

**Name:** Glenn B. Siniscalchi

**Cell Phone:** 412-390-5374

**Address:** 3672 Myrtle Ave. 2d FL. Pittsburgh, PA 15234

**Position:** PhD Student in Systematic Theology at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA

**Email:** [gbsiniscalchi@yahoo.com](mailto:gbsiniscalchi@yahoo.com), [siniscalchig@duq.edu](mailto:siniscalchig@duq.edu)

**Title:** “Resurrecting Jesus and Critical Historiography: William Lane Craig and Dale Allison in Dialogue”

**Why This Article Will Contribute to the Philosophical Notes Section (or article section) of *Philosophia Christi*:** After reading the articles written in response to Dale Allison’s book in the 2008 winter edition of *Philosophia Christi* (Craig, Davis, and Habermas’s articles), I felt as if a further response is still needed to clarify Craig’s historiography in light of Allison’s skepticism. I believe that avid followers of the debate surrounding the resurrection of Jesus will benefit from my reading my article because it demonstrates that Craig’s overall case for the resurrection is still fruitful and able to withstand Allison’s critiques.

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**Abstract:** Dale Allison's argument against the hard apologist's case for Jesus's resurrection in *Resurrecting Jesus* and a recent article in *Philosophia Christi* is compatible with William Lane Craig's soft apologetic argument which insists that the resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation of the evidence. Despite Craig's relative silence about what is entailed by soft apologetics, some of Allison's historiographical challenges are successful in exposing a variety of possibilities that are compatible with Craig's cumulative case argument for Jesus's resurrection, showing its limitations for apologetics in general. However, Allison is ultimately mistaken to conclude that soft apologists like Craig cannot convincingly argue that the resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation of the evidence. I will demonstrate that the soft apologist's contention that the resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation of the evidence is not a dogmatic claim, but is more epistemological in scope.

**Key Terms:** William Lane Craig, Dale Allison, Resurrection of Jesus, Historiography and the Resurrection

From the earliest days of the Christian movement, skeptics have sought to challenge belief in Jesus's resurrection. Although Dale Allison personally believes that God raised Jesus from the dead, he has recently launched a veritable case against the historian's justification for believing in the superiority of the resurrection hypothesis over its competing causal theories.<sup>1</sup> William Lane Craig, an eminent apologist, states: "I have never seen a more persuasive case for scepticism about the historicity of Jesus's resurrection than Allison's presentation of the arguments. He is far more persuasive than Crossan, Lüdemann, Goulder and the rest who deny the historicity of Jesus' resurrection."<sup>2</sup>

I submit that Craig's justification of the rationality of the resurrection hypothesis staves off Allison's skepticism if the former is understood as a soft apologist.<sup>3</sup> Allison's arguments are compatible with Craig's case despite the latter's relative silence about the implications of soft apologetics. What is sorely needed in this debate is some clarification as to what soft apologetics allows for in order to appease Allison's doubts about Craig's overall case.<sup>4</sup> I believe that when these clarifications are made, they will show that Allison is ultimately mistaken to conclude that apologists like Craig are wrong to claim that the resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation of the evidence. But Allison's skepticism exposes a variety of possibilities that are compatible with their case.

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<sup>1</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and its Interpreters*, (New York: T & T Clark International, 2005); idem, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Rational Apologetics," *Philosophia Christi*, Vol. 10. No. 2, (Winter 2008): 315-335.

<sup>2</sup> William Lane Craig, "Dale Allison on Jesus' Empty Tomb, His Postmortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples' Belief in His Resurrection," *Philosophia Christi*, Vol. 10. No. 2, (Winter 2008): 293.

<sup>3</sup> A soft apologetic argument is one that merely seeks to show the rationality of the resurrection hypothesis, not one that attempts to demonstrate the irrationality of non-Christian alternatives.

<sup>4</sup> For Allison's differences with Craig, see Dale C. Allison, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Rational Apologetics," 320-328.

