

DOES GOD EXIST?

A debate between John Koster & Frank Zindler

Voice: With 50,000 watts of "Praise Power," this is WMUZ Detroit.

{Opening Theme Song}

Introductory

Al Kresta, host: Well, here we are on a Tuesday afternoon; you're listening to "Talk From The Heart" on WMUZ. I'm your host Al Kresta. Thanks for sticking with me today. I suspect you're going to be treated to a discussion today that perhaps you've never heard before. It is a discussion on the topic, "Does God Exist?" and I'll have with me John Koster, who has written a book called *The Atheist Syndrome*. He is a Christian who maintains that the men and women who founded modern scientific atheism all shared certain common experiences which contributed to a certain type of mental illness that he {adverb unintelligible} calls the Atheist Syndrome. [1] Also with me will be Frank Zindler. He's the director of the Ohio Division of the American Atheists, and I'll give you a little more background on both gentlemen in just a little while.

This question, Does God Exist?, of course, is perhaps the single greatest question a human being can ask. Mortimer Adler, in his *Great Ideas Syntopicon*, mentioned that more consequences flow from the answer to this question than perhaps any other question that human beings can ask. Does God Exist?

Many of us, of course, when we think about atheists and atheism, set up straw men, things that are easily able to be knocked down in our own intellectual imaginations. And I thought, well, sometimes we're a little unfair to our opponents in matters of this sort. Instead of continually preaching to the choir here, I thought today we'd give ourselves an opportunity to let an atheist come on and debate his point of view. It should be illuminating [*sic*] and instructing for all of us. You will certainly have an opportunity to interact with our guests. Our number will be two-seven-two, forty-one eleven. I don't suspect we will get to the phone lines until one -the earliest I can imagine is one-twenty, and I would think the outer limit'll be about one-forty.

Now that's going to be our topic today. Why do Atheists believe that God does not exist? What is their evidence for it.? We'll also be talking with John Koster about what evidence there is for the existence of God. Is there a reliable revelation? And you'll be able to take part in this discussion. Our number again is -keep it written down - two-seven-two, forty-one eleven.

{Commercials}

Al Kresta, host: We're coming up onto 1:06 on a Tuesday afternoon. My topic today, "Does God Exist?," a debate between John Koster and Frank Zindler. Let me introduce my guests. John Koster is the author of five non-fiction books and more than one hundred articles which have appeared in magazines such as *Civil War*, *Times Illustrated* and *American Heritage*. He is a contributing editor to *World Book Encyclopedia* in Chicago and *Tree of Knowledge* in Britain. As a journalist for twenty years his articles and features have been syndicated by the Associated Press and U.P.I. He reads seven languages including French, German and New Testament Greek. And John has been on with me before as we talked briefly about his book, *The Atheist Syndrome*. And, John, thank you for joining me again on "Talk From The Heart."

John Koster: Well, you're welcome very much. It's a pleasure to be here.

Al Kresta: Frank Zindler is my other guest. Frank is the director of the Ohio Division of the American Atheists. He's a former college professor in biology and geology. He was seventeen years at the State University of New York. His specialty is neurophysiology. Currently, he is employed as an editor and linguist [2] in a scientific publishing house in Columbus, Ohio. He was raised a Lutheran, was going to be a minister, got interested in biology, and through his study, he began to find that there was no reason to believe in God. And that took care of his ministry opportunities.

Well, Frank, thank you by the way, not only for being here, but I'm glad that since you didn't think there was evidence for the existence of God that you *didn't* pursue the ministry!

Frank Zindler: {Laughs.}

John Koster: Well, {unintelligible} . . . not an Episcopalian.

Frank Zindler: I'm not sure I followed that {unintelligible} but thank you for having me on.

Al Kresta: I'm not certain that everybody who goes into the ministry believes in God in the first place!

Frank Zindler: Well, you know that's interesting because I've known quite a few Jesuit priests, for example, who really are Atheists, and some Episcopalian priests who were Atheists and a number of other clergypersons who really didn't believe in god but thought that they were doing something important socially, and so they continued to keep up the hypocrisy of being believers.

Al Kresta: I think, gentlemen, I suspect from your remarks, Frank, and John, I would say from what I know of you, that we can agree at the outset that this question about the existence of God is an important question. Frank, would you -

John Koster: Oh yes, absolutely.

Al Kresta: Would you agree, Frank, that this is an important question?

Frank Zindler: Yes, I think it is, because if any of the gods or goddesses exist, that people have worshiped or worship, it tells us something about what is happening in the world, and what may happen in the world. On the other hand, if none of these supernatural beings exist, it tells us that we humans are on our own resources, that we have to make decisions wisely, that we cannot depend upon a "Big Brother" in the sky to solve our problems for us.

Incidentally, Al, before we get into this good discussion, could I just give a brief plug for our Dial-an-Atheist line there in Detroit?

Al Kresta: Go ahead.

Frank Zindler: We have a Dial-an-Atheist line there. The message changes I think every day. It is your area code, three-one-three, there, and it's not a toll call. The number is two-seven-two, nineteen eighty-one. Again, that's two-seven-two, nineteen eighty-one. It's a recorded message and it's Atheist commentary on everything from soup to nuts. {Laughs.} Sooner or later you'll hear biblical criticism, and political commentary, historical analysis, philosophical analysis, all kinds of stuff. So if any of our listeners are at all curious as to what Atheists think about this or that, they should dial the line up.

Al Kresta: Okay. We will - Let me explain a little bit of the format for today.

Frank Zindler: All right.

Al Kresta: It'll be a very flexible format. This is not formal debate. Not many people understand the dynamics of formal debate anyways [*sic*]. But they do understand discussions. They have 'em over soup and coffee. They have them at bars. And so, that's what I'd like us to have today, is a discussion.

Frank Zindler: Okay.

A definition of god and Koster's repeated unwillingness to discuss it; Koster's digressions into neurophysiology.

Al Kresta: I'll moderate the discussion. And I'll get the ball rolling with some questions and try to establish some continuity. But you gentlemen will really be running with it.

Let me just ask, John, since you make the assertion that God *does* exist, let me ask you then, as we begin this discussion today, to define, briefly, God, so that we know in some measure what we're talking about.

John Koster: {Laughs.} Okay. I'm going to have to fall back on scripture, because I really can't define God in my own subjective personal level.

When Moses was in the desert and saw the burning bush, he said "Who are you?" The answer he received is "I am that I am." To me God is the Ultimate Being in existence. God is there whether we want him to be there or not. [3] What I dealt with in *The Atheist Syndrome* was not trying to prove the existence of God, but to show some of the flaws in the mechanism of denial that led people to think that atheism was more scientific than religion - specifically more scientific than Christianity.

Al Kresta: Okay. Now again, just let's take a little bit of time to elaborate that point. In your book *The Atheist Syndrome*, as you said, this is not a case for the existence of God that you presented. But it's -

John Koster: No. It's for the unscientific nature of Nineteenth Century Victorian atheism and how that affected the Twentieth Century and atheist theory ever since.

Al Kresta: Your claim is that the founders of modern atheism as one examines their lives and looks at their common experiences, that what you see is some sort of pathological -

John Koster: "Pathological" might be too strong a word. I think you see a strong evidence of mental illness. That doesn't indicate that they were psychotic, or that they were, you know, raving lunatics. What it indicates is that they had such a strong bias against religion that they could not possibly accept any evidence in favor of religious reality, that they reacted only to the negative evidence which they claimed to find in the science of the Victorian Era.

Al Kresta: Okay. Now, bringing us back then to a definition of who God is, you rely upon scripture for a definition of who God is.

John Koster: For *my* definition.

Al Kresta: Okay.

John Koster: I think that you can possibly come to have a knowledge of God outside of scripture. I think many people did in Classical times. I think that if you look, for instance, at some of the things that Socrates or Cicero said, it's very clear that without any recourse to Judaism or to Christianity, which of course at that time did not exist, that they had a reasonably clear concept of immortality, of God, and of the Ultimate Ground of Being. They did not understand it, I think, as clearly as Christians can today, but they were aiming in the right direction. I've heard many of the same things, incidentally, from Japanese, from Vietnamese, from American Indians of various tribes, that the undercurrent of religious reality appears to underlie all human experience until it's rationalized away by some sort of system. [4]

Al Kresta: Okay. Frank, you want to -

Frank Zindler: If I could comment on that -

Al Kresta: Please do.

Frank Zindler: {Laughs.} I'm not at all surprised that John is unable to define his god; because if he could define his god, then we could set up a test to test for the existence of this deity. Since we cannot define it, and since we cannot test for it, it puts his god along with most of the other gods and goddesses, beyond the pale of meaning. They are meaningless constructs. The sentences that involve his god - [5]

Al Kresta: Well, Frank, let me just, let me just -

John Koster: Okay, just to work him -

Al Kresta: Hold -

John Koster: Let's deal with something - Let's deal with something, Frank, that can be tested. You say you know something about neurophysiology, right? [6]

Frank Zindler: Right, which you show very little understanding of in your book, incidentally. [7]

{For a few seconds at this point, both Mr. Koster and Mr. Zindler spoke simultaneously, none of which was intelligible on the air.}

Frank Zindler: What's that?

John Koster: I think you'd understand that that book was not written as a scientific text.

Frank Zindler: Well, that's very clear. It's a creationist polemic. It's sort of like what Henry Morris or Duane Gish write. It's really quite outrageous, I think, as a description of that period of time. And what you talk about psychology bears very little resemblance to modern neuropsychology. It's sort of Freudian armchair "psychologizing" with very little substance.

John Koster: Which is okay when Freud did it *against* God, but not when I do it in his favor. [8]

Frank Zindler: Well, I'm not a Freudian. I have never -

John Koster: Neither am I.

Frank Zindler: - been a Freudian. I think Freud sort of got lost. He was not in the mainstream of scientific psychology, which really starts with Pavlov and continues on through the behaviorists and then on into the neuropsychologists.

Al Kresta, host: Gentlemen, listen. We're moving - we're moving away - we can pick up the thesis -

John Koster: Well then, basically, you subscribe to the behaviorist school of psychology then.

