

## **Addendum to *Getting at Jesus: A Comprehensive Critique of Neo-Atheist Nonsense about the Jesus of History* (Wipf and Stock, 2019) – 26<sup>th</sup> August 2019.**

The last chapter of *Getting at Jesus: A Comprehensive Critique of Neo-Atheist Nonsense about the Jesus of History* (Wipf and Stock, 2019) critically assessed a wide range of alternative explanations for the historical evidence relevant to the question of Jesus' purported resurrection from the dead, ranging from the mundane to the paranormal and the frankly supernatural. After publication, I realized that despite my best efforts, there was an alternative explanation on the supernatural end of the spectrum that I'd overlooked. I'm grateful to Peter Harris for comments that led me to revise this addendum.

### **The Deceptive Demon or Daemon Hypotheses**

One might hope to avoid the theistic resurrection hypothesis by suggesting that a supernatural being besides God either caused the disciples to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, or caused Jesus to be raised from the dead. Technically, this wouldn't be a *resurrection* with a 'spiritual body' wholly in tune with the Spirit of God (see 1 Corinthians 15:35-49), but some kind of a return from the dead sufficient to cause the disciples, and even Jesus himself, to conclude that Jesus had been *resurrected* by God.

Such deception hypotheses avoid the theistic resurrection hypothesis at the expense of embracing the supernatural as a category, and will therefore be of little comfort to metaphysical naturalists. Indeed, once the supernatural is admitted into our pool of live explanatory options, the theistic resurrection hypothesis looks like the best, most straight forward interpretation of the relevant historical data according to the standard criteria of explanation.

### **The Deceptive Demon Hypothesis: Did Satan have a cunning plan?**

The Jewish Pharisees accepted that Jesus exorcised demons, but perversely attributed these good deeds to his being in league with the 'prince of demons' rather than his being empowered by 'the finger of God' (see Mark 3:22, Matthew 12:24 & Luke 11:15-20). The Pharisees' accusation appears to have made the *ad hoc* assumption that Satan had lost authority over his now divided 'house' (see Mark 3:23-26 & Luke 11:17-18). Their accusation also committed the fallacy of self-exception, given the existence of the Pharisee's own exorcists (see Luke 11:19).

Taking inspiration from the Pharisees' 'it was Satan, not God' approach, we might conjecture that Satan made it *appear* that Jesus exorcised demons and worked miracles 'by the finger of God', and then made it *appear* that he was resurrected by the same Divine power. But why would Satan (or any other demon) be interested in repeatedly driving out demons, healing the sick, and so forth? Why provide Jesus with such apparent validation? After all, Jesus' teaching leads people towards doing good rather than evil and towards obeying God rather than Satan. The same point would apply to the hypothesis that Jesus was either raised by Satan, or that Satan made it *appear* that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. Why would Satan do it? One might suppose he wanted to deceive people into adulterating Judaism with Christo-centric additions. However, this requires us to believe that Satan either didn't mind, or didn't foresee (and couldn't prevent) his cunning plan giving birth to a Christo-centric variant of Jewish mono-theism that would draw Gentiles away from the evils of pagan worship and which would thereby spread mono-theism all over the world. Either way, this *complex* conjecture is *ad hoc* and *lacks plausibility*.

Furthermore, the demonic deception hypothesis either involves Jesus in a deliberate conspiracy to deceive, or paints him as having been deluded into accepting that he was the *resurrected, divine (and thus sinless)* ‘Son of Man’. Not only are both scenarios *ad hoc*, but both scenarios are *disconfirmed* by the available evidence pertaining to Jesus’ character. They are also *disconfirmed* by several other lines of evidence (e.g. Jesus’ record of miraculous deeds, his fulfilment of messianic prophecy, contemporary religious experience focused upon Jesus) that support a specifically *Christian* theism (unless one is prepared to make the daemon hypothesis *even more complex and ad hoc* by extending it to explain away this disconfirming evidence as well).

Finally, whether we examine biblical or contemporary reports of demonic activity, such activity doesn’t seem to provide a causally adequate account either for Jesus’ rising or appearing to rise from the dead. Neither does it seem to provide a causally adequate account for the long string of deceptive miracles that would be needed to explain away all the other relevant evidence (see Exodus 8:16-19, Deuteronomy 32:39, 1 Samuel 2:6, Isaiah 41:22-23 & John 10:21). Indeed, within the biblical tradition, God keeps Satan on a short leash (see Job 1:8-12). Hence the hypothesis lacks *explanatory power*.

