed he had nothing to fear in the next life because there would be no next life.

Now of course not all atheists are like that and many have chosen to follow their natural moral awareness. But the question is, What reason does an atheist have to choose one way rather than the other? We can look at psychological and social factors that might cause an atheist to go in one direction rather than another. We can say that one just ought to do what is right. Now there are some arguments that claim that we do not have any right to claim that morality is even justified if God does not exist. But even assuming that there really is a right and wrong given atheism, what gives an atheist any motivation to do the good or the right and avoid the evil or wrong? Just saying that one “ought” to do the good simply will not make someone want to do it. And the right psychological and social factors just might not happen to be in place to motivate any particular atheist to seek to live a moral life.

Another problem involves what we might call the problem of death. Though not all atheists believe death is the end of individual human existence, this is so largely assumed in contemporary Western atheism that special justification is usually demanded for any other claim. So assuming that atheism accepts that human consciousness ends at death, what grounds can be offered for claiming that one should not commit murder? If you have reason for not wanting someone to be around any longer and are very sure that you can get away with this crime without being caught, aren't you merely shortening their life a little? Everyone has to die sooner or later; what difference does it make if it's just a little sooner yet? Sooner or later they will be nothing, absolutely nothing; what difference does a few years make when someone is essentially nothing anyway? If they will be nothing for an infinite future, how can a few years of doing virtually nothing (nothing that will accomplish anything that is worth being concerned about anyway) make any difference? (I'm getting so carried away with my argument, I just might start singing “Dust in the Wind.”) So we have the problem of finding justification for claiming that murder is even wrong in the atheist world view.

I'm sure that Doland will remind me that I had earlier argued that death is just stepping through a door from one world to another and that it wasn't

really wrong for the Israelites to commit massive, wide-scale murder just because God told them to. True, I would claim that it isn't murder if God commands it because God does have the right to take any life God wishes to take and God would also have the right to use another person as an agent to take that life. (Also remember that for someone to take a life because they say that God told them to do so requires the person to be absolutely certain that God has asked this. It's not just a matter of obeying the voice that you hear speaking in your head.) But this is just saying that murder in some contexts is not always wrong. Most people (including many moral philosophers) admit that capital punishment, or killing in time of war (at least in a "just war"), or killing in self defense is not wrong. However, if my argument is sound, murder is *never* wrong given atheism.

Doland4: Is theism any better? In theism, you are just sending the person on to their eternal reward, so, what's the problem? It was of course a pope that said, "Kill them all, God will know his own."

Jensen5: Under some forms of theism one can say that, but not under Christianity. The pope you quoted had no right to say that. Only God has the right to command someone to take an innocent person's life.

So now let's compare the ethical conclusion of atheism with Christianity. Under Christianity one has no right on one's own to take an innocent life (someone whose actions are not worthy of death). God has rarely ever commanded the killing of innocent people and then only under special circumstances. And then the innocent receive back at least equal compensation for any undeserved suffering endured. With the Christian era, we have no such command from God. Under atheism one has no reason to be concerned about killing another person: Everyone has to die sooner or later, what difference does it make if it's just a little sooner? And who is to say that one person has no "right" over another person's life. If you are stronger than that other person, why not?

It can no more be wrong to kill or steal than for a lion to kill its prey or for a group of jackals to steal the lion's kill. On the other hand, Christianity motivates followers to keep the moral law they are aware of by nature (see Romans 2). More than that, we are to value all people from the highest to the lowest. As we do to the least, Jesus said, we do to him. Those who, like Mother Theresa, care for the hurt and dying outcasts do so because their Lord had commanded them to do this and because he had done that for them. Slavery, though once allowed because of the hardness of the people's hearts, is incompatible with Jesus' teachings of loving one's fellow as oneself or doing to others as we would have done to ourselves. Atheists will more likely obey a tyrant who threatens and actively seeks to kill all who disobey. Death is the greatest fear for the atheist, the end of their very existence. So when some select group is persecuted (like the Jews in Hitler's Germany) the atheist will be less likely to resist. The Christian who believes we have another life after this one, who knows Jesus' command to aid the persecuted, and who loves and seeks to obey Jesus, will resist the tyrant. Another motivating factor is that the next life is one of rewards for those who obey and punishment for those who disobey him; except for those who obey, those who receive back more than they deserve, this will be a place where justice will be carried out exactly.

Certainly any religion might happen to have commands that go against our intuitive moral awareness: consider the cult of the Thugs who befriended and killed people for Kali (the goddess of destruction). This is very different from what we find in the commands of God in the Bible. There people were to be killed because they were evil (the Canaanites) or because they were children of an evil nation that was to be ended (the innocent children of the Canaanites) or even because God wanted to know whether one would be obedient to a dreaded command (e.g., Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac).

My point is that it all depends on what the particular religion (or ideology, or political system, etc.) commands its followers as to whether we might conclude that good or evil will come of that belief. The ancient Hebrew religion commanded that those who practice homosexual behavior or who

curse their parents be killed. Jesus taught that laws like this should no longer be kept (John 8). Still he indicated that such laws show what such actions deserve (Matthew 15:4). In some cases, it might be that a behavior is wrong because God commanded it not be done for a certain group of people at a certain time in history (e.g., picking up sticks on the Sabbath). If God deserves to be obeyed, it would be wrong to eat kumquats if God commanded us not to do so. Some may be morally wrong but only deserving of death because God commanded such (adultery, homosexual behavior, cursing one's parents). Atheists and other critics will complain that this still shows that his commands are wrong and his religion false. But how do we know that such behavior is not wrong and does not deserve death if God so commanded it? Also remember that the death penalty was the maximum punishment for some of these crimes, not a mandatory punishment. Other evils, like slavery and divorce, we have seen we have reason to believe were originally allowed because of the hardness of the people's hearts.

The conclusion must be that we need to consider the evidence for the particular religion. If we have reason to believe there is a God who deserves to be obeyed and that God has commanded a certain law, then it would be wrong to disobey. Clearly, there would be some acts that would be wrong for God to command and God could not command them. We have none that we can point to in the Bible that are in this category. What is difficult to imagine is that there could be any ethic more beneficial to humanity than the one Jesus taught. [The last three paragraphs were added 19Oc08 and revised 4Jul09 & 26Ap10.]

Doland2: Woodbridge concedes that all of these things [crusades, the Inquisition, etc.] are regrettable blots on the Christian faith, but nevertheless tries to deflect the blame from "true Christianity." While I agree with him that, to some extent, those who conduct themselves according to actual Christian tenets would never have done such things (and that most

Christians are fine people), his response is problematic given that there is no single, universally understood definition of “true Christianity.”

Jensen3: But I think there is. Certainly one must first trust in Jesus for salvation. The New Testament consists of the basic teaching of Jesus and of his first followers. There is pretty strong evidence that this is true. If someone claims to be a Christian and disagrees with the most certain and dominant teachings of Jesus as we find in the Gospels, then that at least must certainly disqualify the person from being a follower of Jesus. A word simply becomes meaningless when it is so completely divorced from the most ostensive meaning of the word.

Jesus said to love your enemies and to love your neighbor as yourself; he said to return good for evil and to do to others as you would have done to yourself (Luke 6:27-35; cf., Matthew 5:38-48). He said that what you do to the least of his brothers (which most literally and primarily meant the Jewish people) you do to him. He even said that this treatment of his brothers would be a means of determining the lost from the saved (Matthew 25:31-46).

Jesus did express great sadness that many Jewish people then and the Jewish nation as a political entity later would reject him (Matthew 23:37). He expressed anger at Jewish leaders just as the ancient Jewish prophets used to denounce evil kings, priests, prophets, scribes, teachers and other leaders.

