

Why i am not a christian. Part 1. The absurdity of the gospel.

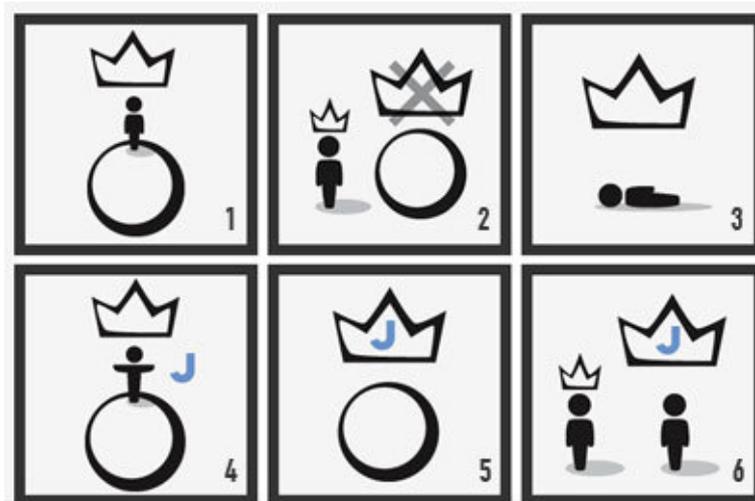
FEBRUARY 10TH, 2008

I have an issue with the central tenants of christianity. I consider the very core of christian theology to be completely nonsensical. However, i'm getting ahead of myself. I should not pay out on a system i haven't yet described. I should first present an overview of the gospel message. And perhaps there is no better place to start than the **Two Ways to Live** system devised by Matthias Media. A simple six-part framework for summarizing the "guts" of christianity (which i have paraphrased below):

1. God made the world. He made dogs, cats, mosquitoes and legumes. He made you and me. And he put us in charge. We were to rule *his* creation under *his* authority.
2. We were mighty pleased to rule the roost, but not under God's authority. We said, "stuff you God, we're doing this our way". Not surprisingly, we stuffed it up.
3. God got seriously cut, and punished us for our petty rebellion. He did this by giving us what we wanted - life without him. Unfortunately for us, God is the source of life, and when God walked away, death entered the world.
4. God continues to love us despite our insurrection. He loves us so much he sent his son Jesus to save us. How? Jesus lived a perfect life and died as a substitute for you and me. The punishment that we deserved for ignoring God was passed onto Jesus.

5. God raised Jesus back to life. He accepted his death as “payment” for our rebellion. It’s like we got busted by the cops and Jesus paid the fine on our behalf; justice is served, and if we acknowledge the payment, we are set free. With the slate wiped clean we can become mates with God.
6. We have two choices. We can continue to give God “the bird”. The result of this choice is death. Or we can trust in Jesus, and what he did for us. The result of this choice is eternal life with God.

The six points are summarised in the following diagram.



The rebellion talked about in the six-part summary really takes two forms. The first is what i call “daily sin”. The ubiquitous tendency of all people to actively ignore God as we seek to run our lives without him. The other kind of sin is what may be termed “original sin”; referring to the general condition of rebellion that we were born into following the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden. The disobedience of Adam and Eve brought the wrath of God upon us all, and the world has groaned under the pain of his judgement to this day; cancer, flood, still-born children, starvation - it’s all a side

effect of original sin; a consequence of God walking away. And yet we shouldn't be too harsh on Adam or Eve. As habitual sinners, you and i would have faired no better. We all would have chosen to stick it to God.

No one can be rightfully blamed for an outcome over which they have no control. We don't punish a newborn child for crying. And this is the point: sin is universal. It is unavoidable. Like tears are an intrinsic element of infancy, so sin is an innate attribute of humanity. The machinery of sin has been built into every one of us. And yet we are all punished by God for the rebellion that took place in the Garden of Eden. The world is bursting at the seams under the weight of his punishment. Every day we suffer the burden of disease and dysfunction that are the consequences of an insurrection that we were powerless to prevent.

I cannot accept this concept. If every single one of us, not just some, but all, would have sinned in the Garden of Eden, how can we be blamed for it? For surely a predilection for sin has been built into us. We have been manufactured by God for rebellion. If a company was in the business of making televisions, and every single television they ever made was faulty, as the manufacturer they would be held accountable. It would be a design fault. It would be their fault. And yet, despite being hardwired for sin, it's not our wonderful God, not our blessed and perfect creator that carries the blame, it is us.

I am sure there are many christians who would jump up and down at this point and say that what i am calling the "machinery of sin" is

nothing more than “free will”, and that ultimately, we are all free to choose God. This is partly right. We can choose God. But we are not free to choose a sinless life. Sin is inevitable. The fall of mankind unavoidable. And the punishment imposed upon the world by God is inescapable. Incidentally, i see no reason why free will and sin need to go hand in hand. After all, we seem perfectly comfortable with the idea that those in heaven live in perfect freedom without sin. Why could God not have created us that way in the first instance? Why put us through a living hell for 70 odd years before resigning most of us to eternal torment? It all seems rather unnecessary for an all knowing and all-powerful God.

The second half of the six-part summary presented above outlines how God takes responsibility for our sin, and provides a way out, if only we should trust him. Noble? I don't think so. This turn of hand does not make a wrong right. It's a little like a husband beating his wife only to tell her the following morning that he loves her. God cannot be lauded for rescuing us from death when he is responsible for that death. He may give us free will, the freedom to choose him, but the point is he built us in such a way that sin is unavoidable, that the fall of mankind was unavoidable, that the punishment of all mankind is unavoidable. We live out the inevitable, he punishes us, and then in the midst of the suffering for which he is responsible, he offers a hand out, if only we should turn to him. Is this to be celebrated? No thanks. God is just like a wife-beater playing the “i love you” card.

The consequences of this theology are highly negative. God is praised. He is perfect. Wonderful. Majestic. You and me, we are

evil. We are worthless. We deserve death. That is what christianity preaches. Every worship service is founded on this principle. God is good. We are not. We sing it. We proclaim it. We come to believe it. This is not a message that builds people up. It is not a message that rehabilitates. You don't nurture healthy children by allowing them to think that wetting the bed, or the other unavoidable embarrassments of life, render them worthless. We would be horrified by any parent that treated their child with such contempt. And yet we are asked to praise an all-powerful God who brings his children into a fallen world where they are punished for sins they are yet to commit, and punished for an imperfect life they cannot help but live. And to rub salt into already raw wounds, we are told that this is our fault, and if we plead forgiveness he will, in his great mercy, ensure the torment doesn't persist for all eternity.

