

## DISCUSSION

CHRISTIANITY AND THE  
RATIONALITY OF THE  
RESURRECTION*Michael Martin*

**Abstract:** In my "Reply to Davis" (*Philo* vol. 2, no. 1) I defended two theses: First, even for Christians the initial probability of the Resurrection is very low. Second, the historical evidence for the Resurrection is not strong enough to overcome this initial improbability. Consequently, I maintained that belief in the Resurrection is not rational even for Christians. In his latest reply, "The Rationality of Resurrection for Christians: A Rejoinder" (present issue), Stephen T. Davis emphasizes that he is only defending the rationality of belief in the Resurrection for Christians, not for non-Christian supernaturalists. Presumably this point is emphasized by Davis because he supposes that I have at best shown that belief in the Resurrection is not rational for non-Christian supernaturalists. However, this is not so. In this reply I will defend the two theses stated above.

In order to maintain that the initial probability of the Resurrection is very low even for Christians, as I do, or not very low, as Davis does, one must have a clear idea of the meaning of *Christianity*. Up to this point in the debate its meaning has been assumed rather than explicitly formulated. Davis' present reply attempts for the first time in the debate to specify the definition of being a Christian. However, there are two dangers for Davis in his doing so. A Christian might be defined in such a way that the belief in the rationality of the Resurrection follows trivially from the definition. The other danger is that, supposing triviality is avoided, many other possibilities besides the Resurrection could be compatible with being a Christian. These possibilities could be numerous enough to make the initial probability of the Resurrection quite low. Unfortunately, Davis does not avoid these dangers.

A Christian, by definition, according to Davis, is someone "who accepts

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what is crucially affirmed in the Creed.”<sup>1</sup> What is *the* Creed? In fact, there are at least three major creeds associated with Christianity: the Apostles’, the Niceno-Chalcedonian, and the Athanasian.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly enough, although Davis speaks of “the Creed,” he does not seem explicitly to use any of the three traditional creeds to define Christian. I have already argued that redemption can be accomplished in many ways and that the Resurrection (R) is only one way. Consequently, the initial probability of R is low. In his latest reply to me Davis gives four reasons why my claim is to be doubted. Although just how his four reasons relate to what he calls “the Creed” is obscure, I will assume that these four reasons provide four necessary conditions for being a Christian in his sense of “the Creed.”

Davis’ first three reasons for preferring R over rival ways of redeeming humanity are: (1) Christians believe that there is a God who can perform miracles including bringing someone back to life. (2) Christians believe in a God who wants to redeem human beings and part of redemption is redemption from death. (3) Christians believe God promised life after death. However, (1)-(3) do not favor R over other possible ways of redemption. Indeed, if (1)-(3) specified the total definition, it would not even be a definition of Christianity. The beliefs specified for Christians in (1)-(3) could be held by non-Christian supernaturalists.

The only reason that seems directly relevant to Christianity in general and to R in particular is Davis’ fourth one: (4) Jesus predicted his future death and resurrection in passages in the NT.<sup>3</sup> Let me symbolize the propositional content of such passages as JPR (Jesus predicted that R.) I will assume that according to Davis’ version of “the Creed,” Christians by definition believe that JPR. But Christians by definition also believe that Jesus is the Son of God and as such is all knowing. I will call this assumption JK. However, JPR and JK *entail* R. And so we establish that belief R is rational for Christians at the cost of triviality since, by definition, rational Christians believe that R.

Is there any way to save Davis’ claim from the charge of triviality? One could argue that the inference from JPR and JK to R is based on an equivocation with respect to R. R in JPR is vague and unspecific. Call this R<sub>1</sub>. In contrast, the R that is allegedly entailed by JPR and JK is included in “the Creed” and is pregnant with all of the specificity of the New Testament story. Let us call this R<sub>2</sub>. Interpreted this way, the inference from JPR<sub>1</sub> and JK to R<sub>2</sub> is clearly invalid. JPR and JK entails R<sub>1</sub>—not R<sub>2</sub>. But in that case the four reasons given by Davis leave open many possible ways in which Jesus could have been resurrected that differ in important respects from R<sub>2</sub>. Given R<sub>1</sub>, R<sub>2</sub> is simply one possibility that is no more likely *a priori* than others. Jesus could have been resurrected in glory, in a purely spiritual form, in front of thousands of reliable witnesses, and so on. Indeed, given the momentous nature of the event it is rather surprising that Jesus was resurrected without thousands of eye witnesses and without bands of angels heralding the good news to all nations.<sup>4</sup>