Frank Zindler: As far as it goes. But I go beyond that because I understand that all behavior is chemically determined.

Al Kresta: Okay, hold on. Hold on. Listen. One of the ground rules of this thing is that this is *my* show.

Frank Zindler: Okay!

{Laughter from both Mr. Zindler and Mr. Koster.}

Al Kresta: All right? Now, the three - the three of us get talking like this and nobody's gonna hear a thing.

John Koster: Okay.

Al Kresta: So, here's what we're gonna do. I want to get back to this question of whether the God that you referred to, John, is a meaningful construct. I think this is going to plunge us into some philosophical discussion.

John Koster: Okay.

Al Kresta: And Frank, this question of the meaningfulness of religious assertions -

Frank Zindler: Yeah.

Al Kresta: - is probably going to occupy us for the next few minutes. So, why don't you hang in there, and we'll come back, and talk about whether John's assertion of the existence of God is a meaningful assertion, an assertion that can be tested, or either falsified or verified.

You're listening to "Talk From The Heart" on WMUZ.

{Commercials}

Al Kresta, host: You're listening to "Talk From The Heart" on WMUZ at 1:18 on a Tuesday. And my guests are Frank Zindler, the director of the Ohio Division of American Atheists, and John Koster, author of the book *The Atheist Syndrome*. We are discussing the existence of God. And Frank, your claim is that if John is unable to define God -

Frank Zindler: Yeah.

Al Kresta: -then, in a sense, the debate is at a disadvantage because how can we verify or classify something which is undefinable? [9]

Frank Zindler: Well, that's right. I mean - you know, if I say his god - How could I say his god does not exist if I don't even know what his god is supposed to be?

Al Kresta: Okay.

Frank Zindler: - what he claims it's supposed to be?

Al Kresta: Okay, John. Response?

John Koster: Let me talk to something that Frank claims that he exists. [sic] He says that all consciousness is essentially chemical or electrochemical, right? [10]

Frank Zindler: Consciousness is a process. It's the result of the ongoing chemical changes and electrical changes in the brain.

John Koster: That idea has been around since, I believe, the 1860s, right? That's from Helmholtz [11] and people like that.

Frank Zindler: Ah, yeah. They were the great pioneers of this. And of course, this grows stronger with every week. You know there are many journals devoted to this now. And there's no serious contradiction of this among the scientific community that I know of - with the possible exception of John Eccles, [12] who thinks that my soul - he told me one time -my soul exists in my left hemisphere. When I asked him how come the left and not the right, he said that's where my speech center is. {Laughs.} I suppose that means that people who are mute are zombies having no soul. But with that exception, there's no serious question about this.

John Koster: Well, Eccles doesn't really exist in outer space. He's building a collection of information that was previously believed in by Sir Charles Sherrington [13] and Wilder Penfield, [14] both of whom also were also [sic] Nobel laureates as Eccles - [15]

Frank Zindler: Well, Penfield, I think, was an Atheist. And uh -

John Koster: No, he was a Christian. In fact, he-

Frank Zindler: {Laughs.} Well, he was a very strange one, then. Certainly I have very little problem with Penfield's experimental work.

John Koster: Okay.

Evidence for souls, spirits, and an

afterlife; can all the primitive peoples of the world be wrong?

Frank Zindler: But, anyway. No. There is no evidence for a soul.

John Koster: But Penfield said there was, didn't he? [16]

Frank Zindler: I'm sorry?

John Koster: Didn't Penfield say that there was?

Frank Zindler: I don't remember that in Penfield. Of course, he's one of the old-timers. But certainly no modern neuropsychologist that I can think of has any room for the soul or spirit in his work.

John Koster: I don't think that's true at all. I think at the University of Edinburgh virtually the whole department believes in something like that.

Frank Zindler: Ah well, I think that's crazy. - {keeps talking as host speaks}

Al Kresta, host: Hold it. Wait. Let me just jump in here. Frank.

Frank Zindler: {continuing} all the time. While I'm on this -

Al Kresta: Frank, Frank -

Frank Zindler: Yes.

Al Kresta: Hold on. You said "that's crazy." I wasn't sure what that was a reference to.

Frank Zindler: Well, the idea that the entire psychology department at the University of Edinburgh believes in spirits. I mean that's - I perhaps should have said -

John Koster: I didn't say spirit but I said soul. I think - it may have been not every person in the entire department, but I know that there has been a lot of literature published out of there by people who believe that an independent mind or soul is entirely possible. [17]

Frank Zindler: Well, of course, almost all research that is published has no use of spirits or souls. We talk about receptors, and neurotransmitters, and electrical circuits, and so forth. You know, the idea of soul and spirit is a biological misunderstanding. The ancients thought that breath, or *spiritus* in Latin, was the vivifying force that differentiated a living body from a dead body. And since *spiritus* is a physical entity, and can exist outside the body at least momentarily, the idea came about that spirits can exist outside the body. And you can have spirit possession and all this sort of thing. But it was simply a misunderstanding. Breath is not the vivifying principle. After all, plants are alive and they don't have breath. So the word *pneuma* in the Greek New Testament means breath; so we have the "holy breath," or *hagion pneuma*, the "holy ghost." It's all just biological misunderstanding. They didn't understand biochemistry in those days.

John Koster: Well, let me use a transcultural example here. Sioux Indians - the word *quaneeggee*, [18] which means 'ghost' in their language, has nothing to do with breath. But they believe in spirits very clearly.

Frank Zindler: And what does it mean?

John Koster: It means 'ghost.'

Frank Zindler: Well, what does 'ghost' mean in its - in its earlier -

John Koster: 'Deceased entity.' 'Person whose body is no longer alive.' [19]

Frank Zindler: Well, I think you'll find that in the vast majority of cases, words that mean 'ghost' or 'spirit,' and even in some cases 'mind,' originally meant 'breeze' or 'breath' or something like that. We find that *ruach* in the Hebrew Old Testament, *nephesh*, all of these words in their primal sense meant 'breath' or 'breeze' or something of that sort. *Anima* in Latin, also, had this same sense. So an animal was thought to be alive because it had *anima*, or breath. Plants were not thought to be alive, and that's why Noah didn't have to take them in the ark to save them. They weren't thought to be living things.

But, certainly we're talking about very primitive understanding, now, when we talk about spirits and souls. This is totally unknown to modern neuroscience.

John Koster: Well, this is something that I've always had to quarrel with Darwin about. Darwin and his successors, Huxley and people like that, had a sort of an intense racist view that primitive people had to be stupid or that they had to be closer to animals than we are. I have always seen them as culturally different, but as essentially just as human as you or I - [\[20\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, I would agree with you. We have -

John Koster: Then why - is the idea of soul or spirit so universal among them? [\[21\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Because none of these people who are primitive in the sense of not having modern science, none of these primitive people had the chemical understanding to know what differentiated living from dead. And the most obvious difference is the presence or absence of breath, in some cases the presence or absence of blood. So you find, also, some passages in the Bible that think that blood is the vivifying force. But these are certainly concepts that would be discovered by every tribe just about everywhere and one certainly shouldn't be surprised about that.

John Koster: Why is it so universal if it's so false? [\[22\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, as I just said, the people who make up these things do not have access to the actual chemical understanding of what's going on to differentiate life from non-living. And the only observation they can make when a man just suddenly dies, is that he isn't breathing any more. And so, it's very logical, given the circumstances, to think that it was breath that made him alive.

John Koster: How do you deal with the fact that people who are sometimes restored from physical death can report experiences outside their body? [\[23\]](#)

Frank Zindler: This can be done without being near death. It's very easy to do that with hypnosis, for example. All that you need is some abnormal situation, whether it be disease or suggestion or anesthesia which blocks off the input from the body surface to the brain. And so the brain begins to function as though it is disembodied. A lot of experimental stuff has been done on this. I've experimented on this myself.

John Koster: Oh really?

Frank Zindler: Yes.

John Koster: And do people report substantive experiences outside their bodies?

Frank Zindler: Yes. They tell about flying out the window and exploring the outside, and coming back through the window, and floating around near the ceiling and looking down at their bodies. It's a reproducible sort of thing.

John Koster: Interesting. Now, if it's reproducible, tell me this. Is the information they bring back accurate, or is it inaccurate?

Frank Zindler: It's inaccurate.

John Koster: Consistently inaccurate?

Frank Zindler: Of course. Yeah, well, I mean, unless they've previously been outside to see what's out there. But, whenever you do experiments on this to control to see whether they can or cannot determine information that is hidden otherwise, you find that they can't do better than just average guessing as far as accuracy is concerned.

John Koster: And you maintain that's a universal finding?

Frank Zindler: Oh sure. Sure. Yeah, these "near death" experiences, as I've said, this "out of body" experience is the result of the brain being cut off from communication with the body surface.

John Koster: Well, how does - how do the sensory receptors function if the brain is cut off? In other words, where is it getting the information from if it's not in contact with the eyes or the mouth or some other sensory organ? [\[24\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, this is from the memory banks in the brain itself. I mean, you have memory. For example, if you were to be blinded this afternoon, if some horrible accident caused you to lose your eyes, you would still have visual memories, wouldn't you? Of course.

John Koster: Absolutely.

Frank Zindler: Of course.

John Koster: Well, would you be able to - would you be able to visualize things that you had not seen before? [\[25\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Sure, because you can put things together from their components. You could - maybe you've never seen a purple house before - but you certainly could imagine one, couldn't you? Because you have a memory of purpleness and you have a memory of various houses, so that the brain can reconstruct these things very easily.

John Koster: And you don't see this as in any way independent of just the receptors? In other words, if the brain has the capacity to reconstruct things that it has never seen -

Frank Zindler: Sure it does, so that we can do trial and error in the brain without actually having to move our bodies, for example, into dangerous situations. The brain sort of walks through things in advance, and those things which turn out to be plausible - then maybe the entire body goes along and does. But that's one of the nice things of higher vertebrates is they apparently are able - we call it thinking things through. But basically it's assembling and disassembling sensory components until something is produced that seems to be workable.