In short, the demonic deception hypothesis is *complex, ad hoc*, is either *disconfirmed* or even more *complex and ad hoc*, and is lacking in both *plausibility* and *explanatory power*.

### **The Deceptive Daemon Hypotheses**

Whether one takes inspiration from biblical demonology, polytheistic religious notions of trickster gods, or from some sort of ‘finite godism’ (à la Plato’s *Demiurge*), one might seek to avoid the theistic resurrection hypothesis by positing the existence of some non-biblical ‘finite’ supernatural being (or beings) conveniently endowed with the motive, means and opportunity to either deceive people into believing that Jesus was resurrected, or to actually raise (and so appear to *resurrect*) Jesus from the dead. Let us stretch the ancient Greek term for a lesser deity or spirit guide somewhat by calling this ‘The deceptive daemon hypothesis’.

In the absence of an adequate apologetic for the existence of a ‘daemon’ (e.g. an adequate apologetic for polytheism, a worldview that cuts against Occam’s Razor), such a hypothesis is of course *entirely ad hoc*. Indeed, one might well conclude, in light of the internal problems with polytheism and finite godism, and the positive case that can be made for mono-theism, that insofar as the daemonic hypothesis seeks to make itself somewhat less *ad hoc* by association with these worldviews, it is also *disconfirmed*.

Like the demonic deception hypothesis, any daemonic deception hypothesis either involves Jesus in a deliberate conspiracy to deceive, or paints him as having been deluded. Both scenarios are *ad hoc*. Both scenarios are *disconfirmed* by the available evidence pertaining to Jesus’ character, and by several other lines of evidence (e.g. Jesus’ record of miraculous deeds, etc.) that support a specifically *Christian* theism, unless one makes the daemon hypothesis *more ad hoc* (and more *complex*) by extending it to explain away this disconfirming evidence as well.

Finally, anyone willing to accept the deceptive daemon hypothesis in order to avoid believing in the theistic resurrection hypothesis will find themselves inhabiting French philosopher Rene Descartes’ philosophical thought experiment about a deceptive demon, only without Descartes’ recourse to God as the ultimate guarantor of empirical knowledge (see: *The*

*Meditations*). To posit a deceptive daemon adequate to the job at hand is to posit an undercutting defeater for any and all empirical inquiry, for it is *ad hoc* to restrict the deceptive activity of this hypothetical daemon to matters pertaining to Christianity.

In sum, the ‘deceptive daemon hypothesis’ is *ad hoc*, either *disconfirmed* or more *ad hoc* (*and more complex*), and *ends up undermining our commitment to empirical, scientific enquiry*. Hence, neither the deceptive demon hypothesis, nor the deceptive daemon hypothesis, outperforms the theistic resurrection hypothesis.

### **Recommended Resources**

Eitan Bar, ‘Did Jesus Use Magic And Sorcery?’ [www.oneforisrael.org/bible-based-teaching-from-israel/did-jesus-use-magic-and-sorcery/](http://www.oneforisrael.org/bible-based-teaching-from-israel/did-jesus-use-magic-and-sorcery/)

Eric Manning, ‘No, Jesus could not have been raised supernaturally by any other being but God’ <https://isjesusalive.com/no-jesus-could-not-have-been-raised-supernaturally-by-any-other-being-but-god/>

Peter S. Williams, ‘Do Angels and Demons Exist?’ [www.bethinking.org/christian-beliefs/do-angels-really-exist](http://www.bethinking.org/christian-beliefs/do-angels-really-exist)

Kirsten R. Birkett, *Spells, Sorcerers and Spirits: Magic and the Occult in the Bible* (Latimer, 2015)

Rene Descartes, *Discourse On Method* and *The Meditations* (Tans. F.E. Sutcliffe; Penguin, 1968)

Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, second edition (Backer, 2013), chapters 12 & 13.  
Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth Is God’s Truth* (IVP, 1977)

Ian Markham, *Truth And The Reality Of God: An Essay in Natural Theology* (T&T Clark, 1998)

Peter S. Williams, *Understanding Jesus: Five Ways to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Paternoster, 2011)