To be fair, i'm only telling one half of the story here. If the first three chapters of our six-part summary relay the "bad news", the next three chapters speak of the "good news". It is here that we are offered salvation through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. What i want to know is this: how does this system work? How does the death of Jesus actually solve the problem of sin? We are told that God is a just God. He cannot let evil go unpunished. If he just turned a blind eye, or said, "don't worry about it mate, shit happens", he would be subverting justice. It's kind of like a cop letting a murderer off scott-free. It wouldn't be "fair". So when we stuff up, something needs to give. God needs justice. And this is the crux of the system. He doesn't get medieval on you and me. No. Instead he takes it out on a substitute; his own son Jesus Christ. Now that Jesus (who incidentally lived a life perfectly

pleasing to God) has received the punishment for our crimes, the sentence has been served, justice delivered, and you and I, the criminals, are set free. Impressive; but I just don't get it.

A non-Christian may exclaim at this point that in sending his son to die for a crime he didn't commit, God is committing child abuse. There are others that would rebut this heresy by claiming that Jesus "offered" to go (even though the Bible clearly uses the word "sent" in 1 John 4:10). A third group may appeal to the concept of the Trinity and say that Jesus was in fact God, and therefore God actually took upon himself the punishment that we deserved. As strange as this may seem - a perfect God punishing himself for something we did - let's just assume for a moment that it's true. How does this work?

Let's try placing this system into a more familiar context. Let's pretend that an evil man kills your partner. In the midst of your anger and grief, you catch the killer, but instead of venting your anger on him, instead of taking his gun and returning like for like, or instead of turning him over to the cops to be locked up for the next 30 years, you decide to punish yourself. With the killer in hand, you turn his gun upon yourself, and let the criminal go free. What does this achieve? Sure, in some weird sense, a penalty has been paid, but no one in their right mind would say that justice has been served. Nothing has been restored. Your partner is still dead. You are now dead. And the criminal is allowed to roam free. There has been no rehabilitation. There has been no restoration. And yet this is the heart of the gospel. We are to believe that the death of God (in human form) on a cross, and his subsequent resurrection

(which is not particularly amazing given that he is God and can do anything), somehow makes us right with him. We are to believe that God's punishment of himself, to satisfy his own desire for justice, somehow makes us worthy of knowing him. Huh? The fact is that this event does nothing to remove the record of my past sin, and it does nothing to alleviate my future sin (for all christians continue to be plagued by sin, despite trusting that the resurrection of Christ will bring them salvation). So if sin is the problem, and Christ's death does not obliterate sin, how does this work?

The best explanation i've received is that on the day of judgement, when standing naked at the pearly gates, Jesus will stand in front of the christian, such that God will not see a sordid life of wicked sinfulness, but rather the perfect life of Jesus. As such, the christian will be granted entry into the kingdom. On the other hand, the non-christian will be left standing in isolation; their wretchedness in full view, for they will not know Christ, and Christ will not know them, and he will therefore not shield them from the full wrath of God's judgement. The result? They are left out in the cold... or should i say the scorching heat of an eternity in a lake of burning sulfur.

Although this rather convoluted scenario is indeed an explanation, i'm not sure it's entirely biblical, for the bible is strangely quiet in disclosing the nuts and bolts of this crazy system. However, whatever the explanation, it is clear that the death of Christ does little to address the core issue of sinfulness. God may as well have taken out his anger at our rebellion on a heavenly boxing bag; the end result would have been the same.

There is much more to say on the issue of salvation, but for now it is sufficient to say that the gospel is frankly absurd. We all sin. It is built into us. It was built into us by God. And in booting us out of the Garden of Eden he punished us for it. He tells us we are worthless. He tells us that he is wonderful. He is so wonderful; he offers us a way out of the despair that he has brought upon us. He entered the world as Jesus. He sentenced himself to death. He raised himself to life. This is a story that has everything to do with God and nothing to do with us. A story that does nothing to address our sin, does nothing to restore us, does nothing to rehabilitate us. A story that does nothing to alleviate the sinfulness of the christian; does nothing to undo the brokenness of a world in pain. And yet somehow, it's a story sets us right with God. There is only one condition. You've got to trust that this crazy system works.

I will finish by preempting those that will point out that the bible tells us the gospel will appear as nothing more than utter stupidity to the non-christian. For example, 1 Corinthians 2:14:

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

This statement is anything but convincing. To prefix a foolish story with a disclaimer that preempts objections of foolishness does nothing to support the authenticity of the story. The idea that God would rest our salvation on a system that is completely nonsensical to anyone who isn't already convinced of its truth is

surely even more absurd than absurdity of the gospel. That, however, is a topic for another post.

Why i am not a christian. Part 2. The watchmaker analogy.

FEBRUARY 11TH, 2008

A common argument for the existence of God is known as the watchmaker analogy. The argument is easy to explain: say you happen to find a watch in the middle of the desert, do you stop and say to yourself, “hmmm, i bet that watch just popped into existence, all by itself”, or do you pick it up, take a look, and say, “that appears to be a complicated piece of machinery, i guess a watchmaker must have made it”. I suspect you’d go with the second option. The implication is that the design of the watch implies a designer. It would therefore seem obvious that if a watch implied a designer, than the entire universe, infinitely more complex than a silly old wristwatch, must also have a designer. And that designer is God.

There is an obvious objection to this argument. Who created God? For if the answer to this question is, “oh, that’s simple, God has always existed”, than surely the same argument can be applied to the universe. Why is it so hard to believe that the universe has always existed without a creator, when to believe in God is to believe that an even more complicated entity than the universe has always existed without a creator? The introduction of God solves nothing. It only serves to make the problem of “first cause” more difficult by substituting the dilemma of creating the universe with the dilemma of creating God.

As a side note, the idea that a universe, not *our* universe, has always existed, is not as strange as it may first appear. A popular proposition in the field of cosmology is that of the “oscillating universe”. The idea is that each universe, including our own, explodes from an infinitely dense singularity, expands (as it is now doing), slows under the pull of gravity, and then collapses, until finally space and time is reborn in a new configuration following a new explosion. Our universe is just one universe from a chain of infinite progression. You may be forgiven for thinking that this idea is even more absurd than the concept of God; except for two points. Firstly, the idea of an oscillating universe is arguably more simplistic, and therefore tenable, than the conception of an infinitely complex theistic God. Secondly, and more importantly, cosmologists arrived at this idea from tangible evidence that suggests that our universe exploded into existence approximately 14 billion years ago, is currently expanding, and thanks to “dark matter”, is slowing to the point that it may one day start to shrink. The point is this: the idea is based on tangible and reproducible measurements resulting from the study of the world in which we live... unlike the concept of God which is based on nothing tangible, nothing reproducible, and certainly nothing measurable.