Al Kresta, host: You're listening to "Ta -

Frank Zindler: But you know, you mentioned that -

Al Kresta: Hold on, Frank. We'll come back and let you and John continue interaction on this question of - "Does God Exist?" And we'll recap in just one moment. Two-seven-two, forty-one eleven's our number if you want to begin lining up on the phone lines. My guests again: John Koster, author of the book *The Atheist Syndrome*, and Frank Zindler, the director of the Ohio Division of American Atheists.

{Commercials}

Al Kresta, host: We're discussing, today, the topic "Does God Exist?" The director of the Ohio Division of American Atheists, Frank Zindler, my guest, and John Koster, author of the book, *The Atheist Syndrome*, on this topic. Let me see if I have - I can recap for us here, gentlemen.

John, at the beginning, Frank alleged that you had inadequately defined God, so that really there was not - wasn't a very meaningful word for us. We had no way to verify or falsify this God that you asserted. And as I understand it, you asked Frank then, well, what about human consciousness or a soul or a sense of identity. Is there not some analogy between, you know, human consciousness and our inability to fully define it, and God himself, our ability [\[26\]](#) to fully define him. Frank's response was that, well, consciousness is simply the result of electrochemical reactions. And, where do we go from here, John?

John Koster: Well, I'm, actua - what I'm trying to get at is that if this is true, then it should be impossible for a person who has a near-death experience or is otherwise completely unconscious and rendered what we would say is clinically dead, to bring back accurate information about what was going on around the operating table at the time he was being restored.

Frank Zindler: Well, wait a minute.

Al Kresta: Would you agree that that's the case, Frank?

Frank Zindler: Wait a minute.

John Koster: Yes, ask Frank about that.

Frank Zindler: There is very definite experimental evidence that anesthesia does not necessarily completely cut off all ability to register auditory input. Studies have been done which show that a person under anesthesia can sometimes remember quite accurately things that were said in the operating theater. And, some of these things have been repeated in purely experimental situations, that anesthesia does not cut off all the sensory inputs equally.

Al Kresta: Maybe what would help us here, listen. Maybe what would help us here is to have a particular instance or a case, John, that you could propose that maybe Frank could then take a look at. Do you have an instance in mind?

John Koster: Well, I recall reading in *Recollections of Death*, by Dr. Michael Sabom, [\[27\]](#) that a number of people reported exactly what was going on not at a time when they were anesthetized, but at a time when there showed no heartbeat or brainwaves.

Frank Zindler: Well, again, I was not there to see that those were accurate reports.

John Koster: Oh, okay. But if they did - but if they did show a response through outside surroundings which was correct, giving the position of people, conversations that took place, medical techniques that they had not seen, things they don't usually show people, like in defibrillator pads, and giving somebody an injection directly to the heart, or pounding his chest, something that's hidden from the average layman, but they could report this taking place, and what people said, when they had no heartbeat, and no breath, and no brainwaves, then they may, in fact, have experienced life after death. [28]

Frank Zindler: Well, this is - this requires more corroboration. Certainly. And -

John Koster: Okay. It requires a great deal of corroboration, but it took place.

Frank Zindler: Yeah, a lot of these anecdotal things, when you do have an opportunity to check into them, you find that things aren't quite as reported, that there's a certain amount of retroactive examination going on.

Trying to get back on the subject;

historic evidence for the existence of Jesus

Frank Zindler: I am curious that when asked to define god, John, you mentioned Moses and the interaction at the burning bush with Yahweh saying 'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh, "I am who I am." And, you know, I think that's one of the most interesting examples of primitive religion, because what that's really all about is he's trying to get the *secret name* from the deity. In the ancient world, the priests and priestesses of the different gods and goddesses held their power because they knew the secret name of the deity. And the whole covenant between Moses and Yahweh was the agreement: give me your secret name and I'll carry out your sacrifices and so on for you. And this is why the Bible commands the death penalty to anyone who pronounces the name of god aloud. [29] Moses knew the secret name, finally, Yahweh, and, -but - god wasn't going to give in right away. They had to dicker a bit, you see. And so we have this, "I am who I am," and he says, "No, but what's your REAL name?" {Laughs.}

John Koster: Well, I'm rather relieved to see that you think Moses actually existed [30] because usually when I deal with atheists, they will deny that either Moses or Jesus actually had a historical -

Frank Zindler: Well, I treat Moses as a literary character just as I do Jesus. I don't know whether he did or not.

John Koster: Let's talk - let's talk about that. Let's talk about Jesus a little bit since this is a - [31]

Frank Zindler: Okay, yeah.

John Koster: Do you believe that he existed historically?

Frank Zindler: Well, there's no evidence that he existed.

John Koster: Ah!

Frank Zindler: That's not quite the same as proving he did *not* exist.

John Koster: Okay, well, what evidence do you say would be acceptable to you to believe that Jesus actually existed?

Frank Zindler: Well, certainly we would want at least some eyewitness accounts, wouldn't we?

John Koster: Well, we have the four gospels, right?

Frank Zindler: Well, those were written too late and none of those were by eyewitnesses. As you know, the authorship -

John Koster: Well, they were probably - they were probably dictated by eyewitnesses to people who took them down.

Frank Zindler: Well, there's no proof of that. In the identification of the different gospels with the supposed authors - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - this came late in the second century. [32] And so we really have no idea who wrote them. But from internal evidence we know that they could not have been eyewitnesses. Matthew and Luke -

John Koster: Excuse me. Isn't that rather dated research? I rec - that sounds like it comes out of the Tübingen school of theology. Don't most people accept now that all the gospels were written in the form they exist now by A.D. 100?

Frank Zindler: Well, by 100, I wouldn't quibble with that. [33] Well certainly -

John Koster: That's only about seventy years after the date of the crucifixion. [34]

Frank Zindler: Well, now wait a minute.

John Koster: So they didn't come from the Second Century, did they? [35]

Frank Zindler: Certainly by the year 100 we're talking about *way* after the time that some of these things supposedly would have happened.

Now "Matthew" and "Luke" plagiarized over 80 percent of the Greek text of Mark. So that wipes them out automatically. They wouldn't have to plagiarize if they had been eyewitnesses. Mark-

John Koster: Well, Luke never claimed that he was. Luke came afterwards.

Frank Zindler: What's that?

John Koster: Luke never claimed to be an eyewitness. He -

Frank Zindler: Okay. So I'm just - eliminating the gospels one at a time.

Mark couldn't be an eyewitness because he makes geographic errors and so forth and we rule that out. John, I think everybody agrees, is too late to have been an eyewitness. We go to the epistles of Paul, those which can be agreed upon as belonging to the same author, and we find that he knows nothing whatsoever of any biographical history of Jesus. All he has is the idea of someone who is sacrificed and who inaugurated a sort of cannibal feast, the - what became the Eucharist or the Mass. The rest of the epistles are far too late to be of any significance.

There are no eyewitness extra-biblical authors. We have Tacitus and we have Josephus, who were all born after the alleged date of the crucifixion. [36] So they automatically are not eyewitnesses. They were simply reporting on the already existing cultural movement that we now call Christianity.

Al Kresta, host: John, I'm gonna let you, of course, respond to that.

John Koster: Okay.

Al Kresta: But first I want to introduce some of the people who make this show possible. You're listening to "Talk From The Heart" on WMUZ. I'm talking with John Koster, author of *The Atheist Syndrome*, and Frank Zindler, director of the Ohio Division of the American Atheists, debating the question "Does God Exist?" Right now we're focusing on the historical existence of Jesus Christ. Our number: two-seven-two, forty-one eleven.

{Commercials}

Al Kresta, host: Here we are, at 1:38, discussing the topic "Does God Exist?" The question has moved now to a more concrete historical question, and that has to do with the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth. Frank Zindler, the director of the Ohio Division of American Atheists, maintains that there is certainly no evidence that permits us to say that Jesus existed. John Koster, a Christian, author of the book *The Atheist Syndrome*, says, well, certainly the evidence is significant, and permits us to say this. John, you want to respond, no doubt, to some of the biblical criticism offered by Frank.

John Koster: Right, I am at a sort-of disadvantage here because I am not a particularly good Christian, and it is obvious that Frank is an extremely good Atheist. But let me - let me say a few things. I am rather surprised to find out that we can invalidate anything Josephus wrote because he and Jesus were not contemporaneous. It's sort of strange to say that Carl Sandburg couldn't write anything about Abraham Lincoln because their lives didn't overlap, [37] or that I could not write anything about Adolf Hitler because he was killed before I was born. [38] This type of thing.

Suetonius [39] was also a Roman writer and he mentions many things that are paralleled both in Paul and in the gospels. Pliny [40] mentions the early Christians, although he doesn't mention Jesus explicitly in a biographical sense. He mentions seeing Christian rituals about 114 A.D. Jesus is mentioned, at least obliquely, in the Talmud, [41] and he is mentioned specifically in a number of works of the Apocrypha, which were not accepted into the Bible, some because they were deemed to be unacceptable for moral reasons, [42] or some because they just was [*sic*] considered to be inauthentic. But there's a tremendous amount of written evidence stemming from the first century that there was an earthly life of Jesus.

Frank Zindler: Well, the Apocryphal works, of course, are even later than the gospels that have stayed in the Canon. And Suetonius, as he points out, is even later than Josephus and Tacitus. Now, of course, what we are seeing here, is these are historians who are reporting upon a *religious movement* that was part of their day. Now, to say that the fact that there was a religious movement implies that the object of worship existed, is like saying that because the ancient Egyptians worshiped Isis and Osiris, and there's [*sic*] reports of them doing that, that Isis and Osiris actually existed. There's no reason to suppose that Jesus existed any more than Isis and Osiris, and Zeus and Thor and the whole celestial zoo.

As for the fact that Josephus could perhaps have been reporting on a real historical personage even though it was a person who lived before his time, we would have to have some evidence that Josephus was referring to some documents, some historical documents, annals or something like that. And there's nothing like that. The passage in question in Josephus bears all the marks of being an interpolation and it has Josephus saying things that he couldn't possibly have said as a good Pharisee Jew. He could not have said that Jesus was the messiah and was resurrected from the dead and then continue to go on not believing that Jesus was somehow associated with god. And we know from Origen's testimony, Josephus was not a believer in Jesus as the Christ or messiah. So the evidence that Josephus' passage there is an interpolation is overwhelming and I don't know of any Greek scholar who seriously questions that.

