

# **The Implausibility and Low Explanatory Power of the Resurrection Hypothesis**

## **—With a Rejoinder to Stephen T. Davis**

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**Abstract:** *We respond to Stephen T. Davis’ criticism of our earlier essay, “Assessing the Resurrection Hypothesis.” We argue that the Standard Model of physics is relevant and decisive in establishing the implausibility and low explanatory power of the Resurrection hypothesis. We also argue that the laws of physics have entailments regarding God and the supernatural and, against Alvin Plantinga, that these same laws lack the proviso “no agent supernaturally interferes.” Finally, we offer Bayesian arguments for the Legend hypothesis and against the Resurrection hypothesis.*

**Keywords:** Resurrection hypothesis, Legend hypothesis, Inference to the Best Explanation, Criteria of Adequacy, Explanatory Power, Explanatory Scope, Jesus, Christianity, Standard Model, Apologetics, William Lane Craig, Stephen T. Davis, Alvin Plantinga

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### **Outline**

- 1.0 Review of Davis’ “Craig on the Resurrection: A Defense”
- 2.0 The Implausibility of the Resurrection Hypothesis *R*
  - 2.1 The Laws of Physics have Entailments Regarding the Supernatural
  - 2.2 *R* is Inconsistent with *SM*
  - 2.3 The Scientific Evidence that *R* is Inconsistent with *SM*
  - 2.4 The Laws of *SM* Lack the Supernatural Non-Interference Proviso *P*
  - 2.5 What *SM* Tells us about God—*SM* and Divine Omnipotence
- 3.0 The Low Explanatory Scope and Power of *R*
- 4.0 Two Additional Problems for the Resurrection Hypothesis *R*
  - 4.1 The Common Error of All Resurrectionists
  - 4.2 The Superiority of the Legend Hypothesis

## Introduction

FIRST, WE WISH TO thank Darren Slade and SHERM journal for hosting this exchange with Dr. Stephen Davis.<sup>1</sup> We are also grateful to Davis for responding to our article, “Assessing the Resurrection Hypothesis: Problems with Craig’s Inference to the Best Explanation” (henceforth, “Assessing”)<sup>2</sup> in his rebuttal article, “Craig on the Resurrection: A Defense” (henceforth, “Defense”).<sup>3</sup> Some readers may recall that twenty years ago, Davis debated the historicity of the Resurrection with Michael Martin in the journal *Philo*. Other prominent Christian philosophers—most notably William Lane Craig, Richard Swinburne, and Timothy and Lydia McGrew—have presented increasingly sophisticated arguments in defense of the Resurrection hypothesis. We want to acknowledge Davis’ own lifelong contribution—in numerous books and articles—to a topic that all Christians regard as a matter of priority and urgency.

It is therefore surprising that in his “Defense,” Davis offers such a weak response. His article purports to defend an *inference to the best explanation*, yet what is most conspicuously absent is any statement, schema, or discussion of the logic of explanatory arguments. It remains unclear *how* the Resurrection hypothesis (*R*) is supported by or explains the evidence (*E*). Davis thus fails to justify or lend any new support to his long-standing position, repeated here, that Christians are “within their intellectual rights” in believing that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead or even the weaker claim that the Resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation of the evidence.<sup>4</sup> Our conclusion in “Assessing” stands: *R*, as defined by Craig, is strongly disconfirmed by the relevant historical and scientific evidence—even allowing (for the sake of argument) the existence of God and the full range of New Testament evidence adduced by Craig. A fair comparative assessment will show that *any*

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<sup>1</sup> We also thank Cypress College and Skyline College for their support.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Greg Cavin and Carlos A. Colombetti, “Assessing the Resurrection Hypothesis: Problems with Craig’s Inference to the Best Explanation,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 205–28, [dx.doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v11i2.2836](https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v11i2.2836).

<sup>3</sup> Stephen T. Davis, “Craig on the Resurrection: A Defense,” *Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 28–35, <https://doi.org/10.33929/sherm.2020.vol2.no1.03>.

<sup>4</sup> See Stephen T. Davis, “Is It Possible to Know that Jesus was Raised from the Dead?,” *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (April 1984): 147–59, [doi.org/10.5840/faithphil19841226](https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil19841226).

evidence of the differences (and similarities) in the New Testament Easter traditions. The implication of this conclusion for the historical argument for the Resurrection is clear: the New Testament evidence for *R* is largely bogus and thus—even apart from *SM*—the epistemic probability of *R* is quite low.

### **Conclusion**

We have shown through multiple arguments that Davis, Craig, Habermas, Licona, the McGrews and other Christian apologists are wrong in saying that they are within their rights to believe *R*, or that *R* is probable, or even that *R* is the best explanation of the evidence. We have established that *R* has an exceedingly low plausibility—even if God exists. We did so by justifying the relevance of the Standard Model (*SM*) to the assessment of *R* and showing that *R* is inconsistent with *SM* as part of *NNT* because the equations of *SM* have only natural inputs and natural outputs. We also provided four independent arguments against the claim—made by apologists from C. S. Lewis to Alvin Plantinga—that the laws of nature are prefixed with a supernatural non-interference proviso. Contrary to the “common sense” view of believers and skeptics alike, we showed that *R* cannot explain the resurrection appearances of Jesus to the witnesses. For the body of the Risen Jesus—being a metaphysically transformed *soma pneumatikon*—is not *physical* as this term is defined in *SM* and so cannot be seen, heard, or otherwise detected by witnesses. It is comprised, not of the ordinary atoms of *SM* but, rather, of some mysterious “schmatoms” that according to *SM* cannot interact with the physical world. In addition, we presented a Bayesian argument against *R* defined in its *minimal* sense and a Bayesian argument sketch for the superiority of the Legend hypothesis. We thus reaffirm our statement in “Assessing” that “almost any naturalistic hypothesis is superior to the hypothesis that God supernaturally raised Jesus from the dead.” The conclusion that the Resurrection hypothesis is refuted has profound theological significance: just as God, if he exists, allows massive and randomly distributed suffering to befall sentient beings, so too does he allow massive deception to occur regarding matters of great importance.

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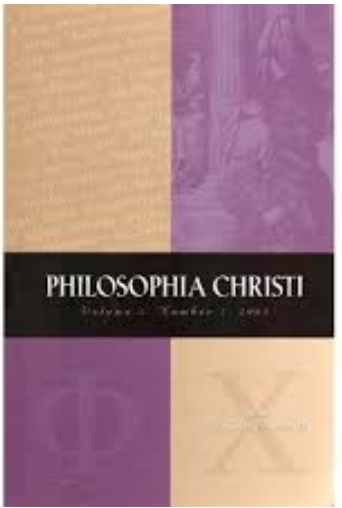
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