A companion argument to that of the watchmaker analogy is expressed in the realisation that the laws that govern our universe are perfectly tuned. If we were to adjust the gravitational constant even a smidgen, or slightly increase the mass of any of the subatomic particles, the entire universe as we know it would be a disaster and incapable of supporting life. Therefore, the argument proceeds: there must be a God who twiddled all the dials to set the

conditions just right. Again, there is an obvious objection to this argument: you and i are here, marveling at the finely balanced nature of the universe, not because it was destined by God, but simply because if it were any different, we wouldn't be here at all. Let me repeat that from the opposite perspective. Imagine that the physical attributes of space and time were different, and hence the universe incapable of supporting life - if it were, you and i wouldn't actually exist, and we wouldn't be here suggesting that our life is a miracle that proclaims the existence of God. It is no miracle. It had to be this way or we wouldn't exist. This idea is called the anthropic principle. And as astute readers will have noticed, the anthropic principle is even more convincing when viewed against the framework of an oscillating universe, where each instance of the universe has a unique set of properties, and in the never end cycle of expansion and collapse, every possible permutation of conditions is experienced.

Although these rebuttals of the watchmaker analogy do not for a moment suggest that God does not exist, they do clearly indicate that neither does the watchmaker argument prove that God *does* exist. And without an argument for God, one must assume that he does *not* exist. Non-belief must be the default position. I don't believe in Zeus. I don't believe in Atlas. I don't believe in Apollo. Why not? Because without reason, the default position is non-belief. In a similar manner, i don't believe in the christian God. Why? Again, without reason, the default position must be non-belief. In summary, the arguments here don't "disprove" God; they simply invalidate another set of "reasons" for claiming that he exists. And that is all that is required.

Why i am not a christian. Part

3. Other religions.

MARCH 2ND, 2008

I used to think i was a christian because christianity was the pinnacle of truth. It was only when i travelled overseas, particularly through countries like Egypt and Jordan, that i stopped to think about how significantly we are shaped by our surroundings. I met wonderful people brought up in muslim homes, to muslim parents, attending muslim synagogues, in muslim societies, and guess what? They were muslim. I looked back on my own life. I grew up in a christian home, with christian parents, attended a christian church, hung out with christian friends, all within the context of a christian society. Was it any surprise i was a christian?

If my beliefs were really founded on truth, surely i could convince the muslim world of their folly? Surely i could present a solid argument to all muslims that would persuade them that christianity was the only path to god? We should expect this to be possible if religion were indeed derived from truth. Just like i could explain to another person that the internal angles of a triangle always sum to 180 degrees, or that the brain is the seat of human consciousness, surely i could demonstrate to people of other faiths that my religion is right and theirs wrong? If only this were possible!

Unfortunately, people of all religions typically use the same reasons to justify their beliefs. The problem is this: if two people of

different religions are arriving at different conclusions (e.g. the christian believes in god and the muslim believes in allah), and both use the same arguments to support their mutually exclusive claims (i.e. personal experience, prayer, divine knowledge, etc), then clearly one side must be wrong, as the same set of arguments cannot logically lead to two different conclusions. This of course does not for a moment suggest that both sides are wrong; it is possible that one side is indeed correct. However, the point is this: the arguments cannot be sound, as a sound argument cannot support mutually exclusive outcomes.

There are some people that will point to the near universality of religion throughout human history as if it were clear evidence demonstrating the existence of god. The idea is that we are all born with a god-shaped hole that we are desperately seeking to fill; those that don't turn to god, turn to fame, sex, drugs, and other unhealthy secular pursuits, as a way of satisfying the void within. This idea, as nice as it sounds, is completely without substance. The human drive to understand the numinous and to embrace the mystical does not for a moment suggest that god exists. As with all broad-spectrum human character traits, there is strong reason to suggest that our predilection for religion is rooted in our evolutionary past.

At the heart of the theory of evolution is the principle of "survival of the fittest". In simple terms, any characteristic that enhances the ability of a species to survive (and produce more of their own kind) will be passed on to subsequent generations. With this in mind, explaining why humans appear to thirst for a "higher order" is

somewhat akin to explaining why we have an appendix. All we need to do is provide a reasonable explanation of how the trait aided survival at some point in our evolutionary past. In much the same way that an appendix appears to be a vestigial organ passed on to us from our leaf-eating ancestors, so propensity for religious belief may be the byproduct of a once beneficial characteristic of humanity. What survival benefit, you may ask, could be attributed to a belief in a supernatural deity? Well, there are plenty of candidate ideas, such as the notion that religion assisted primitive peoples deal with the anxieties of human consciousness facilitating the formation of cohesive and mutually supportive groups that were better equipped at living in a harsh and always unpredictable prehistoric climate. In fact, Daniel Dennett addresses this question in his book [Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon](#). Michael Shermer also offers up some ideas in [How We Believe: Science, Skepticism, and the Search for God](#).

I am not suggesting that these ideas are a definitive explanation of why human history records almost a universal belief in god. I'm simply suggesting that there is considerable scope within the bounds of science to provide a rational explanation for the phenomenon. We do not need to invent god to answer this question any more than we need to believe in a supernatural entity to explain why we're all born with an appendix that appears to serve no practical purpose.

In fact, it could be argued that our propensity for belief, coupled with tight familial ties, and our impressionable human nature, is at least a consistent and not altogether surprising explanation for why

we have such universal adoption of religion and yet such regionalised diversity. It certainly appears a rather plausible explanation of why muslims breed muslims, and christians breed christians, when neither can produce any compelling evidence to support their mutually exclusive claims. It certainly appears more compelling to me than the notion that my christian religious experience is valid, but the religious experience of anyone outside of the christian faith is delusional. That's not an argument. That's just naiveté.

Why i am not a christian. Part 4. Prayer.

MARCH 9TH, 2008

I'd say there are four kinds of prayer. Firstly, there are worship prayers, through which people praise God. This is where you tell God that he is one amazing and almighty dude. Then there are prayers of thanksgiving. This is where you thank God for helping you through that stressful job interview, or for introducing you to that pretty girl at the party last night. Thirdly, there are prayers of petition. This is where you say, "God, can i have...". And finally, there are what i call "shouting" prayers. Like the Psalms, these are the sort of prayers through which you vent at God, shake your fist, and demand to know why he left you high and dry.

All four kinds of prayer tell us something about the christian god. They tell us that the christian god is a theistic god. This means, among other things, that he is a god that actually takes a personal interest in our lives and our attitude toward him. Furthermore, three of the four types of prayer tell us that in addition to taking an interest in who we are, God is in fact so involved in our mundane lives that he is willing to intervene in the events of the world - a kind of meddling hand that tweaks outcomes - in response to our personal requests. For if God did not intervene in the world, there would be no point in asking him to arrange matters in our favour, there would be no point in thanking him when we feel our requests have been answered, and there would be little sense in getting angry with him when we feel like he's given us a bad hand. Through the act of prayer, christians are clearly asserting a belief

in a theistic god that is willing to actively involve himself in worldly events.