Davis’ attempt to define Christianity is not the only way Christianity can be defined. Since Davis’ definition brings in specific historical events

such as JPR it can be called a Historically Concrete Definition of Christianity. However, Historically Abstract Definitions are also possible and in this debate I have been assuming such a definition. For example, one might say that Christianity is the belief that the redemption of human beings was brought about through the death of the incarnated Son of God because his death atoned for human sin and allowed for eternal life. Such a conception of Christianity is compatible with alternative historical scenarios and alternative routes to redemption through the death of God's Son. On this definition the essence of Christianity would be preserved even if God's Son had been incarnated in other times or in other places than First Century Palestine and even if the redemption of human beings took other forms. It should be noted that such a definition does not make Christianity an ahistorical religion: some sequence of historical events is essential to the definition although not any one *particular* sequence of events.

It is obvious that on this historically abstract definition of Christianity, the initial probability is quite small that the *particular* historical events associated with the Resurrection occurred. As we have seen, Davis takes a narrower view of the matter and defines Christianity in terms of a *particular* sequence of historical events. On such an account, if the Son of God had been incarnated in ancient China or had died for our sins (thus allowing eternal life) and had not been resurrected, we would not call this Christianity. There is one obvious disadvantage with a Historically Concrete Definition of Christianity: it seems arbitrary to deny that Christianity could have originated in ancient China in the way specified above.

### **THE PARTICULAR TIME AND PLACE ARGUMENT**

Given the above discussion, Davis' evaluation of the particular time and place argument can be disposed of quickly. Assuming a Historically Abstract Definition of Christianity, I have argued that the initial probability of R is low. It should be clear by now why this is so. As far as Christianity is concerned, the Son of God could have died for our sins and provided salvation in many different times and places. This conclusion provides the background knowledge for evaluating how initially improbable is the resurrection of Jesus in First Century Palestine. Davis, who assumes a Historically Concrete Definition of Christianity, finds it difficult to understand what my thesis is and how I can defend it. Of course, as he says, we have agreed on a putative time and place of The Resurrection. But given his perspective he fails to acknowledge that we differ on whether alternative redemptive events could have occurred at other times and places that are compatible with Christianity. Moreover, as I have just argued, even if a Historically Concrete Definition is assumed, many possible ways of redemption are open that are compatible with the accepted time and place. In particular, if Davis' particular historical concrete definition is accepted, many alternatives are still possible.

## THE ATONEMENT

I have argued that the failure of Christian Atonement theories make the Resurrection initially unlikely. Davis disagrees. Although he still does not say what theory he accepts while affirming that he rejects the Ransom Theory, he maintains that even this latter can be defended against my criticisms. According to Davis, despite what I have said the theory does explain why God sacrificed his son: the sacrifice of Jesus enticed the devil who had possession of sinners to release them. In *The Case Against Christianity* I give five reasons why this explanation should be problematic even for thoughtful Christians.<sup>5</sup> Davis ignores them all. He rejects completely any criticism that God's actions in sacrificing his son seem arbitrary. His reason is that Christians should be prepared to admit that some of God's actions *seem* arbitrary since they should admit that God's actions are sometimes arbitrary. He goes so far as to claim that the only thing I have shown is that arbitrariness is not acceptable to me.

I have five comments to make about his rejection of my criticism of arbitrariness. First, most traditional theories of the Atonement have not supposed that God's actions in sacrificing his son are arbitrary. Rather they have held that God's action can be explained in terms of his reasons.<sup>6</sup> In other words, people who expound these theories *assume* nonarbitrariness. Despite what Davis supposes, nonarbitrariness is not just what is acceptable to me. Second, saying that because God is free does not mean that he is arbitrary in his choices. Third, the view that God's choices are arbitrary has traditionally been an obstacle to Christian faith and has not been accepted by many Christians. Fourth, Christian thinkers have often avoided appeal to God's arbitrary choice in theological explanations of the Resurrection since it weakens the explanatory power of the Resurrection. Lastly, and most important, to admit the death of God's Son to save humanity was arbitrary is tantamount to admitting that an indefinite number of other choices could have been made by God for the same end and that one has no right to believe any one of them is any more likely than any other. However, this seems to admit my point about the low initial probability of the Resurrection relative to Christian belief.

