ASSESSING THE RESURRECTION HYPOTHESIS: PROBLEMS WITH CRAIG'S INFERENCE TO THE BEST EXPLANATION

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Abstract. The hypothesis that God supernaturally raised Jesus from the dead is argued by William Lane Craig to be the best explanation for the empty tomb and postmortem appearances of Jesus because it satisfies seven criteria of adequacy better than rival naturalistic hypotheses. We identify problems with Craig's criteria-based approach and show, most significantly, that the Resurrection hypothesis fails to fulfill any but the first of his criteria — especially explanatory scope and plausibility.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is the foundational doctrine of Christianity. The orthodox creed that Christ died, was buried, and was raised on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) is universally acknowledged as of "first importance." While most Christians believe this simply on faith, a growing number accept a liberal interpretation according to which the Resurrection is unhistorical but profoundly symbolic. In response to such doubt, modern apologists since as far back as Thomas Sherlock (1729) have sought to establish the hypothesis of the Resurrection (henceforth, *R*) on the basis of historical evidence. The most prominent of the contemporary arguments for *R* is that given by William Lane Craig, and so we evaluate it here.[1]

Craig defines *R* as "Jesus rose supernaturally from the dead" and as "God raised Jesus from the dead" (274) — formulations he treats as equivalent.[2] To avoid confusion, we state *R* fully as "God supernaturally raised Jesus from the dead." Craig argues that *R* is probable on the grounds that it is the best explanation of the historical evidence consisting of the empty tomb, the postmortem appearances of Jesus, and the origin of the Christian faith (henceforth, *E*). Although *E* is contested by several prominent New Testament scholars, we accept it here for the sake of argument.[3] Craig maintains that *R* is the best explanation of *E* since it alone fully satisfies certain criteria for assessing the virtues of competing historical hypotheses, *e.g.*, explanatory scope and plausibility. We refer to the pattern of reasoning based on such criteria as the *Inference to the Best Explanation* (henceforth, IBE) approach. Our critique of Craig will proceed as follows. First, we provide a summary of his method and argument. Second, we identify a fundamental problem that arises regarding the logical structure of his argument. Third, we discuss problems concerning the meaning and justification of his proposed criteria. Finally, we show that *R* fails to fulfill any but the first of his criteria — especially explanatory scope and plausibility.

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1 William L. Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989); William L. Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Crossway Books, 2008) — all references are to 2008 unless otherwise indicated.

2 Yet these are not equivalent since the former does not entail the latter.

3 Craig's full statement of this evidence is in Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence* chapters 9-11; Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 360–89.

I. CRAIG'S METHOD AND ARGUMENT

Craig's IBE approach makes use of criteria derived from philosopher of history C. Behan McCullagh for identifying the best explanation of a body of historical evidence from a range of viable alternatives. Rephrasing McCullagh's original criteria, Craig formulates his own set:[4]

(1) The hypothesis, together with other true statements, must imply further statements describing present, observable data.

(2) The hypothesis must have greater *explanatory scope* (that is, imply a greater variety of observable data) than rival hypotheses.

(3) The hypothesis must have greater *explanatory power* (that is, make the observable data more probable) than rival hypotheses.

(4) The hypothesis must be *more plausible* (that is, be implied by a greater variety of accepted truths, and its negation implied by fewer accepted truths) than rival hypotheses.

(5) The hypothesis must be *less ad hoc* (that is, include fewer new suppositions about the past not already implied by existing knowledge) than rival hypotheses.

(6) The hypothesis must be *disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs* (that is, when conjoined with accepted truths, imply fewer false statements) than rival hypotheses.

(7) The hypothesis must so *exceed its rivals* in fulfilling conditions (2)-(6) that there is little chance of a rival hypothesis, after further investigation, exceeding it in meeting these conditions.

Craig employs these criteria to show that R is the hypothesis that best explains the evidence E consisting of the discovery of the empty tomb, the postmortem appearances of Jesus, and the origin of the Christian faith. As explanations for the empty tomb, he considers and rejects four hypotheses: *Conspiracy* by the disciples, *Apparent Death*, *Wrong Tomb*, and *Displaced Body*. As an explanation for the postmortem appearances — to individuals and groups on numerous occasions and in different places — Craig considers and rejects the *Hallucination* hypothesis. Finally, as an explanation for the origin of the Christian faith, Craig considers and rejects the hypothesis of *Christian, Pagan, or Jewish Influences*. He acknowledges that some of these naturalistic hypotheses satisfy certain criteria but says that they are "especially weak when it comes to explanatory scope and power and are often highly implausible" (396). R, he maintains, fares significantly better. He thus concludes on the basis of the historical evidence and his seven criteria that it is probable that God supernaturally raised Jesus from the dead.

II. PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE LOGICAL STRUCTURE OF CRAIG'S ARGUMENT

It is customary for philosophers of religion to state their arguments in standard logical form. Unfortunately, Craig fails to do this in the case of his argument for R, thus placing the burden on the critic. Nonetheless, his appeal to the above criteria seems to support the following interpretation:

> Hypothesis H_1 of the set $H_1, ..., H_n$ is the best explanation of the evidence E in being superior to its rivals $H_2, ..., H_n$ in satisfying the seven criteria for justifying historical explanations.

> Therefore, H_1 is probably true.

Indeed, this schema is consistent with Craig's statement: "The historian should accept the hypothesis that best explains all the evidence" (234) — which is to be understood in terms of his criteria. And it is consistent with McCullagh's statement, which Craig simply repeats: "if the scope and strength of an explanation are very great, so that it explains a large number and variety of facts, many more than any competing ex-

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4   Page 233; the original formulations are in C. B. McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984).

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planation, then it is likely to be true" (1984, 26).[5] Accordingly, the above schema seems to be an accurate representation of Craig's understanding of the logical structure of IBE arguments.