John Koster: Well there was a Hebrew scholar named Dr. Schlomo Pines who translated a message from Arabic, which he did in 1971, as I believe.

Frank Zindler: Yeah. Yes.

John Koster: An Arabic translation -

Frank Zindler: Right.

John Koster: -of Josephus from the original Greek into Arabic.

Frank Zindler: Yeah.

John Koster: He found that the Josephus passage substantially was the same as it was in Josephus. Although as I believe - [[43](#)]

Frank Zindler: Well, the Arabic dates it, of course, puts it quite late. It would have to date from the date and the time of the Arab Expansion. And the evidence is pretty good that the interpolation was put into Josephus by Eusebius, a church father who lived in the 300s. So there's no problem with the Arabic translation. It is certainly understandable. But it certainly gives no support to the authenticity of that passage.

John Koster: Let me quote you another example of Josephus which he wrote, not as a Christian but as a Jew, indicating that there may have been stories of a resurrection circulating even in the early Christian times. Are you familiar with the *Wars of the Jews*, the fall of Jerusalem?

Frank Zindler: Go ahead.

John Koster: You know the name Simon Bar Gioras?

Frank Zindler: Simon what?

John Koster: Simon Bar Gioras.

Frank Zindler: Bar Gioras? Oh -

John Koster: Simon Bar Gioras. Simon Bar Gioras was one of the leaders of the factions who were fighting to keep the Romans out of Jerusalem.

Frank Zindler: Yeah, right.

John Koster: Now, when Jerusalem fell, Simon Bar Gioras took shelter in the caves under the city. He came out, appeared before the Romans dressed in - and I quote from Josephus - a white robe and a purple mantle. When the Romans saw him they were horrified. For a moment they didn't know what to think. Then, after they thought about it, they realized he was a real person and they apprehended him.

Frank Zindler: So?

John Koster: What do you take from this?

Frank Zindler: {Laughs.} Well, it's just another story. What am I supposed to take from it?

John Koster: That he was staging his own resurrection because the Romans all knew that something very strange happened after the crucifixion and were frightened.

Frank Zindler: Oh, boy. That's stretching it, isn't it? {Laughs.} [44] Well, I - {unintelligible}

John Koster: {unintelligible} - Josephus inserted which wasn't inserted by a forger. He put it in himself. And yet it could very possibly point to the resurrection of Jesus.

Frank Zindler: Well, I see no connection between that and the particular passage in question.

John Koster: Well, I think if you know psychology you know that perception is always subjective, isn't it?

Frank Zindler: Well, -

John Koster: {Laughs.} I mean, I could see a religious message if I wanted to, and you could see it as being irrelevant if you have already decided you don't wish to believe in religion.

Frank Zindler: Well, I don't think any impartial panel of Greek scholars would think that the one thing supports the other.

John Koster: Well, I think it would depend [45] on -

Frank Zindler: I don't know of anybody but you who's ever suggested that.

But anyway, you still don't have any proof of the existence of god, apparently. [46]

John Koster: Well, you see, you have to define proof! [47] Now, we've just dealt with the fact that we don't have any proof of the existence of Jesus, unless you're willing to accept about ten writers, whom you find various reasons for saying did not write in his lifetime, were not functioning as reporters. I mean we can suggest there are no videotapes either. [48]

Frank Zindler: Well, that's true. You know, I might be more inclined to believe if there were a videotape surviving from that period. That's a good p-

John Koster: Well, I would tend to think it was a forgery since the video camera wasn't invented then. But that's - [49]

Frank Zindler: Okay, I stand corrected. That would be a good - that would be a good argument!

John Koster: {Laughs.}

Al Kresta, host: Let's continue our conversation in just one moment.

{Commercials}

Al Kresta, host: It's 1:46 in the afternoon. Frank, let me ask you a question. It sounds to me, as I listen, that you're using a degree of historical rigor -

Frank Zindler: Yes.

Al Kresta: - regarding the person of Christ that we're not able to use for other figures of ancient history.

Frank Zindler: Oh, but we can! In fact, even more so, because most of the other figures of ancient history themselves left writings - Julius Caesar, for example. And, Alexander the Great did leave some writings, which don't survive to this day but were certainly still around several centuries into the Common Era and were cited by various other historians, and so on. And there are accounts by eyewitnesses. We have coins minted by him, and so forth. So, actually, we have very rigorous evidence of the existence of these other characters from the ancient world, and -

Al Kresta: Well we have, at the same time -

Frank Zindler: - that we don't have any writings by Jesus is very curious, don't you think?

John Koster: I don't think we have any *manuscripts* by Caesar [\[50\]](#) or by Alexander. We have copies of their works that were made by later copyists, right?

Frank Zindler: That's right.

John Koster: The oldest Virgil, I think I recall, goes back to about the fourth century.

Frank Zindler: That would probably be correct.

John Koster: Well, we don't deny, do we, that Virgil was a real person.

Frank Zindler: No.

John Koster: Why?

Frank Zindler: But we have a transmission of his own writings, but there's nothing that even purports to be the writings of Jesus of Nazareth.

John Koster: Well, having been a journalist for twenty years, Frank, and having covered a really fantastic number of people telling the truth and some who were not, I think that when you have - when you're looking at somebody, if you don't have a translation or a transcript of his own writings, and you hear essentially the same story, with minor differences, from three or four people, you can kind of draw a vector line. You're probably looking at reality.

Frank Zindler: Well, that would be so. But that has nothing to do with the Bible because the gospels contradict each other in incredible ways. For example, the two genealogies that were concocted in Matthew and Luke disagree even as to who Jesus' grandfather was, and they can't

agree on the number of generations. They are utterly at odds. Certainly this bars the - this shows evidence of fraud. And -

John Koster: Well, I would disagree, Frank. I think that when you're dealing with documents, if you're looking for fraud, you look for extreme consistency. [\[51\]](#) If -

{For a few seconds at this point, both Mr. Koster and Mr. Zindler spoke simultaneously, none of which was intelligible on the air.}

Frank Zindler: You do know that there is one Greek manuscript, a fairly late one, in which these two genealogies agree a hundred percent. The people who transmitted the books of the Bible were, of course, not very honest people. They had an axe to grind. And so we see that the later the manuscripts, the more harmonious they become. But the earliest manuscripts show great contradiction.

Al Kresta, host: Frank, what - Frank, let me jump in. What axe - this - what axe would they have had to grind? You mentioned that the people who transmitted the manuscripts, you know, were very dishonest people. I - first of all, I mean I don't know how one can make that conclusion. But, you mentioned they had an axe to grind. In what sense was this in their own best interests, especially the earliest manuscripts?

Frank Zindler: Well, they had their own theories, you see, as to what was going on. And some of them thought that Jesus had to be of the line of David, some who had more infection from the mystery religions thought he had to be born of a virgin, and so the stories get changed.

Al Kresta: What I want - but what I want to know is if you're so certain about the historical setting, surrounding the composition of the gospels, you're imputing a degree of certainty to that historical period, about the setting of the gospels, which you're unwilling to attribute to the gospels themselves. And -there's something - there's - and you're speaking out of both sides of your mouth. [\[52\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, "certainty" is not the right word. "Probability," "probability" is the best - [\[53\]](#)

John Koster: Let me give you another example from your attempt to get manuscripts. Arminius, did he ever leave anything in writing? [\[54\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, I don't really know.

John Koster: Could he write?

Frank Zindler: I'm sorry?

John Koster: Could he write? Did he know how to write?

Frank Zindler: I really don't recall.

John Koster: Did he leave anything in writing?

Frank Zindler: He is reported by eyewitnesses, however.

John Koster: Who?

Frank Zindler: I'm sorry?

John Koster: Whoever saw Arminius face-to-face and lived to tell about it? [55]

Frank Zindler: Well, I think some of the church fathers mentioned him. [56]

John Koster: Arminius? Arminius was before Jesus, Frank? We're talking about Arminius from the Teutoburger Forest?

Frank Zindler: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were talking about the other -

John Koster: You were thinking about Arius. Okay. Arminius.

Frank Zindler: Okay. Arius, excuse me. [57]

John Koster: How many - how many people wrote about Arminius?

Frank Zindler: Well, I don't know. It's not something that I've investigated.

John Koster: He's described by one Roman historian, Tacitus, the same one that describes Jesus. [58] And yet he was a reality.

Frank Zindler: Well, how do you know he was a reality?

John Koster: Because when you go to Germany, you can find tombstones that say "slain in the defeat of Varus." Varus was the Roman general who was killed fighting Arminius. [59]

Frank Zindler: Well, we're getting a little bit far afield. We still have no evidence that god exists or even a definition of god.

John Koster: Let's -let's talk about Arminius and then let's talk about Jesus. Quinctilius Varus was the Roman governor who was the governor of the province of Syria at the time of Herod the Great. He put down a revolution there that supposedly crucified something like two thousand people. Is *that* a historical fact?

Frank Zindler: Well, I haven't really looked into it to be able to determine one way or the other. I'd have to look at what evidence survives, and then pass judgment on it.

John Koster: Okay, so we have the same man who may or may not have existed in Syria. Then he gets killed in Germany. He's mentioned by Tacitus, and tombstones of his soldiers are found all over the landscape saying, *occidit* ... {Latin very slurred and apparently not a literal translation of the English given next} "Killed in the Wars of Varus." Did he really exist?

Frank Zindler: Well, you know. This is quite irrelevant. This is something that I'd have to look into. It's completely irrelevant to what we are debating here. I simply have shown that there is no eyewitness evidence that Jesus ever existed. He -

John Koster: Well, you've got no eyewitness existence [*sic*] that Arminius or Varus ever existed. All you've got is tombstones and writing and, you know, the fact that they changed history, or at least Arminius did. [60]

Frank Zindler: Well, whether they did or did not, I really don't have an opinion, and I don't see how that is relevant to this particular situation.