As a side note, a deistic god - like the “force” in Star Wars - is a transcendent god, devoid of anthropomorphic qualities, that exists without interest or affiliation in the affairs of humanity.

I suspect most christians do not consider science and religion to be in conflict; claiming instead that science and religion are two non-intersecting domains that not only exist in harmony, but somehow, like good mates, lend mutual support to one another. I disagree. I think a belief in prayer makes it perfectly clear that science and religion are in conflict. For as we just discussed, a belief in prayer indicates a belief in an interfering god, a god that doesn't only exist outside of the universe, as some would claim, but a god that is repeatedly reaching into the universe, into our day to day lives, to arrange matters on our behalf. And as soon as you acknowledge the existence of an interfering god, you must admit that the interference can be observed, and at this point, you provide science with the opportunity to study that interference. You can't on the one hand claim that God healed your head cold, aided your memory in your maths exam, and blessed you with a safe holiday, unless you are willing to also claim that these God-enabled outcomes are actually identifiable as the work of God, and therefore open to the scrutiny of science. If the “outcomes” that are claimed to be the work of God cannot be distinguished from natural events, then how can we be assured that they are indeed the work of God? How can i be sure that my head cold went away because God pulled a few tricks, when it could also have been

nature simply running its course (for all head colds eventually disappear)?

A typical christian response to this question, “How do you know God answered your prayer?”, is that they “just know”, or that they can “just tell”. It should come as no surprise that i find this a particularly naive answer. For if God is really interested in responding to our prayers, surely he’s not just going to answer prayers in such a way that we can’t actually tell they’ve been answered. I mean if God is really all-powerful, surely we could expect him to answer some serious prayers, and not just little things like head colds that may go undetected. I mean why is it that God is willing to answer our prayers about our back pain, headache, pimples, and tooth ache, but never the really big prayer requests, like “God, i’ve lost my leg in a bomb blast, can you make it grow back, please?” Unfortunately god never answers these kind of prayers. If you pray hard enough, he’ll heal your cut finger (which will also heal itself), but he’ll never heal your arm when it is cut off from the elbow down in a chain saw accident. It seems God is only willing to answer those prayers that could actually answer themselves naturally. As the saying goes, why won’t God heal amputees? Is he biased? I could offer an explanation: God only appears to answer prayers that are self-limited, because God doesn’t really answer any prayers at all.

A follow up christian response may be that God does not answer the really big prayers, because the bigger the prayer, the more faith you need for it to come true. This fits with the passage in Matthew where Jesus says to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, if

you have faith and do not doubt... you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done". I'm not happy with this response, as it makes God sound like a rather astute business man who is only willing to give you the expensive stuff if you drag together enough "money", in this instance faith, to buy his favour. This doesn't entirely fit with the idea of a merciful and loving god. I mean, seriously, how earnest does the amputee need to be until God considers him worthy of healing?

Finally, you may argue that i've got this all wrong. That God is as much a god of justice as he is a god of mercy. In other words, we've all rebelled against him, and therefore, in keeping with justice, God does not need to pay us any attention at all, and he certainly doesn't need to answer our prayers. You may say that when God does choose to help us, he is actually demonstrating his great mercy. However, this argument still does not explain why God only answers self-limiting prayers. And it certainly doesn't explain why we need to plead to God in prayer before he actually shows us mercy. Especially when we're told that God only answers prayers that are consistent with his will (i.e. what he wants). Why is it that we should have to beg for mercy through prayer just so God can perform what he thinks is right? Does this mean that if i don't plead, God will do what he thinks is wrong? It all gets a bit muddled.

In fact, when you start to look into the topic of prayer, you soon find that it is riddled with problems. For example, if God really loves us so much, and he knows everything that we are going through, why do we even need to ask him for help? Why does a

dying person need to ask God to be cured of cancer? If God already knows they are suffering, and he has the power to do something about it, why does he need us to ask? And what about all those people that don't even know they are dying from cancer, and therefore don't even know they need to ask? It seems rather pathetic that God would just sit around and do nothing until the dying person, even a devout christian, actually asks for help. Could you imagine a parent idly standing by as a car is about to run over their child? Could you imagine a parent not willing to rush in and pick up the child until the child, who may not even be aware of the impending danger, has actually asked for help? We'd label that parental negligence. In fact i'd imagine any parent that allowed their child to come to harm just because the child didn't specifically ask for help, may actually be locked up in the slammer. Isn't it surprising then, that we should be willing to accept this behaviour from a god of pure love?

Then of course, there is the problem of prayer in other religions. I've already written about this topic in a [previous post](#), but the mere fact that people of other religions are convinced that their god answers their prayers, in the same way that christians are convinced that God answers their own, only serves to confirm in my mind that people of all nations have wonderful imaginations. As a christian, to claim that you can tell that God has answered your prayers, but at the same time, to clam that anyone of another faith is wrong to claim that their non-existent god has answered their prayers, well that, in my opinion, is the real delusion.

Why i am not a christian. Part 5. The scale of the claim and the justice of hell.

MARCH 16TH, 2008

In this post i will discuss two topics. Firstly, i will explain why i consider there to be insufficient evidence to support a belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ. I will not attempt to methodically refute all arguments standing in favour of the resurrection, although there are many who have done so; rather, i will seek to expound on why i consider even the most sturdy of arguments an inadequate justification for purporting the reality of the resurrection. Secondly, i will explain why i consider the eternal assignment of non-christians to hell to be irreconcilable with the concept of a just god.

There are numerous statements in the bible, and a handful in non-biblical sources, that report the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Any good christian apologist will explain that the passages in the bible that report the resurrection are strengthened by a principle known as “multiple attestation”. This simply means that certain books in the bible, which were written independently, consistently document the resurrection. Although somewhat true, we do need to be careful when we say that the gospel accounts are truly independent. For example, not all of the material presented in the gospels is uniquely formed: large tracts of the gospels of Matthew and Luke are explicitly based upon the gospel of Mark. Also, it’s important to recognise that the gospels were not

written immediately following the resurrection (the earliest, Mark, was written perhaps 40 years later, whilst John was written up to 60-70 years after the resurrection). I say this not to discredit the writings (for in comparison with the majority of historical records, these timeframes are actually rather impressive), but merely to highlight that the gospels did not introduce “new ideas” as much as they captured the essence of existing oral traditions that were already within heavy circulation amongst christian communities. Let me explain why this is important.