Craig fills in the IBE schema with the premise that R is the best explanation of the adduced historical evidence in being superior to certain naturalistic rivals, *e.g.*, the *Conspiracy* and *Hallucination* hypotheses, in satisfying his criteria and the conclusion that R is "more likely than not" (360). However, this raises a problem: Craig offers no justification to show that his IBE schema — and thus his argument for R employing it — is probabilistically correct, *i.e.*, that the premises of this kind of argument make the conclusion probable. Consequently, even if Craig shows that R is the best explanation of those rivals he considers, he provides no justification for holding that R is to any degree probable. Nor can he. For, as even certain proponents of R — those who employ Bayes' theorem — would agree, Craig's argument schema is a *non sequitur* because it violates the laws of probability. To achieve the conclusion that H_1 is probably true, Craig's schema requires the additional premise that the set of rival hypotheses being considered is jointly exhaustive of all possible alternatives. For otherwise there might be some further hypothesis (H_{n+1}) being overlooked that is actually the one made probable by the evidence — perhaps some version of the *Legend* hypothesis. Yet nowhere does Craig state this crucial premise. Nor is the set of hypotheses he considers as rivals to R jointly exhaustive. It might be objected that one cannot consider all the alternatives because they are so numerous. But this overlooks the possibility that these can be grouped and considered collectively rather than individually. Thus, the most Craig is entitled to conclude is that H_1 is more probable on E than those few alternatives he considers. Without the additional premise, R might be probable on E, but the opposite might just as well be true. It remains to be seen below whether Craig can establish the more modest thesis that R is superior to each of the alternatives he considers.

III. PROBLEMS CONCERNING CRAIG'S PROPOSED CRITERIA

Even apart from problems regarding the logical structure of Craig's IBE argument, serious problems also arise regarding the meaning, justification, and ranking of his proposed criteria. We begin with four problems regarding the *meaning* of the individual criteria.

First, what does Craig mean by "implies" in the five criteria in which this term occurs? There seem to be only two possible ways in which Craig might be interpreting this — to mean either "entails" or "makes probable." The first possibility seems wrong because neither R nor its naturalistic rivals entail E — even with the addition of other statements known to be true. And so the second interpretation as "makes probable" seems correct. But this raises a further question: Does Craig mean that the hypothesis of interest, H_1, makes E more probable than does each of $H_2, \ldots, H_n$ *individually* or more probable than do all of $H_2, \ldots, H_n$ *combined*? Craig is unclear.

Second, Craig is unclear regarding how the criteria of explanatory scope and explanatory power (henceforth, scope and power) are to be interpreted and how these differ. Are they independent? If not, then how are they related? Craig does not say. Despite this, it is at least clear that Craig interprets scope and power as being roughly quantitative for he speaks, in the first case, of the "large number and variety" of facts accounted for by a hypothesis and, in the second case, of "probability" (233). But, given that this is so, then, to be clear, Craig needs to explain whether and, if so, how power thus interpreted differs from power as this is understood by other leading proponents of R such as the McGrews[6] — *viz.*, as the Bayesian likelihoods of R and its rivals. Craig's insufficiently clear IBE approach fails to show how scope and power are interrelated — a deficiency that can be rectified by the Bayesian approach. Thus, on the Bayesian approach, the scope and power of any hypothesis H_i are most naturally interpreted as correlative aspects of the Bayesian likelihood $P(E|B\&H_i)$, *i.e.*, the degree to which it is rational to believe evidence E on the basis of H_i in conjunction with background information B. On this interpretation, the scope of H_i

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5   Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 233.
6   Timothy and Lydia McGrew, "The Argument from Miracles: A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth", in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. J. P. Moreland and William L. Craig (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

is the range of facts contained in E in the term $P(E|B\&H_i)$ — the greater the range of facts, the greater the scope. Correlatively, the power of H_i is the magnitude of the term $P(E|B\&H_i)$ itself — the degree of likelihood that H_i confers on E — the greater the magnitude, the greater the power. The Bayesian approach shows why these are not independent criteria, contrary to how Craig seems to treat them. For, in general, the greater/lesser the scope, the lesser/greater the power, *i.e.*, the greater/fewer the number of facts stated in E, the lower/higher the value of $P(E|B\&H_i)$. This is not to deny that H_i may be so strong that it can attain relatively great scope and power simultaneously. But, nonetheless, if the scope is increased, then the power must decrease, and vice versa — if only minutely.

Third, Craig's IBE approach requires that hypotheses be compared on the basis of what he calls "plausibility." But what is plausibility and how is it to be assessed? Craig does not explain. Given his use of such terms as "likely," "degree," and "background knowledge," one might wonder whether Craig considers plausibility to be some kind of probability, namely, the conditional probability of a hypothesis with respect to our background information B, *i.e.*, what Bayesians call "prior probability." However, Craig avoids the use of prior probabilities for assessing historical explanations. He claims that it is difficult, if not impossible, to assign prior probabilities to historical hypotheses — specifically that "the values assigned to some of the probabilities involved are little more than conjectures" and that the probability of R on B, *i.e.*, $P(R|B)$, depends on the probability that God would raise Jesus, *i.e.*, $P(R|G)$, which he says is "speculative" (359). This, Craig thinks, should lead us to reject prior probability in favor of plausibility. Yet this is surely a mistake because the very problems Craig urges against prior probability arise equally for plausibility itself — these having nothing to do with the symbolic formalization of the former in Bayes' theorem. For, to the degree that prior probability is speculative, so is plausibility for precisely the same reason. After all, the plausibility of a hypothesis is surely a function of what the hypothesis states and of the background information relevant to it; but this is precisely the same for prior probability. Furthermore, both are matters of degree. Indeed, apart from there being a formalism for one and not the other, they seem indistinguishable. It thus seems entirely natural to identify the plausibility of any hypothesis H_i (*e.g.*, R) with its prior probability $P(H_i|B)$, *i.e.*, the degree to which it is rational to believe H_i solely on the basis of B. Identifying plausibility with prior probability provides a clear interpretation of this notion. Thus, for example, the plausibility of the hypothesis that Galileo would be charged with heresy is simply its prior probability and is thus determined in precisely the same way — using the same background information. Moreover, prior probability has the advantage of occurring within a Bayesian framework that gives it a more precise function in determining the probability of a hypothesis on the total evidence for it. Despite his protestations, what Craig means by plausibility seems indistinguishable from prior probability.

