

# Jesus, the Truth?

Summer 2011

A quarterly journal dedicated to exploring Jesus' claim, "I am ... the Truth."

## Worldviews in the News

International terrorist, Osama Bin Laden, was killed in an attack on his house. Various people and groups have criticized the killing. How does one measure "justice" when critics from, say, England (i.e. [N.T Wright](#)) criticize Americans for killing a Saudi Arabian in Pakistan for crimes he committed while living in Afghanistan? Which nation's legal code is the basis for such an assessment? When dealing with such complex issues, is a Universal code of justice necessary? If God does not provide the foundation for such a code, what does? The whims of human consensus?

On the topic of right and wrong, ethicist Peter Singer, known for some [highly controversial ethical views](#), is apparently in a "state of flux" with respect

to what he considers the best foundation for ethical judgments. At a conference with Christian Ethicists, Singer acknowledged that his brand of ethics has difficulty coming up with the right answer (paraphrased) to certain ethical quandaries, whereas Christian Theism – with its foundation in objective morality – naturally arrives at the right answer. Does it not seem strange that the ethicist would begin with the right answer (i.e. environmental stewardship is morally good) and then work backward toward an ethical theory that brings him to the right answer? Given the fact of the right answer, does that not strongly suggest an objective morality in the first place?

Harold Camping predicted the end of the world on May 21, 2011. Apparently there was a misunderstanding; Camping clarifies that May 21 was the "spiritual" return of Christ, and the physical end of the world will be in October 21, 2011. The end of Harold Camping's career (if not the world) should have been in [1994](#). Some Christians simply dismiss Camping and others like him, while other Christians feel compelled to actively respond because of perceived damage he is causing. Which is a more appropriate response and why? Is this a problem that is likely to go away, if ignored?

An international body of Christian thinkers recently compiled "[Recommendations for Conduct](#)" when evangelizing. The very first basis for Christian Witness was the same Bible verse often used to highlight the importance of Apologetic training, [1 Peter 3:15](#). It includes an admonition to evangelize "with Gentleness and Respect." Elsewhere in the document it encouraged Christians to act out of God's love, to avoid violence, to be truthful, to respect everybody and so forth. Are these principles merely Christian, or should everybody

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abide by them? Can Christians expect the same treatment from others? If not, how ought we respond to such an asymmetry?

Israeli Linguists utilized a software program to determine the [alleged authorship divisions in the Pentateuch](#). The original research paper can be found [here](#). The story goes that a computer has confirmed that the Pentateuch was composed by multiple authors, allegedly debunking the traditional view that Moses compiled it. To what extent can we trust a computer to draw this conclusion, especially when the software requires not only the input of how many authors to look for, but assumptions regarding how to distinguish between their writing styles? In other words, how much is computer, and how much is just a computer quickly conducting a human job, utilizing human biases and human interpretations?

## Letters from the Front Being an Ambassador

Paul Levesque

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Engaging others in spiritual dialogue is humbling work, especially on university campuses. Sure, apologetic tactics are necessary, but they're insufficient without God's guidance. Asking faithfully for *His* manifest discernment is unequivocally paramount for effective evangelism.

Take, for example, the other night, how I met Andy (alias), a confident business student in his mid-20's studying at the University of Alberta. My church was hosting an apologetic event - *Christianity as a Straightjacket*. At our table, I listened in for Andy's stumbling blocks. Turns out he felt Christianity was a religion of "rules," and then came his concerns about "Hell," and then "Pre-destination." "O brother," I mused, "this guy's in theological weeds! I wonder if he even knows Jesus?" Turning in prayer, I asked the Lord for patience, and his thoughts to guide an after-topic conversation between Andy and me. Despite my limited expertise with these objections, I was curious what Andy wanted from Jesus.