We should expect that early christian communities would develop in disparate locations, and develop perspectives, preferences, and practices that were largely unique to each community (just as we experience in church's today). We should also expect that there would be a degree of pollination across the communities (e.g. through traveling missionaries). Therefore, when two separate communities commit to writing independent gospel accounts, we should not be surprised to see the development of passages peculiar to each community, but also to witness a degree of harmonization across the accounts. Are the writings truly independent? I would say no. They may be written by different authors, and at different times, but the authors have drawn on a common body of understanding, not just explicitly, as Matthew and Luke reference Mark, but implicitly in the way the writings represent an already agreed and respected account of events. To my way of thinking, this is not “real” multiple attestation. As an example, consider this: two unrelated people attend a music concert. They return that night to their respective homes and immediately write independent reviews based on what they

witnessed at the gig. This is multiple attestation. In contrast, if the fans waited a couple of weeks, read reviews of the concert recorded in high profile music magazines, discussed the gig with common friends over internet chat lines, listened to the same music critics dissect the concert on the radio, and then sat down to write their own reviews, would we say they were truly independent? I think not.

With respect to the extra-biblical references to the resurrection, I do not regard these accounts as particularly revealing. An historian is like a reporter. They report what they see and hear in the community. They are not oracles of truth. In recording the occurrence of a particular event, an historian, or other social commentator, is not necessarily lending weight to the notion that the event actually occurred. They are simply recording what others purport to have occurred. An historian may write that Christians claim that Christ rose from the dead. Does this mean that Christ did? No, it just means that Christians thought he did. In this respect, the secular sources speaking of the resurrection tell us nothing new; they simply reinforce a point that the Bible renders perfectly clear.

Another mechanism used by Christians to support the truth claims of the resurrection is the reliability of the Gospel tradition; the almost faultless manner in which the text of the Bible has been passed through the generations. For example, many Christians will point to the reliability of the Gospel tradition; the almost faultless manner in which the text of the Bible has been passed through the generations. Archeological discoveries of tracts of biblical text

have shown uncanny word for word consistency with modern day renderings of the ancient writings, confirming that the scribes tasked with reproducing the bible through the centuries were particularly methodical and trustworthy in the way they transcribed the text. This of course does not mean that accidental and deliberate errors have not crept into the bible. There is an entire branch of study known as textual criticism, that amongst other tasks, seeks to verify the authenticity of the scriptures, highlighting what has changed through the passage of time, what was accidentally added or removed after the fact, what was deliberately embellished, etc. There are some scholars who have become so disillusioned by the errors that have crept into the scriptures that they have abandoned the faith, although this response is somewhat difficult to appreciate, as most of the identified errors have little impact on the broader principles of christian theology. However, what i consider even more important than the reliability of transmission, is the reliability of the first writings. It is one thing to show that we can reproduce the bible word for word as it was originally written (not that we can), but it is quite another to show that the original words were indeed correct. I could write down on a piece of paper today that i have red hair. These words could be faithfully reproduced down the generations for two thousand years without suggesting for a moment that i really have red hair.

There are many other techniques used to show that the claims of the original gospel writers were valid. These techniques seek to demonstrate that the bodily resurrection of Christ is the most plausible explanation of the collected evidence. Examples include: As the resurrection was preached so close to the actual event, why

did non-believers not recover the body of Jesus to demonstrate that he hadn't risen from the dead? Why did non-believers not challenge those who claimed to have witnessed the resurrected Jesus? Why do the gospels record women as the first people to see the resurrected Christ, when society so poorly respected the opinions of women? Surely, if the story was fabricated, the scriptures would record men as witnesses of the risen Christ. Why do the gospels present the apostles as bumbling idiots? Surely if the story was fabricated the followers of Jesus would have been presented in a positive light? If the resurrection is not real, how do we explain the apparent transformation of these bumbling disciples into brave and focused missionaries who were prepared to die for their beliefs? And so on.

It would take far too much time to systematically challenge each of these points in turn (although there are many good books that do); and besides, this is not the primary purpose of this post. The point is, even if it is not possible to offer strong and sure answers to the questions offered above, even if i can't provide a reasonable explanation as to why the disciples underwent a dramatic change of demeanor, are the absence of suitable explanations sufficient to justify a belief that a man died, lay dead for 3 days, and then rose again? This is the key point i want to address.

The evidence required to support a claim must be commensurate with the scale of the claim. I need little direct evidence that my wife went to the gym today. I know from experience that she attends the gym every Sunday. She left the house wearing gym clothes. She came home smelling a little sweaty. I am not aware of any

reason why she would lie to me about going to the gym. Her behaviour is completely consistent with her character, with her past actions, and with the actions of people that attend the gym daily. Even without other evidence (i.e. the clothes, the sweat), the mere fact that she told me she went to the gym is sufficient evidence for me to believe that she did.

Now if Megan told me that instead of going to the gym she went to the moon, i'm afraid i would not take her at her word. Her statement alone is no longer sufficient to justify the magnitude of the claim. Even if she brought home some grey looking dirt in a bottle. Even if a couple of her friends vouched that they saw her blast off into space. Even if she showed me photos. I'm not going to be easily persuaded. I'm going to need more than that. The claim that in an interval of a few hours on a Sunday morning she somehow went to the moon is so extraordinary that i would need truck loads of evidence before i would believe it. And so it is with the resurrection of Christ.

It is one thing to point to a passage in the book of Acts that states that 500 people saw the resurrected Jesus. It is one thing to ask the question of how else are we to explain the transformation of the disciples. Written statements, and suggestive scenarios, may be considered sufficient evidence when trying to ascertain the plausibility of "everyday" historical events. But the resurrection is not an everyday event. It is nothing at all like Megan attending the gym. It is like Megan claiming to travel to the moon. The evidence that is sufficient to support one claim is not sufficient to support the other. The point is this: i need more, lots lots more evidence before

i am willing to accept the writings of people that i do not know; writing 2000 years ago in a context, and for a purpose, of which i cannot be sure; writing in a mythical age, where without the benefit of science, and critical rational thought, all sorts of wild fancy abounded. I just cannot accept that these writings, and these writings alone, are sufficient to support a completely miraculous claim, when i, and arguably no one alive today, has ever witnessed the truly miraculous. The bible is “full” of miraculous events. Isn’t it strange that these miracles no longer occur; that the events vanish into thin air in the context of an educated and critical society? I need more. Much more evidence to support a miraculous claim.

There are some who may argue that the resurrection of Christ is really not that surprising given that Jesus is God and God can do anything. But this is a cyclic argument. For christianity is dependent upon the resurrection. The only reason christians believe that Jesus is God is because of the resurrection. To claim that the resurrection is evidence that Jesus is God, and then to say the resurrection is possible because Jesus was God is to talk in circles.