### 1. *Strong and Neutral Resurrection*

I argued that the evidence Davis cites does not well support resurrection in the strong sense; that is, what Davis calls Strong R.<sup>7</sup> In this sense Jesus was resurrected with a body having supernatural properties. However, Davis now says that although in his book he did affirm Strong R and still believes that Strong R is true, he is only defending Neutral R: that is, that Jesus was resurrected.

Davis believes there is nothing wrong with his defending the rationality of Neutral R rather than the rationality of Strong R. I would have thought there is a lot wrong with it, however. In my original *Philo* paper which started this debate I cited Davis' advocacy of Strong R.<sup>8</sup> Now that his views

are threatened it seems all too convenient for him to say that he only wishes to defend Neutral R. After all, *Davis* is the one who asserted Strong R—I am not the one who brought it up.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it seems fair to assume that Strong R is what Christians generally understand by R. So again, if this exchange concerns the question of the rationality of R *for Christians*, then *Davis*' refusal to defend the rationality of R thus interpreted is difficult to understand.

## THE EVIDENCE AGAINST NEUTRAL R

For the sake of argument, let us accept *Davis*' restrictions and consider Neutral R. *Davis* wrongly seems to suppose that I must show that the evidence makes the probability of Neutral R low. However, if my argument so far is correct, the only thing that I must now show is that the evidence for Neutral R is not so high as to swamp the low initial probability of Neutral R; or, what amounts to pretty much the same thing, I must show that the probability of rival hypotheses is not very low.

I argued in my reply to *Davis* that supposing the initial probability of alternative theories (AT) is only 20% then if there are five alternative mutually exclusive explanations—AT<sub>1</sub>, AT<sub>2</sub>, AT<sub>3</sub>, AT<sub>4</sub>, AT<sub>5</sub>—the average probability of the historical evidence relative to each alternative and our background knowledge could be as low as .04. Basically what this means is that *Davis* must show that alternative theories are completely worthless. At best what *Davis* shows is only that scholarly opinion is divided over the issues that divide us and that he has counterarguments to offer. I will sample some of his counter arguments here and show that they are of questionable worth.

### 1. *The Empty Tomb*

According to a number of well-respected New Testament scholars, it is not known where Jesus was buried. *Davis* in his reply makes it sound as if only one "radical" scholar holds such a view, but in fact, 70% of the Jesus Seminar, a group of liberal New Testament scholars, endorses this opinion. Moreover, *Davis* does not consider the probability of this claim relative to known Roman and Jewish burial customs. The only argument he considers is that if the place of Jesus' burial had been known it would have been venerated as was the custom in the case of tombs of saints, but since it was not venerated it had not been known. How does *Davis* combat this argument? *Davis*' reply to this argument deserves to be quoted at length.

But as evidence against the claim that Jesus' tomb was found empty this argument is feeble since it simply presupposes that this claim is false. Christians could reply that the reason Jesus' tomb was not venerated is because Jesus was bodily raised and hence was not there.<sup>10</sup>

Now *Davis* does not understand the argument if he thinks it presupposes that the Empty Tomb claim is false. The argument can be explicated as follows:

- a. If the Empty Tomb stories are true, the location of the Tomb was known.

- b. If the location of the Tomb was known, it is likely that the Tomb would have been venerated by Christians shortly after Jesus' Resurrection.
- c. The Tomb was not venerated by Christians shortly after Jesus' Resurrection
- d. Therefore, it is not likely that the Empty Tomb stories are true.

In this argument the Empty Tomb story is not presumed to be false—it is *argued* that it is. The crucial premise b is based on analogous cases, for example, the veneration of the tombs of saints of the time. But then it would be strange indeed for Davis to assume that Jesus' followers would not have venerated his tomb because they believed he had risen from it. Indeed, one would suppose that venerating the tomb is precisely what they would have done given their belief. "Here," they would have likely said, "is where Our Lord rose from the dead. Let us worship here!" Moreover, after the Jewish War a site was picked out and venerated and even today the Holy Sepulchre Church proudly claims it harbors the tomb of Jesus. However, there is good reason to suppose that such a claim coming many years after Jesus' death is suspect and in fact is rejected by most Biblical scholars.<sup>11</sup>

Davis admits that the purported existence of women witnesses to the empty tomb is complex and controversial. I offered two explanations in the text of my paper why the presence of women in the empty tomb story is compatible with its being fictional, and refer the reader to three others in note 11 of my paper.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted in particular that Davis assumes uncritically that the women in the story are presented as witnesses. But other interpretations are possible.<sup>13</sup> I believe that any impartial reader would have to admit that Davis has not shown that all of these alternative accounts are worthless.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. *The Legend Explanations*