Al Kresta, host: I think what he has to do -

John Koster: - Cleopatra?

Frank Zindler: I'm sorry?

John Koster: Do we have anything in Cleopatra's own handwriting?

Frank Zindler: Well, we do have inscriptions that were made in her time. In fact, the famous Rosetta Stone, one of the cartouches, has Cleopatra's name in it. And various other things from that period in time from which we can reconstruct a biography of Cleopatra.

John Koster: Well, that's a different Cleopatra, though.

Frank Zindler: I'm sorry?

John Koster: That's a different Cleopatra. That's not the same one. [\[61\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Okay. There's two, there's several.

Al Kresta, host: Let me -

John Koster: There were a number and they were all named Cleopatra and all the boys were named Ptolemy. And he was a -and Ptolemy was a general of Alexander the Great. And all his daughters were named Cleopatra, [\[62\]](#) and all his sons Ptolemy, and so forth and so on and -

Frank Zindler: Okay.

John Koster: - for about two hundred and fifty years.

Al Kresta: Gentlemen, I think - let me bring us back. The discussion here has to do with the - John's perception, and mine as well, Frank, and that is that you're applying a degree of historical rigor, you know, to the gospel accounts, that - and to evidence regarding the existence of Jesus - that you're unwilling to apply to other figures of ancient history. [\[63\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, on the contrary. I certainly am willing to apply it to other figures. But the point we have to realize is the question of whether a god-man ever marched around in Palestine is of far greater importance than whether Arminius [\[64\]](#) ever marched from Syria to Germany.

Al Kresta: I understand the stakes get higher -

Frank Zindler: Certainly.

Al Kresta: - given the claims of Jesus himself.

Frank Zindler: Certainly.

Al Kresta: I understand that, and I think that's a fair point.

We're gonna continue our conversation with Frank Zindler, director of the Ohio Division of the American Atheists, and John Koster, author of the book *The Atheist Syndrome*.

{Commercials}

Assuming Jesus did exist, was he a god-man? What causes so-called religious feelings and experiences? Is religious belief dangerous? Who invented eternal torment?

Al Kresta, host: It's 1:55 in the afternoon. We're talking about the existence of God. And recently, in the last few segments, we've taken a look at some of the evidence, or from Frank's perspective lack of evidence, regarding the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth. I guess Frank has raised an important point here, John, and that is: fine, even under the best of conditions, the historical existence of Jesus is established, [65] we still have the difficulty of demonstrating that he is the unique god-man that the scripture portrays him as.

John Koster: Okay. The historical argument I can make in that favor is that by all intents and purposes, Jesus came from a very obscure part of the world. He came from a very obscure family, at least in his immediate line. And yet, we find him becoming *the* major figure of the first century and the whole human history ever since. I think he must have had something going for him that the average person does not, even the average Roman emperor does not.

Frank Zindler: Well, you can say the same thing about Isis and Osiris. They came from very obscure regions of Egypt and yet they guided Egyptian culture and life for nearly three thousand years.

John Koster: Oh, I wasn't aware that Isis and Osiris actually existed. [66]

Frank Zindler: Well, I'm not either. {Laughs.} I'm just using that as an analogy. You're claiming that because these characters have an effect that they must have existed historically as real people. And I'm simply showing that the worship of Isis and Osiris was a very important thing for three millennia and we certainly wouldn't suppose that that means that Isis and Osiris existed. And by the same logic, whether Christianity was an important force for two thousand years is irrelevant to whether Jesus existed. [67]

You know, I'm wondering how you might perhaps *operationally* define your god. What can your god do? I mean, is there something that your god can do that would allow us to detect whether he, she, or it exists? [68]

John Koster: I would say that the feeling of the presence of God is so entirely subjective that you really can't explain it in verbal terms. But I would say that that influence is obvious in the life of anyone who's ever felt him.

Frank Zindler: Now, you know when I was -

John Koster: I can't actually explain that to you in a logical way.

Frank Zindler: Well, I do understand, I think though, what you are driving at.

John Koster: But -

Frank Zindler: When I was young -

John Koster: {Unintelligible}

Frank Zindler: - excuse me - when I was young, I was a church organist.

John Koster: Okay.

Frank Zindler: And I had a number of experiences that were very moving and very, I thought, profound. And I identified them as religious experiences. I felt that I was communing with something eternal, with - something greater than I, and so forth. And, it was a number of years after I had become an Atheist, that, upon hearing a very moving performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, I had that same experience. And I suddenly realized that what I was calling a religious experience was actually a musical, aesthetic experience. There was absolutely no difference subjectively between the experiences that I had had as a child in the midst of an organ and choir and moving performance, and that which I had experienced later as an Atheist. The question is not whether these subjective experiences exist (I certainly wouldn't call you a liar about something like that). The question is what, if anything, do they refer to? Do they refer to anything outside the individual brain in which they are occurring, or not? And I'm simply saying that despite the intensity of these feelings, there is really no external referent, that this is the result of various inputs through the nervous system and the brain acting upon them, and then at some point these experiences occur. [\[69\]](#)

John Koster: How do you deal with these experiences when they occur to people unexpectedly, without any outside reference, without the stimulus of listening to music or playing the organ or anything like that? [\[70\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, there are a lot of variables and there are probably as many answers as there are instances of the experience that you're talking about. In some cases, fatigue will cause this sort of thing to happen. Low blood sugar may cause this to happen. Sensory deprivation may cause these things to occur. There are various drugs that may be deliberately consumed, or accidentally consumed, can cause these things to happen. Again, this is not to deny the reality of the experiences. It's simply to say that these experiences cannot be taken as being evidence of anything supernatural.

John Koster: Well, you say you're not a Freudian. But isn't this what Freud said? He said that ev - it was all internal, and it was all a delusion, and that projecting religious experiences were an extension of someone's neurosis. They were an attempt to deal with inadequacy and things like that?

Frank Zindler: Well, I'm not sure how that Freudian interpretation relates to what I have just said.

John Koster: Well, he said that it wasn't real. He said that it was a delusion. That -

Frank Zindler: Oh well, yeah. I mean, in a sense, these are delusions. Yes, but -

John Koster: They *are* delusions!?

Frank Zindler: - but you don't have to be a Freudian to say *that*. People have delusions all the time.

John Koster: Well, people do have delusions. But isn't it also a delusion to reject the evidence of eight different writers for Jesus when you accept one or two for some other historical figure? Or if it's not a delusion, isn't it an extreme form of subjectivity? [71]

Frank Zindler: No, not at all. Because in the one case we're talking about something of immense importance. In other cases, we're talking about things which are not very important one way or the other. If those other characters had the implications that the existence or non-existence of Jesus has, then most assuredly we would apply the same rigorous canons to their examination that we do with the Jesus thing. But most of these other things are just mildly interesting historical questions, and it makes no difference to my survival one way or the other, whether Arminius existed or didn't. [72]

John Koster: In other words, the more important something is, the stronger the mechanism is that we should deny it. [73]

Frank Zindler: Oh no, not that we should deny, but that the stronger the mechanism that should be used in *examining* it, because there's much greater danger in us being wrong - that is, the consequence of our being wrong - is much greater in that case, than in the other situation.

John Koster: What danger do you see if we accept Jesus as a historical figure? [74]

Frank Zindler: Well, the future of the world, I think. You know, for eight years the United States and the human species was [*sic*] in grave danger because the President of the United States was a man who believed literally in the reality of the prophecies of Armageddon. He believed that Armageddon (a) was inevitable and that it would be a nuclear war, and (b) that it was god's will that that should happen. And consequently we were always in danger, that whenever a situation might arise, we could not count on our Evangelist-in-Chief to do everything possible to preserve peace in the world. If, I mean, after all, who is *he* to contradict the will of god, if he thinks that god really wants nuclear holocaust to fulfill the prophecy? And so we were -

John Koster: How many - how many different historical sources can you cite [75] for this analysis in politics?

Frank Zindler: I'm sorry?

John Koster: How many different people wrote about this?

Frank Zindler: Wrote about what?

John Koster: That our Commander-in-Chief, *et cetera, et cetera*, believed in Armageddon literally?

Frank Zindler: Oh, I have tape recordings of him himself saying that.

John Koster: Oh, okay. Well, that's pretty irrefutable evidence. I mean it's not a forgery.

Frank Zindler: {Laughs.}

John Koster: Okay, what I'm trying to say is that you say the experience is subjective. Isn't your urge to deny also somewhat subjective? [76]

Frank Zindler: Well -

John Koster: I mean we've heard several reasons *not* to believe in something. Why do you apply a much stricter form of scrutiny, and a much stricter form of evidence, to Jesus than some figure who is less important but also possibly less benign?

Frank Zindler: Well - did you say less *benign*?

John Koster: Yes.

Frank Zindler: Well, why do you think Jesus was benign?

John Koster: Yeah, okay. Well, now we're getting to the root of it.

Frank Zindler: {Laughs.}

John Koster: {Few words unintelligible} dangerous, right?

Frank Zindler: What?

John Koster: You see Jesus as dangerous? [\[77\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, Jesus, at least according to the gospels, is the person who invented eternal torment.

John Koster: I haven't seen that written in the Bible.

Frank Zindler: I'm sorry?

John Koster: I've never seen that written in the Bible.

Frank Zindler: Well -

John Koster: *Invented* eternal torment? I know he *spoke* about eternal torment, but I don't think that he *invented* it.

Frank Zindler: Well, I don't know of anybody before him who said that.

John Koster: {Few words unintelligible} me chapter and verse and tell me where he invented eternal torment.

Frank Zindler: Well, what about all of the worm that dieth not and the fire that quencheth not and so forth? [\[78\]](#)

John Koster: He didn't claim he invented that. [\[79\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, where did the Christian church get these ideas then, if they aren't in the Bible?

John Koster: Yeah but, Jesus did not say that he invented eternal torment. He said he came to save and not to condemn too, didn't he?

Frank Zindler: Yeah, but I don't know of any character before the character of Jesus in the gospels who believed that there was eternal torment.

John Koster: No, I think the ancients in general believed that the afterlife was rather unpleasant, whether they were Greek or Jewish. Certainly you can find that in the Iliad by Homer.