As the crowd left I reached out with my question: "Andy, do you mind if I ask you...what do you want from Jesus?" Befuddled, Andy stood blank-faced, so I replaced the odd question with another. "Ok," I said, "well, is Jesus trustworthy?" Again, he looked off to find something to say, replying skeptically "well, generally, we don't know... but personally... I'd say 'No' he's not." Puzzled, I shot another question at him, writing this third question down:

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

#### Articles:

[The "Rapture" and the "Singularity" have much in common](#) – Theistic and Atheistic end times stories compared.  
[What Scientists Believe](#) – Book reviews with some interesting perspectives on the relationship between scientists and spirituality.  
[Being Faithfully Unreligious](#) – Reflections of a Christian Ex-Atheist.

#### Podcasts/Videos:

[New Evidence the Gospels were Based on Eyewitness Accounts](#) – Dr. Peter Williams narrates a very interesting, quantitative, analysis of New Testament data that speaks to its authenticity. Geeks should love this!

#### Websites:

[Christian Answers for the New Age](#) – a website hosted by a former Astrologer.  
[The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion](#) – Over 350 resources (audio, print, etc) exploring science and religion from various perspectives.  
[God Keep our Land](#) – a Campus-based Apologetics ministry launching in Western Canada this Fall.

"Is God trustworthy?" "I don't know," he replied. "Is God good?" "I don't know," he repeated. "Well, does God even exist?" I asked, curiously digging deeper to the crux of what I thought was his dilemma. "I'm not sure" he resigned. Pensive yet curious, I asked, "Well, Andy...what kind of evidence do you find compelling?"

With brief examples that earned his agreement, I spent the next 20 minutes illuminating the logic of why human Origin, Destiny, Morality, and Purpose are uniquely answered vis-à-vis the Christian worldview, unlike the dissatisfying views of Materialism. Of this Andy seemed persuaded, but still reserved. Consequently, I ventured to share a bit of my own experience with Jesus. Andy listened intently as I admitted to the damaging power of sin that affected my family and work relationships, and how I needed a Rescuer. Gradually, Andy's eyes lit up, and I thought to re-ask my question.

"Andy, what do *you* want from Jesus?" Looking longingly at the ground Andy raised his head timidly and said, "what did you want from him?"

I could hear the door of his heart open. He welcomed me in, or should I say Jesus, to hear what He's done for me...for us all. To answer, I recounted investigating the evidence for the resurrection and how in it's verity I realized that Christ died not simply for others *but for me!* He was *my* personal Savior! With joy I shared that what I wanted - and now experience - was real freedom to love others freely without expectation of reciprocation.

To my delight, Andy visually resonated with my story. I knew his heart was connecting with God's love. It was getting late, though, and we soon parted company. Driving home, I felt that nudge to pray for Andy to realize how loved he is, and for his heart to openly receive God's grace.

So, what's my point? Apologetic tactics are necessary, but insufficient. Being Ambassadors for Christ, we need his Spirit to discern how to tell *His* story effectively. I do hope to see Andy next week. I hope he did business with Jesus.

## How the Concept of Philosophical Naturalism Disproves Philosophical Naturalism

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Is there a being or concept more pondered than that of god? Since recorded history, man has asked how and why we are alive. The French philosopher Descartes once stated, “Je pense donc je suis”.<sup>1</sup> (“I think therefore I am”) One is left, after they become aware of themselves, to then contemplate the source of their existence. There are many conclusions that humankind has devised. Most generally, there are deistic, theistic, or atheistic explanations. This is perhaps the most fundamental question we have asked ourselves and with such divergent views, one can become overwhelmed. Yet, this question must be explored. Why? Because, the answer to this question will fundamentally change the way you live, think, and feel.

### The Argument from Abstract Concepts

I define, for this article, an abstract concept to be anything that exists in a mind that possesses no physical properties. Examples include logic, knowledge, memory, emotions and numbers. A further breakdown of what an abstract concept is could be done; however, it is not important to do so in this article. The foundation of the argument will not change based on a more refined definition.

1. If God does not exist, abstract concepts would probably not exist.
2. Abstract concepts do exist.
3. Therefore, God probably exists.