## Craig's Case for the Resurrection

Craig argues that the majority of scholars who have studied the resurrection as an historical event have maintained that there are four established facts that every critic must be able to account for: (1) the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea; (2) the discovery of Jesus's empty tomb by a group of his women followers; (3) the post-mortem appearances of Jesus; and (4), the origin of the disciples' belief in the resurrection despite their every predisposition to the contrary. Not only is Craig's evidence launched on the basis of the scholarly consensus, but he also provides arguments from within the New Testament to lend credibility to each piece of evidence.<sup>5</sup>

In this essay I am not as concerned with the arguments for establishing the evidence as much as the types of explanations that have been used to account for it. Craig has argued that after various naturalistic hypotheses have been tried and found wanting by filtering them through standard historiographical principles, the resurrection hypothesis is the "best explanation of the facts." Now on the face of it, Craig's case appears very similar to the manualist style of apologetics from yesteryear, demonstrating the irrationality of non-Christian alternatives.<sup>6</sup> But Craig has only affirmed that *the resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation of the evidence*.

In any attempt to justify past events, historians must (1) choose which sources should be used, (2) understand them within the context in which they were composed, and (3) explain how they came about. Various reasons demand that Craig's argument is a soft apologetic case for Jesus's resurrection in light of this threefold procedure. Lest my reader deny that Craig is a "soft

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<sup>5</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Wheaton: Crossway Publishing, 2008), 350-400.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology," *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 216.

apologist,” I think it is important to let him speak for himself: “I do not assert that belief in the resurrection of Jesus ‘is the only reasonable option, and thus it would be irrational not to believe in it.’ Rather, I argue that four established facts . . . ‘provide adequate inductive grounds for inferring Jesus’ resurrection,’ and that ‘it’s very difficult to deny that the resurrection of Jesus is the best explanation.’ of these four facts.”<sup>7</sup> I believe that Craig would agree with my following contentions, all of which demand that a soft case for Jesus’s resurrection should be made in contemporary apologetic discourse.<sup>8</sup>

As far as (1) *the choice of sources* goes, there may be unknown evidence that scholars are currently unaware of that could radically alter their understanding of the evidence or the resurrection itself. Hence, historians should not make hard apologetic claims in light of this option. But the fact that unknown evidence could alter the argument for the resurrection would not mean that historians should refrain from using the evidence that is now available to them.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Craig has used the New Testament to make an argument for Jesus’s resurrection, but not in the spirit of hard apologetics.

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<sup>7</sup> William Lane Craig, “Resurrection and the Real Jesus,” *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?: A Debate Between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan*, ed. Paul Copan, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 160.

<sup>8</sup> Craig is not in a minority position in this regard. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, a ranking Christologist, affirms that most Roman Catholic fundamental theologians would use soft apologetic arguments in defense of Jesus’s resurrection today (Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology,” 216). Stephen Davis, a Protestant philosopher, concurs: it is a mistake in contemporary apologetics to argue that Jesus’s resurrection is never rational or that it is the only rational view (Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993, 20. Cf. 169, 173, 185). Belief and disbelief can be rational.

<sup>9</sup> Historians are much more likely to use the evidence that they do have instead of constructing hypotheses on the basis of sheer historical possibility or silence. Given that ancient historians rarely find new sources to supplement their understandings of the evidence or causal explanations, it is commendable that Craig would use the New Testament to at least make an argument. Until detractors can provide positive evidence to explain why the earliest Christians or detractors of Christianity would remain silent about these unknown sources that would tell us the non-Christian truth about Jesus, the modern historian is completely within his or her rights to use the New Testament. These documents are, in point of fact, the only sources we have to assess the resurrection hypothesis.

When it comes to (2) *understanding the sources*, historians unanimously recognize the personal bias that affects their understanding of history. Undoubtedly the best insights of postmodernism have enabled historians to realize that they should be very cautious to make dogmatic assertions about the past (for historical arguments and conclusions are always tentative and capable of revision). Be that as it may, a non-absolute historical relativism is not taken to mean that critical historians should give up on the attempt to retrieve the shape of the past in the best way that they can. These considerations should make apologists cautious to make hard apologetic claims.<sup>10</sup>

When it comes to (3) *determining the cause(s) of the evidence*, historians normally appeal to law-like regularities, not miraculous ones. In a sense, however, all events are utterly unique and without parallel. So if a naturalistic explanation does not seem to account for the facts because the evidence is pulling in a direction that strongly suggests that a miracle happened, and if the context in which the event is thought to have occurred is religiously oriented, then it would be feasible for the historian who happens to believe in a God who would reveal himself in human history in a certain way to conclude that a miracle happened. Troeltsch's "principle of analogy" is not a hard and fast rule. It can be qualified and subsequently recast in a way that is hospitable to miracles. Historicism is no longer a prevailing view in the academy in a postmodern age.