For anyone to call oneself a Christian and to claim beliefs in contradiction to at least the basic moral teachings mentioned above, just cannot be a Christian. Certainly Jesus taught that we should be more concerned about the next life than this one, but he also indicated that the way we live this life morally has everything to do with whether we will attain the eternal life of the next life.

If I cannot persuade Doland that it is pretty clear what true Christianity consists of, at the very least it must be pretty clear what the Christian ethic requires. Those who called themselves Christians who tried to justify the crusades and the Inquisition had to simply ignore Jesus' clear teachings and to recruit and twist other biblical statements that didn't even apply to ethical behavior.

Hitler's religion and Luther's antisemitism

Doland2: A Christian, by definition, is someone who believes that Jesus Christ is the Savior. Plenty of people who have believed that have done very bad things. For example, though Christians often deny it, Adolph Hitler was a Christian.

Jensen3: To say that Hitler was a Christian would make the word meaningless. First of all we have no reason to think that Hitler ever even believed "Jesus is the savior." Secondly, this certainly is not enough in itself if he did. It's like saying that a Scotsman who put sugar on his porridge isn't a true Scotsman. Only the Scripture can define who a Christian is; this is not subject to human whim. To disregard the teachings of Jesus and his immediate followers in this regard is the same as saying that how one prepares one's food determines if one is a Scotsman. It turns out that Doland is guilty of falling for the "no true Scotsman" fallacy he accuses Christians of accepting.

When an evangelist seeks to persuade a non-Christian to become a Christian, one seeks a commitment to Jesus. Often people will say that they are convinced that it is true but they are unwilling to commit themselves or to give up some cherished sin. The evangelist never believes the person is now a Christian just because they believe that Jesus is the savior or that Jesus would be able to save them.

Someone in the mafia once made a prayer of salvation (made a commitment to Jesus, or “asked Jesus into his heart,” or “believed in Jesus”) with the persuasion of some Christian acquaintances. When he promptly went back to work for the mafia, the surprised Christians told him that he just cannot do that any more, he’s a Christian now. The would be convert retorted that they never told him he would have to change the way he lived. This is something of a commentary on the deficiencies of some contemporary evangelistic methods but it also points out that no Christians accept that one can be a Christian and live just any way they want to. Every book in the New Testament emphasizes this. Jesus’ moral teachings are not some peripheral items that can be divorced from a Christian’s identity.

Imagine an atheist friend telling you that he is now a Marxist. You ask him why and he says that he agrees with Marx that religion is the opiate of the masses. But on further questioning you find out that he agrees with Marx on absolutely nothing else and is a laissez-faire capitalist. You would tell him he is definitely not a Marxist. Likewise one point of agreement on Christian doctrine does not make one a Christian. The demons believe Jesus is the savior, does that make them Christians?

Woodbridge quotes Jesus as saying very explicitly that those who claim to be followers of Jesus but do not do God’s will by following Jesus’ teachings will not be accepted by God (279, 2000 edition; Matthew 7:21-23). The Scripture is extremely clear about this. Any other opinion on this matter simply does not matter. Yet Doland does not respond to this quotation except to obscure the issue by his misapplication of the “no true Scotsman” fallacy. Just as where one is born determines a sufficient definition of a Scotsman, so Jesus’ statements determine what kind of individual would definitely not be a Christian.

Woodbridge notes that Martin Luther late in his life wrote very hateful tracts against the Jews. Earlier in his life his writings were very honoring and flattering to the Jews, possibly in hopes of persuading them to become

Christians. He later wrote against the Jews after so few came to believe. Luther was known for his temper and at times let his anger override what he knew the Scripture taught. But church history is filled with the same disregard for or twisting of clear scriptural teaching when it opposes one's wishes. As Paul said, "Let God be true and all people be liars." Whatever anyone else says or wants the Bible to say cannot change what the Bible does say.

So ultimately it does not matter what Luther wrote or said. We can look at his work and find much that does accord with or follow the Scripture but nothing that he said is otherwise binding to Christians. Luther scholars have always accepted that some of his writings at this time in his life are exceptional and very much out of keeping with his other works. Luther was a Christian, but that does not mean that he never sinned. He once said, "We always sin, we always repent, we are always forgiven." I can only hope he did repent of this horrible sin.

I cannot make similar statements about Hitler since his sin of attempted genocide was not a largely isolated incident of vented anger but a near lifelong goal. This and other atrocities Hitler advocated and enacted until he took his life. If he had actually trusted in Jesus at some point in his life, then he had repudiated his commitment by his murders. It would be the same as saying that someone became a Christian and then started a career killing people for the mob. Paul says in essence that it doesn't matter what you profess to believe, if you do these things you simply do not have eternal life (Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Some of my arguments above claim that Hitler could not have been a Christian even if he believed and professed everything the Bible says one must believe and profess to be a Christian. Do we have any idea what his religious views might have been? It is most likely that Hitler was "deeply religious but deeply anti-Christian" as Speer recounted (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler%27s_religious_beliefs, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/13/weekinreview/word-for-word-case-against->

nazis-hitler-s-forces-planned-destroy-german.html). (Shouldn't those who knew him most intimately be considered our most credible sources for this information?) Certainly in his public statements he paints himself as a dedicated Christian. But from one of the 20th century's most capable propagandists and liars, should we really expect anything else? He couldn't alienate a nation so strongly culturally, and to a lesser degree religiously, Christian and hope for his regime to survive. He could only hope to mutilate and reshape Christianity into a belief system that would support his regime. Only after Germany would win the war did he believe he would have the power to wipe out Christianity. He may have actually admired Jesus, but his Aryan Christ was so alien to anything one finds in the New Testament that the only thing he could share with Christianity was the name "Jesus."

Jensen3: [First underlined sentence in Jensen3 above.] First of all we have no reason to think that Hitler ever even believed "Jesus is the savior."

Doland4: Sure we do. He said he believed he was doing God's work in exterminating the Jews. But, I can concede that neither of us can read Hitler's mind. Maybe he was a closet atheist twisting Christianity for his purposes.

Jensen5: Notice that Doland has not produced even a quotation from Hitler saying that he accepted Jesus as his savior. In the continuation of my previous response I gave evidence that Hitler was definitely not a Christian. He certainly made public statements claiming to be a Christian. But what dictator would claim to be an atheist or non-Christian to a culturally Christian nation? [One sentence added here 26Ap10.]

Doland4: What I didn't bring up was the fact that it was Martin Luther's anti-Semitic teachings that were popularized in Nazi Germany in order to

sell the holocaust to the Germans. German military belt buckles said, “Gott mit uns” (God with us).

Jensen5: This I’ve commented on already in my past response. Luther just demonstrates that no one is without sin. He did fall into a very horrible sin near the end of his life, a sin Jesus strongly condemned. I only hope he did repent of it. As for the belt buckles, this was a very nice propaganda device. God was continually appealed to in the Nazi propaganda. The highest Nazi leaders were usually either outright atheists or worshipers of the state or race. Some did believe in a god but a god of the Aryans only. So whether they were atheists or theists, they had no problem appealing to God and using God’s name for their purposes.

Unchanging moral laws and changing laws with moral content

Doland2: If Woodbridge believes that there are effectual witches and that we should accept the Bible’s mandates, and the Bible mandates that witches should be executed, how can he oppose the execution of witches? . . . As far as I can tell, his admission that the witch trials were a disgraceful sham amounts to a concession that we should not believe everything that the Bible says.

Most Christians would probably respond that the biblical mandate to execute witches no longer applies, as the Old Testament—God’s old covenant—may still have historical value, but was superseded when the New Testament was written.