One of the primary reasons i am no longer a christian is the mismatch of the scale of the claim and the scale of the evidence as it relates to the resurrection. I am sure many christians would like to think that i left the faith either because i was never really a christian to begin with, or because i don’t want to live under the authority of God. This is crap. I have no problem with authority. I have no problem submitting to a real God. My departure from the faith has nothing to do with convenience or self will. I am no longer

a christian for one reason only. I don't see a reason to believe in God. I just don't believe he exists.

This brings me to the topic of hell. To get straight to the point, christians believe that non-christians will spend an eternity without God. What does this mean? It means an eternity without everything that God provides: no love, no compassion, no peace, no refuge, etc. This is hell. It is the antithesis of everything good. Or to use New Testament terms: it is a place of fire and brimstone and gnashing of teeth. It is utter torment. It is hell. And non-christians will be there for all eternity. Some may argue that hell isn't really about punishment. It's a bit like heading to the south pole to attend a party, but since you're not on the guest list the host won't let you in, and you have to sit outside in the freezing cold and slowly die; you're not being punished, you're just dealing with the consequences of not being permitted into the presence of the host. You get the idea: the host is God, the party is heaven, and only christians are on the guest list. It's kind of a nice analogy, but i think it is floored, partly because it doesn't really deal with the notion that God, in his role as a just judge, must enforce justice through punishment of the sinful. And in my unbelief, i am apparently rebelling against God, and on the day of judgement, without Christ by my side, i will be exposed to the full wrath of God and thrown into the lake of burning sulfur.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that i have a problem with this. In particular, i see this as unjust. We are told that God is just. This is why he needs to deal with sin. But the major characteristic of justice is the notion that the payment fits the crime. If i am

sentenced to death after stealing a loaf of bread, you would not say that justice has been served. Similarly, if a court of law sentenced Hitler to four weeks of community service for his role in the Holocaust, you'd say that justice had been subverted. So even if we should argue that I have spent a lifetime in rebellion against God, is eternal punishment a just response? Not 100 years, not a thousand, not a million billion trillion, but an eternity of perfect suffering for a mere 70-80 years of sinfulness. It sounds awfully like chopping off my head for stealing a loaf of bread, only infinitely worse. This is not justice.

You may argue that because God is perfect, that any transgression against him is infinitely great, and therefore reason enough for an eternity of punishment. And yet I'm not convinced that this approach is valid. For I consider justice to center on the nature of the crime, not on the nature of the offended party. Should a criminal receive a greater punishment for murdering an "important" person than a nobody? We would say this is wrong. The crime is murder, and the criminal should be punished independently of the status of the murdered. In a similar vein, I'd argue that my crime toward God is ignorance at worst. And if I should be punished, the nature of the punishment should be based upon the nature of the crime, not on the nature of God. Anyway, what is the root cause of my apparent sinfulness? I don't follow God because I don't believe there is sufficient evidence to warrant belief in his existence. Why should I be punished for all eternity because God hasn't provided evidence commensurate with the claim that he came to Earth, died, and rose from the dead? Why should I be punished if he hasn't made his presence clear? I mean,

what kind of god would punish a person, and punish them for all eternity for failing to be convinced of the miraculous on insufficient evidence? It isn't right. And it's just another reason why i am not a christian.

Why i am not a christian. Part 6. The problem of suffering.

MARCH 29TH, 2008

The world is groaning under the weight of incomprehensible suffering. The extent of this suffering is not always obvious. It is easy to grow comfortable; to consider our present state of existence, however luxuriant, as normal, even necessary; to define suffering as the degradation of the quality of life that we have come to expect, however inconsequential the loss. A person forced to downsize to a one-bedroom flat may cry poor; another, offered a roof and a pillow after years of living rough, may cry for joy. Our perceptions of sufficiency, of necessity, are significantly shaped by our expectations of what we deserve, which in turn is shaped by the experiences we have known. And yet, not all suffering is relative. If we dare to look beyond our own immediate circumstance we will only too quickly confront the realities of objective and universal suffering.

The following is a snapshot from the [World Health Organization](#) of global maternal suffering in 2005:

- 529,000 women in the developing world die during pregnancy and childbirth each year.
- The risk of death during pregnancy and childbirth is 1 in 16 in Africa.
- More than 50% of all child deaths occur in just 6 countries.
- 2.2 million women with HIV/AIDS give birth each year.
- 3.3 million children are stillborn each year.
- 46 million children are aborted each year.

And then there is cancer; war; famine; disease; natural disasters; mental, physical, and sexual abuse. We could fill books and libraries with numbers and words that depict a world in pain. And yet at the end of the day these are just scribbles on paper. The statistics do little to portray the damage, the immense personal trauma, that befalls those that suffer.

An obvious question follows: How is this possible? How can a God that is all knowledgeable, all-powerful, and all loving, allow us to suffer? This dilemma is referred to as the problem of evil or the problem of suffering.

If God knows everything, he knows our present suffering, and even before he created us, he knew of the suffering that we would endure. If God is all-powerful, he could end our suffering, or he could have created us in a way that avoided suffering. And if God is all loving, he would want to keep us from suffering. The mere presence of suffering in the world suggests that at least one, and possibly all, of these claims about God are invalid.

The attempts made by Christians to respond to the problem of suffering are referred to as theodicies. Perhaps the most popular theodicy is that of "free will"; the idea that God did not want us to be robots, he wanted us to have freedom, the freedom to choose or reject him, and so he gave us free will, and an unavoidable consequence of free will is that we hurt one another and hurt ourselves.

Unfortunately, this argument misunderstands the notion of free will. No one has complete free will. Sure, i can make a choice to sit or to stand, to drink water or beer, but i am not free to choose to hover. As much as i would like to hover two feet above the floor, i cannot. I cannot go without sleep for a month, run at the speed of sound, or travel backwards through time. There is much that i am not free to do, but i still consider myself to have free will. It would seem that God has created us with a subset of freedoms (i.e. i can run but i cannot fly). The point is, i could still have the freedom to love God, the freedom to choose him or reject him, without necessarily needing the freedom to inflict pain on my fellow humans. Why didn't God leave off the freedom to hurt? For those of you not convinced by the argument, consider this: christians believe that they will freely worship God in heaven, yet they also believe that there will be no suffering in heaven. This clearly suggests that free will and suffering are not contingent; i can have one without the other. If this is possible in heaven, then why not on Earth? Finally, the argument of free will makes no attempt to explain the suffering that is experienced as a result of natural disasters: fire, flood, drought, earthquake, tornado, tsunami... how does my freedom to choose God explain why nearly 250,000 people died in the boxing day tsunami?