{For a few seconds at this point, both Mr. Koster and Mr. Zindler spoke simultaneously, none of which was intelligible on the air.}

Frank Zindler: Well, no, you can't. No, you can't. Because the Shades -

John Koster: Yes you can.

Frank Zindler: - the Shades did not exist for eternity. They existed for a short while after death, around the grave and gradually they dissolved, as breath would be expected to do. They did not have *eternal* torment.

But again, what can your god do, that would allow us to -

John Koster: Well, I'm curious as to where you - I'm curious as to where you derive that. When I read in Homer, it didn't seem to me like these people were dissolving. It seemed to me they spent a lot of time moaning and sucking blood and things like that, but they were certainly very unhappy.

Frank Zindler: Well, I don't see any evidence that they existed for eternity. [80]

Al Kresta, host: Okay, hang on. Well this is - seems like both of you gentlemen want to go in different directions. Frank, you want to press the issue of what this God can do so you can establish some tests for his reality or non-existence. And, John, it looks like the direction you want to go here is to talk about the mechanism of denial, which you believe causes Frank to reject what on the face of it seems to be some good historical evidence. [81]

You're listening to "Talk From the Heart" on WMUZ. We're going to be taking your calls at about 2:15. And we're gonna continue conversation now between Frank Zindler, the director of the Ohio Division of American Atheists, and John Koster, who's written a book called *The Atheist Syndrome*. I'm Al Kresta. This is "Talk From the Heart."

{Commercials}

Trying to deal with a caller who knew absolutely nothing about science.

Al Kresta, host: We're at 2:08 on a Tuesday afternoon. My guests, again, Frank Zindler, from the American Atheists -he's director of the Ohio Division there - and John Koster, *The Atheist Syndrome*, his book.

I said we're gonna go 2:15 to calls. I think what we'll do is we'll go to calls now because we are running out of time, and I did want to allow some discussion with our audience. Let's go right now to Joe in Auburn Hills. Hello, Joe.

CALLER: Hi. Speaking of Frank, I would like you to explain the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the Law of Biogenesis.

Frank Zindler: Well, the Second Law of Thermodynamics simply says that in a closed system, entropy increases, or basically, every time energy is converted from one form to another, some energy is lost in the form of heat. The Law of Biogenesis is not a law. It is a statement that in the

present day world, life comes from previously existing life. But of course, that cannot be taken as a statement for all time, because, certainly, once upon a time, life did originate on the earth, when the situation was quite different than it is now.

CALLER: Okay, well.

John Koster: I think it's interesting - oh, excuse me.

Al Kresta, host: Joe, are you done?

CALLER: No, I was gonna add - well, the Law of Thermodynamics, would, like you say, heat is lost. Sounds more to me like it's a matter of going from order to disorder, and nothing in the present day right now, if you allow it to set for any period of time, is going to go from disorder to order. Science has not been able to create life on its - that can live on its own and reproduce more of its species, from non-life, from just the raw - the raw - particles or whatever - I'm sorry can't - I'm not thinking of the right words. Also, another thing I want to ask about is where - where - has the col - the, - gen - ge - genealogy column [*sic*] - the fossil bed column that is talked about, where is that ever found? It doesn't seem to me that in any of the fossil remains, the lone bed fossil remains, the basal plate things, the Keny - the one in Kenya, Africa, nowhere is anywhere is this record of fossils of rock layer ever found.

Frank Zindler: Well, you've got a lot of questions there. You would have had to have taken all the college courses I ever taught to get full answers to all of this. With regard to the fossil record, we have large sequences in different parts of the world that give us pieces of the geologic history of the world. And in some of these we see very nice transitions from one form of life to another. For example, in the Tertiary fossil beds out in the Great Plains and in the Western states, we see the evolution of the horse and the various types of rhinoceroses, where one form blends into the next one higher up in the strata. We do not have the entire geological column -

CALLER: You say "blends in."

Frank Zindler: - but we have parts of it. The process by which geologists piece together the entirety of the geological column, is, of course, a fairly complicated thing and we really don't have time here to go into all of that. I'm trying to remember now what your other questions were besides that.

John Koster: Abiogenesis and how life originated.

Frank Zindler: And how life originated? Well, I just published three articles on that. [\[82\]](#) This is a real growth industry now, the origin of life studies. There are many journals that are devoted exclusively to this subject. The science, of course, only began in 1925. We had a real problem because Louis Pasteur pretty much put the kibosh on that for over fifty years. Everybody was afraid to go against his authority. But in the twenties, people sort of recovered from Louis Pasteur and enormous amounts of research are being published now on that. We're at the point where we pretty well understand how all of the different chemical forms - the forms of chemicals needed for life - originated spontaneously, in fact, even in the solar nebula before the earth was formed. And we are closing in very rapidly in an understanding of how these chemicals associated into the dynamic pattern that we call metabolism. The last word isn't in on that, of course, but it's getting there. We're very, very encouraged by the research.

John Koster: Now it's interesting that you can go on research as superficial as that for abiogenesis which has never successfully been done in a lab as far as I know, [83] and yet you can reject scripture when you have eight [84.] different authorities [85].

Frank Zindler: Well, in the one case, we have concrete evidence, don't we? We have the chemicals. They *do* spontaneously form: amino acids, nucleic acids, sugars, lipids. Membranes *do* spontaneously form, which are capable of imitating certain little parts of metabolism and photosynthesis and so on. This is all fact. This is reported in the journals every week. This is not anything tenuous at all. There remain, of course, some things that have to be worked out. But, you see, your god, apparently, John, rules only the unknown. As the unknown becomes known, your god progressively goes out of business. This is why Darwin was so important. Darwin showed that we didn't need a god to create human beings.

Darwin and Wallace: who really

discovered natural selection?

John Koster: Alfred Russell Wallace showed exactly the same thing before Darwin did, and he became a spiritualist. [86]

Frank Zindler: Well, he didn't -

{For a few seconds at this point, both Mr. Koster and Mr. Zindler spoke simultaneously, none of which was intelligible on the air.}

Frank Zindler: No, he didn't show it before Darwin. Your book is wrong on that. That section has some serious errors in it. Darwin received the manuscript from Wallace. Wallace did *not* publish it before sending it to Darwin. And their papers were read jointly in the Linnaean Society. Darwin had nearly twenty years' priority with regard to natural selection.

John Koster: Not s - no, he didn't publish. He may have been talking about it. He may have been thinking -

Frank Zindler: He wrote to his friends, and as a matter of fact at the Linnaean Society, Lyell and Hooker, and a letter from Asa Gray, showed by the dates as to when Darwin had written to them about his theory of natural selection, quite clearly establishing his priority. Wallace never questioned it, never took exception to it.

John Koster: Never questioned that Darwin had derived the theory *independently*.

Frank Zindler: And had preceded him. And had done it before he had.

John Koster: But independently. Isn't it true that -

Frank Zindler: Of course independently.

John Koster: Independently, didn't Wallace use the terms "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest"? [87]

Frank Zindler: In that - in the manuscript -

John Koster: Without ever - having heard it from Darwin?

Frank Zindler: In the manuscript he sent to Darwin?

John Koster: Right. Exactly.

Frank Zindler: And Darwin did not use -

{For a few seconds at this point, both Mr. Koster and Mr. Zindler spoke simultaneously, none of which was intelligible on the air.}

Frank Zindler: I'm sorry?

John Koster: Which arrived before Darwin reported to the Linnaean Society.

Frank Zindler: That's right. They were reported simultaneously to the Linnaean Society by Lyell and Hooker.

John Koster: Right. Isn't it true that Lyell and Hooker put Darwin's material first and Wallace's last to make it - [[88](#)]

Frank Zindler: Well, yes, because Darwin had priority. Darwin had come up with it twenty years earlier. And they had -

John Koster: I would - I would suggest that - I would suggest either Darwin hadn't come up with it twenty years earlier. I would suggest either that Lyell and Hooker were Darwin's friends and not Wallace's. [[89](#)]

Frank Zindler: Well, {laughs} well, they had *the letters* . And Asa Gray at the University of Michigan [[90](#)] also had several letters from Darwin discussing this. And, you know, I mean -

{For a few seconds at this point, both Mr. Koster and Mr. Zindler spoke simultaneously, none of which was intelligible on the air.}

Frank Zindler: - this is simple, simply known fact.

John Koster: Let me state this. Darwin would definitely have come up with the theory of evolution by natural selection without Wallace. Wallace would definitely have come up with the theory of natural selection without Darwin. [[91](#)]

Frank Zindler: That's right. And you should take that as being indicative, as being something that's real in nature. [[92](#)]

John Koster: Yes, it is real in nature. But, when Wallace asked Darwin to investigate any possible evidence for spiritualism, Darwin was frankly not interested.

Frank Zindler: Well, of course he was uninterested, because the frumpery and trumpery of spiritualism by that time was very well known. And as you know it turned out that the spirit rapping and so on was a fraud. The sisters were - clicking their toes. [[93](#)]

John Koster: You're talking about the Fox sisters. You're not talking about the same people that Wallace investigated. [[94](#)]

Frank Zindler: Sure. Well. But the thing is, spiritualism was quite well recognized as a fraud even in Darwin's day. And why would anybody waste time on it? All of the studies since then have further shown that this spiritualist stuff is fraud -

John Koster: But why did Darwin refuse to investigate? Why wouldn't he -

Frank Zindler: Well, why would he waste his time? He was in ill health. He was suffering from Chagas' disease. He was in pain all the time. Why would he waste his time on something which is so palpably fraudulent?

John Koster: How can you say that he was definitely suffering from Chagas' Disease?

Frank Zindler: Well, again, you have errors in your book about that. This has been debated in the pages of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Recently a series of letters in the *New York Times* have [*sic*] chewed this over. There doesn't seem to be any question about it. Darwin reported in his journals about being attacked by these vicious reduviid bugs, which we now know carry the Chagas organism, and the symptoms that he had are completely consistent with it. [\[95\]](#)

John Koster: I would maintain that any person who doesn't make Darwin as an object of worship [\[96\]](#) would have to say that at least some of his symptoms were psychogenic.