Fourth, Craig presents an idiosyncratic and unjustified interpretation of the criterion regarding *ad hoc* explanations. Logicians call an explanatory hypothesis *"ad hoc"* (meaning "for this special purpose") if it satisfies two conditions: it is introduced just for the special purpose of accommodating some particular observation that otherwise would constitute counterevidence (*e.g.*, failed predictions) to the hypothesis of interest, and there is no independent evidence for it. But Craig's formulation deviates from this standard definition. Thus, for Craig, a hypothesis is "*ad hoc*" when it includes new suppositions "not already implied by existing knowledge." Notice that his focus is not on the number of new assumptions *per se*, but (following McCullagh) on whether or not these are already implied by existing knowledge. However, Craig never justifies his interpretation.

We turn next to the deeper problem of justifying the correct set of criteria. This problem becomes obvious when one sees how Craig differs from another proponent of the IBE approach, Michael Licona, in selecting criteria.[7] It is odd that Craig and Licona both appeal to the authority of McCullagh, and yet end up with distinct (albeit overlapping) sets — Craig has seven, whereas Licona has five.[8] Clearly, each is presupposing some other unstated factor to select and justify his individual set. But what is this fac-

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7   Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (InterVarsity Press, 2010).
8   Licona's criteria are scope, power, plausibility, less *ad hoc*, and illumination.

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tor? The problem is how any particular set is to be selected and justified. This problem arises, not just because Craig and Licona arrive at different sets, but because they each omit one or more widely accepted criteria — *e.g.*, non-*ad hoc*-ness, simplicity, modesty, testability, and fruitfulness. They do so by either ignoring certain criteria altogether, *e.g.*, simplicity and fruitfulness in the case of Craig, and testability and modesty in the case of Licona, or distorting the criterion beyond recognition, *i.e.*, retaining it in name only. Craig, as we have seen, omits non-*ad hoc*-ness in this latter way: he retains the term "*ad hoc*" but so redefines it that it no longer corresponds to its standard meaning. These differences, omissions, and distortions raise the question of which set of criteria is correct and how this is to be justified.

Finally, we note the more fundamental problem of whether and how the various criteria are to be ranked, *i.e.*, weighted or prioritized. Here again Craig differs markedly from Licona, and, like him, provides no justification for his approach. Craig does not rank the criteria, whereas Licona does (ranking plausibility first, followed by scope and power) but offering no justification. Thus it remains unclear how to deal with inevitable cases in which rival theories satisfy different subsets of the criteria to varying degrees — *e.g.*, high plausibility and low power versus low plausibility and high power.

IV. ASSESSING CRAIG'S ARGUMENT AND THE RESURRECTION HYPOTHESIS

We turn now to our criticism of Craig's application of his criteria to R and, more fundamentally, our assessment of R itself. We attempt to show, contrary to Craig's argument, that R fails to fulfill any but the first of his criteria — especially scope and plausibility. We take up each of his seven criteria in turn.

1. The hypothesis, together with other true statements, must imply further statements describing present, observable data.

Craig claims that this criterion is easily fulfilled by virtually any hypothesis, including naturalistic theories as well as R itself. And this is surely correct. For R, together with the statement that Jesus was given a tomb burial, entails the empty tomb — one of the most important items of evidence in E that needs to be explained. While we assume that this statement is true for the sake of argument, R still satisfies this criterion even if, as more skeptical New Testament scholars (*e.g.*, Crossan) maintain, the body of Jesus was buried in a grave or simply left on the cross to decompose. Wherever it was left, R implies that it was no longer there. Since it is thus clear that R satisfies Craig's first criterion, we shall move on to his second and the matter of the appearances of the risen Jesus.

2. The hypothesis must have greater explanatory scope (that is, imply a greater variety of observable data) than rival hypotheses.

Craig's criterion of *scope* overlaps with his first in adding the requirement that R must "imply a greater variety of observable data" in comparison to its rival hypotheses (where "implies" means "makes probable"). We just saw in our discussion of Craig's first criterion that R entails the empty tomb. Consequently, it has this item within its scope. The main problem with R, as we shall see, lies in its failure to explain the experiences of the risen Jesus had by the various witnesses as stated in E. But there are two preliminary problems that first require discussion.

The first of these problems is that the argument Craig gives to show that R satisfies his second criterion fails. The problem is that the conclusion Craig defends — that the scope of R in explaining E is superior to that of its rivals — is *comparative*, and yet the reasons he presents for it are entirely *non-comparative*. Indeed, Craig focuses his lengthy discussion of scope exclusively on the deficiencies of certain naturalistic competitors to R (*e.g.*, the *Conspiracy*, *Apparent Death*, and *Hallucination* hypotheses) while saying nothing at all about the scope of R itself. However, from the fact that hypotheses $H_2, \ldots, H_n$ each have weak scope, it does not follow that the scope of the remaining hypothesis H_1 is greater. It might actually be weaker — perhaps even the weakest of them all. To show that H_1 exceeds $H_2, \ldots, H_n$ in scope, Craig must actually determine the scope of H_1 itself and compare this with the scope of each of H_2 through H_n.

Since he fails to do this, his argument that *R* has superior scope is a *non-sequitur*. Remarkably, in his entire discussion of this matter (2008), Craig offers only one sentence on the superior scope of *R*:

> The resurrection hypothesis, we have seen, exceeds counter-explanations like hallucinations or the Wrong Tomb Hypothesis precisely by explaining all three of the great facts at issue, whereas these rival hypotheses only explain one or two. (397)