You may say that we deserve suffering. You may argue that natural disasters are actually a result of our rejection of God. In fact much of the old testament takes this perspective. When Israel followed God they prospered. When they turned their back on God they suffered. And yet the principle that punishment follows sin is clearly unsustainable. For our common experience tells us that

suffering is not distributed fairly. Evil people do not always suffer in accordance with their deeds, nor are the loyal always blessed. Are we to suggest that the incredibly high infant mortality rate in Africa indicates that Africans are more deserving of punishment than Australians? That is absurd. Furthermore, if pain and suffering were really a direct result of God punishing us for our sinfulness, then arguably we should not try to help those in pain, for to do so would be to undermine God's will. This is clearly absurd.

Another common theodicy is that suffering is good for us. To paraphrase a statement from C.S. Lewis: suffering is like the chisel blows of a sculpture forming a beautiful work of art. The pain refines us. It makes us better people. This argument sounds rather poetic, but try explaining that to the 3.3 million still born children each year, or the 100,000 newborn babies that die of malaria. Where is the opportunity for refinement in arbitrary infant death?

You might argue that although we suffer in this life, there will come a time when God will wipe away the tears of the faithful; a time when he will banish all sickness and pain. And yet, even if true, this argument does nothing to explain present suffering. Imagine if I saw you by the side of the road, injured, bleeding, and barely conscious, only to say, hey, I'll be passing through here again early next week, if you're still here, I'll stop and help you out. My promise of future compassion does nothing to address your present pain. My decision to delay assistance is not commendable, or even acceptable; it is pure evil. Shouldn't we consider God's behaviour in similar terms?

Although there are many other arguments raised against the problem of suffering, i'll end this post with the typical christian "fall back" position: it's all a mystery. In other words, yes, suffering sucks, and yes, i cannot understand it, but who am i to understand the enormous mind of God? We just need to trust him. For he loves us perfectly and we must be humble enough to admit that his plans for our lives are beyond our fickle minds. We must trust that he is constantly working in our lives to bring out the best in us. But if God is simply one big mystery; if we cannot understand his plans, his purpose, and his methods, then how can we possibly say that God is good? How can we justify his love for us? Our daily experience suggests that he does not love us. How do we know the invisible love of God so clearly and yet explain away the ever-visible reality of wanton suffering as just a wonderful mystery? I guess there is no limit to the fanciful explanations used to maintain the belief in an image of God that is at complete odds with our daily experience.

So which is it? Is God not all knowledgeable? Not all powerful? Or does he really want us to suffer? There is only one other explanation: he doesn't exist.

Why i am not a christian. Part 7. The summary.

APRIL 13TH, 2008

In this series i have discussed a number of the reasons why i am no longer a christian. I have not attempted to write a definitive work. I simply wanted to provide an overview of the key obstacles that stand in the way of my belief in God.

In the [first post](#) i talked about the absurdity of the gospel. It simply does not make sense that the punishment of an innocent party in lieu of the guilty serves to redeem the guilty. I simply do not understand how the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ absolves my own selfish rebellion. The punishment of the righteous for crimes they did not commit is not justice. It is nonsensical. We are to believe that God's punishment of himself, to satisfy his own desire for justice, somehow makes us worthy of knowing him. I challenge anyone to rationally explain how this works.

I argued that although "free will" allows us to make choices about our day to day actions, we do not ultimately have the freedom to choose a sinless life; although specific acts of sin are preventable, the very concept of sin is not. As such, it can be argued that God has made us in such a way that sin, and hence the fall of mankind, was completely unavoidable. And yet, through the punishment that ensued the inescapable entrance of original sin, we suffer for that which we could not and cannot control. The world is bursting at the seams under the weight of God's punishment. Every day we suffer

the burden of disease and dysfunction that are the consequences of an insurrection that we were powerless to prevent. I do not believe that God's plan to save us makes a wrong right. God cannot be lauded for rescuing us from death when he is responsible for the sin that leads to death.

Finally, i touched upon the negativity of christian theology; a theology that proclaims the idea that God is perfect and we are worthless. This is not a message that builds people up. It is not a message that rehabilitates. It reminds me of the infamous scientology survey: on approaching the church of scientology you will be asked to complete an innocuous questionnaire. Upon review you are told that your answers testify to your almost complete inner corruption. Fortunately you came to the right place; only "they" know how to make you right. With your sense of self worth diminished, and your confidence in tatters, you sign up. Christianity is no different. What more encouragement do you need to join the fold then to be told you will burn in hell for all eternity if you do not follow Christ?

In the [second post](#) i challenged the watchmaker analogy (the argument that claims that if the design of a watch implies a designer, it would therefore seem obvious that the entire universe, infinitely more complex than a silly old wristwatch, must also have a designer, and that designer is God).

I need to point out that the weakness of this particular argument is not an actual reason why i am not a christian. The argument is just

an example of an almost countless number of nuanced philosophical propositions that seek to prove the existence of God. These arguments, and the counter arguments, and the counter countered arguments, are typically nothing more than confused rhetoric tripped up on definitions and leaky premises that ultimately do nothing to provide us with any certainty on the existence of God. With that said, i couldn't pass up the opportunity to provide my own rebuttal of the watchmaker analogy.

I attempted to show that the introduction of God to explain the existence of a complicated entity (i.e. our universe), only gives rise to an even more complicated entity (i.e. God) that needs explanation. If it's possible to assert that God has always existed and doesn't need to be created then i cannot understand why (philosophically at least) the universe could not always have existed.

I then proceeded to explain how science offers an idea in support of an ever-existent universe, or should i say, never ending sequence of oscillating universes. This is not to say that science has proposed anything more than just an idea; however, the mere recognition of reasonable alternative explanations for the creation of the universe is sufficient to relegate the watchmaker analogy to just another "idea" and not a justifiable "motive" for belief. In other words, although arguments, such as an oscillating universe, or the anthropic principle, do not disprove God, they do discredit any attempt by christians to prove the existence of God. And without positive proof, i argue that we need to fall back to a default position of non-belief. As a side note, there is one clear difference between

the theological claims of creation and scientific claims: the latter is based on tangible and reproducible measurements resulting from the study of the world in which we live; unlike the former which is based on nothing tangible, nothing reproducible, and certainly nothing measurable.

In the [third post](#) i discuss the idea that people of all religions typically use the same reasons to justify their beliefs. It should be clear that if two people of different religions are arriving at different conclusions about the nature of God, and both use the same arguments to support these mutually exclusive claims (i.e. personal experience, prayer, divine knowledge, etc), then the arguments cannot be sound, as a sound argument cannot support mutually exclusive outcomes.

I also argued that the apparent universality of religion (i.e. a persistent belief in the concept of God across time and culture) does not demonstrate the existence of God. I explained that the human drive to understand the numinous and to embrace the mystical does not for a moment suggest that God exists, and as with all broad spectrum human character traits, there is strong reason to suggest that our predilection for religion is rooted in our evolutionary past.