### Premise One

Did a Mind<sup>2</sup> create abstract concepts or did matter produce it? Which came first? Since abstract concepts exist (as I will argue for in premise two) in minds alone, it is a fair question. Can the Materialist point to somewhere outside of a mind where abstract concepts exist? Since we have only observed that abstract concepts originate from a mind, the naturalist has to provide a process for the formation and sustaining of these abstract concepts. If a transcendent Mind does not exist, how did mindless matter develop the capability of a mind, with the capability of realizing abstract concepts?<sup>3</sup> In the Bible, God is said to make people in His image.<sup>4</sup> This is

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<sup>1</sup> Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1641 AD

<sup>2</sup> In this article, Mind equals God when the M in Mind is capitalized

<sup>3</sup> It seems to me that in order for a Naturalist to maintain their atheism, the “burden of proof” falls to the Naturalist to explain how his/her view explains abstract concepts. If not, then a Mind creating abstract concepts becomes the more natural explanation.

<sup>4</sup> [Genesis 1:26](#)

easily understood to mean that God gave us the ability to exercise the aspects of our minds we find most noble, including abstract concepts.

*"But it is the soul, the great soul, of man, that does especially bear God's image. The soul is a spirit, an intelligent immortal spirit, an influencing active spirit, herein resembling God, the Father of Spirits, and the soul of the world. The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord. The soul of man, considered in its three noble faculties, understanding, will, and active power, is perhaps the brightest clearest looking-glass in nature, wherein to see God."*<sup>5</sup>

A transcendent mind, which is the source of abstract concepts, created minds capable of abstract concepts, aptly explains where abstract concepts came from. Without this transcendent mind, the process or complex chemical reaction that produces this effect needs to be brought forth, which is, as far as I know, now lacking.

In, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, Ron Weasley drinks a love potion which then causes him to predictably fall in love.<sup>6</sup> It's an interesting idea; being able to create a complex chemical reaction that produces an abstract concept such as love. However, this is alchemy which was abandoned many years ago. Today, we have chemistry. A complex chemical reaction cannot be created to force the concept of love on an unsuspecting victim. If mindful human attempts cannot produce this compound, how did mindless chance produce it? In theism, we have an explanation, In Naturalism I have yet to see one.

We have free will, which is another abstract concept. How can matter, which is by its very nature subject to mindless natural laws, go against its very nature and produce free will? Indeed, if Materialism is true, free will becomes doubtful. If Materialism is true, mindless matter is in control of our illusionary "free will". Since we are born with a specific genetic and material makeup, and since we know that these materials are mindless in themselves, then all our thoughts and actions are a result of these mindless chemical reactions. Our actions are predetermined. We may have an illusion of free will, but in reality we do not.<sup>7</sup> There then becomes no reason to debate the issue, as debate assumes a free will, and a society envisioned by Aldous Huxley should be instituted for the betterment of mankind!<sup>8</sup> Law and order must be abandoned and reprogramming must be put in its place.<sup>9</sup> The serial killer has no more choice to act in the manner of a serial killer as Mother Teresa had in helping the poor. A serial killer cannot therefore be condemned, and Mother Teresa cannot be commended. They are both simply how their material make-up determined they would be. Additionally, anyone's view that

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1706 AD, section on [Genesis 1:26](#)

<sup>6</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, 2004 AD, Chapter 9

<sup>7</sup> For further development of this idea, read Richard C. Lewontin's book "*Biology as Ideology: The Doctrine of DNA*" 1993

<sup>8</sup> Aldous Huxley, "*Brave New World*", 1932

<sup>9</sup> Of course, you would need to know what society would be the best one which is also an abstract concept.

it is better to be a Mother Teresa instead of a serial killer is predetermined for them and is even less valid than mere opinion.