Jensen3: I was about to answer when I saw that Doland had done so for me with this last paragraph. That God commanded one group of people at one time in history to do something does not indicate that it should always be done. But we still have reason to see that witches should have been executed under the Israelite theocracy. When it is undeniable that the God

of the Israelites lives and makes covenant with a people (as happened during the Exodus, if indeed this did happen) then God has the right to say that no other religion or spiritual practices should be followed except those practices given in the covenant. One does not have the right to decline. To tell your creator that you do not want to follow this way, or that you want to follow and engage lesser created spiritual powers is to essentially “tread under foot” the love of God, as the writer of Hebrews might put it (10:29). This is more undeniable under the New Covenant in which God not only offers us reconciliation but paid the greatest price imaginable, the death of God incarnate on the cross to do so.

Why can't God just leave us alone? Why can't we just live like we want to without God? First of all because we cannot live without God. We cannot continue to exist without God's sustaining power. Those in hell are living without God but not without God's sustaining power. So, secondly, if God would allow us to continue existing though alienated from God like those in hell, we would eventually experience the full force of the emptiness and absurdity of existence, the anguish of our nothingness. Without God we are nothing. But thirdly, justice would require that for all the evil we do, from the mildest lie to the harshest infliction of pain, that we would receive back exactly as we deserve. Fourthly, we find ourselves bound by guilt for all that we have done if we honestly evaluate our lives. Out of mercy God seeks to remove this sin and guilt from us. For our own good and out of God's great love for us, God does not leave us alone.

So far we have assumed that it was obvious to the Israelites that Yahweh did exist. Suppose we consider a time when the Israelites were not clearly and undeniably aware that the God of their national heritage was truly there. There must have been such times in their history for very many individuals. But Paul claims that everyone does truly know that God exists, that God has given them awareness of God's power and nature and the moral law (Romans 1). If this is true then the Israelites were at least aware that the God of Israel might be the true God and that none of the immoral gods of many of their neighbors could be the true God. People then as now

may have been unaware of God's existence but only because they suppressed this knowledge and eventually were unaware of ever having it. Then, as now, people who disbelieved in God could still have called upon God, a God who does deserve their worship and commitment, and have discovered the truth. But likewise, these Israelites could have asked God if the purported God of the Israelites was this God.

If one should thus have discovered that the God of the Israelites was the true creator of all things and the God who does deserved their commitment and obedience, then this God had the right to say that no other religion or spiritual practices should be followed except those practices given in the covenant.

Notice also, however, that anyone who wanted to practice witchcraft or spiritualism had the opportunity to leave this nation. If they were to stay, they could avoid practicing witchcraft. If they should continue to practice it, they would only have themselves to blame for their deaths.

Though I have attempted to justify the ethics of the Hebrew Scripture, I hope we do not neglect the most important point of this answer to Doland's question: From Jesus' teachings it is very clear that we are not to kill witches or homosexuals or children who curse their parents. [Paragraph added 26Ap10.]

Jensen3: [First underlined sentence in Jensen3 above] That God commanded one group of people at one time in history to do something does not indicate that it should always be done.

Doland4: I thought God never changed and right-and-wrong never changes. Can't you . . . theists stick to a . . . story for two . . . seconds?

Jensen5: God never changed. God had always planned to give one group certain unique commands not given to others. I'm not talking about the moral law. Everyone knows that law instinctively. There were some laws

given to Israel that had no moral purpose, they were given to establish certain teachings and principles. Other laws were given to Israel that did have a moral content (e.g., the anti-witchcraft laws) but were done away with at a later time when some of God's purposes for Israel as a particular social entity had changed. Right and wrong never changed. But God gives some commands for different purposes in history.

Jensen3: [Second and third underlined sentence in Jensen3 above] But we still have reason to see that witches should have been executed under the Israelite theocracy. If it is undeniable that the God of the Israelites lives and makes covenant with a people (as happened during the Exodus, if indeed this did happen) then God has the right to say that no other religion or spiritual practices should be followed except those practices given in the covenant.

Doland4: You do of course realize that is the way that Islamic extremists justify killing Christians and other non-Muslims—that Allah is the One True God and has the right to order the death of any non-Muslim. You are . . . dangerous. . . . I'm done with this response. . . .

Jensen5: So read what I've just said and consider the following scenario. I'm a Christian and I go to a Muslim country and begin trying to convert people to Christianity. Islamic law says to do this deserves death and anyone who converts from Islam should die. Suppose this country follows this law. Suppose I have an experience in which God speaks to me and I cannot deny that it truly is God who does so. God tells me that Islam is true and that I should never try to persuade another person to become a Christian and that I should convert to Islam. If I do try to evangelize anyone else and if I do not convert to Islam, God tells me that I deserve to die. Don't you honestly think I would deserve to die?

Now later in my previous response paper I talked about how the situation would work out if we did not know that the Hebrew religion was true. But considering the conditions in the above paragraph, how can we assume that I do not deserve to die? How could it be wrong for the authorities to take my life if they know the same thing? Contrary to Doland's claim, the Muslim extremists he fears do not have this knowledge and do not claim to have it.

The enemy of humanity: atheism or Christianity?

Doland10: I initially ended this with a diatribe about how Jensen proves that he is the enemy of humanity (Doland4 above); that his arguments prove the necessity to fight against his ilk. Of course he could say that he is just the product of his biology as I am. And as much as his thought processes annoy me, his thought processes are indeed, near as I can tell, just a part of his biology. I understand the desire to believe in free will. I really want to blame him for his free will coming up with really lame arguments, that is, if he actually had free will for me to blame!

Jensen11: I also ended discussing how atheism and Christianity compare ethically. I've shown that we have much more to fear from atheists than those who follow the Christian teachings. Indeed, those who are true to New Testament teachings would be obligated to be rescuers if they lived at the time of the holocaust, they would be obligated to work against slavery, they would be obligated to seek to aid the oppressed; though they would be obligated to tell the gay community that they are engaged in behavior that is morally wrong, they would be the first to seek protect the homosexual against harassment and persecution. That, at least, is what those who follow the teachings of the New Testament are obligated to do whether they actually do so or not. Atheism on the other hand has no specific ethical obligation unless one happens to wish to embrace a particular moral code. No complaint can be made to someone who wishes to embrace Hitler or

Stalin or Mao or Pol Pot's moral code. They all had ethics that were quite consistent with their atheism. (Hitler may not have been an atheist. Remember that we do not know what his religious beliefs really were, except that he was definitely not a Christian and that his ultimate intention was to use religion to advance his political goals. But as so many of Hitler's leading henchmen were militant atheists and since there was so much pressure to give up one's Christian beliefs as one rose in the ranks of the hierarchy, my point remains that the ethic of the Third Reich was quite compatible with atheism.) Like the Soviet torturer in Stalin's gulag who rejoiced that his disbelief in God allowed him to do the most horrendous evils he desired (since there was no afterlife to fear God's judgment) or the criminal who has no qualm about taking a human life since we all have to die eventually anyway (so what's the problem if it's just a little sooner for some people?), this is where the consistent atheist ends. As I've said, a consistent atheist may also choose a very high and noble ethic; but my point is that there is no reason for one to choose good ethic over a very bad ethic. It is entirely up to the whim and desire of the individual.

So who really is the enemy of humanity? Is it the theist? That depends on the ethic espoused by the particular theistic religion considered. If you consider the Mayan or Aztec or Incan religions with their mass human sacrifices, exquisitely refined torture, and cannibalism, then, yes, such a religious follower should be called an enemy of humanity. If you consider the religion of Jesus with his teachings to love your neighbor (that is, all people), to care for the least of God's human creation on threat of God's judgment, to do to others as you would have done to yourself, and even to love and pray for your enemies, then we have an ethic that would benefit our world enormously. Is the atheist the enemy of humanity? Because the consistent atheist has no obligation to choose any particular ethic over no ethic at all, we must conclude that any atheist could truly be an enemy of humanity, as, indeed, so many have been throughout history and still are.