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<sup>10</sup> Stated as such, skeptics are completely within their intellectual rights to insist that all of the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus comes from individuals who already believed in the Risen Jesus. They argue that the New Testament authors' beliefs prevent us from having reliable information about the past. But on the other hand, there are other critics who would maintain that their beliefs serve as an even greater indication of historical accuracy. As I. Howard Marshall points out: "If Jesus meant so much to his followers, then it is overwhelmingly improbable that they remembered so little about him, or that they so completely refashioned the content of their memories" (I. Howard Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977, 219). Authentic documents can have inaccurate information, and inauthentic documents can have accurate information. Left in this difficult dilemma, the only responsible thing that historians can do is use the sources that they have to establish what they at least think should count as reliable evidence. And this is precisely what Craig has done in his argument. Allison, it should be noted, does not dispute Craig's case up to this point. He agrees with Craig's use of the New Testament and the way in which he reads them. See William Lane Craig, "Dale Allison on Jesus' Empty Tomb, His Postmortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples' Belief in His Resurrection," 293-301.

All of these contingencies (namely, the choice of which sources to use, understanding them accurately, and explaining what accounts for them) should not impede the historian from making what he or she believes is the best conclusion on the basis of the historical evidence. Listen to Allison: “one can draw any number of curves through a finite set of points to create a thousand different pictures.”<sup>11</sup> But should scholars cease to make inferences by using historiographical principles to make arguments because there are many possibilities that *can merely* account for the evidence in many ways?<sup>12</sup> By no means! The more interesting aspect to history is not the positing of historical possibilities but the ability *to make arguments* that have the potential of outstripping rival hypotheses (with the added possibility of convincing those who think otherwise). For instance, some scholars will insist that the swoon theory ought to be rejected. Is Allison saying that we cannot rule out the swoon theory on epistemological grounds because it is historically possible? Of course not. Allison believes that some hypotheses are more historically plausible than others and that historians should make defensible arguments in support of their views. The soft apologist is not claiming to prove anything like the hard apologists used to claim. Rather, the soft apologist is saying that the resurrection hypothesis is the most epistemologically respectable hypothesis and therefore it ought to be accepted.

So it is easy to see why Craig’s case is within the sphere of soft apologetics. Although Craig does not typically write about the things that I have mentioned here (and many other things

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<sup>11</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 339.

<sup>12</sup> Some skeptics will note that there is no one set of historiographical principles that should be used in every situation to help them decide what was probably happened. But it is commendable that Craig would at least use some historiographical criteria to make an argument on the basis of evidence that Allison already agrees to. Hence, to be more specific, Craig should state from here on out that on the basis of the historical evidence, *which comes from believers*, the resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation of the facts by filtering various competing hypotheses through *C. Behan McCullagh’s* historiographical criteria. Certainly, Craig’s use of McCullagh’s criteria is more akin to the nineteenth century scientific historiographical case for deducing historical conclusions. Today there is no one formula for success. Nevertheless, it remains a valid way to make an argument. It is much simpler process to think up hypotheses from silence, but it is not as simple to formulate hypotheses that connect and make sense of the evidence.

could have been mentioned to show the weaknesses of hard apologetics), it was important for me to mention all of these, no matter how far stretched they could have been, to show that much of Allison’s concerns are insightful and valuable—but that they do not detract from Craig’s overall case. Allison’s arguments should not prevent historians from using the evidence that they do have to make rigorous arguments to the best of their abilities. I agree that Allison’s so-called “skepticism” nuances Craig’s case by showing its limitations for those who would naively seek to use Craig’s arguments to unblushingly bowl over non-Christian skeptics. But these limitations do not take away from what Craig has claimed for years: namely, that on the basis of the evidence, the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead is far and away the best causal theory.