There is a standard response that many Materialists counter with. That abstract concepts, such as free will, are simply a result of evolutionary processes. That in order for us to survive, we had to evolve brains which gave us the ability to develop abstract concepts. This simply helped us survive and that is why we have the reality of abstract concepts. This explanation has a fatal flaw. It must rely on the first single cell organism to have the instinct to survive in the first place. A fundamental aspect to evolution is that an organism desires to survive. Put another way, "survival of the fittest" only makes sense if survival is something organisms strive for. When the first organism popped into existence, that single cell needed to eat in order to survive. Yet, even if that single cell possessed the physical ability to consume food, why would it do so? It had to possess some instinct, however basic, to do so. It needed to desire to move and search out food to consume. Instinct is just another example of an abstract concept. So, this explanation doesn't explain anything as it uses an abstract concept to explain abstract concepts. Abstract concepts had to come into existence before it caused abstract concepts to come into existence. No, instinct would have had to pop into existence as the first single cell popped into existence if Naturalism is to be upheld.

Since universal abstract concepts exist in a mind, and we have no known natural source for abstract concepts in nature, it then becomes most logical to conclude that abstract concepts were created by a Mind to begin with.

My second premise is that abstract concepts do exist. I would think that this is an obvious observation. However, sometimes the most obvious things escape the notice of very smart people. If someone disagrees with the reality of abstract concepts, that person is using abstract concepts to deny abstract concepts. In other words, to deny their reality is to affirm their reality. This goes against the "law of non-contradiction".<sup>10</sup> To use logic to deny logic is absurd. To disagree that disagreeing is real is absurd.

Thus, one is left with the conclusion that a transcendent Mind being the source of abstract concepts. At least, that is the best running theory based on the evidence we have. We do not have a known natural source, outside of our minds, of abstract concepts. We could not have evolved abstract concepts as you need an abstract concept, survival instinct, in order for evolution to begin.

## **Conclusion**

As I stated earlier, arguments such as this do not prove God with 100% certainty. These are merely probability arguments. I also understand that these arguments do not prove the God of the Bible, just that there needs to be a being or force of sufficient power. Regardless, abstract concepts are non material and experienced by everyone, yet I have never seen any reasonable

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<sup>10</sup> Law of Non-Contradiction – that A cannot equal non-A at the same time and in the same way.

natural explanation for them. In this way, Naturalism leads to Irrationalism as there is nothing objective to base your reason or knowledge (both abstract concepts) on.

Surely one can see that as we discover more complexities the less likely Philosophical Naturalism seems likely. This is because the more we discover the more chance occurrences need to be found to explain those discoveries. Put another way, the more we know, the more we need to know. This is an unsustainable theory of knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the same progression of discoveries gets us closer to the conclusion of something transcendent. The more we learn the more probable God is. I am left to conclude that thinking people who hold onto Philosophical Naturalism do so for other reasons than evidence.

*[Justin Wishart - Justin is a husband and a father of two. Growing up in a Christian/Socialist mixed home he had many questions about Christianity that others seemed not to be able to answer. Not content to live by "blind faith", yet these questions looming larger each day, Justin searched for answers. This is where he found his love of philosophy and searched out many differing views on the world. Justin is a heavy duty mechanic and currently works for Calgary Transit.]*

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<sup>11</sup> Occam's Razor may be invoked, for a definition go to <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/occamraz.html> For a good exploration into Occam's Razor and its use in science and religion read the article, "Religious and Scientific Faith in Simplicity" by Don N. Page. That article can be found here [http://arxiv.org/PS\\_cache/arxiv/pdf/0811/0811.0630v1.pdf](http://arxiv.org/PS_cache/arxiv/pdf/0811/0811.0630v1.pdf)

## What can you do to make the world more reasonable?

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*[Ed. The editors of this journal considered carefully whether to include this article. Although the primary thrust of the article was clearly divergent from the primary thrust of the journal, the article contained sufficient content that was related to the truth claims of Jesus that the article was included in its entirety. It is our hope that those who respond to this article will focus primarily on the implication that Theistic belief, especially Biblical Theism, is somehow inherently unreasonable.]*

Descartes had a problem once. He hypothesized a demon that makes us imagine everything we experience. Somehow, he thought, our world could possibly be a creation of some illusory medium, and we cannot guarantee actual 100% objective experience. There is no way to disprove this. I'm sure it was a source of some concern for this man.