One final comment. If the reader has been following Doland's arguments from his web site and my responses from this web site, it will be noticed

that I have had to cut out an enormous amount of obscenity and vilification from his statements. I cut out the vulgarity and more hateful statements and kept his basic arguments/claims. The vile and hatred evident in Doland's words should show the reader just what we could expect in an atheist paradise, a world where only atheism is allowed. I doubt that he would have felt as free to use the same kind of language in his Christian days. Now that he feels more free to say whatever he feels like saying, one wonders if he would feel more free to act toward his opponents and followers of views he disagrees with in the same manner were the political climate conducive. Would he insist that he would follow his conscience and never let his vile pour out in any form other than through his words? If so, since a consistent atheist cannot provide any justifying grounds for following one's conscience rather than not, and since Doland's conscience does not seem to have any influence on his language now, might he not very soon also give up such a primitive idea as abstaining from violence against those he disagrees with?

Unchanging moral laws and changing laws with moral content, continued

Doland earlier went on to respond to the Christian idea that the command to kill witches now no longer applies:

Doland2: Of course, Christians are not so quick to shrug off the Old Testament when it (supposedly) predicts the birth of Christ.

Jensen3: But there seems to be a pretty obvious difference between a predictive prophecy and a command given to a particular people. A prophecy would give information and evidence that could apply to all generations. Some commands could never be carried out after the historical situation in Israel changed (e.g., animal sacrifice could not continue after the Temple was destroyed); some were never meant to apply

to Gentiles (e.g., circumcision after the Christian message went to the Gentiles; the command was only given to Abraham and his descendants). The command to execute witches was not to be a binding command for Jews after the theocracy ended and should not be reinstated unless the theocracy were to begin again. It was only applicable to Israel as a nation.

Doland2: For example, relying on a blatant pick-and-choose methodology, many Christians cite Leviticus as the source of their view that homosexuality is an “abomination,” yet disregard what it says about executing witches.

Jensen3: First a word about “abominations.” The law of Moses speaks of marrying a woman and her sister, homosexual behavior, and child sacrifice as being listed among other actions which are called abominations for which the Canaanites were cursed and “the earth vomited them out” (Leviticus 18:18-30). Now the patriarch Jacob married two sisters not that many generations before Moses. So I think it is pretty obvious that this act is not truly an abomination as we would think of it today. It was a form of behavior that was socially disadvantageous and even harmful to some degree (as Jacob found out). Because it was included in the same list of abominations as homosexuality, we should conclude that homosexuality might not truly be an “abomination” either. This does not mean that all crimes on the list might not be abominations, however. Child sacrifice can hardly be described as merely a socially disadvantageous behavior. My conclusion is simply that we cannot say definitely that homosexuality was one of the sins for which the earth vomited out the Canaanites. Christians believe it is a sin primarily because of the New Testament teaching to this effect. But we should be cautious about saying just how bad of a sin it is, as some are wont to say.

This is hardly a pick and choose methodology, as Doland claims. The Torah statements about homosexuality point this out very well. Whether

homosexual behavior and witchcraft are truly “abominations” is questionable as we have seen. But we do at least see disapproval of these types of behavior. And remember that the homosexual or witch could be executed only if such behavior were discovered, thus giving such persons ample opportunity to leave the country. But on the other hand, because the nation of Israel (as a theocracy) no longer exists (and for Christians at least, because Jesus commanded us not to do this), the command to execute a homosexual or a witch no longer applies. But this does not diminish the fact that God expressed disapproval of both homosexuality or witchcraft. So in fact, both are treated the same by Christians. [These two paragraphs revised for clarification, 21Fb15.]

Doland2: And in any case, even if Old Testament law is no longer “in effect,” when could murdering witches ever possibly have been the right thing to do?

Jensen3: As we have seen already, it would be the right thing to do if and **always** if God should command that it be done. It would never be the right thing to do if God does not command it. This is not to say that anything God says to do is right because God’s choice determines right and wrong. No, the moral law follows from God’s nature, not God’s choice. There are acts that if God could do them would be evil for God to do and there are acts that would be evil for us to do if God could ask us to do them (which God is not able to so ask). But because of who God is, we would be morally obligated to obey any command God could ask of us.

Given that the Hebrew religion was true, it was right to execute a witch because, 1) they either knew the true God exists and their actions would point people to worship other gods or spirit beings, or 2) they would not know the true God of Israel exists but they would know that this law exists which they must follow to preserve their own lives and they would know that by seeking God and the truth from God they may be able to determine if Yahweh worship is the true religion. By so seeking, the truth of the

Hebrew religion would be verified or (relatively) falsified. If the former, one would be in condition 1) above; if the latter, one would rightly assume Yahwehism is false and, if only for expediency sake, need to leave the country. Only if one would take the steps to determine the truth of Yahwehism and discover that it is not true could one claim that it is not right to execute a witch at this time and location in history. Given that the Hebrew religion was true, one would never discover that it is not true. [Paragraph added 21Fb15.]

Doland2: Consider Deuteronomy 22, which presumes that a woman who is raped but does not cry out “really” consents to sex and consequently should be stoned to death. Was there ever a time when that rule could have been reasonable? Of course not!

Jensen3: This seems a very unusual conclusion and Doland doesn’t take any effort to support his claim or even try to understand the text. The passage simply says essentially that if you do not consent to have sex with a man, and he starts to force himself on you, cry out for help. If you do this, it will be accepted that you are not consenting (vv. 23-24). If the circumstances do not allow calling for help to make any difference, such as if it is obvious that there isn’t anyone else around, then of course the woman won’t be considered guilty if she does not cry out (vv. 25-27), but she will be guilty otherwise.

There is nothing unreasonable about this unless Doland is merely thinking about the death penalty for adultery being unreasonable. In that case he should simply say so and possibly point out clearer examples—there are many. For example, during the Exodus a man was executed for picking up sticks on the Sabbath. These are clearly examples of acts whose punishments do not intrinsically accord with the gravity of the crimes. But an act may be wrong simply because God commands that we not do it, as was argued earlier. The basic principle in the law of Moses was usually a

strict accounting of justice, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But there were other laws, like the ones just considered, which were not simply right in themselves. Adultery may not deserve capital punishment, but it does if God commands it. [These two paragraphs revised for clarification, 21Fb15.]

Are Christians commanded to do evil?

Doland2: Matthew 10:34 (NIV), Jesus says: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Of course, most Christians do not interpret this passage as an impetus to instigate war, but prefer to interpret it as a warning that war is inevitable since there will always be enemies of Christianity. Nevertheless, it is quite natural to read it as a warmongering passage; and who is to say what a “true Christian” interpretation of it is? After all, as discussed in Objection 4, God Himself orders wars in the Old Testament. It’s easy to see how a person reading this passage could conclude that God wants the enemies of His people exterminated, and consequently feel obligated to hasten that extermination. And who is to say that that isn’t what “true Christianity” requires?

Jensen3: It is not at all natural to interpret this passage as one commanding Jesus’ followers to kill their enemies. After all, the passage in itself says nothing about who should be wielding the sword. But even without this intrinsic ambiguity in the passage, Jesus had elsewhere clearly commanded his followers to love their enemies and do good to those who hate them; to love their neighbors as themselves and to do to others as they would have done to themselves (Matthew 5:44. 22:39, 7:12). He rebuked those who wanted to bring judgment upon any who would not welcome him (they asked that he call down fire from heaven on them, Luke 9:52-56). Some manuscripts record him saying that they do not know what spirit they are of and that he had come not to destroy but to save people.

Didn't Jesus specifically reprimand Peter for taking up a sword to protect him when he was about to be arrested? Indeed, he said that his kingdom is not of this world and that only if it were should his followers fight for it (John 18:36). Some of these passages we have mentioned already but again let me refer the reader to the even longer passages to this effect like Luke 6:27-38 or Matthew 5:38-48.