He apparently thinks that, if all of the naturalistic alternatives to *R* have low scope, then the scope of *R* itself must be quite high. But, as the following diagram illustrates, this is clearly mistaken.
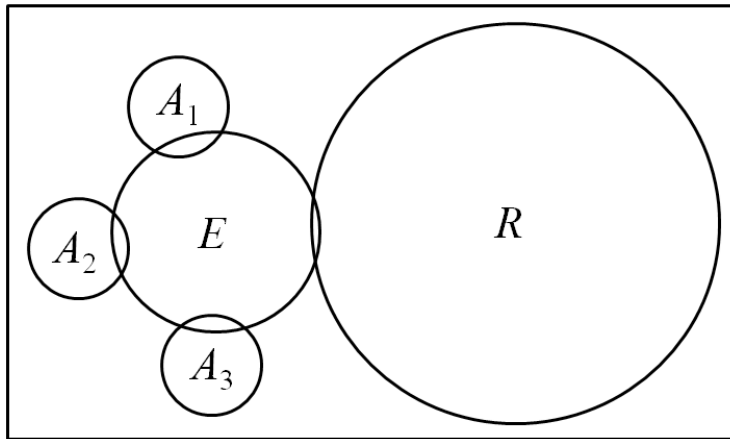
Even if the explanatory scope of each of the naturalistic alternatives to *R* is low, the explanatory scope of *R* may itself be even lower. Here the explanatory scope of a hypothesis is depicted as the ratio of the area of the portion of the evidence *E* it encompasses to the total area it covers. *R* is depicted here (for the sake of argument) as having a high plausibility, but this is inessential. (Only three alternatives to *R* are shown.)

What Craig needs is a genuinely *comparative* argument to show that *R* has superior scope. Yet he fails to provide one. It is clear, accordingly, that Craig is merely assuming that *R* has superior scope.

While Craig gives no comparative argument to show that *R* has superior scope, it might be thought that he easily could. Yet, given his definition of *R*, he faces a second preliminary problem to his doing so: the disparity in content between *R* and *E*. This problem arises because the content of *R* is not the only factor that determines its scope. The content of *E* itself is also crucial, and, in contrast to that of *R*, this is highly specific and detailed. Indeed, *R* is actually inferior in scope to certain rival hypotheses because what they postulate pertains far more closely item-by-item to the content of *E* than does what is postulated by *R*. For what *R* postulates — that God supernaturally raised Jesus from the dead — pertains only to what happened to Jesus at the moment of his resurrection, whereas what *E* states is very detailed accounts of a number of complex events that happened in Jerusalem, Emmaus, Galilee, and Damascus after this — *e.g.*, the event of the eleven having sensory (visual, auditory, and tactile) impressions of Jesus appearing in the Upper Room, interacting with them, eating fish, and giving an extended discourse. Thus, on the grounds of disparity of content alone, the probability of *E* on *R* cannot be high. And this will still hold even if *R* is revised to include a clause explicitly stating that God's purpose for raising Jesus from the dead requires the discovery of the empty tomb and the risen Jesus appearing to the women, the disciples, and Paul — for this still lacks sufficient detail. This gives those naturalistic alternatives to *R* that correspond in content to *E* a much greater edge in scope.

Because of this problem, *R* has far less scope, ironically, than do the two most infamous of its naturalistic rivals: the *Apparent Death* and *Hallucination* hypotheses (henceforth, *A* and *H*). Thus, consider the former. As formulated by its proponents, *e.g.*, Venturini and Cheek, and understood by Craig in his critique, *A* specifically postulates that Jesus only seemed to die on cross and, then, having sufficiently recovered from his crucifixion wounds, left the tomb and appeared to the women and the disciples as

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stated in the gospels.[9] *R*, in contrast, merely postulates that God supernaturally raised Jesus from the dead — thereby accounting for the empty tomb but omitting that content essential to explaining other key events recounted in *E*, *e.g.*, the women and disciples having sensory experiences of the risen Jesus appearing to them on Earth. Craig might protest that *A* is highly implausible, but this has nothing to do with the scope of *A* — which, given what *A* postulates and *R* omits, is far greater in the case of *A*. Of course, *A* does not include the appearance to Paul within its scope. But neither does *R* as Craig defines this. Thus, despite its other notable defects, *A* is superior in scope to *R*. Now consider *H*. Unlike *R*, this hypothesis possesses content that bears directly upon *E*. For, as formulated by its proponents, *e.g.*, Strauss and Lüdemann, and so understood in his critique by Craig, *H* postulates that the women, the disciples, and Paul satisfied those psychological conditions that would produce in them hallucinations of the risen Jesus at those times and places specified in the New Testament Easter accounts. *R*, however, states only what happened at the moment of the Resurrection. Because what *H* postulates corresponds far more closely in content to *E*, it escapes this problem. Of course, *H* is fantastically improbable, but the issue here, again, is not plausibility but scope. Craig will object that the scope of *H* in contrast to that of *R* does not include the empty tomb, and this is correct. Nonetheless, *H* has overall greater scope since the number of facts to be explained in *E* regarding the experiences of the risen Jesus had by the women, the disciples, and Paul far outnumber and exceed in considerable detail the number of facts to be explained in *E* regarding the empty tomb and its discovery.[10] We conclude that, since *R* states nothing about the post-resurrection activities of the risen Jesus, its two historically chief naturalistic rivals surpass it in scope. Our point, of course, is not to extol the virtues of *A* and *H* but only to highlight the very weak scope of *R* as defined by Craig.

We have now identified two serious preliminary problems for Craig's claim that *R* possesses superior scope: he gives no comparative argument to support this and the content of *R* fails to correspond sufficiently to that of *E*. To this Craig would surely respond that he need only provide what he has not — an argument to show that the scope of *R* is superior to that of its naturalistic rivals *when it is supplemented by auxiliary hypotheses regarding post-resurrection activities of Jesus*, *viz.*, those that correspond in content to the discovery of the empty tomb and the experiences of the risen Jesus had by the various witnesses as stated in *E*. As we will now see, however, Craig's definition of *R* makes it impossible for him to do this since *R*, so defined, is *incompatible* with these supplementary hypotheses. The scope of *R* is, thus, necessarily limited to the discovery of the empty tomb (or cross or grave) and thus must exclude, ironically, the experiences of the risen Jesus had by the witnesses. This results from a deeper and more fundamental problem overlooked by Craig that severely limits the scope of *R*.