One obvious alternative explanation of the historical evidence is that the Resurrection story is a legend that grew over time. Briefly, the main points are these:

- a. There is no independent confirmation of the details of the Resurrection story from Pagan and Jewish sources. Davis does not deny this.
- b. There is no independent confirmation of the details of the Resurrection story from Paul or other earlier Christian writers. Davis does not deny this either. However, he argues that this does not necessarily show that Paul and these other writers did not know these details. Perhaps. But this mere possibility does not provide independent support.
- c. The legend theory predicts that later accounts of a growing legend would have more details. Gospel versions of R have more details than earlier ones.
- d. We know from other historical cases of growing legends that the zealous followers of a religion dismiss negative evidence and are not fazed by rational arguments. It is thus hardly surprising then that the Gospels contain no "inner circle controversy," as Davis calls it, over R—the crucial Christian belief.<sup>15</sup> Any adverse eye witnesses or arguments would have been ignored

and their claims would not have been recorded. Davis says that such irrationality is unusual and that “most sensible folk change their beliefs in the face of powerful evidence.”<sup>16</sup> He cites the fact that many former religious believers gave up their religion after being exposed to negative arguments.

But surely the history of religion—from Mormonism to Father Divine, from Jonesville to Heavens Gate, from Jehovah’s Witnesses to the followers of Sabbatai Sevi—is filled with cases of irrational dogmatic belief on the part of zealous followers. Yes, most sensible folk change their minds in the face of powerful evidence. But it simply begs the question to suppose that most religious believers—including early Christians—are sensible folk.

e. In my reply to Davis I argued that the legendary nature of the Resurrection is to be expected given that many resurrection myths were common in Jesus’ era and before.<sup>17</sup> Davis dismisses the relevance of these myths to Christianity since, he asserts, non-Christian myths are wild fairy tale-like stories where the Christian stories of the Resurrection “are understated, realistic, firmly grounded in historical settings and events of the first century.”<sup>18</sup> Davis must be reading a different Scripture from the one I am. In Mark there is the wonder of the darkness at noon and the rending of the temple veil. Matthew outdoes Mark by adding an earthquake and the resurrections of numerous “saints” who appear in Jerusalem. How Davis can suggest that these stories are understated and realistic while the apotheosis stories of Apollonius, Empedocles, Romulus, and so on are overstated and unrealistic defies all understanding.

### 3. *Hallucinations*

In my reply to Davis I argued that the reports of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances could have been based in part on hallucinations. Analogous cases of hallucinations show that the restrictions Davis puts on how and where hallucination can occur are not found in actual historical cases. In his present reply Davis seems to admit this but says only that “the vast majority” of hallucinations occur under conditions not found in Jesus’ resurrection: they usually occur to one person and usually carry no long standing conviction and so on. But surely the question is whether mass hallucinations carrying longstanding conviction are found in contexts analogous to Christianity. Davis gives no reason to doubt this.

Davis complains that I have not provided details in expounding the hallucination theory. However, this is not necessary for my purpose. I only need to argue that Davis has not shown that the hallucination theory is extremely improbable. I think it is obvious that he has not. Indeed, he makes no attempt to show any relevant difference between the Christian context and the analogous cases I cite where hallucinations that convince large numbers of people are found.

### 4. *Inconsistencies in the Empty Tomb Story*

In my reply I pointed out that Davis’ view is mistaken that the inconsistencies in Gospel empty stories were few and that there is agreement on

the main points. He still insists that the stories agree on “the basic points.” It is unclear what he means by “basic,” however, since there are inconsistencies in these stories regarding who the witnesses were and what they saw in and around the empty tomb. Davis agrees that some of these inconsistencies have not been harmonized and others are possible to harmonize only by “hypothesizing”—which seems to mean reinterpreting the Gospel story in ways that go well beyond what is actually said. One need not agree that unharmonized contradictions in these stories lower the probability of R to zero, unless we can reconcile them. The probability of the historical evidence relative to R and our background knowledge is much lower than 1. This in turn means that even higher initial probabilities of R would be compatible with the irrationality of R on the historical evidence and background knowledge. Although this is the important point, it is not addressed by Davis.<sup>19</sup>

### 5. *Eyewitness Testimony*

Davis pretty much ignores my argument that eyewitness testimony tends to be unreliable. Yet much of Davis’ argument is based on the reliability of such testimony. We know from psychological studies as well as from the history of religious movements that such testimony is influenced by “post event” and “pre-event” information. This general unreliability combined with the initial low probability of R, the failure of independent confirmation of R, and the failure to show that the probability of alternative explanations are very low indicates that R is not rational for Christians.