### **William Lane and Dale Allison in Dialogue**

Dale Allison is primarily concerned to rule out two extremes when discussing the resurrection: hard apologetic claims and complete skepticism.<sup>13</sup> “I tend to focus on the extremes,” he says, “the convinced believer and the strident unbeliever.”<sup>14</sup> Craig would have no problem with Allison on this point. Competing explanations to the resurrection hypothesis are not wholly irrational, but the more interesting approach is whether naturalistic explanations ought to be preferred over the Christian one given the evidence that critics must reckon with.

*First, Allison misunderstands N.T. Wright’s contention when he says that the resurrection hypothesis is the “best historical explanation.”*<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Allison thinks that Wright is trying to

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<sup>13</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 344, 345.

<sup>14</sup> Dale C. Allison, “Rational Apologetics and the Resurrection of Jesus,” 327, 328.

<sup>15</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 345, 346.

prove Jesus' resurrection like a hard apologist would (Allison compares Wright with a rationalistic apologist from the late nineteenth century). But Craig and Wright would not argue that the resurrection hypothesis is the best historical explanation in the sense that non-Christian explanations are wholly irrational or indefensible, but that the resurrection hypothesis is the best historical explanation *of the relevant evidence* (which is not indubitable as the Enlightenment thinkers would have us believe). Allison then goes on to critique Stephen Davis after Wright: "one can still land upon a new book or article with the assertion that 'alternative theories that have been proposed are not only weaker but far weaker at explaining the available historical evidence than the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead.'"<sup>16</sup> But even within this citation Allison misses Davis's point. Davis is not saying that the resurrection is the best explanation, all things being equal, but that the inference to the resurrection is the best inference to make *given the evidence that we have*. Are scholars supposed to refrain from making arguments on the basis of the known sources? Of course not. We must not become complacent. None of these thinkers—Wright, Davis, and Craig—are doing apologetics in the hard sense of the term.

*Second, Allison maintains that parapsychological experiences have weakened the legitimacy of the historical evidence for Jesus's resurrection.*<sup>17</sup> A few things can be said in response to this. First, Allison says that he believes that the disciples saw the Risen Jesus after he died—and that Jesus saw them.<sup>18</sup> In light of this ambiguity I will assume that Allison thinks

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<sup>16</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 345.

<sup>17</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 347. "Ostensible encounters with the newly departed are, . . . not uncommon, however one explains them. Further, although Wright does not register the fact, people often perceive apparitions not as ghostly shades, but as solid, wholly real. So what prevents the unorthodox. . . from regarding the resurrection appearances as some wider phenomenon? Mix in a little Jewish eschatology and the pre-Easter expectations of the disciples and one might claim, there it is."

<sup>18</sup> Dale C. Allison, "Rational Apologetics and the Resurrection of Jesus," 315.

that *Jesus* really appeared to his disciples and that these appearances were objective and veridical. *So why doesn't Allison follow the next step in Craig's argument?*

Still, paranormal experiences can provide historians with the necessary leverage that is needed to nuance and recast Troeltch's principle of analogy to infer that a miracle is a plausible alternative to naturalistic ones. Moreover, there is nothing wrong with positing the post-mortem appearances as genuine parapsychological occurrences (of course, I am saying this from the lone perspective of a paranormal investigator). Apologists *can* maintain that Jesus's glorified body was not the same exact body as the one that was left in the tomb, but was reassembled by God with a whole new set of atoms to make an exact duplicate of his earthly body in the form that the disciples saw him alive from the dead. I see no reason why apologists cannot grant to even the most radical critic that Jesus's body may have been stolen by some third party and that the empty tomb is ultimately irrelevant. But apologists will part company with the skeptics if the latter denies the objective, bodily, and glorious nature of Jesus's resurrection appearances.<sup>19</sup> It is very surprising to me that Allison spends so much time describing and explaining so many different types and characteristics of apparitions but never considered this orthodox possibility.<sup>20</sup>

*Third, Allison argues that we do not have enough evidence to make a convincing case (especially considering that we are trying to establish a purported miracle).*<sup>21</sup> But what one historian thinks is a small amount of evidence will be a lot to another. So why is Allison so quick to say that there is not enough evidence here for the critical historian? Moreover, Allison

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<sup>19</sup> Idea inspired by John H. McKenna, "The Eucharist, The Resurrection and the Future," *Anglican Theological Review* 60 (1978): 154. See also G.B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 249.