Because of this context, the most obvious interpretation is that the sword would be brought against Jesus' followers and not that one should take up the sword. It would be completely out of keeping with Jesus' teachings to find him just out of the blue saying something so contradictory to everything else that he had taught.

Yes, God did clearly command an Old Testament war to bring about justice and to fulfill a promise to Abraham. But as we have seen, we have no reason to think that Jesus ever advocated violence and good reason to think that he condemned it. So we have good reason to conclude that the most likely reading of this passage is that violence against Jesus' followers will be inevitable. This is not a "true Christian" interpretation but an interpretation any reasonable person would admit as being quite obvious.

Free will and the Holy Spirit's restraint of evil

Doland2: Presumably, the sort of evil "restrained" by the Holy Spirit is so-called moral evil, evil caused by the (bad) free choices of human beings. But if we have free will, how can the Holy Spirit "restrain"—i.e., contain or interfere with—how we choose to act at all?

Jensen3: As we discussed earlier, not all of our choices are free. We may do evil so often that we are no longer free not to do evil (or at least a particular evil), just as we may do good so often that we are much more likely to do good when we face another decision. So imagine not having our

natural disposition to do good or to feel guilty when we do evil. It may be that that natural disposition is simply God's Spirit acting upon us, influencing us to do good and to avoid evil. It might be that we would have a more natural tendency to do evil because Satan's influence would be stronger. It may also be that though free, we will have greater pressures socially and psychologically to do evil. I can give you an account of an officer in Hitler's military who felt he was "imprisoned" and almost unable to do other than he did do.

There are very evil people in the world who simply do not have the opportunity to do great evil because they lack the political power. It is not difficult to imagine how this might change if some people who are now in prisons and mental institutions are made into our leaders. Some people we work with or meet on the streets may seem to be normal people to us now but they would be very different if they could get away with doing great evil.

Finally, I wonder if it might even be possible that some people will have their free will taken from them, or at least some of their leaders, entirely. So long as the Holy Spirit is taken from them, there is no possibility of salvation, of reconciliation with God. Perhaps Satan will choose people who have passed a point of no return and have entered reprobation. What need then would there be to have free will?

Doland2: And if the Holy Spirit has license to "restrain" evil at all, then why can't the Holy Spirit restrain all evil? Can the Holy Spirit restrain or prevent evil altogether—yes or no?

Jensen3: Yes, the Holy Spirit could restrain all evil. But we have seen that God has reason *not* to prevent all evil.

The value of life under atheism and Christianity

Evil Christians and reprobation

Doland2: Woodbridge goes on to claim that atheism denigrates the value of human life. If there is no God, he says, then we are just byproducts of natural forces with no intrinsic or eternal value. And in essence, I agree. If we are fated to become dust, how can there be a proverbial “meaning of life”? As I once overheard another atheist say, asking “What is the meaning of life?” is like asking “What is the meaning of a cup of coffee?” There is no meaning; it just is. Though I don’t find this viewpoint particularly appealing, I do think that it is probably true—atheism does denigrate the value of human life.

However, one can make a good case that theism is no less denigrating. From a Christian perspective, life on Earth is of no intrinsic value; it is simply a “necessary evil” one must endure in order to get to Heaven.

Jensen3: But life does have an intrinsic value, or at least a derived value from being God’s creation, in the Christian view. The most important distinction is that life does have value, but it does not necessarily have to be life on earth. When a person’s life is taken, that person’s eternal life is not taken. We can value a criminal’s life even if the state judges that their life be taken.

I wouldn’t say that life on earth is a necessary evil to be endured to get to heaven, rather life on earth is a good in that we are here given the responsibility and thus the dignity and honor of being able to choose God and the joy of heaven which consists of knowing God. We do endure suffering in this world as part of the testing process, but ultimately it is good that we do so. So in one sense it might be said that this is a necessary evil, but it is an evil that hardly seems to be such when weighed against the outcome. So it is not life on earth that is the important thing; life on earth is just a phase or stage we go through for a higher purpose. It is life itself that

has value: life that resides here and the greater life, the life that resides in the next world.

Finally, life has an intrinsic worth in that no person by their choice alone has the right to take another person's life or to usurp another person's rights. God alone has the right to take a life or to command that of another person.

Also, life is to be valued and honored for all from the weakest and lowest and poorest to the most powerful. Life has value because it comes from God. It is difficult to imagine the grounds one might have for any ethical behavior given atheism. More than merely the metaphysical basis theism provides for ethics, however, we find in the Christian teachings likely the most profound ethical teachings and motivation for such behavior. For example, Jesus taught that as we do to the least, we do to him. He also taught that God in justice will require that we who know that his teachings are from God take these teachings very seriously. More importantly, one who has come to realize the enormous price God has paid to reconcile us to himself finds oneself deeply motivated to seek to follow his commands. We find ourselves drawn to follow, love, and commit ourselves to God. And as Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." [Sentences added to last three paragraphs 5Jul09.]

Despite the very motivating force of this teaching, Christians have done evil. People sometimes have less than the best motives for becoming Christians. And they will, like anyone else, sometimes disregard their beliefs when they conflict with other desires. Of course, after a given point they simply have no right to call themselves Christians. Nevertheless, without such moral teachings I think the evil in the lives of Christians would be far greater, though generally no greater than the general population at large that lacks such teachings. The fact that there are evil people who claim to be Christians just proves that people will go to any extent to avoid and distort what they do not want to see in the Bible.

What more can be said of the evils that have been done by Christians? And there have certainly been many. And here I am speaking of evils that are admitted to be such by Christians and atheists alike. Some Christians have done evil because they have trusted speculative teachings purported to be biblical teachings rather than the Scripture itself. (Doland relates the story of a woman who killed her children to be sure they would never be damned; she had no right to feel assured that they would or would not be.) Some have done evil that they should have known or did know was wrong (e.g., Luther's diatribe against the Jews).

Any political power structure will attract evil people; but it will also corrupt many good people, because power does corrupt. It shouldn't be thought strange to find evil people in every conceivable system that wields power, even religious ones that purportedly hold to high moral standards. But at the very least, leaders in such systems have to contradict the teachings of their system. To rationalize such contradictions can never be easy. The more strongly one holds to a belief system or ideology, the more one will be tempted to protect it by any means, even violence. But again, only the moral content of that system will stop or limit one from unethically advancing or protecting that system.

When one can do evil and not contradict the teachings of one's system, it is much easier for evil people and policies to be found in that system. So under Hitler's state worship it was much easier for him to justify his attempted genocide to his followers. It wasn't at all easy for him to try to do so to those who held an ethic based on Jesus' teachings. Those who have lived consistently with the New Testament teachings have produced the greatest good imaginable for a world like ours. [These last two paragraphs are taken substantially from an earlier article I had written on the issue of **evil Christians**.]

Now Christians do sin and they do repent and God does forgive. The parable of the prodigal son illustrates this, as well as other teachings Jesus gave. At the other extreme we find behavior, like Hitler's, which the

Scripture makes clear cannot be part of a Christian's life. I have argued earlier that Hitler could not have been a Christian. And there is a gray area somewhere in between in which it is difficult to say whether one can be a Christian.

Could Hitler have repented and called out to God just before he killed himself and would he then have been a Christian, one accepted by God? I don't know. Normally I would say that God can and is willing to forgive anyone no matter what sins they had committed. But in Hitler's case it appears as though he had had a long history of rejecting God. Eventually God will no longer draw a person to salvation.

Moral relativity and moral absolutes

Doland2: I too am uncomfortable with the notion that morality is merely a human invention; but at the same time, I see no evidence that it is anything more than this.

Jensen3: But if it is a mere human invention, how can Doland complain about the Hebrew massacre of the Canaanites or the evil God has allowed in the world or even the doctrine of hell? How can an argument from "outrage" apply to subjective notions about right and wrong?