The problem is that, in accordance with his understanding of the conception of the resurrection body of Jesus given in Paul and the gospels, Craig formulates *R* to imply that the body of the risen Jesus remained physical and yet acquired supernatural powers that no pre-resurrection human body possesses — in particular, the ability to materialize into and dematerialize out of the physical universe at will. Regarding the physicality of the body of the risen Jesus, Craig argues in detail that "[Paul] conceives of the resurrection body as physical" (382) and that the gospels of Luke (24:36-42) and John (20:19-20) "demonstrate both *corporeality* and *continuity* of the resurrection body" (378) through their depictions of the risen Jesus showing the disciples his wounds and eating before them. Regarding the supernatural powers of the body of the risen Jesus, Craig observes that Paul conceives of this as immortal and glorious (382) and that the gospels of Luke (24:36) and John (20:19&26) depict the risen Jesus as having the power "to appear and vanish at will, without regard to spatial distances."[11] Craig thus concludes:

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9   See, *e.g.*, John L. Cheek, "The Historicity of the Markan Resurrection Narrative", *The Journal of Bible and Religion* XXVI, no. 3 (1959).

10   Craig might object that, to explain the discovery of the empty tomb, *H* requires the auxiliary hypothesis that the corpse of Jesus was stolen or the witnesses went to the wrong tomb. But this is unnecessary since *R* is already so weak in scope compared to *H*.

11   Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence*, 342–43.

> On the one hand, Jesus has a body — he is not a disembodied soul.[…] On the other hand, Jesus's body is a supernatural body.[…] Jesus rises glorified from the grave. In his resurrection body Jesus can materialize and dematerialize in and out of the physical universe. The gospels and Paul agree that the appearances of Jesus ceased and that physically he has left this universe for an indeterminate time.[12]

Thus, as Craig understands "raised from the dead" in the case of Jesus in *R*, this implies that the body of the risen Jesus was *physical* and yet had *the ability to materialize into and dematerialize out of the physical universe at will*. What Craig fails to see, however, is that this implication is incompatible with the physicality of the body of the risen Jesus as the term "physical" is understood in contemporary physics and, because of this, limits the scope of *R* to the empty tomb and its discovery alone.

An essential part of what Craig means to affirm by taking "raised from the dead" in *R* to imply that the body of the risen Jesus is *physical* is that it possesses the ability to interact with its surroundings and, in particular, to be seen, heard, and touched through the use of the eyes, ears, and hands — for this is how he envisions *R* serving as an explanation for the sensory experiences the women and disciples had of the risen Jesus as stated in *E*. Conversely, a crucial part of what Craig means to affirm by taking "raised from the dead" in *R* to imply that the body of the risen Jesus has supernatural powers is that it possesses the ability to materialize into and dematerialize out of the physical universe. However, these two implications of *R* together with the quantum field theory consisting of the Standard Model of particle physics (henceforth, *SM*) create a severe limitation in its scope. For, as Craig himself must concede, none of the particles of *SM* (*e.g.*, quarks and electrons) or the bodies composed of them — especially human bodies — can do this. It thus immediately follows that the body of the risen Jesus as conceived in *R* cannot be physical in the sense in which "physical" is used in *SM*. Call this "physical$_{SM}$." Because of this, furthermore, it follows that the body of Jesus after its resurrection lacks all of the physical$_{SM}$ properties it had before that — most fundamentally, existence in the physical$_{SM}$ universe. It thus exists in its own non-physical$_{SM}$ universe and can have absolutely no contact with our physical$_{SM}$ universe. As a result, it cannot appear in the Upper Room; walk across the floor; be seen, heard, or touched by the women and disciples; pick up and eat a piece of fish; appear to Paul in heavenly glory; etc. For, on *SM*, only those things that are themselves physical$_{SM}$ can interact with things that are physical$_{SM}$.[13] Because of this, ironically, *R* cannot explain *any* of the appearances of the risen Jesus given in *E* — except as a series of extremely realistic hallucinations indistinguishable from sensory experiences or (in the case of Paul) heavenly visions of the risen Jesus. But, as Craig himself observes in his critique of *H*, this would be totally preposterous, if self-induced, and a moral impossibility for God.[14] What we can thus see is that *R* utterly fails as an explanation of the post-resurrection experiences of the risen Jesus. These lie beyond its scope. As previously observed, however, *R* can explain the empty tomb — but in a convoluted way. At the very moment of the Resurrection — the moment on *R* at which, according to Craig, the risen Jesus receives the power to materialize into and dematerialize out of the physical universe — his body would cease to be physical$_{SM}$ and *for that reason alone* would cease to exist in our physical$_{SM}$ universe. He would "dematerialize" out of this universe, paradoxically, not by using this power, but simply because he acquired it. What we can thus see is that the scope of *R* is limited to the empty tomb and its discovery alone.[15]

Craig will surely protest that our appeal to *SM* is irrelevant on the grounds that, being a theory of the *physical$_{SM}$*, it cannot apply to the *supernatural* and, thus, to the body of the risen Jesus. But this is

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12   Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence*, 346.

13   Where "interact" means broadly "act upon and/or be acted upon." On *SM*, all interaction involving physical$_{SM}$ bodies reduces to interaction between (*e.g.*, the exchange of) such sub-atomic particles as electrons, quarks, gluons, and photons — *e.g.*, physical$_{SM}$ bodies have mass that curves spacetime in accordance with the General Theory of Relativity only by interaction with the Higgs boson.

14   It would be massive deception for God to create hallucinations of the risen Jesus appearing bodily, *e.g.*, at the tomb, in the Upper Room, from Heaven, and telling the disciples that he had flesh and bone (Lk. 24:39), beckoning Thomas to place his hand in his side (Jn. 20:27), *etc*. More importantly, this would involve interaction between physical$_{SM}$ and non-physical$_{SM}$ entities disallowed by *SM*.

15   Adding the Religio-Historical Context to *SM* would not increase the scope of *R* because *R&SM* entails *~E* and thus so does *R&SM* in conjunction with this.

