sShort Answers to Big Questions

Kirk Durston

Introduction: The questions and answers given in this article are meant to be a starting point. Each question is worthy of an entire book. Nevertheless, the answers provided will go a long ways toward satisfying the average person.

A. Does God Exist:

1. Cosmological argument from science and logic

   It is the consensus among those scientists who focus their research on the origin of the universe that the universe had a beginning.[1] This applies not only to the theory that this universe is a non-off event, but also to the theoretical multiverse and the oscillating universe theories. In other words, nature (space-time, matter and energy, and the laws of physics) had a beginning. There are only two categories of causes, natural and non-natural (supernatural). Logic dictates that the natural category of causes cannot because by the natural category of causes; that would be a circular fallacy. That leaves us with the following argument.

   i. The cause of nature must be natural or supernatural
   ii. Necessarily, the cause of nature cannot be natural (to avoid the circular fallacy)
   iii. Therefore, the cause of nature is supernatural (from i. and ii.)
   iv. The cause of time cannot be dependent upon time (to avoid the circular fallacy)
   v. Therefore, the cause of time must be timeless
   vi. It is logically impossible for a timeless entity to have a temporal beginning
   vii. If something has no temporal beginning, it is impossible for it to be caused by something; it is always there
   viii. Therefore, the cause of nature must be supernatural, eternal and uncaused.

   Science and logic, therefore, require a supernatural creator of the universe that happens to correspond to a general notion of God held to by many different people groups throughout history.

   Objections:

   a. What about Lawrence Krause's 'universe from nothing?'

[1] New Scientist; 1/14/2012, Vol. 213 Issue 2847, p6-7, 2p

Many atheists, have been mistakenly led to believe that a universe can pop into existence from absolutely nothing at all on the basis of Lawrence Krauss' somewhat misleading video.[2] In reality, Krause is actually talking about how, in theory, a universe might pop into existence from a state of zero energy. Unfortunately, the theory requires the existence of a law of quantum gravity, as well as some sort of other space-time universe from which this one can come. So Krauss' 'universe from nothing' still requires something and fails to solve the problem of what it was that caused the origin of nature (in this case, the multiverse). For a review of Krauss' book, see this article in New Scientist.[3]

b. What if the universe has no beginning?

There are two problems with this. First of all, the science is saying it does. To deny the universe has a beginning is to set aside science. Secondly, no beginning requires an infinite progression of either units of time or of universes to get to this present time and place. The problem with trying to count through an actual countable infinite is that one will never, ever count down from infinity past to get here, yet here we are. The number of past events, therefore, must be finite. There is much more that can be said about this. For additional problems with an actual countable infinite, see Hilbert's Hotel.[4][5]

c. Some insist that the universe caused itself

I have observed that some are so absolutely convinced that natural causes explain everything, that they refuse to believe that nature cannot bring itself into existence. When faced with the logical fallacy of the circular argument, I have witnessed some state that science trumps logic, or that logic does not apply in this case. Well, one can take that road and abandon logic, but one also abandons critical thinking. One of the foundations of the scientific method is logic. Toss logic and one tosses science.

2. Historical argument

The cosmological argument presented in A. 1 merely establishes the existence of a supernatural creator. Has the Creator ever stepped into history and interacted with humanity? There is a candidate who claimed to be God and for whom there is highly unusual warrant to believe He was telling the truth. The following is an argument centering around Jesus Christ.

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[2] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjaGktVQdNg
[3] Brooks (2012) Trying to make the cosmos out of nothing, *New* Scientist, 11 January, 2012.
[4] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faQBrAQ87l4
[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilbert's_paradox_of_the_Grand_Hotel

i. Jesus Christ claimed to be God
ii. There are two lines of warrant for the belief that he was telling the truth
iii. Therefore, there is unusual warrant for the belief that God exists and is active within humanity.