Doland2: Woodbridge's reference to an "absolute moral standard"—presumably provided by Christianity—merits more exploration. For instance, does Christianity actually provide absolute moral standards? Consider a trivial example: Is hip-shaking morally acceptable? When Elvis Presley began publicly shaking his hips in 1950's America, many Christians at the time believed that this behavior was unacceptable. Yet today many

Christians (including preachers) idolize Elvis and would be surprised to learn that hip-shaking was ever considered to be morally problematic.

Jensen3: But some behavior is culturally relative. In some countries to be virtually unclothed is normal and hardly sexually stimulating while in Victorian England the mere sight of a woman's ankle sometimes had exactly that effect. Jesus taught that lust was in some ways the same as adultery. So we should seek to avoid behavior that we might have reason to think induces lust. In even a marginally diversified culture we might find much disagreement as to what behavior will do so. But at least the basic principle is invariable for the Christian. We shouldn't try to induce lust, but what will do so might differ at different times and in different cultures. Elvis's hip shaking might be in this category (though perhaps also to some degree in the next category we will discuss).

Other behavior might be deemed inappropriate not so much because it induces lust but because it makes public and common and sometimes humorous things that might be thought better to be private or special, possibly even, in some degree, sacred. I think that if we dig into the mind-set of this kind of response, we will find a sensitivity to persons, to sexuality, and often to other social values which at its core is good. But of course such a sensitivity can be taken to extremes. It is sometimes difficult to persuade someone that their sensibilities are excessive. Here too I think some cultural relativity is involved.

So I think that though some professed moral beliefs might be somewhat variable, there are grounding moral assumptions that are invariable. The absolute moral standards do not originate from Christianity. All people have an innate awareness of the moral law (at least at some time in their lives). The Bible simply assumes these absolutes and builds on them. Those expanded moral absolutes are of course binding for Christians and are, like natural moral law, the grounding for the more relative moral beliefs.

Good (or evil) because God says so?

Doland2: But there is a more serious problem here. If right and wrong only “exist” at God’s discretion, then moral absolutes don’t really exist at all. For God could (and indeed did), on this view, change what is or isn’t moral at His discretion; consequently, moral standards wouldn’t be absolute at all.

Jensen3: I have pointed out that good and evil are not determined by God’s choice but the good is intrinsic to God’s nature. Good and evil are meaningful only if entities have value such that their treatment can be considered good or evil, right or wrong. If our value comes from God, then morality has meaning and an act can be good or evil depending upon whether one’s value is affirmed or usurped. Likewise the absolute laws that are intrinsic to God’s nature reflect this and in fact follow from the nature of the value of God and those who have value derived from God.

I’ve shown that God’s moral views have never changed. Witchcraft is still as wrong as it has ever been and we have seen that, given the historical context, it was right to require capital punishment for witchcraft and spiritism in, say, the kingdom period. Nevertheless, God may judge two participants of such practices differently because of their differing awareness of the evil their actions entail.

Some evils are such only because God has commanded they not be done. Picking up sticks on the Sabbath was not evil outside of Israel if God had only commanded this of the Israelites. We have seen that some things are right or wrong just because God deserves to be obeyed. The absolute is that God deserves to be obeyed. The variable is what God commands at different times and to different people. Again, some commands are absolute for all people. The absolute that God deserves to be obeyed is itself an absolute law that is intrinsic to God’s nature. Because God has absolute worth, we who have derived worth are obligated to obey God

because this would be to value God as God deserves. [Last three paragraphs modified 26Ap10.]

Ambiguous commandments

Christians who don't follow the Bible

Doland2: Most Christian churches today teach something contrary to what New Testament Scripture says about divorce: namely, that divorce is only acceptable when one's wife is the one who commits adultery (see Matthew 5:32). What Christians have considered to be acceptable grounds for divorce has changed substantially over the centuries.

Jensen3: Paul does add some other special conditions concerning divorce between Christians and non-Christians (1 Corinthians 7:15). So it is not entirely correct to say that Matthew 5:32 is the only acceptable grounds for divorce. The parallel passage in Mark (10:11-12) indicates that both the husband and wife are commanded not to divorce the other. Applying this back to Matthew's passage, it appears that Jesus is saying that divorce is permissible for either the husband or wife if the spouse commits sexual sin (adultery, homosexuality, incest, prostitution, etc.).

The fact that some churches do not follow this only tells us something about the failing of humans to accept all that Jesus and his apostles taught. Even the Catholic Church, which sometimes boasts of being the only church to follow this teaching, often allows annulment as a virtual divorce. I'm open to correction on this point but I question whether the majority of the more conservative denominations do not follow the teaching of Matthew 5. Of course, it doesn't really matter what any church believes, all that matters is what the Scripture teaches.

Doland2: Of course, Christians could argue that we are bound by absolute moral standards through God's covenant, but that we simply haven't discerned precisely what those standards are. But at the very least, this response shows that God hasn't clearly communicated the moral standards that He wants human beings to follow even to his own followers. . . .

If there are universal moral standards that God wants us to follow, surely He would see to it that we know what those standards are.

Jensen3: The most basic universal moral standards are clear to all people. They have traditionally been called natural moral law. Any usurpation of one's basic right to life, freedom, etc., would be wrong. Scripture specifies or builds on the moral law further. We can thus discern what those standards are for the most primary and general issues as well as many very specified issues. The more important scriptural teachings are very clear. For general issues, to love and care for one's neighbor, which is all people without exception, as we love and care for ourselves, is most basic and can be applied to many moral situations. Correct moral behavior concerning some issues is not clearly stated and judgments can vary. Still, the best judgments will look at scriptural teachings concerning related issues and seek the most reasonable conclusion possible, while, of course, seeking God's leading concerning these issues. Many people do seek to be honest with the Scripture and not merely to follow "changing social conditions." For less significant moral issues, we should expect that honest opinions will vary.

Doland2: If there are universal moral standards that God wants us to follow and that we can't discern without revelation, what is more incredible still is that God would leave billions of people throughout history without any means to determine what those standards are (let alone how to be saved) simply because they didn't have access to a Bible.

Jensen3: But Paul (the apostle) makes it clear that universal moral standards are clear to everyone without any special revelation (Romans 2:14-15).

Doland2: But I've come to realize that, like Woodbridge, the Christians that I admire simply ignore 99% of what the Bible tells them—such as the mandate to execute witches. As far as I can tell, if there is any such thing as “true Christianity,” the Christians who followed its precepts are the ones who participated in the five “sins of the church”—not the Christians (like Woodbridge) who condemn them.

Jensen3: Christianity or “true Christianity” simply follows the Scripture so far as it is clearly stated. Where it is not clear, one simply seeks the most likely understanding, and here there might be difference of opinion. Following this principle a Christian cannot justify any of these five sins of the church.

For example, going back to an issue Doland likes to dwell on, Woodbridge mentions the story of one of the judges in the Salem witch trials who repented of his actions after being struck by a passage in the Gospels: Jesus saying, “If ye had known what it [the passage] meaneth, ‘I would have mercy and not sacrifice,’ ye would not have condemned the guiltless.” (307, 2000 edition; Matthew 12:7). This passage and others, like the story of the woman who was about to be stoned for adultery (John 8), make it clear that laws of this kind, commands to execute witches, were not to continue among Jesus' followers.

OBJECTION 8: I STILL HAVE DOUBTS, SO I CAN'T BE A CHRISTIAN

Doland2: Here Lynn Anderson seems to be arguing . . . that everyone is an agnostic (i.e., a fence-sitter—someone who is undecided).

Jensen3: But Anderson isn't denying that many people have little doubt that God exists or that Christianity is true. As Doland concludes:

Doland2: There is an entire spectrum of belief from those who are utterly certain that God exists to those who are fully convinced that He does not.