<sup>20</sup> For more on this, see Lisa J. Schwebel, *Apparitions, Healings, and Weeping Madonnas: Christianity and the Paranormal*, (Mahwah: The Paulist Press, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 337, 350, 351; idem, "Rational Apologetics and the Resurrection of Jesus," 325, 326.

does not seem to notice that his complaint still does not mitigate the force of Craig's argument. Let us grant that the evidence is meager. Would this mean that we should not make historiographical arguments given the evidence that he already agrees with?<sup>22</sup> And how much evidence is needed before Allison will put all of his various hypotheses to the test? Even so, Allison does not seem to realize in general that in history "a lot of evidence" can sometimes make it even more difficult for historians to make defensible conclusions—even when the event is recent, has numerous witnesses, and is relatively simple. A lot of evidence is not necessarily better.

*Fourth, Allison limits himself to possibilities instead of going the extra step and making an argument in defense of a certain hypothesis.* Allison has explained everything and so has explained nothing: "one can draw any number of curves through a finite set of points to create a thousand different pictures."<sup>23</sup> But the issue is not whether historians *can* construct viable hypotheses that *can* compete with the resurrection hypothesis, but whether the former can outstrip the latter through the use of defensible historiographical arguments to explain the evidence. Allison retorts: even if the resurrection happened this does not mean that we can show that it happened; and if the resurrection did not happen this would not mean that we can show that it did not happen.<sup>24</sup> Soft apologists would have no problem with this. *But the more interesting alternative is to make an argument that can persuade someone else given their different approaches and intuition when approaching the evidence.* The soft apologist, in agreement with Allison, does not seek to prove Jesus's resurrection like the rationalistic

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<sup>22</sup> Allison agrees with the evidence that Craig has already argued for: the burial, the empty tomb, etc. For more on this, see William Lane Craig, "Dale Allison on Jesus' Empty Tomb, His Postmortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples' Belief in His Resurrection:" 293-301.

<sup>23</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 339.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

apologists of a by-gone era. The next logical step for Allison is to engage the evidence in the way that Craig has done to put the various alternatives to the test.

*Fifth, Allison mistakenly misunderstands Craig's use of Occam's razor: "Occam's razor is not the skeletal key to everything. Historical events typically have multiple, complex causes."<sup>25</sup> But Craig has never argued that Occam's razor is the end all and be all! Rather, simplicity is just one of the criteria that Craig has used to help establish the plausibility or implausibility of causal theories. Now it is true that the phenomenon of the early Church can be said to have more than one cause for its existence, but this would not mean that the historian cannot posit Jesus' resurrection as the ultimate cause that set off a chain reaction of additional causal conditions that brought it into full bloom.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, that is what Christians apologists would argue. Various causes can and do have different values.*

*Sixth, Allison aims his guns on the second prong of the procedure by noting that our sources only represent one point of view.<sup>27</sup> Presumably Allison means that the evidence is coming from people who already believed in Jesus's resurrection (and so their writings cannot be*

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<sup>25</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 347.

<sup>26</sup> Aside from the original resurrection appearances, Larry W. Hurtado discusses some of the various reasons why earliest Christianity spread at such an astounding rate. First, it began in Jerusalem—a city that allowed for many persons to hear the Good News in order for them to take the message outside the city (Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, 195, 196). Second, outsiders found the strict nature of Christian worship attractive (Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion*, Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000, 4; idem, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 483, 484, 650), including its exclusive stance (*At the Origins of Christian Worship*, 18. Cf. 39; idem, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 77, 402). Third, Christianity was unlike any other religion at the time. It did not discriminate on the basis of gender, social class, etc. It called on everyone to repent and believe in the Gospel (*At the Origins of Christian Worship*, 46). Fourth, Christian worship was highly intense in the face of the mundane liturgies of Judaism (*At the Origins of Christian Worship*, 53, 55). The earliest Christian worship featured the belief that God was active in the midst of ritual action (*At the Origins of Christian Worship*, 56, 57). Similarly, the Christian attitude in worship was not passive, but was one in which the believer could expect to be changed by the Spirit of God. Despite the varied expression of Christian devotion, the Church's intense charismatic experience of the Risen Jesus in the context of worship was highly attractive to outsiders (*Lord Jesus Christ*, 134-153; 619-624; 649-653).