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confused. For, given what Craig postulates in *R*, the body of the risen Jesus is not physical$_{SM}$, and yet, according to *SM*, only those things that are physical$_{SM}$ can interact with things that are physical$_{SM}$.[16] Thus, *SM* is *directly* relevant to the supernatural *and* assessing the scope of *R* — indeed, no less relevant than is, *e.g.*, the abnormal psychology of hallucinations to assessing the scope of *H*. Furthermore, as Craig must concede, *SM* is one of the two most strongly confirmed items of our scientific background knowledge (the other being the General Theory of Relativity) and, in fact, far more strongly confirmed than any of the theories he uses to assess the scope of the naturalistic rivals to *R*, *e.g.*, those of physiology and abnormal psychology. Finally, Craig cannot reject our appeal to *SM* on the grounds of incompleteness — that it fails to encompass the interactions of all domains, *e.g.*, the gravitational interaction, and, thus, must be replaced by a more fundamental theory that does. For, as theoretical physicist Sean Carroll observes, although *SM* is insufficient to cover such exotic phenomena as dark matter, quantum gravity, and matter/antimatter asymmetry, it is a perfectly valid and complete theory for the phenomena of the everyday realm — including, of course, corpses:

> In every single case, the basic underlying story […] would involve the particles of the Standard Model, interacting through electromagnetism, gravity, and the nuclear forces, according to the principles of quantum mechanics and general relativity.[17]

Indeed, so strong is the evidence for *SM* that Carroll states without reservation:

> The view of electrons and protons and neutrons interacting through the Standard Model and gravity will stay with us forever — added to and better understood, but never replaced or drastically modified.[18]

We conclude, accordingly, that our use of *SM* in assessing the scope of *R* is fully justified and, on that basis, that Craig's claims on behalf of the scope of *R* are highly exaggerated. When supplemented with the background information of the tomb burial, its scope is limited to the empty tomb and its discovery. It is ironic that *A* and *H*, despite their extremely low plausibilities, have far greater scope than *R*.

> *3. The hypothesis must have greater explanatory power (that is, make the observable data more probable) than rival hypotheses.*

Our criticism regarding the previous criterion of scope applies to power as well and thus suffices to refute Craig's claim that *R* fulfills the third criterion. Here is the entirety of what Craig says on the power of *R*:

> This is perhaps the greatest strength of the resurrection hypothesis. The Conspiracy Hypothesis or the Apparent Death Hypothesis just do not convincingly account for the empty tomb, resurrection appearances, or origin of the Christian faith; on these theories the data (for example, the transformation in the disciples, the historical credibility of the narratives) become very improbable. By contrast, on the hypothesis of the resurrection it seems extremely probable that the observable data with respect to the empty tomb, the appearances, and the disciples' coming to believe in Jesus' resurrection should be just as it is. (397)

It is clear that Craig has nothing to say here regarding the power of *R* beyond what he has already said about scope. All he does, again, is focus exclusively on the vices of the naturalistic alternatives. Thus, Craig fails to justify his claim that *R* makes the historical data of *E* so much as probable — let alone extremely so. Again, Craig believes that he has justified his claim, but, as in the case of scope (see above diagram), he has failed to give a genuine comparative analysis of the power of *R* *vis-à-vis* its naturalistic alternatives. We argued in detail above that the two historically chief naturalistic rivals to *R* (*A* and *H*) far surpass it in scope. It is clear for the same reasons that this conclusion also holds for power. We now turn to Craig's fourth criterion, plausibility.

> *4. The hypothesis must be more plausible (that is, be implied by a greater variety of accepted truths, and its negation implied by fewer accepted truths) than rival hypotheses.*

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16   We shall return to this important implication of *SM* when we discuss the plausibility of *R* below.
17   Sean Carroll, *One last stab* (2010).
18   Carroll, *One last stab*.

Craig makes his case for the plausibility of *R* on the basis of two considerations — a distinction between *natural* and *supernatural* resurrection and an alleged context for *R* consisting of religio-historical background information, *e.g.*, Jesus' unparalleled life and radical personal claims, together with the arguments of natural theology. Accordingly, he claims that, while a *natural* resurrection is outrageously improbable, the *supernatural* resurrection of Jesus is not at all implausible in view of its religio-historical context. However, these considerations lead to two corresponding problems. First, Craig overlooks key background information that makes supernatural resurrection highly implausible. Second, his religio-historical context is not genuine evidence.

Regarding the first problem, Craig draws a distinction between natural and supernatural resurrection:

> The hypothesis "Jesus rose from the dead" is ambiguous, comprising two radically different hypotheses. One is that "Jesus rose naturally from the dead"; the other is that "Jesus rose supernaturally from the dead," or that "God raised Jesus from the dead." The former is agreed on all hands to be outrageously improbable. Given what we know of cell necrosis, the hypothesis "Jesus rose naturally from the dead" is fantastically, even unimaginably, improbable. Conspiracy theories, apparent death theories, hallucination theories, twin brother theories — almost any hypothesis, however unlikely, seems more probable than the hypothesis that all the cells in Jesus' corpse spontaneously came back to life again. Accordingly, that improbability will lower greatly the probability that "Jesus rose from the dead," since that probability will be a function of its two component hypotheses, the one natural and the other supernatural. But the evidence for the laws of nature which renders improbable the hypothesis that Jesus rose naturally from the grave is simply irrelevant to the probability of the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead. Since our interest is in whether Jesus rose supernaturally from the dead, we can assess this hypothesis on its own. (274-275)

Contrary to what Craig claims here, the distinction he draws between natural and supernatural resurrection fails to support his claim that *R* has about zero implausibility with respect to our background information and, in particular, the laws of nature. Indeed, *R* is highly implausible on our background information since this includes, as observed above, one of the two most successful theories of physics to date: *SM*. As a quantum field theory, *SM* allows natural resurrection, but only as an astronomically improbable statistical fluctuation (apart from the possible triumph of future medical technology). In contrast, it forbids distinctively supernatural resurrection by immaterial beings, *e.g.,* God, because it entails that only those things that are physical$_{SM}$ can interact with things that are physical$_{SM}$, thus making the subsequent state of any physical$_{SM}$ thing a sole function of its previous physical$_{SM}$ state and/or those of its physical$_{SM}$ surroundings. According to *SM*, consequently, the state of the body of Jesus at the moment of its alleged supernatural resurrection by God was a sole function of its previous physical$_{SM}$ state — that of a corpse in some particular stage of postmortem decomposition — and those of its physical$_{SM}$ surroundings. Since God is necessarily immaterial, *SM* thus entails that the state of the remains of Jesus at each point in time after its death had *nothing to do* with God. *SM*, it should be emphasized, denies neither theism nor the omnipotence of God. What it does deny, rather, is that *anything* acts *supernaturally* in the world.[19] But now, *SM* is the most comprehensive theory of physics ever formulated — encompassing all subdivisions of the latter except *GTR* — and, as a result, is highly confirmed by the massive amount of experimental data from these. Because it is inconsistent with *SM*, *R* thus has a very high degree of implausibility.