## **RATIONALITY: COMPARATIVE AND NON COMPARATIVE**

To this point in the debate I have assumed that to say that R is rational for Christians is to say that the probability of R relative to background theories K and historical evidence EH is more than 50%. This means that if  $\sim R$  relative to K and EH is more than 50% then R is not rational for Christians. Let us call this the Non-Comparative Sense of Rationality (NCSR). I have been presuming that the assumption of NCSR set the parameters for the debate and was agreed to by Davis. In the conclusion to his latest reply, however, he now maintains that even if I have shown that  $\sim R$  has a higher probability than R relative to K and EH, this does not settle the question of the rationality of R for Christians since R still may be more probable than any specific alternative hypothesis.

Clearly Davis is suddenly proposing a different meaning of rationality as a backup position. Now to say that R is rational for Christians is to say that the probability of R relative to background theories K and historical evidence EH is more than any specific alternative hypothesis. Let us call this the Comparative Sense of Rationality (CSR). Note that CSR is compatible with a disjunction D of specific alternative hypotheses that do not entail  $\sim R$  and are more probable than R.

I have two points to make concerning Davis’ shift to CSR. First, the

introduction of CSR has strange and paradoxical implications that I suspect many Christians would find hard to accept. It implies that Christian belief in R is rational even if the probability of R relative to EH and K is .000000000000000001 so long as all specific alternative hypotheses have a lower probability. So in terms of CSR, paradoxically even if  $\sim R$  is virtually certain, belief in R could still be rational.

Second, although as far as I am concerned the debate has not been about CSR, I cannot see that Davis has done anything to establish that the probability of all specific alternatives to R are less than the probability of R. Given the low initial probability of R, the weakness of the historical evidence, the unreconciled consistencies, the unreliability of eyewitness evidence, is it really the case that, say, the legend explanation has a lower probability than R?

Davis complains that I have not specified the details of alternative accounts to R. But is this really necessary? It is certainly not necessary when we are debating the NCSR of R. Here it is enough to provide general considerations indicating that alternative accounts are not worthless. Is it necessary if we are debating CSR? Not always. Consider an entirely different context: Suppose a ship called the Santa Marie disappears in the Bermuda Triangle. Someone proposes a hypothesis H to explain this disappearance consisting of a detailed story of the disappearance of Santa Marie that involves UFOs and parallel universes. Suppose a specific alternative explanation A is that the Santa Marie sank in a storm. But no details are provided in A since none are known. The mere vagueness of A and lack of detail does not necessarily mean that A is less probable than H. Its probability would depend on other factors: the initial probabilities of H and A, evidence of a storm in the area during the relevant time, and so on. In a similar way, the vagueness of some alternative account of the historical evidence, despite what Davis believes, does not necessarily indicate that it has a lower probability than R.

## CONCLUSION

In his conclusion Davis says that the exchange between us could go on “virtually indefinitely” and “that, in its own way, underscores the very point I have been arguing for: Christians are objectively rational in believing R.”<sup>20</sup> He is correct about one thing. Our debate could go on virtually indefinitely and perhaps has lasted too long already. However, the mere fact of our lengthy exchange would only mean that it is rational for Christians to believe in the Resurrection if Davis were *successful* in his defense. I cannot see that he has been.

First, he has failed to meet my argument that the initial probability of R is low. Second, he has refused to defend Strong R in the light of historical evidence although this is what he has asserted and what most Christians assume. Third, his criticism of alternative accounts of Neutral R has failed to show that they have at least a modest probability. However, this must be done to undermine NCSR of Neutral R. Fourth, in his conclusion he intro-

duced for the first time a new sense of rationality (CSR) which has paradoxical implications for the rationality of R. Finally, he has failed to show that R is rational even in terms of CSR.<sup>21</sup>