<sup>27</sup> Dale C. Allison, "Rational Apologetics and the Resurrection of Jesus," 326.

trusted because their beliefs may have been wrong to begin with). But like I said, no historian would stop at this juncture and conclude that historians should throw up their hands and quit because our sources may have been shaped by an agenda. Rather, historians are forced to use their sources. Allison is well aware that the New Testament has embarrassing details and other features that increase the probability of certain fundamental events described therein. Indeed, Allison agrees with the validity of the evidence that Craig has already used to make his case.

*Elsewhere he mentions that the Gospels were written too far after Jesus's life to be fundamentally reliable.*<sup>28</sup> But surely Allison knows that indirect sources can be just as reliable as direct sources; firsthand reports are not necessarily better than subsequent interpreters of tradition.<sup>29</sup> Sometimes later interpreters understand the original event better than eyewitnesses. So, instead of relying on an older nineteenth century historical methodology, which overvalued firsthand accounts over subsequent reporters of a tradition, modern historians recognize that in times of radical upheaval people are not likely to immediately write things down and that later compilers of established traditions are sometimes in better a position to grasp earlier events better than the eyewitnesses themselves. Later compilers may have more well rounded evidence coming from various perspectives to determine what should/should not be included in the most up to date reporting. The critical historian does not need earlier sources to ensure that his or her case is more trustworthy.

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<sup>28</sup> Dale C. Allison, "Rational Apologetics and the Resurrection of Jesus," 325, 326.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 97. "Anglicans and Orthodox, as well as Roman Catholics, have generally rejected the Protestant position, in so far as this is purely Biblicist, and have insisted that the Bible cannot be the rule of faith except when conjoined with a continuous Church tradition. In this perspective, which is fundamentally Catholic, the very sections of the New Testament which the liberals tend to discount as too far removed from the events can be seen as providing privileged interpretations, for, as Newman pointed out, events of great importance require a considerable span of time in order to be rightly comprehended."

What is more important for Allison is to actually engage the evidence, not dismiss it in the name of silence, unknown evidence that we do not have, mere historical possibilities, or because the evidence is so meager or coming well after the original event. In each of these skeptical complaints what we have is someone who refuses to take the evidence (evidence that he already agrees to!) in order to account for it in the way that soft apologists have already done.

*The last argument is that the apologist is already biased in favor of his or her orthodox position.*<sup>30</sup> Surely Allison knows that all historians interpret reality in a way that is consistent with their underlying presuppositions. Allison notes: “I wholeheartedly agree that we should try to establish the historical truth whether or not it upholds our theology” But he goes on: “I question the notion that I found what I was looking for, or that my theological uncertainty unduly infected my historical thinking.”<sup>31</sup> It is well known that presuppositions can change through arguments and experience. *Even if apologists must work with a certain set of presuppositions, this would not necessarily mean that the resurrection hypothesis is not the best explanation of the evidence or that the pertinent evidence cannot be trusted to make such an inference.* It is possible that Christians can make the best assessment because of their faith.

I do not see why Allison precludes the use of philosophy and Christian theology to inform his historiography.<sup>32</sup> Allison states that “pure historical reasoning is not going to show us that God raised Jesus from the dead.”<sup>33</sup> But what is “pure historical reasoning?” And how do critical historians do history without endorsing philosophy or theology to inform their work? The answer is that no one—not even Allison—can do history without a worldview, Christian or

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<sup>30</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 342.

<sup>31</sup> Dale C. Allison, “Rational Apologetics and the Resurrection of Jesus,” 320.

<sup>32</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 350, 351.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

otherwise. Unfortunately, Allison thinks that *he can* place his philosophical presuppositions off to the side when analyzing the evidence.<sup>34</sup> Nowhere does Allison openly admit that his *historical* presuppositions have affected his work, which is very surprising considering that he has said that he wants to be as skeptical as possible—because “the subject matter demands this.”<sup>35</sup> So Allison thinks that a healthy skepticism is equivalent to being “purely historical” and that Christian philosophical presuppositions (such as belief in a certain type of God) should not interfere with his historical method. But this contention is wholly arbitrary, if not fallacious and outdated, similar to the scientific historiography of a Leopold von Ranke.<sup>36</sup> While Allison *is quick to fault the orthodox for finding what they were looking for*, the same has to be said about him as well. Contemporary historians are much more open to interdisciplinary work, especially in a postmodern age. In the strictest form, scientific historiography nor its presuppositions are credible today.