The first proposition (i) is a matter of historical record. Jesus claimed to be I AM, the God who created the cosmos, the laws of nature and life. The people who lived at the time and understood the language understood Him to be claiming to be God and they attempted, and eventually succeeded, in killing Him. It is the second proposition (ii) that needs further rational justification.

a) First line of warrant:

The Old Testament portion of the Bible was completed a few hundred years before the birth of Christ. It contains many prophecies concerning a future Messiah or Christ. For example, the prophecies include statements that He will be born of the seed of a woman (instead of a man), he would be born in Bethlehem, He would be God born as a little boy, God would one day be valued at 30 pieces of silver, He would be crucified, they would cast lots for his clothes and He would be given vinegar to drink as He was crucified. The exact time of His arrive was prophesied as being exactly sixty-nine, septads of years (483 years) after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and before the destruction of the second temple (which occurred in AD 70 under the Romans). It was also prophesied that He would lay down His life to make people from every nation holy and pure, satisfying the demands of flawless justice for the sins of humanity, so that perfect love could then be satisfied for those who will accept it. Jesus Christ appears to have fulfilled the first set of Messianic prophecies. The second set are to fulfilled at the end of the time of humanity's rule on earth.

b) Second line of warrant:

The historical evidence seems to indicate that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, causing an explosion of Christianity within two months that spread across the Roman Empire within thirty years and as far East as India within a few decades. More details on the historical evidence are presented in Section E.

These two lines of warrant are unique in human history. There is no other case of so many clear, ancient prophecies concerning an individual, nor is there any historical evidence for the resurrection from the dead of any other human being in history. There have been countless resuscitations where the person later died, but nothing approaching the kind of resurrection that Christ carried out. That being the case, we have highly unusual warrant for the belief that

Jesus was telling the truth when He claimed to be I AM, God the Creator. If that is granted, then (iii) logically follows.

3. Argument from evil

The argument from evil for atheism is often used. In general, it is argued that there appears to be gratuitous evil in this world (instances of suffering and evil that have to point so far as we can see). Since a perfectly good, all-knowing and all-powerful God would not permit pointless evil, it is not likely that such a being exists.

a) The first point to make is that when one complains about the high crime rate, it entails there are some laws in existence to be broken. In the same way, to complain that instances of evil and injustice actually occur in this world entails that there is an objective standard of moral laws that transcend societies, geography and history. If there are no such laws, then everything becomes subjective, expecting others including God to abide by our own moral opinions would be without grounds. We must conclude that if we are going to discuss evil and injustice, then we implicitly grant an objective standard of moral laws.

b) Although Darwinian theory is adept at creating just-so stories for any possible scenario, it does not work as an explanation for the moral law. The moral law tells us what we *ought* to do, not what we actually do. If morality is an outcome of our evolutionary history, then morality should be defined by our genes. To clarify, it should correspond to the way we actually are. To contemplate the way we naturally are, we do not have to teach our children to lie, cheat, take each others' toys and fight. That comes naturally and is perfectly consistent with a Darwinian struggle for survival. Instead, we have to work hard to teach our children not to lie, not to cheat, not to take each others' toys, and not to fight. The moral law, therefore, does not describe the way we naturally are; it describes the way we *ought* to behave. Darwinian theory might explain why children naturally lie, fight and take each others' toys, thus it fails to explain the existence of the moral law.

c) Instances of evil and injustice actually provide an argument for God, as follows:

i. If evil and injustice actually occur, then there is an objective, perfect standard of morality and justice.
ii. The best explanation for an objective, perfect standard of morality and justice is God.
iii. Therefore, God exists.

Question: Why is God the best explanation for an objective, perfect standard of morality that transcends civilizations and history?

Response: The moral law is only useful to beings with minds capable of moral deliberation, and who have free will to make meaningful moral decisions. Therefore, the best explanation for the moral law is that it comes from a being with a mind capable of moral deliberation and who has free will. That is not sufficient, however, for the being must be maximally excellent (that degree of excellence beyond which it is not logically possible to be more excellent) so that we have a flawless standard of rightness and justice against which we can compare all other standards and opinions.

B. Which religion is true?

A brief overview of the world's religions soon reveals that the core beliefs of each religion contradicts at least one core belief of every other religion. We can conclude, then, that if God has revealed Himself in this world, it can be at most through only one religion. So which one would it be?

1. Step One: Determine if there is any rational justification for believing that the founder of that religion spoke for God. Is there anything that might give that founder unusual warrant for the belief he or she was speaking for God? If not, then we can conclude that there is no reason to believe the founder of that religion had access to divine information.

2. Step Two: Determine if there is any rational justification for believing that the holy book of that particular religion contains divine revelation to humanity. If not, then we can conclude that there is no reason to believe that religion is the one that truly represents God in this world.