Craig cannot dismiss this critique on the grounds that we assume the mere statistical generalization that "dead men do not rise," because we do not. Indeed, our only appeal is to *SM*. Nor can he reject it for proceeding on "naturalistic presuppositions," for *SM* is not naturalistic metaphysics but, as we saw in Carroll's observation above, an exceptionally well-confirmed item of our scientific background information *that is here to stay*. Furthermore, Craig cannot dismiss our critique on the grounds that the formulas comprising *SM* are, not categorical assertions, *i.e.*, unqualified equations, but actually conditionals that

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19   For Theism, *SM* is part of the *Via Negativa*, telling us what God does *not* do — not what He *does*. Thus, where *p* is any proposition, *p* entails (trivially) that God does not intervene to make it the case that ~*p*. But then, most significantly, where *p*, like *SM*, is exceptionally well-confirmed, it is also exceptionally well-confirmed that God does not intervene to make it the case that ~*p*. (This follows from the Logical Consequence principle according to which, if Ψ is a logical consequence of Φ, then P(Ψ) ≥ P(Φ).)

have the supernatural closure proviso "if no agent supernaturally intervenes" as the antecedent.[20] This claim is simply false, and one finds no mention of supernatural intervention in connection with the equations of *SM* (and of physics more generally) in the reference works, research journals, and textbooks of physics. More importantly, prefixing this proviso to the equations of *SM* renders the resultant "laws" untestable, since any failed prediction can always be "explained away" by the *ad hoc* expedient of claiming that some undetected agent must have been supernaturally intervening after all. Indeed, apart from the equations of *SM* alone, *i.e.*, unqualified by this proviso, there is no way to determine that no agents supernaturally intervene in any given situation to which they apply since (with the possible exception of God) we know nothing at all about such agents (their number, the extent of their supernatural power, their motives, etc.) and, most importantly, whether they are detectable by our senses or best scientific instruments when they are supernaturally intervening. Here absence of evidence is *not* evidence of absence. Craig cannot circumvent this problem by restricting the supernatural closure proviso to God alone since this problem arises equally from the supernatural intervention of *any* agent. Life would grind to a screeching halt if the supernatural closure proviso were prefixed to the equations of *SM*. A cop couldn't know that his gun would fire, a mother that juice would not poison her child, a student that his book would not burst into flames, etc. The supernatural closure proviso is a myth of Positive Natural Theology[21] and appeal to it constitutes a case of special pleading — attempting to exempt *R* from objections based on its conflict with the exceptionally well-confirmed physical laws of *SM* while at the same time urging that its naturalistic rivals be subjected to the most trenchant criticism by less fundamental and less strongly confirmed scientific generalizations.

For the above reasons, it is difficult to understand how Craig can claim that a distinctly *supernatural* resurrection of Jesus by God has about zero implausibility with respect to our background knowledge — unless he is including in this items that do not really count as knowledge at all. This brings us to the second problem.

Craig maintains that the plausibility of *R* "grows exponentially as we consider it in its religio-historical context of Jesus' unparalleled life and radical personal claims and in its philosophical context of the arguments of natural theology" (397). However, Craig's appeal to this religio-historical context (henceforth, *RHC*) as background information is undermined by two problems. First, even if *RHC* taken alone were to increase the plausibility of *R*, the problem remains that the other part of our background information, *SM*, entails ~*R* and, thus, so does the combined background information, *SM&RHC*. Second, any appeal to *RHC* is undermined by the sharp division among leading New Testament scholars (*e.g.*, Brown, Crossan, Ehrman, Jeremias, Meier, Sanders, and Wright) regarding the historical reliability of the Gospels. Because of this, *RHC* itself lacks adequate justification. While the general considerations Craig adduces for its reliability seem reasonable, *e.g.*, that there would be insufficient time for the New Testament Easter traditions to arise as legends, so also do the more specific counterarguments of opposing scholars (even some who are conservative), *e.g.*, that the command of the risen Jesus to baptize in the Trinitarian name in Mt. 28:19 is unhistorical since Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; and 19:5 only mention early church baptisms performed in the name of Jesus alone.[22] Likewise, Craig cannot appeal to the exalted claims, *e.g.*, "Son of Man" and "Son of God," made by Jesus (or by others of him) in the Gospels because, again, New Testament scholars are sharply divided over Jesus' self-understanding, *e.g.*, as a mere prophet,

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20 This supernaturalist proviso is not to be confused with "in a *physically* isolated system," which occurs in the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the conditional form of the Law of Conservation of Energy.

21 On the distinction between Positive and Negative Natural Theology, see R. G. Cavin and C. A. Colombetti, "Negative Natural Theology and the Sinlessness, Incarnation, and Resurrection of Jesus: A Reply to Swinburne", *Philosophia Christi* 16, no. 2 (2014).

22 R. T. France, "The Authenticity of the Sayings of Jesus", in *History, Criticism, & Faith*, ed. Colin Brown (InterVarsity Press, 1976) concludes: "The formula of Matthew 28:19b looks much more like the end-product of this [legendary] doctrinal process than its starting-point."

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Messiah, or God. Craig gives a credible argument for a high Christology, but it is inconclusive given the absence of scholarly consensus.[23] Consequently, his appeal to *RHC* fails on pain of begging the question.