Frank Zindler: Well, that may very well be, but you see, your whole book is a fallacy of *ad hominem* abusive species. You - instead of trying to disprove any particular fact that Darwin came up with, you simply say that Darwin was mentally ill, and that somehow this proves the existence of god.

John Koster: No. What I tried to say was that even a brilliant man like Darwin can be - have such a subjective bias because of some tragic event in his past -

Frank Zindler: Of course, the more brilliant -

John Koster: - that he overlooks the whole range of evidence.

Frank Zindler: The more brilliant a person is, the more sensitive his or her nervous system is.

John Koster: Absolutely. And also, the more apt he is to be totally subjective and to not recognize evidence which is put in front of him if he doesn't choose to believe it. [\[97\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, you would have to show that Darwin ignored some important evidence in coming up with his theory of natural selection. In fact, he went to great lengths to come up with the most difficult things that would seem to argue against his theory. In his day, for example, the subject of genetics was not known. He -

John Koster: Right, it wasn't until Mendel that people understood -

Frank Zindler: Yeah, well, Mendel sent him his paper, but Darwin apparently never read it, which is really an irony, because if Darwin had read Mendel's paper he would have been able to really solidly support his theory. As it was he had a completely incorrect theory of genetics, the pangenesis and so on, and his theory managed to survive despite that. And he would have had a really solid theory in his own lifetime if he had incorporated Mendel. But these are one of the - that's one of the many ironies of the history of science.

John Koster: Well, perhaps he was psychic as his father claimed to be. [\[98\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, again, you -

John Koster: You're aware that his father used - you're aware that his father, Dr. - Robert Darwin apparently used psychic diagnostic -

Frank Zindler: Well, you have to understand that Darwin, despite his pain and everything, did have a sense of humor, also. And -

John Koster: He wasn't being humorous when he wrote about his father.

{For a few seconds at this point, both Mr. Koster and Mr. Zindler spoke simultaneously, none of which was intelligible on the air.}

John Koster: - people, without interesting them, just look at them, and say, you have this, you have six months to live.

Frank Zindler: Well, Darwin certainly did not believe in psychic phenomena.

John Koster: Have you read his autobiography?

Frank Zindler: Yes, many, many years ago.

John Koster: Well, you should read the first part of it where he talks about his father. I think you'd find - [\[99\]](#)

Koster's repeated use of the ad hominem fallacy.

Frank Zindler: Well, I read your quotations of it. And, again, you simply are misunderstanding what he is saying. You're putting great weight on casual statements. If you say that somebody had an uncanny knack to do this or that, does that mean that he has extrasensory abilities?

John Koster: This was not a casual statement, Frank. He went on for this for four or five pages.

Frank Zindler: Well -

John Koster: And he described a number of specific examples.

Frank Zindler: Well, again, it's all *ad hominem*, you see. And this is a simple fallacy of logic.

John Koster: Well, it's **not** *ad hominem*.

Al Kresta, host: Well -

John Koster: He could only look at a very limited spectrum. He could look at the plants and the lower animals and -

Frank Zindler: Okay. Okay, John. But prove one thing that was necessary to support natural selection that Darwin said that was wrong.

Al Kresta: Okay, we'll come back and, John, we'll let you respond to that.

John Koster: Okay.

{Commercials}

Al Kresta, host: We're discussing the question of "Does God Exist?" John Koster, author of *The Atheist Syndrome*, and Frank Zindler, the director of the Ohio Division of American Atheists with me. The, Frank has said, a number of times, through the discussion today, John, that your book, *The Atheist Syndrome*, is really a gigantic *argumentum ad hominem*, and that is, that it just, in a sense, doesn't deal with the arguments of Nietzsche, Darwin, Freud. It doesn't deal with their arguments. It tries to discount their arguments by disqualifying the men. Was that the intention of your book? [\[100\]](#)

John Koster: The intention of my book was to show how even a brilliant mind can become so subjective and so biased that it will only look at a very small quadrant of the evidence in favor of human spirituality, and therefore, of the existence of God. It will also attempt to screen out, or mutilate, or mutate any fact that doesn't fit that argument. [\[101\]](#) I think that's what Darwin did. I *know* that's what Huxley did. [\[102\]](#) And I think even Frank would have a lot of trouble with Huxley's version of neurophysiology - I certainly hope so - which he invented as an antidote to the idea that there might be a human spirit or soul. Frank has disagreed with Freud, so I won't approach him. With Nietzsche we can deal with a person who raved against God because he was a syphilitic and had a latent homosexual tendency. [\[103\]](#) But he was not really a scientist. He was a philosopher. What I am trying to show, and what I did try to show in *The Atheist Syndrome*, and I think I did successfully, was that all perception is subjective. And if a person for reasons he may - he himself may not understand, sets out to deny god, that it may be impossible to get through to him with any factual evidence. [\[104\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well, again, I would simply say that his book is completely irrelevant with regard to question, "Do any gods exist?" And it is irrelevant with the question -with regard to the question - "Has evolution occurred?" It is a personal attack on a number of historical figures, some of whom are a little bit nicer than others -

{Laughter from all three individuals.}

John Koster: Darwin was a very nice man. And you know, I was very heavily criticized for saying all those terrible things about him by people that admired him because he was a good husband and a good father - [\[105\]](#)

Frank Zindler: Well -

John Koster: Fact is that he was a good scientist, but only when dealing with lower animals. He was a disaster when dealing with people.

Frank Zindler: Well, you have to understand, that at that point in time, dealing with the human species even quasi-objectively was a very novel thing.

John Koster: No, I don't think it was.

Frank Zindler: Things are often much more clear when you're looking at worms and mice and so forth than when you're trying to look at yourself. [\[106\]](#)

John Koster: All right. Wallace and before him, Humboldt, had lived with the same or similar Indians that Darwin did. They considered them to be humans. Darwin considered them to be much closer to the apes than ordinary people.

Frank Zindler: Well, they weren't even British!

John Koster: He completely brutalized their culture. He believed that they spoke in grunts and grimaces [[107](#)] when they had a vocabulary of thirty-eight thousand words.

Frank Zindler: Yeah?

John Koster: He believed they were cannibals when they weren't.

Frank Zindler: Well, again -

John Koster: He's *not* being objective.

Frank Zindler: -these people were obviously sub-human, they weren't even British, you know. {Laughs.}

John Koster: Yeah, - Therefore, their opinions didn't matter because they too believed in a life after death. [[108](#)]

Frank Zindler: Well look, there is no one who says that you have to take everything that Darwin or Huxley said as being gospel. [[109](#)] Science is a self-correcting system. And the things that they said that were not correct are being corrected. And the corrections will be corrected.

John Koster: Yes.

Al Kresta, host: Okay.

Frank Zindler: And that's not true of religion. Religion -

Al Kresta: I'll tell you what. Gentlemen -

John Koster: I think before we try to correct Louis Pasteur too thoroughly we should continue to Pasteurize milk and to wash our hands before performing surgery. [[110](#)]

Frank Zindler: That's fine, but -

John Koster: Because he spent twenty years trying to convince the scientists - quote scientists - of his time that germs could cause disease. [[111](#)]

Frank Zindler: Yeah.

John Koster: And a large number of the medical profession refused to believe him, and went on butchering people with dirty operations because they just didn't believe that a germ could kill people.

Frank Zindler: In his narrow area of expertise, Pasteur did very fine work. You just can't extend Pasteur into all of the areas in which he made claims, that's all I'm saying.

John Koster: I see. In other words, because he was a believing Catholic we have to discount his views on religion. [[112](#)]

Frank Zindler: Well, that would be a good reason I would think, yeah.

John Koster: Yeah, {laughs} I guess you would, Frank.

Al Kresta, host: Gentlemen, listen. I want to thank you both for joining me today on "Talk From The Heart."

John Koster: Thank you. I enjoyed it.

Al Kresta: And, John Koster, author of *The Atheist Syndrome*, thank you for joining me. Frank Zindler, director of the Ohio Division of American Atheists, I enjoyed the conversation with you. And I wish you the best, sir.

Frank Zindler: Okay, and have everybody dial the Dial-an-Atheist line up there, at two seven two, nineteen eight-one.

John Koster: And buy my book *The Atheist Syndrome* and read my *ad hominem* attack.

Frank Zindler: Right! (Laughs.)

Al Kresta: Thank you, gentlemen.

Frank Zindler: Okay.

Al Kresta: We're going to be going open line right now at two-seven-two, forty-one eleven. Two-seven-two, forty-one eleven. I decided to stay rather than go do the phone lines. I took one call and decided that the repartee between the two gentlemen and the conversation was so lively, that I probably would do no better than allowing them to do out the hour and a half. However, we can go open line right now and if you're interested in continuing this conversation in some measure, reacting, responding to either of our guests, John Koster or Frank Zindler, we can do that. We've got a half an hour together here on "Talk From The Heart." I'm Al Kresta.

{Commercials}

Calls after the debate.

Al Kresta, host: You're listening to "Talk From The Heart" on WMUZ. Let's go to open line right now. I imagine there's gonna be quite a bit of conversation regarding the debate between John Koster and Frank Zindler. And let's talk with Larry in Sterling Heights. Hello.

CALLER: Hi, Al.

Al Kresta: Yes, Larry.

An attempt to define god.

CALLER: I was hoping I could get through and talk to Frank before he got off the air, but it was really - I dialed for about an hour and I couldn't get through. But anyway, I think there *is* a way

to define God. And, John said that you can't really do that. I have a way that I think there's a medium that can show exactly how science and spiritual relate to each other.

Al Kresta: Why don't you - why don't you define God before you give me the whole rationale, or the methodology.

CALLER: Well, God is the Center. [113.]

Al Kresta: Yeah. Center of what?

CALLER: The Center of All.

{Pause}

Al Kresta: Now, what does that mean?

CALLER: It means that there was *something* that was in existence that created *everything* out of *it*.

Al Kresta: Right.

CALLER: And that all of the things that create - were created out of it, including the language [114] that we use, the way we look at things, the way we understand things, can be defined by a medium that explains the whole of all of it.