This, like Christianity, is one of the infinite propositions one can make without having to prove or disprove it. There are no physical things which we can objectively look at and say "Yes, the Christian God is real". The experience is purely subjective.

Some would prefer to believe in a non active progenitor. Not one who hangs out in the clouds, not a personal deity who takes form, but perhaps a pantheistic deity which is all things, or a deistic entity, who set the ball in motion and stood back to watch.

Anything more interactive suggests a factual claim which would thus be disprovable. We can't bypass noticing blatantly claimant suggestions. Like

[Psalm 104:5](#): "Thou didst fix the earth on its foundation so that it never can be shaken."

Followed with the same types of claims in: [1 Chronicles 16:30](#), [Psalm 93:1](#), [Psalm 96:10](#), [Isaiah 45:18](#):

The earth is most certainly afloat in outer space.

An attempt at an argument for the claims of the bible being accurate will be presented with:

[Isaiah 40:22](#) He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,  
and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,  
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

and

[Job 26:7](#) He spreads out the northern skies over empty space;  
he suspends the earth over nothing.

This claims a circle, not a sphere in the first part, and suspending said circle over nothing, and having the heavens be a canopy. In the second passage it would be reasonable to assume the writer (a human) believes the Earth has nothing beneath it. What's above it? Besides. I'm still not sure what enthroned above the earth suggests. I'm sure you recognize the flaw in adding to a factual claim a prosaic statement. One shouldn't have to sift through the psyche of the author of a book to understand what's a claim and what's a poem.

If these represent prosaic allegory, how do we decipher objectively what should be considered fact? I'm confused why prayer can be the reliable source to differentiate between scientific claim and spiritual allegory. Does prayer only work for those who pray properly? How do I pray properly? Should I pray to find out how to pray right?

They make very obvious mistakes on anatomy of animals. Bats are not birds ([Deuteronomy 14:11,18](#)), rabbits do not chew cud ([Deuteronomy 14:7](#)). These are part of a bible and passages that claim to be inspired by God. At what point is the bible just as any other book for garnering my understanding of morality from? At what point can we say "Well, a good proportion of the bible is good for understanding this, but the rest of it is just allegory"... is it a just so story book? I would say. I don't mean to be a Godwin, but I'm sure I could garner some moral value from Mein Kampf if I were inclined to sieve through it with revelatory prayer.

Back to the subject of Descartes. The poor man, after all his troubles attempting to find out how to tell what is true discovered that these two things he knows are true: I think, and I am. But only him. He doesn't know if others think or are. Subjective truth which is incapable of becoming objective. This is why I am not an Atheist. I believe in something, purely from personal experience. That something has not in any way made me believe that any book on this earth is a source of revelatory wisdom, but rather has simply shown me I exist. My savior is my ability to live a healthy, sincere life while, as best I can, harming nobody.

I am writing this article for two reasons. To show to you that the bible makes mistakes and cannot be solely relied on for facts, and to suggest to you that you shift your resources toward making the world a better place by helping Christians who aren't aware of the discrepancies in the bible to realize that they can still be Christians if the earth revolves around the sun and is 4.3 billion years old. To realize that the bible shouldn't be referred to as a solitary moral resource.

Statistics change yearly, but we can say for certain that the major belief in our country is Christianity. We can say (hopefully) that at least half of those Christians don't actually believe the Earth is less than 10,000 years old. I'm sure you don't, but there are enough who do. In fact there are Christians who have faith in almost every kind of superstition left over from the 5th century, they are not conscious of the fact that we currently have the ability to test the legitimacy of their claims. There is enough reason to suggest, with limited argument against it, that the Bible is a book of stories, one that ends up having few more good moral stories than it has moral outrages. Jesus was barely in any history books besides the bible.