This problem would only be exacerbated were Craig to add to *RHC* the purported miracles of Jesus, his sinlessness, and his fulfillment of prophesies. Indeed, the miracles of Jesus are no less in dispute than is *R* itself — and, moreover, there is vastly more evidence for *SM* than there is for these. There are problems, similarly, with including the sinlessness of Jesus in *RHC* since the disposition of humans to sin is so particularly strong and the meager New Testament evidence for the moral perfection of Jesus (as opposed to his general goodness) is hardly representative, being limited to certain childhood incidents and the last few years of his life (*e.g.*, Jn. 8:46).[24] The same goes for fulfillment of prophecies since it remains an open question among New Testament scholars whether these are historical or evolved for apologetic reasons in the early church. Craig has not adequately dealt with these problems. For the reasons given in this and the previous paragraph, Craig's appeal to *RHC* to increase the plausibility of *R* fails.

> *5. The hypothesis must be less ad hoc (that is, include fewer new suppositions about the past not already implied by existing knowledge) than rival hypotheses.*

We saw above that Craig's definition of *ad hoc* is idiosyncratic. Now let us consider whether or not *R* fulfills this criterion by including fewer new suppositions. Craig argues that *R* is not *ad hoc* or contrived since it readily fits within the *religio-historical context* (*RHC*) of the unparalleled life, ministry, and personal claims of Jesus. However, we have already seen that Craig's appeal to *RHC* fails, and thus have implicitly shown that *R* on Craig's definition is *ad hoc*. Moreover, while rival theories do, as Craig observes, require many new suppositions, these are trivial in comparison to the *supernaturalist* suppositions implicit in *R* resulting from how Craig defines the term "raised" therein. For, on Craig's understanding of the Resurrection in *R*, God does not merely return Jesus to life but changes his corpse into a glorious body that is immortal and imperishable and has the ability to materialize and dematerialize. And these suppositions are surely fantastic. Moreover, to explain the specific details of *E*, Craig must also add the suppositions that Jesus appears on the road to Emmaus, in the Upper Room, on a mountain in Galilee, etc., since these are not included in *R* itself. Lastly, Craig must add a final supposition that enables *R* to explain the surprising post-Easter disappearance of the risen Jesus from Earth and his appearance to Paul from Heaven — a role performed by the *ad hoc* miracle of the Ascension. Given all these suppositions, it would seem that *R* is significantly more *ad hoc* than its naturalistic rivals.

> *6. The hypothesis must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs (that is, when conjoined with accepted truths, imply fewer false statements) than rival hypotheses.*

Craig states that he can't think of any accepted beliefs that disconfirm *R*. But, as we have already seen, this is clearly mistaken. There are, to be sure, accepted beliefs that tend to disconfirm the naturalistic rivals of *R* to various degrees — *e.g.*, the probability of death resulting from crucifixion. However, these pale in comparison to the fact that *SM* entails ~*R* and thereby disconfirms *R* to the maximal degree. First, *SM* disconfirms *R* in its appeal to a supernatural agent, *viz.*, God, as the cause of the Resurrection. Quite apart from this, *SM* disconfirms *R* in a second way. It is an accepted belief that, in order for a body to be *seen*, it must be made of atoms that enable it to interact with and emit photons. But, as previously explained, the resurrection body in *R* is not physical$_{SM}$ and, thus, cannot be made of atoms and be perceived through *any* sensory modality. Finally, the resurrection body in *R* is a *soma pneumatikon* and, thus, immortal and imperishable. However, *SM* entails that all physical bodies are physical$_{SM}$ bodies and thus neither immortal nor imperishable — thereby disconfirming *R* in a third way. Craig may object to our appeal to *SM*. Yet, as already observed, it is far more strongly confirmed than any of the accepted

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23   Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?…Or Merely Mistaken?", *Faith and Philosophy* 21, no. 4 (2004), though himself a Christian, shows in his critique of C.S. Lewis' famous Trilemma argument that, even if we knew that Jesus claimed to be divine, this would not establish that he was God.

24   On the problem of the sinlessness of Jesus see Cavin and Colombetti, "Negative Natural Theology".

beliefs he uses to disconfirm the naturalistic alternatives to *R*. His failure to appreciate this explains why he believes that *R* fulfills criterion six.

> *7. The hypothesis must so exceed its rivals in fulfilling conditions (2)-(6) that there is little chance of a rival hypothesis, after further investigation, exceeding it in meeting these conditions.*

Craig concludes that "There is certainly little chance of any of the rival hypotheses suggested to date ever exceeding the Resurrection Hypothesis in fulfilling the above conditions" (399). He offers no additional argument of any kind for this claim, only reminding us of the "stupefaction" of scholars when confronted with the facts of the empty tomb, the appearances, and the origin of the Christian way. Only prejudice against miracles, he suggests, stands in the way of accepting his conclusion. Yet, in light of our evaluation of Craig's argument, this conclusion should be dismissed as mere apologetic *bravado*.

In summary, we have tried to show that Craig's defense of *R* fails. His IBE approach suffers from deep conceptual problems in his definitions of the criteria. Moreover, he fails to show that *R* fulfills *any* but the first of his criteria — most notably, scope and plausibility (and even power as well) — whereas it is clear that certain naturalistic rivals to *R* fulfill more. Regarding scope and power, we have seen, most significantly, that, as a consequence of *SM*, *R* can only explain the facts regarding the empty tomb but not the appearances. Regarding plausibility, we have seen that *SM*, again, renders *R* far more implausible than its naturalistic rivals and that serious doubts arise regarding the existence of *RHC*. In light of our critique, it would seem that almost any naturalistic hypothesis is superior to the hypothesis that God supernaturally raised Jesus from the dead.[25]

The reader might conclude that, in rejecting *R*, we are forced to accept one of its implausible naturalistic rivals, *e.g.*, the *Conspiracy* hypothesis. But this does not follow since the evidence statement *E* may well be false. The argument Craig presents for *E* is fallacious if for no other reason than it begs the question against equally qualified experts who reject its key supposition, *viz.*, that legend could not arise due to refutation by eyewitnesses. Nor can *E* explain the similarities and differences found within New Testament Easter traditions. A logically correct argument to determine what actually happened must begin with a detailed explanation of these. The way forward, we propose, is a rigorous Bayesian argument to determine whether the alleged facts of *E* are legends that escaped eyewitness refutation.[26]

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25 It should be clear that our critique of Craig's criteriological argument for *R* applies no less to its Bayesian counterpart.

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