Jensen3: It is important that people do have doubt. Otherwise the choice for or against God would be far too determined. People are much less apt to choose against God who feel they have little or no choice but to believe. Doubt also is allowed in the Christian life when it has a more “feeling” or emotional than rational basis. It is a great Christian virtue to stand in faith for what we know is true (or are justified in believing is true) when all our emotions push and pull us to disbelieve.

But God also allows rationally based doubts to enter. An important point was brought out by C.S. Lewis in this regard. I summarize it in my book *The Endless Call* (OOP):

“One would come to believe on the basis of good reason, good evidence. That being done, one comes to trust in more than just a set of facts based on evidence and logic. You see, when one believes, one encounters a person. When you meet a person, the rules change.

“If a trusted friend is put on trial and you watch the evidence begin to stack up against them, you do not say, ‘I will believe in their guilt or innocence only in direct proportion to the evidence.’ No, you should say, ‘Until the evidence is conclusively against them, I will believe in their innocence.’ That was the test. And when you had passed the test of trust, then God

would give you back sufficient evidence for normal rational belief.” (43-44; for Lewis’ essay, see “On Obstinacy in Belief” in *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1959, 1960.)

Doland2: Let’s say that 0 represents certainty that God does not exist and 100 represents certainty that He does. . . . Where on that continuum between doubt and faith would one have to be in order to be saved?

Jensen3: I’ve emphasized that one is not saved or lost by what one believes but by one’s choice. But knowledge does follow, even if in some cases it follows only in the next life. Choices are either/or, they don’t fit on a scale or continuum. One who has come to believe may have great doubt or little doubt. For those with great doubt, my response to the previous question would apply here.

Doland2: Even if you can’t find a satisfying answer to every question that you have, [Strobel] says, you should base your faith on the answers that you do find satisfactory. He urges his readers to have faith that any of their remaining questions will be answered in due time. But, ironically, the more I contemplated the objections posed in *The Case for Faith*, the less satisfying I found the responses to them presented there. For every single objection that Strobel raised, I found the answers to be weak at best, and often simply preposterous.

Jensen3: One should certainly have some minimal grounds for belief, and I think Strobel has given some such evidence in this and his other books of this series. Of course you know that I haven’t agreed with all of the Christian arguments given in his book, but I have agreed with many and I have given, I hope, better arguments for the ones I’ve found inadequate. Many or at least some of my own arguments I’m sure Doland will also find

not only weak but preposterous. But I think that is to be expected. So many of his arguments seem to me to be not based on reason but on his feelings or unwarranted assumptions. For example, I think we have seen here good arguments defending God's allowance of evil or the slaughter of the Canaanites. For Doland, I doubt that any argument for these will even be considered since it is just "obvious" to him that there cannot be a good answer. How can there be an argument from "outrage" at God's allowance of evil if it is possible that God has good reason for allowing it? Given the arguments we have considered, there can only be an argument from outrage if one does not wish to think rationally. Interestingly, this accusation is usually flung at the Christian or theist. I would claim that it is atheism that ultimately must retreat from reason.

This is the end of the debate proper. We did talk about some related topics, however, which the reader might be interested in looking at:

Problems with Strobel's presentation of the arguments

Doland2: My main complaint with Strobel is that after doing a good job at setting the stage, he invariably gets very inadequate responses to the questions [the objections to faith] and all too easily accepts them [the "inadequate" responses to skeptical questions].

Jensen3: Of course here the question is whether he truly does receive inadequate responses. In some cases I do disagree with the responses (as we have seen) but many are quite powerful in answering the objections. I have difficulty understanding why critics do not see this. Sometimes it just seems as though they do not recognize these good answers because they just don't want to, not because they have a good case.

Doland2: It is the fact that Strobel proceeds on the pretense of playing the part of the skeptic, but then clearly stacks the deck against the skeptic, that I object to.

Jensen3: But the problem is that it is not at all clear that this is true. To present solid arguments (or at least arguments that the author and others perceive as solid and persuasive) is not necessarily card stacking. Strobel may simply not be aware of any other good responses to the theistic arguments presented here. Or perhaps he is aware of some of the responses Doland or others might raise but does not mention them because he doesn't consider them adequate. He does bring up objections for his interviewees to answer and does seem to present them very forcefully. There is no pretense or dishonesty here.

Doland2: But it should be noted that Strobel interviews one skeptic, in the beginning of the book, and interviews eight believers to answer Templeton's questions. Essentially, eight believers are given the opportunity to rebut Templeton's questions, but no skeptic is allowed to rebut the believers.

Jensen3: That's simply not true. The theists have sometimes responded to questions Templeton had not raised. And occasionally Strobel brings up quotations from other critics for one person to answer. So to be honest, we sometimes have one believer responding to two or more critics. (Is that fair to the Christians?) Though certainly one person could have answered all of Templeton's criticisms just as I am doing with Doland's critique and Doland has done with Strobel's, Strobel appears to have thought it a useful literary device to have several people interviewed. This is not an unfair advantage since all of the most important responses and counter-responses have been considered in Strobel's view. Strobel here presents many of the arguments used by skeptics, arguments many apologists try to avoid even

mentioning. We don't need to have noted skeptics state an argument to get their argument across, though Strobel has provided such quotations at times. He gives the best skeptical responses he has to the answers he receives. We have no good reason to think that Strobel was not speaking as an honest skeptic attempting his hardest to find inconsistencies and to press home critical conclusions.

But show me a good critique by an atheist in which the believer is given the last word and a virtually word for word equal hearing. Yet it sounds as though that is what you expect the theist to provide. Perhaps Strobel will do another book someday that covers the objections you and others raise. Of course such a book will end with the theist getting the last word just as your critique allows atheism to get the last word. A solid and honest investigation will continue this kind of "debate by the book" until the reader comes to the most well informed decision that one can reach. There is nothing dishonest about such an approach.

I'm just saying that you should not disparage Strobel's honesty if you don't do any differently yourself. You present yourself as an honest skeptic, and I do believe you, but do the same for Strobel. You've given no reason to believe he is not. He may honestly think that the responses he receives do adequately answer the objections.

Doland4: Given that every skeptic I've talked to who had read the book agrees with me that Strobel's skeptical challenges were inadequate, I think it reasonable to conclude he did not adequately present the skeptical position. Given he is claiming to present our side, I think we are the better judge of whether he did so or not.

Jensen5: My point in the above statement was that he probably honestly thought that he was giving the best responses he had. Whether he actually did so or not was not the question.

But to answer Doland's claim, he has admitted more than once that Strobel has presented the initial case against theism or Christianity very forcefully. In my previous critique I quoted Doland: "My main complaint with Strobel is that after doing a good job at setting the stage, he invariably gets very inadequate responses to the questions." As an example of Strobel's "good job," Doland later says, "His [Strobel's] discussion of the evil in the world that he has seen is moving and well-presented." At another point Doland says of Strobel's presentation of the skeptical position, "I couldn't have said it better myself," (on God killing innocent children). So what "skeptical position" did Strobel inadequately present? Evidently not the initial skeptical arguments, nor even the Christian responses since those weren't really part of the "skeptical position." Once or twice, perhaps even several times, Strobel gave purported skeptical responses to those Christian answers or other Christian/theistic arguments. Is that all there is to the "inadequate" "skeptical challenges"? Then we don't seem to have a lot of material left to talk about.

But should we expect that skeptics would think such responses to be adequate? Isn't that a lot like going to a Republican convention and asking the delegates if the Democrats misrepresented their views? Wouldn't you expect a lot of "Oh, I didn't mean to make it sound like I advocate such and such; what I really meant was so and so." Isn't that what Doland's skeptic friends are essentially saying? Furthermore, it is difficult to take Doland's accusation seriously when he has admitted that Strobel's initial presentation of the skeptical arguments were so good.