When the above two steps are performed on the world religions, none of them, with one exception, can provide any rational justification for believing their founders or holy books speak for God. The exception is Christianity; there is something unique and highly unusual about it. For example,

1. It is the only religion in the world that began thousands of years before its founder, Jesus Christ, appeared.
2. It is the only religion in the world that provides possible falsification through the many prophecies made about the Messiah long before He came.
3. The Bible is the only book in the world that was written over a period of roughly 1,500 years, yet it has one, uniform theme, God's plan of salvation for humanity.
4. It is the only religion in the world for which there is evidence that its founder, Jesus Christ, physically rose from the dead after being soundly killed.
5. There is a remarkable explosion of Christianity within two months of the resurrection of Jesus that spread like a shock wave across human civilization within 70 years.

C. Did Jesus Exist?

It has become a popular assertion that Jesus of Nazareth never existed, that there was no such historical figure as described in the four New Testament gospels. The existence of the Jesus of the New Testament is, however, regarded as a historical bedrock fact by all scholars in the field. One such scholar, Ben Witherington, writes, 'The only persons who doubt the existence of Jesus of Nazareth are those who either hate Christianity and so want it to disappear, or those who have not bothered to do the proper historical homework.'

Another scholar in the field, Michael Licona, defines *historical bedrock facts* as follows,

> Historical bedrock facts are not just consensus, but nearly unanimous consensus by scholars in the field, spanning 'a very wide range of theological and philosophical convictions and include atheists, agnostics, Jews and Christians who make their abode at both ends of the theological spectrum and everywhere in between.'[6]

According to Licona, the following are regarded as historical bedrock facts by historians in the field:

1. Jesus performed feats that both he and his followers interpreted as miracles and exorcisms.
2. Jesus viewed himself as God's eschatological agent-the figure through whom the kingdom of God was coming.
3. Jesus died by crucifixion.
4. Very shortly after Jesus' death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and had appeared to them.
5. Within a few years of Jesus' death, Paul converted after experiencing what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him.

Historians in the field use a variety of historical sources including the New Testament documents and 39 sources outside the Bible, including the Didache, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, and the Gnostic gospels. Those scholars in the field, be they atheist, agnostic, Muslim, Jew or Christian, do not dispute the existence of Jesus of Nazareth.

D. Has Christian doctrines been borrowed from more ancient pagan myths?

The movie *Zeitgeist* has done much to promote the idea that the main ideas within Christianity have actually been borrowed from more ancient pagan myths. The movie began as an art project and blatantly, consistently, and almost completely ignores actual historical evidence and, instead, makes false claims

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[6] Licona M (2010) The resurrection of Jesus : a new historiographical approach. IVP Academic ; Apollos, Downers Grove, Ill., Nottingham, England.

that are in flat contradiction to the primary sources we have today. Zeitgeist has been soundly debunked on the internet and by many different people. An excellent debunking is available here.[7]

E. Is there historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an essential, core belief upon which Christianity stands or fails. The best, most current scholarly treatment of this subject is provided by Michael Licona in his massive book *The Resurrection of Jesus: a new historiographical approach*. In this book, Licona examines various theories put forward by various scholars and evaluates each one in terms of how well they explain the historical bedrock facts mentioned above, according to five criteria:

1. *Explanatory scope*: the quantity of facts accounted for by an explanation
2. *Explanatory power*: the quality of the explanation of the facts
3. *Plausibility*: how well the explanation is implied to a greater degree and variety of accepted truths than others.
4. *Less ad hoc*: explanation is not dependent upon assumptions for which there is not evidence
5. *Illumination*: does the explanation provide a solution to other problems outside of the one being directly examined?

In light of the bedrock historical facts and the above criteria, Licona examines seven competing theories that attempt to explain the bedrock facts surrounding Jesus of Nazareth. The theories include those put forward by Geza Vermes, Michael Goulder, Gerd Lüdmann, John Dominic Crossan, Pieter F. Craffert, Dale Allison, and the Resurrection Hypothesis itself.

Licona's conclusion, well shown in his book, is that the best hypothesis given historical bedrock facts about Jesus of Nazareth, coupled with the five criteria above, is that Jesus of Nazareth physically rose from the dead. That is our current, best scholarship.