So what's keeping them in the dark ages?

Sure, having to defend their beliefs has always been an issue, especially in a day and age when logic can oppose them efficiently. In fact I would say it is a part of our human sicknesses that we feel the imperative to defend our beliefs aggressively, even when they are clearly misguided. It is a part of that sickness that if we cannot effectively defend our beliefs, we close off and stop communicating.

The best way around this?

The solution is for those who are part of the belief who have the capacity for critical thought to speak up and help move the world forward. When a gay rights activist bashes a certain type of Christian, don't write *him* angry letters reminding him there's good, intelligent Christians out there. Instead, write the primitive Christians letters of anger for making it seem like Christianity as a whole is stuck in the dark ages. Write the media responsible and demand good, intelligent Christians be represented.

It is easy to understand there are many intelligent Christians who *don't* feel the need to chemically castrate a gay or jail abortion doctors.

So my proposition is that you push for a better world, as you have been, not just by promoting the meditation on what we can know about a God, but also by promoting modern thinking to irrational believers. Are some of you rationalizing non-activism by worrying you might convert the individual to atheism? Admittedly, belief is shaky enough without having to admit that much of the historical accounts in the bible aren't useful for moral certitude.

Don't let this stop you from making the right decision. Work to help Christians understand that their belief isn't at risk. What's at risk are the old, outdated superstitions that helped this belief survive dark dark ages of human civilization. Those superstitions aren't needed anymore.

I am sure you understand the problems we face with superstitious Christianity. I'll make a short list to refresh you. (From the perspective of the irrational believer)

- HPV vaccines are evil (STIs are natural aversions for premarital sex)
- Abortion is evil (A blastocyst has a soul, even when it has less nerve connections than a fly)
- Gay marriage is evil
- Dinosaur fossils are either a test put here by God or Satan, or Adam and Eve hung out in the garden with them. They died in the flood.
- Geological aging using nuclear half life doesn't work, light from distant galaxies was created mid-transit.
- Blood transfusions are not acceptable.
- Transitional fossils don't exist.
- condoms and birth control are evil (You're preventing God's work)

Each of these beliefs are inherently presumptuous, and tend to get built up by hand waving rationalization. They have no context to reality, no matter how vehemently some people hold them to be true.

But most of all, they are hurtful to the advance of human kind.

This is the type of person we should write to. I look forward to having them listen to logic, eventually. They've heard it before, and sometimes someone stands up and realizes their beliefs are unfounded. I consider it a benefit to our culture to have organizations out there that preach left of the middle Christianity to Jehovah's Witnesses and extremist Christians. In my life I've met a lot of Atheists who started out JW or Mormon and were completely disenchanted because, to them, this is the only Christianity they know. Irrational religious belief is at least a major part responsible for overpopulation, human rights problems (really big list), AIDS epidemics, anti-scientific propaganda.

So the question is: What can You do about it?

The belief in a God may have its origins in superstition but I have had spiritual experiences that are impossible to deny. I understand the mindset, and I don't care if these experiences are just faulty wiring in my human brain, they are very real to me. This doesn't push me to think that praying will have an effect on my surroundings. Prayer is delightful in any sense, and, yes, it does have an effect on me. Like Yoga and meditation; beneficial to the mind and calming. Meditation and prayer may be a gift from God, but they should be recognized as having life changing effects only in that they make the self more capable of focus and calmness in the struggle that is life.

In conclusion, the bible has, to a good proportion of believers, been used as a crutch for moral responsibility. A crutch that is too short, and twisted to be efficient in such an endeavor. Read the bible, listen to its stories, try to relate to your ancestors who relied on it for rules that were useful for survival in their time. But don't assume that it is a reliable resource, use your own head, and pray, and help other Christians use their rational senses to come up with an idea of how they think the world is and should be.

*[Lars is a self identified skeptic, dedicating a good portion to his life studying how people come to understanding their world. He is also a Deist, but can't prove or explain why using objective terminology.]*