But let's concede the Strobel did fail to adequately present the skeptical responses. Hopefully Doland believes he has presented an adequate critique to fill in for Strobel's deficiencies. If so, we can go on with our discussion with nothing lacking for all of the skeptical arguments. In other words, in the end, even if true, Doland's accusation simply does not matter.

Doland6: Touché! Jensen . . . is correct that I did indeed complement him on some of his presentations of the challenge. I was sometimes impressed

with him for it, at least at the time of initial reading of the book. But, now, I see it as a “set-up.” That he starts out being more honest than you might expect, so that when he is dishonest later in the chapter, you might not notice it. Admittedly, that is personal impression, not necessarily fact.

Jensen11: Again, I would maintain that Doland has no grounds for claiming that Strobel is in any way dishonest.

More comments concerning form, methodology, and Doland’s approach

A few comments concerning form and style: 1) I have carried over Doland’s major topic headings. Those in caps follow the topic headings in Strobel’s book. To track my quotation of his work one need only look in that section of his text to find his original statement. 2) I have normally addressed Doland in the third person though occasionally in the second person, especially when the issues become more personal in nature. 3) I have occasionally used bold print when normal italics are not enough to bring sufficient emphasis to a statement. 4) I have here underlined the portions of the original responses to which Doland has responded. This will help anyone wishing to track the original statements to which Doland responds. 5) Some references which now lack URL information I have placed in bold print until the information can be provided. 4) Revisions and alterations were added and noted in brackets within or at the ends of the some of my paragraphs. These were added primarily to add clarification. Any new material Doland has not seen is noted as such and should not be seen as part of the debate proper. They are added merely to give clarification or new information relevant to the debate.

Much of Doland’s critique on his web page is difficult to read since he often responds to isolated statements without giving the reader a good understanding of sometimes even the issues that are being discussed. This

simply causes confusion. Also the serious reader will find Doland's endless use of obscenities and expletives tiring and unprofessional. I think one would profit more by reading the debate as I have recorded it rather than going to Doland's website and having to endure his endless temper tantrums (an example is recorded in part below). When quoting Doland I will delete his expletives using ellipses and sometimes blank underlining. Nevertheless, it will usually be sufficiently clear as to what he is saying. I believe my summaries and quotations do justice to Doland's responses. Some of his minor critiques which I could have answered were not included because they were too insignificant and they make no difference to my overall arguments or his.

The reader may find it interesting how feasible some of Doland's arguments appear at first sight when he makes sure most of my responses are not included. Even without my responses, the plausibility of some of his statements will easily be lost once the reader takes the time to think carefully about them. In the reproduction of the full debate, I have edited out some of the excessive repetition found in the original, but I have included all of the arguments. No points Doland had considered important have been omitted.

Readers should compare my actual statements with Doland's sometimes highly abridged quotations. As just one example, in Doland's fifth response (<http://www.caseagainstfaith.com/fifth-response-to-jensen.html>) I mentioned someone's belief that they experienced a healing miracle (Cf. 138, 144-150 above). By cutting off important parts of my quotation, Doland gave no indication that this was not a true miracle claim on my part and he gave a long response about how this kind of purported healing is easily faked. Merely including my response would have removed this misunderstanding and answered his questions. Even including a more complete original quotation would have solved most of the misunderstanding.

Some of our further dialogue might illustrate our disagreement in methodology for this debate. The following was not included in the main debate because I didn't want the reader to have to read material that had nothing to do with the real issues of the debate.

Jensen9: The difference is that the programming [of our brains] is not all that we are. We are also able to choose without the programming determining our choices. (64)

Doland10: You keep making this claim without evidence. And in fact, [it] is contrary to the evidence. I presented some of this contrarian evidence, by referring you to the article by Keith Augustine: "The Case Against Immortality." . . .

Jensen11: No, you did not give any evidence for your claim. . . .

Doland12: I have pointed you . . . multiple times to the Keith Augustine article. . . . READ THE . . . ARTICLE. . . . I ain't your . . . mommy here to feed you spoonfuls of knowledge.

Jensen13: Normally in a debate one attempts to present an argument for oneself. If in a formal debate someone were to actually say, "I'm not going to give an argument, but here, read this other person's writing, it can answer your argument," the judges would smile embarrassingly and discontinue the debate or declare the speaker the loser by default. Now this is not a formal oral debate. But we have to follow a particular format for debate because the audience wants and needs to hear the best of both sides of the issue. If Paul Doland thinks presenting an argument constitutes spoon-feeding his opponent, he has a very strange view of debate. I think we owe it to our readers to give them arguments and evidence, not just references to other arguments and evidence. But since it seems apparent that Doland is not able to give an argument (one would think he should be able to at least summarize Mr. Augustine's article) I see no alternative but to suggest to our readers that the normal format for this debate can no

longer be followed (temporarily one would hope) but for this subject at least.

Instead, if we follow Doland's demands, the reader will need to read through the various articles, books, etc. offered as evidence. Since Doland wishes to give Mr. Augustine's article as his evidence against libertarian free will and (as the name of the article suggests) immortality, I will give as my response an article by Charles Taliaferro entitled "The Project of Natural Theology" as well as J. P. Moreland's "The Argument from Consciousness" in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*. It should be available in any university library. I should also say that my own responses should supplement Dr. Moreland and Taliaferro's arguments. What is that Paul, you think I'm obligated to read your article but you aren't obligated to read mine? Paul, I can't spoon-feed you.

Of course, this scenario shows how absurd Doland's demand is (that the debaters—and thus the readers—go through all of the articles, books, etc. cited to present their respective cases). A debate like this would very quickly lose all its viewers. If Doland thinks I should save the reader all of this work by reading Augustine's article, presenting all of his arguments, and then attempting to respond to them, I think it should be obvious that it is Doland who wants to be spoon-fed. You want a debate, Paul, and you don't think you should even have to present your own arguments?

Oh, and Paul, I think you have now admitted that, as I've said, **you** did not give any evidence for your claim. You aren't Keith Augustine, are you? [Last three paragraphs minus the last one were supplemented and modified July 2014.]

My first critique of Doland's article (Jensen3) was completed January 2008; my first critique of Doland's response to this (Jensen5) was completed July 2008; my second (Jensen7) in January 2009; my third (Jensen9) February 2009, my fourth (Jensen11) July 2009, my fifth (Jensen13) April 2010.

References

Paul Doland's critique of Strobel's *The Case for Faith*, is entitled "The Case Against Faith" at <http://www.caseagainstfaith.com>. See also J. P. Holding's critique of Doland's article: <http://www.tektonics.org/caf/caf00.php>. Paul also has gone under the pen name Paul Jacobsen and is addressed in Holding's critique by that name. At his web site, Doland has other critiques of Strobel's series the reader might wish to look at. Doland's articles containing portions of this debate (obscurities and all) can be found at <http://www.caseagainstfaith.com/dennis-jensen-debate.html>.

Doland has not provided other general texts for reference but some may be found at his website. My general non-internet references plus one I found of Doland's are below.

The Historicity of the New Testament

Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses, The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Eerdmans, 2006).

Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents, Are they Reliable?* (IVP, 1960).

Robert Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 2000).

Evidence for and against the Resurrection

William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1989).

N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, Mn: Augsburg Fortress Pub., 2003).

Earl Doherty, *Challenging the Verdict: A Cross-Examination of Lee Strobel's "The Case for Christ"* (Age of Reason Pub., 2001).

Evidence for God's Existence outside of Biblical Revelation

William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). Truly a monumental work comprising the best of current and traditional arguments for God's existence from philosophical and scientific analysis of the natural world.

William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, Il: Crossway, 2008). Less technical than Blackwell but also presenting a wider range of evidence, including historical evidence.