In [part 4](#) of the series i note that through the act of prayer christians are clearly asserting a belief in a theistic god that is willing to actively involve himself in worldly events. It is hopefully clear that a belief in an interventionist god demands that science and religion are in conflict. For as soon as you acknowledge the

existence of an interfering god, you must admit that the interference can be observed, and at this point, you provide science with the opportunity to study that interference.

I proceed to highlight a number of issues relating to prayer including why we even need to ask God for relief from suffering and hardship if he is a loving God and already knows our thoughts.

However, the pinnacle argument against prayer is that we can never actually tell if our prayers are answered. If we observe no results, we can claim that our prayer wasn't consistent with God's will. If we observe some result, but not what we expected, we can claim that God knows better than we do, and is working out his divine purpose in our lives. And finally, if we observe the results we expect, we can claim whole heartedly that God has indeed responded to our petitions, although we actually have no way of demonstrating that the apparent response was not sheer coincidence; a case of the world just working itself out. For this is the problem: all answered prayer is self-limiting; the only prayers that are ever "answered" are those that seek outcomes that could occur by natural means. For example, we get the promotion at work, our sick friend gets better, etc, but you will never see an amputee re-grow a missing limb. A truly miraculous response to prayer, which would clearly put the nail in the coffin of atheism, is nowhere to be seen.

In the [fifth post](#) i discuss two topics. Firstly, i explain why i consider there to be insufficient evidence to support a belief in the bodily

resurrection of Christ. Secondly, i explain why i consider the eternal assignment of non-christians to hell to be irreconcilable with the concept of a just god.

I challenge the idea that many books of the bible were really written independently (a state referred to as multiple attestation). They may be written by different authors, and at different times, but the authors have drawn on a common body of understanding, not just explicitly, as Matthew and Luke reference Mark, but implicitly in the way the writings represent an already agreed and respected account of events.

With respect to the extra-biblical references to the resurrection, i do not regard these accounts as particularly revealing. An historian is like a reporter. They report what they see and hear in the community. They are not oracles of truth. In recording the occurrence of a particular event, an historian, or other social commentator, is not necessarily lending weight to the notion that the event actually occurred. They are simply recording what others purport to have occurred.

I then proceed to discuss the greatest obstacle i have when it comes to accepting the resurrection of Christ. The evidence available in support of the resurrection is not sufficient to justify acceptance of the miraculous. Let me generalize: the evidence provided to a claim must be commensurate with the scale of the claim. I would not be willing to accept the word of my wife or her friends if she claimed that she travelled to the moon. I'd need more than verbal or written confirmation before i was willing to accept

the truly miraculous. The resurrection is not an everyday event, and everyday evidence is not sufficient. I need substantially more evidence before i am willing to accept the writings of people that i do not know; writing 2000 years ago in a context, and for a purpose, of which i cannot be sure; writing in a mythical age, where without the benefit of science, and critical rational thought, all sorts of wild fancy abounded. I just cannot accept that these writings, and these writings alone, are sufficient to support a completely miraculous claim, when i, and arguably no one alive today, has ever witnessed the truly miraculous. The bible is “full” of miraculous events. Isn’t it strange that these miracles no longer occur; that the events vanish into thin air in the context of an educated and critical society?

In the second thread of this article i propose that eternal judgement in hell is an unjust punishment for a lifetime of rebellion against God. The key principle of justice is the notion that the payment fits the crime. Eternal torment in the flames of hell, with no opportunity for respite or escape, is anything but justice.

Anyway, what is the root cause of my apparent sinfulness? I don’t follow God because i don’t believe there is sufficient evidence to warrant belief in his existence. Why should i be punished for all eternity because God hasn’t provided evidence commensurate with the claim that he came to Earth, died, and rose from the dead? Why should i be punished if he hasn’t made his presence clear? I mean, what kind of god would punish a person, and punish them for all eternity for failing to be convinced of the miraculous on insufficient evidence? It isn’t right.

In the [sixth](#) and final post in the series i turn to the problem of suffering: How can a god that is all knowledgeable, all powerful, and all loving, allow us to suffer?

If God knows everything, he knows our present suffering, and even before he created us, he knew of the suffering that we would endure. If God is all powerful, he could end our suffering, or he could have created us in a way that avoided suffering. And if God is all loving, he would want to keep us from suffering. The mere presence of suffering in the world suggests that at least one, and possibly all, of these claims about God are invalid.

The most popular argument against the problem of suffering is free will (the notion that suffering is an unavoidable consequence of humans making bad choices). I explained that no one has complete free will (i can stand, but not fly), and that my limitations do not prevent me from worshipping God. The point is, i could still have the freedom to love God, the freedom to choose him or reject him, without necessarily needing the freedom to inflict pain on my fellow humans. Why didn't God leave off the freedom to hurt?

I suggested the idea that we deserve suffering is abhorrent. For our common experience tells us that suffering is not distributed fairly. Evil people do not always suffer in accordance with their deeds, nor are the loyal always blessed. Are we to suggest that the incredibly high infant mortality rate in Africa indicates that Africans are more deserving of punishment than Australians? That is absurd. Furthermore, if pain and suffering were really a direct

result of God punishing us for our sinfulness, then arguably we should not try to help those in pain, for to do so would be to undermine God's will. This is clearly absurd.

The argument that suffering is good for us is equally weak - it does nothing to explain the 3.3 million still born children each year, or the 100,000 new born babies that die of malaria.

I argued that delayed deliverance (the idea that God will one day wipe away all our tears and end suffering; the promise of future compassion) does nothing to relieve my current pain, and only serves to point to God as the essence of evil. To be able to help now, but to choose not to, is anything but just or merciful.

Finally, i concluded that the fall back position that God is a mystery is nothing but wishful thinking. If God is simply one big mystery; if we cannot understand his plans, his purpose, and his methods, then how can we possibly say that God is good? How can we justify his love for us? Our daily experience suggests that he does not love us. How do we know the invisible love of God so clearly and yet explain away the ever visible reality of wanton suffering as just a wonderful mystery?

And so ends this series.

Are these the best arguments i can offer for disbelief in God? In some ways, this is not the point. For i believe that it is not the responsibility of the non-believer to disprove the beliefs of the faithful. I will believe in something if i see a reason to believe. In

the absence of a reason i will not believe. I do not believe that Atlas or Zeus or Mickey Mouse, created and sustain the universe simply because i see no compelling reason to accept this conclusion. Likewise, i do not believe in the notion of any God, for i do not see any reason to alter my default position of non-belief. I see no active presence of any God in this world. I am told that God wants me to enter into a relationship with him more than anything... so much so that his son died on the cross to make that possible. And yet no earnest plea, no heartfelt desire to seek his presence, will ever yield his appearance. Could the absence of evidence be any more obvious? There is only one response that makes sense of the dilemma: God does not exist.