F. How can the seemingly barbaric Old Testament laws come from God?

A very common objection to Christianity is to point out various Old Testament laws and practices that seem barbaric to us and conclude, therefore, that the Old Testament God does not exist and is different from the New Testament God. The fatal assumption in this approach is that the point of the Old Testament laws given at Mount Sinai was to reflect what God desired. This appears to be a false assumption for reasons about to be provided.

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[7] http://www.alwaysbeready.com/index.php/zeitgeist-the-movie

First, it must be pointed out that perfect laws made for perfect world, but that were not complied with in the real world, are actually bad laws for they cultivate disrespect or contempt of the law. In reality, laws must be drafted that are often a compromise between what is perfect and what the people will actually comply with. In the case of the ancient Israelites, they were coming out of barbaric slavery, living in a world where violence, slaves, and pillaging was the norm of the day. It was a long way from there to a perfect world. With this in mind, there are two points to be made.

1. The purpose of the law was never to reflect how God desired people to live. Instead, the purpose of the law was to show human beings that they could not even live up to an imperfect set of laws. They could not even obey laws that were a compromise between what God wanted and what the people wanted. If they could not even live up to those laws, then no human being could possibly justify himself or herself in the face of a being Who is the origin of purity, beauty, honor, power, justice, love and every good thing given and every perfect gift. This was not to put us in our place. Rather, it was to help us see that we have a problem. This is stated in the New Testament as follows,

   > *Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.*[8]

2. The Bible, both the Old Testament and the New, make it clear that the Old Testament law did not reflect what God wanted. Rather, it was a compromise between what God wanted for humanity and what humanity might possibly be willing to comply, though all have failed miserably. First, a quote from the New Testament that underscores this fact,

   > They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way."[9]

   It is clear from this statement by Jesus, who claimed to be I AM, that there was compromise in the Old Testament law between what God wanted and what people wanted. God's view of the Old Testament law is also revealed in the Old Testament in the following passage,

   > I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live;[10]

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[8] Romans 3:19-20
[9] Matthew 19:7,8
[10] Ezekiel 20:25

Once again, we see in the Ezekiel passage two things; God considered the law given at Mount Sinai as 'not good' (where the Hebrew word 'good' is *tov,* and can be taken to mean 'pleasant or desirable). We can conclude, therefore, that the law given in the Old Testament did not reflect what God desired. Instead, it was a compromise between His desires and what the hard hearted people wanted. The point of the law was that humanity failed to keep even a law that was a compromise. Therefore, all humanity must realize that they have fallen short of a God who is flawlessly just, indescribably beautiful and pure, all powerful, the origin of love, music, honor and every good thing. We have a problem and that is precisely why the Messiah came.

G. What about the extermination of the Canaanites?

Atheist philosophers, such as internationally distinguished William Rowe, make the assumption that God cannot permit gratuitous evil. Therefore, He must prevent any event or series of events at the point where they go from being a net moral good, to a net moral evil. The evaluation is not made merely on the basis of the events themselves, but all the consequences to the end of history. If we grant the atheists' premise, then this has massive implications for a society or civilization when they reach the crossover point between being a net moral good to a net moral evil. By the atheists' own premise, God must terminate a civilization at that point. The only question left is whether the Canaanite society had reached that point. It is interesting to note that some 400 years earlier, God had told Abraham that he and his descendants could not have the land for another 400 years because 'the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure'.[11] I have provided a more thorough discussion of this question elsewhere.[12] The real question is whether humanity is approaching the tipping point where it becomes a gratuitous evil and must be terminated. How much good have we done the planet? How about each other? What have we done for the galaxy? The prophecies in the Bible indicate that, just as there was a destruction of the Amorite society, so there will be a destruction of human civilization when wickedness has increased.

H. Has neo-Darwinian theory provided a non-theistic explanation for life?

In its most broad sense, Genesis states that God created the cosmos as well as life in its various 'kinds'. We have already seen in Section A that logic requires a supernatural cause for nature, but is there evidence that life is the product of an intelligent Creator who created live in various 'kinds'? In this section we will briefly look at two problems with neo-Darwinian theory and then look at some strong, positive evidence for the intelligent creation of life in its various kinds.