## NOTES

1. Davis, "The Rationality of the Resurrection For Christians: A Rejoinder," 41.
2. Michael Martin, *The Case Against Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), 3–17.
3. Critical Biblical scholars have recognized for a long time that the Markan prediction of passion and resurrection is a redactional creation used to reassure the readers that Jesus was, despite appearances to the contrary, in complete control of the situation.
4. Richard Carrier makes a similar point in his internet paper, "Why I Don't Buy the Resurrection Story," [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard\\_carrier/jesus.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/jesus.html).
5. Martin, *The Case Against Christianity*, appendix 2.
6. One notable exception is the Acceptance Theory of Dun Scotus. See Martin, *The Case Against Christianity*, 256–57.
7. Martin, "Reply to Davis," 66–67.
8. Michael Martin, "Why the Resurrection is Initially Improbable," *Philo* vol 1, no. 1, (Spring-Summer 1998), 69, footnote 12.
9. Strangely Davis says in note 8 that I been misled by Cavin's paper. On the contrary, if I have been misled by anyone it is by Davis who affirms Strong R and refuses to defend it.
10. Davis, "The Rationality of the Resurrection For Christians: A Rejoinder," 45.
11. See Dan Bahat, "Does the Holy Sepulchre Church Mark the Burial of Jesus?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* (May/June 1986); Gabriel Barkay, "The Garden Tomb—Was Jesus Buried Here?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* (March/April, 1986). I owe this point to Jeff Lowder and Richard Carrier in an unpublished paper, "Historical Evidence and the Empty Tomb."
12. Martin, "Why the Resurrection is Initially Improbable," 75.
13. Robert Price wrote in a personal communication, "the empty tomb story reflects and derives from myths and rituals of Isis and Nephthys seeking the corpse of Osiris to anoint it after Set's betrayal and murder. They anoint the body and bring it back to life!" He points out interesting parallels between the Osiris myth and Gospel stories and suggests that Mark got hold of these stories and adapted them to his own purposes. Crossan also suggests an explanation in which the women are not considered as witnesses. See Martin, "Why the Resurrection is Initially Improbable," 75, footnote 11.
14. I suggested that the body of Jesus was likely to be unidentifiable after seven weeks and so it is hardly surprising that critics of the Resurrection story failed to produce a body to refute Christian claims. On the authority of his brother-in-law who is "an eminent pathologist" Davis says that in "normal cases, especially where the body is buried and where local climate is dry as opposed to humid, corpses are identifiable by sight alone for much longer than that." Apparently, authorities disagree. A pathologist I consulted maintained that in cave temperatures (65 degrees or less) in the Middle East in several days, decomposition will render a face nearly unrecognizable. Even recently dead bodies will have distortions in the facial structures that render them unrecognizable to relatives. This is a well known caveat in forensic circles. It is never a good idea to rely just on sight recognition of most corpses for identification; fingerprints, dental records and other forms of I.D. are always the standard. Needless to say, in Jesus' day such methods were unavailable. Moreover, I already pointed out ("Reply to Davis," 62–63) that it is certainly possi-

ble that seven weeks is an underestimate and that the empty tomb stories may have emerged many months after Jesus' death. Furthermore, there is controversy among Bible scholars about when the empty tomb stories emerged. See *The Case Against Christianity*, 22.

15. There is, of course, the Jewish objection reported in Matthew 28 that the disciples stole the body. But how seriously this is to taken is completely unclear given the fact that the Roman guards at the tomb were reported to have fallen asleep on duty and yet claimed to know what happened when they were asleep. This story most likely reflects the Jewish polemic as of Matthew's time, that is, late 1st Century-early 2nd Century. It is too late to provide information about what the original non-Christian critics might have said. The Jewish criticism can be understood as granting the empty tomb for the sake of argument and then explaining it away.

16. Davis, "The Rationality of the Resurrection For Christians: A Rejoinder," 49.

17. In "Reply to Davis," footnote 18 when citing ancient parallels to the Resurrection, I mention the Old Testament stories of Enoch and Elijah who were taken up to be with God and left no traces. Davis points out that they were not said to have been raised from the dead. Very true. But I did not say they were. The close analogy between being taken up without a trace and being resurrected remains and is not discussed by Davis. See Davis, "The Rationality of the Resurrection For Christians: A Rejoinder," 47.

18. Davis, "The Rationality of the Resurrection For Christians: A Rejoinder," 47.

19. Whether Davis is correct that it is absurd to suppose that unreconciled contradictions in different historical sources should lead us to suppose that the events at issue have zero probability is quite irrelevant to my main point and is best discussed on another occasion. It is significant that Davis spends much time trying to refute this irrelevant point and says nothing about the relevant one.

20. Davis, "The Rationality of the Resurrection For Christians: A Rejoinder," 50.

21. I would like to thank Robert Price for helpful comments.