Now Allison is not *completely* against Christian philosophy, but like I said, he believes that it needs to be separated from his historical method: “In like fashion, I understand why Richard Swinburne, in his recent defense of the resurrection, commences by first seeking to establish the existence of a certain sort of God and the likelihood of such a God communicating

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<sup>34</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 350, 351. “When the mundane historical work is done, the results are disappointingly scanty, severely circumscribed. . . . At this point, then, the discussion has to be handed over to the philosophers and theologians, among whose lofty company I am not privileged to dwell. They, not me, are the ones who can address the heart of the matter, the problem of justifying—if such a thing is possible—a worldview, the thing that makes the resurrection of Jesus welcome or unwelcome, plausible or implausible, important or unimportant.”

<sup>35</sup> Dale C. Allison, “Rational Apologetics and the Resurrection of Jesus,” 321.

<sup>36</sup> Alan Padgett, “On the Myth of A Purely Historical Jesus: Advice for Religious Historians,” *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 287-307.

with and redeeming the human race.”<sup>37</sup> A slight overview of Swinburne’s argument is now in order.<sup>38</sup>

Swinburne’s first prong in his overall argument for the resurrection consists of those reasons that can be utilized apart from the influence of divine revelation to show that God is the type of God who would want to become a human and do certain types of things in human history. These are his “*a priori* reasons” which, in his words, arise “from the very nature of God and from the general condition of the human race why we should expect them to be true.”<sup>39</sup> While it was not necessary for God to become human, there are still good reasons to think that he would do such a thing. It would appropriate for God to identify himself with human beings;<sup>40</sup> it provides reasons for thinking that people have intrinsic dignity; and it reveals the extent to which God loves the human race. He will live an exemplary human life in terms of teaching the truth about God and being supremely moral.<sup>41</sup> A divine stamp of approval will be made on his life, vindicating his central message.<sup>42</sup> His teachings will be faithfully carried out to future generations.<sup>43</sup> After the *a priori* reasons, Swinburne turns to what he dubs the “*a posteriori* evidence” for resurrection faith (i.e., the empty tomb, the appearances, etc.). Swinburne concludes that the *a posteriori* evidence for Jesus’s divinity and resurrection fits in with the *a priori* reasons better than any other evidence from other religion.

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<sup>37</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 341.

<sup>38</sup> William Lane Craig, “Dale Allison on Jesus’ Empty Tomb, His Postmortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples’ Belief in His Resurrection,” 300, seems to agree with Swinburne’s arguments.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-52

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-77

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-87.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-77.

So why does Allison refuse to consider Swinburne's natural theology? The answer is that Allison is agnostic about Swinburne's arguments.<sup>44</sup> More importantly, Allison claims that philosophical considerations such as these should not be included within the historian's craft. But philosophy, including Dionysian types of arguments for God's intervention, can and do influence historiography, especially in a postmodern age which stresses the importance of interdisciplinary findings.<sup>45</sup>

### **Conclusion**

If Craig is understood as a soft apologist (an apologist who seeks to demonstrate the rationality of the resurrection hypothesis over other rational hypotheses), then his case staves off Allison's skepticism. However, Allison's contentions are, for the most part, compatible with Craig's argument despite the latter's relative silence about the implications of soft apologetics. But Allison is mistaken to conclude against Craig that we cannot defensibly argue that the resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation of the evidence. I have shown that some clarifying remarks about Craig's soft apologetic shows that Allison's skeptical arguments are ultimately unwarranted and that Craig is still able to defensibly claim that on the basis of the evidence the resurrection hypothesis is the best hypothesis and ought to be preferred over naturalistic ones. Craig's argument is more epistemologically driven than dogmatically affirmed.

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<sup>44</sup> Personal conversation in Allison's office at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Fall 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Postmodernism can serve as a construct or a corrective. It is a corrective to the strict, one-sided rationalism of the past; but it is a construct in the sense it denies universals or other coherent meta-narratives.