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[11] Genesis 15:13-16

[12] http://powertochange.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/God-and-the-Canaanite-Destruction.pdf

1. Two Problems with neo-Darwinian theory:

   There has been an enormous amount of verification for micro-evolution, variation within a species or a genus, as a result of mutations, genetic drift, natural selection, crossover, insertions and deletions, and so on. In science, verification can be found for many competing theories, so a necessary part of science is falsifiable predictions to determine which theories are false. When a primary prediction is falsified, it indicates there is something fundamentally wrong with the theory.

   a) The first problem, not so much with neo-Darwinian theory as with a natural explanation for the origin of life, is that the more we learn about the level of genetic information that would be required to encode within a minimal life form, the more it becomes obvious that we really do not have any plausible natural process that would write the software for the origin of life.[13] Evolutionary Biologist, Eugene Koonin, believes the probability of obtaining a replication and translation system is so low that the solution must be an infinite number of universes. That would result in events of extremely low probability actually occurring often, if not an infinite number of times.[14][15] It is Koonin's view that this 'sidesteps the issue of irreducibility and leaves no room whatsoever for intelligent design'. Needless to say, postulating an infinite number of unseen, untestable entities to avoid intelligent design surely begs for Ockam's Razor. Another paper concludes that chance and necessity, the two resources natural processes have available, cannot explain the origin of life. In their view, the problem is that life is 'programmatically and algorithmically organized.'[16] Essentially, life requires computer code and nature does not write code. What we can conclude is that science has utterly failed thus far to explain the origin of life.

   b) The second problem directly to do with neo-Darwinian theory is that with the advance of science, there is increasing evidence that is falsifying key predictions. Only one example will be provided here.

      A primary prediction of Darwinian theory is that the functional information[17,18,19] encoded within the genomes of biological life began at

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[13] Horgan J (2011) Pssst! Don't tell the creationists, but scientists don't have a clue how life began. Scientific American

[14] Koonin EV (2007) The cosmological model of eternal inflation and the transition from chance to biological evolution in the history of life. Biology direct 2:15

[15] Koonin EV (2012) The logic of chance : the nature and origin of biological evolution. Pearson Education, Upper Saddle River, N.J.

[16] Trevors JT, Abel DL (2004) Chance and necessity do not explain the origin of life. Cell Biol Int 28:729-739

[17] Szostak JW (2003) Functional information: Molecular messages. Nature 423:689

virtually zero and has steadily increased with time to encode all of biological life as it diversifies. By way of contrast, a prediction of intelligent design is that functional information begins at a maximum, and then steadily degrades through real world processes that we observe with every other information storage device. The beauty of a prediction like this is that the falsification of one provides verification for the other. In this case, it appears that the functional information within the genomes of life is steadily degrading, falsifying a primary neo-Darwinian prediction. One example is bacteria, which appears to be experiencing a net deletional bias in the DNA, with the result that the genetic information in bacteria is slowly decreasing.[20] Another example is drosophila, or the fruit fly, which is experiencing a high rate of DNA loss as a general process, not merely in once section or in one species.[21]

2. Positive evidence for an intelligent creator

It is not merely the case that advances in science are falsifying primary predictions of neo-Darwinian theory. There is positive evidence for an intelligent creator. It could be summarized as follows:

i. A unique attribute of intelligence is the ability to produce statistically significant levels of functional information
ii. Protein coding genes carry a statistically significant level of functional information.
iii. Therefore, the unique fingerprints of an intelligent designer are all over the genomes of life.

This is not a 'god of the gaps' argument (we don't know what did it, therefore God did). We *do* know what can produce statistically significant levels of functional information ….. intelligence. Hypothesis (i) is testable, verifiable and falsifiable. It is a scientific hypothesis which can be tested in the lab or with genetic algorithms. If one does not like the conclusion, one must falsify the hypothesis. That is the way science works. Thus far, all tests seem to verify the hypothesis (i). Therefore, there is enormous evidence that the genomes of life were encoded by a super-intelligence.

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[18] Hazen RM, Griffin PL, Carothers JM, Szostak JW (2007) Functional information and the emergence of biocomplexity. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A 104 Suppl 1:8574-8581

[19] Durston KK, Chiu DK, Abel DL, Trevors JT (2007) Measuring the functional sequence complexity of proteins. Theor Biol Med Model 4:47

[20] Mira A, Ochman H, Moran NA (2001) Deletional bias and the evolution of bacterial genomes. Trends Genet 17:589-596

[21] Petrov DA, Hartl DL (1998) High rate of DNA loss in the Drosophila melanogaster and Drosophila virilis species groups. Mol Biol Evol 15:293-302