Al Kresta: Okay. Let me see. When you say that God created out of himself, [115] are you saying that the physical universe in - is an extension of the essence of God?

CALLER: No. It is the Sonship of - the God.

Al Kresta: What does that *mean*?

CALLER: It means that all things that were created, all life that is created, the existence of everything that is *other* than God, is created through the Son, which is one of the spirits in the God-person, and that that creation is that Sonship. [116] That all of the existence of everything outside of -

Al Kresta: Is the Creation the Son of God? Is that what you're saying?

CALLER: The Son of God is Life.

Al Kresta: Well, that's not a biblical - that's not a biblical concept of - Creation.

CALLER: But it *is* biblical. It's just in how it's interpreted.

Al Kresta: Well, I certainly don't know any biblical concept which identifies the Creation as the Son.

CALLER: I'm not saying the Creation. I'm saying Life.

Al Kresta: Well, okay. When you say Life, I'm maybe missing something here. When you say Life, what are you referring to? Are you referring to consciousness, emotion?

CALLER: Okay, I'm referring to a spiritual existence, in relationship to a physical existence, and that both of them are related, but one is the real life, and the other one is the realm of the - it's like where there was no life would be considered darkness, and where the light went, it went into a darkness, and that light went into darkness, and the reaction, the creation, of the what was created from the lack of light with light, is the medium by which these things compare to each other, and by which one is - reality is - sacrificed so that - for a physical reality is sacrificed so that its spirituality can exist through eternity without - [\[117\]](#)

Al Kresta: Yeah, okay. Well, let me just say that this is one of the reasons why I think John was unwilling to do the hard work of definition. It's obviously a very awkward and clumsy attempt.

CALLER: But see, I can - I have a medium that I can prove all of this.

Al Kresta: Nah. I don't - I find that hard to believe, and we don't have time to do it on the air. It usually makes for bad radio to do that.

CALLER: Well, no -

Al Kresta: But if you want to send me something - if you want to send me something in the mail, I'll be glad to look it over.

CALLER: Well, see, I can't really *send* you anything. I called you once before and told you that I would like to get together with you and spend an hour with you and *show* you some things.

Al Kresta: I don't ha - I just don't have the time to do that. If you want to send me something in the mail -

CALLER: Well I've heard you say to those people before when they've talked to you on the air that you'd get together with them and have lunch and discuss some things.

Al Kresta: Nah. If they - I've gotten together with people who need, you know, who need special ki - who have special kinds of needs. But, even, I haven't even had time to do, you know, counseling outside the work of my own church, never mind meet with people for stimulating intellectual conversations.

CALLER: This isn't a stimulating intellectual conversation. [\[118\]](#)

Al Kresta: Well, then, if it's not stimulating I guess I'm - that makes me a little more UNinterested in getting together. What I - if you want to send me something, you know, jot it down, and if it catches my interest, we can talk about it. That's the best I can offer you.

CALLER: But if I sent you anything, you would not be able to understand it. Without me talking to you, and going deeper, I mean, you could not - I could not just put something down on paper that will explain it well enough that you will be able to understand what I am talking about.

Al Kresta: Well, then the best thing you can do is outline what the conver - how the conversation would go, and what you expect to do, if you expect to show me something or give me a shift of consciousness or introduce me to a technique by which I can become illumined [*sic*], jot that down and maybe I'll be interested.

I gotta move on, Larry. Thanks for the call.

Rick in Detroit, we'll be talking with you in just one moment. I'm Al Kresta. This is "Talk From The Heart."

{Commercials}

How tragic to be an Atheist! Wouldn't it be better to be a Christian? Do Atheists strive for immortality?

Al Kresta, host: Well, let's go and talk with Rick in Farmington Hills, or no, Rick in Detroit. Hi, Rick.

CALLER: How you doing, Al?

Al Kresta: Ah, I'm excellent, thank you.

CALLER: Sounds like you need a better screening process. [\[119\]](#)

Al Kresta: Ah, well, you never know.

CALLER: Yeah, I know what you mean. I was kind of - well the - discussion certainly was stimulating, at least for the two participants involved. I was kind of hoping, though, that John would maybe take a little different tack, but he was - going at it from the viewpoint of his book I understand. And it - I think it just demonstrates how difficult it is to approach an atheist strictly from a historical and scientific apology when they've certainly done their homework.

Al Kresta: Go ahead. Keep going.

CALLER: And I was kind of interested, especially with having Frankie Schaefer on yesterday, that I was hoping we could kind of maybe pursue some of his father's avenues in dealing with people.

Al Kresta: Yeah.

CALLER: I would have liked to have asked Frank how he justifies his own existence, justifies any moral view that he might have.

Al Kresta: Yes.

CALLER: Somewhere in a conflict -

Al Kresta: Certainly that - certainly that approach to the problem was missing. Francis Schaefer, as you know, obviously you've read Francis Schaefer, would have appealed to this man - this man's sense of intrinsic dignity, significance in life, how can an atheist believe that his life has any lasting significance, and if he aspires to immortality, then isn't he the most tragic of all men -

CALLER: Yes, absolutely.

Al Kresta: - because it's an aspiration which can never be fulfilled. And so the universe is cruel, there's nobody at home there, and like Charlie Chaplin, he just has to say, I'm lonely. There's nobody there. [\[120\]](#)

CALLER: The thing that prompted me to pick up the phone and dial as I was being entertained by the conversation - more so than having my thoughts provoked - was he made an allusion somewhere to a holocaust and, you know, an Armageddon or nuclear thing, probably in reference to Reagan I believe. And I was gonna ask him, from his point of view, why would that be such a bad thing?

Al Kresta: Well, I think, let me say, having approached many people like that, I think his response would have been that he just likes to survive, and that this attempt to drive him to despair about his own existence is a futile effort. Because, since God doesn't exist, he doesn't care, frankly. But he likes life. And he wants to enjoy life. And, you know, he doesn't - it doesn't really - he doesn't really have to have any *ultimate* answers. He has learned to live with the ambiguity, [121] and so he's not, you know, it's not an issue.

CALLER: So if - the meaning and significance of his own life is not an issue, then I'm free to develop my own meaning and significance which is diametrically opposed to his, and have it be equally valid.

Al Kresta: Yes, and that's - the problem here, of course, is that somebody is going to have to settle some of these issues, 'cause if you develop your meaning and significance in the area of violence towards me, you develop a certain type of revolutionary philosophy which permits you bomb the American Humanist Association or the State University of New York, or the American Atheist Union, [122] then, of course, he can only appeal to The State, to put pressure on you, and to, in a sense, protect him from you. He can't really appeal to any sense of fairness or morality or justice. [123]

CALLER: Right. And that's - that's kind of like I - where I would have liked to see him pushed - to see how he would react to that.

Al Kresta: Yeah, it would have been-

CALLER: I've never had the opportunity to take that tack with a hard-core atheist, to see how they [*sic*] would react.

Al Kresta: Yeah, I again, doing a debate like that, I usually agree up front with both parties that I'll seek to be a moderator, and rather than do a two-on-one kind of thing. But I was surprised myself that John didn't move in that direction. But he had something else he was trying to do and, yeah, he - he's a competent man, and I let him go.

CALLER: I did enjoy the show, though. Thanks, Al.

Does Zindler make leaps in logic?

Al Kresta: Thank you, Rick. Our number is two seven two, forty-one eleven. Mike in Redford, you're on "Talk From The Heart."

CALLER: Hi, Al. How're ya doin'?

Al Kresta: Great.

CALLER: The guy, whose name escapes me, the one who was the atheist -

Al Kresta: Frank. Frank Zindler.

CALLER: Okay, he used a common sophism about the - to defend the existence and the - his ability to believe in evolution in the first place, the one where he said that we have - we know that amino acids exist and that they do - we have been able to demonstrate that they can spontaneously combine. And from there he made the gigantic leap to humanity.

Al Kresta: Right.

CALLER: And I would just like to say that, you know, there is copper in the ground. There is silicone [[124](#)] in the ground. And under certain conditions you can have a computer.

Al Kresta: That's right.

CALLER: But I would love to see it happen.

Al Kresta: Yeah.

CALLER: And it's a - it's a foolish and silly argument and why isn't it - it cannot be defended on any logical grounds and I don't understand why it is so easily relied on.

Al Kresta: Well, I'll tell you why. There's a certain *prima facie* appeal to it. And that is that you can come up with amino acids and handle them. You can write formulas for them and how they do coalesce together and all that. Whereas it's - God does not permit of that kind of manipulation. He's not an object in quite the same sense that amino acids, copper in the ground, Larry Stroh sitting in the studio here, God is not that kind of object, that permits us to walk over, shake his hand, dig him out of the ground, unite him with certain chemicals.

CALLER: True.

Al Kresta: So that puts the theist at somewhat of a disadvantage on this argument. It's-

CALLER: But, except, if you're allowed -

Al Kresta: Go ahead.

CALLER: - if you're allowed a little liberality in the argument, you can say that all of these, the house you live in, is made out of wood. However, the trees don't get to be that way without - there's one element in all of these *other* demonstrations of natural elements combining to form some useful and recognizable thing, and that is an intelligent -

Al Kresta: Sure.

CALLER: - being- [[125](#)]

Al Kresta: Yes.

CALLER: -manipulates those elements -

Al Kresta: That is true.

CALLER: into that final form -

Al Kresta: That is true.

CALLER: - in *every* case and - except in this case, that - and - they get away with relying - the rest of his arguments, the - that the geological column - sure, his explanation is widespread, but it is definitely not the *only* explanation available. [126] So, there you go.

Al Kresta: Thank you, Mike. Take it easy.

CALLER: Okay.

Al Kresta: Bye, bye. We're at 2:44 in the afternoon. We have one open line at two seven two, forty-one eleven.

{Commercials}

Caller alleges Christians shouldn't try to prove what they can't prove anyway. Christians should just admit it's all based on faith and let Atheists go on their merry way.

Al Kresta, host: Derek in Detroit, welcome to "Talk From The Heart."

CALLER: Yes, how ya doin'? This is *Eric*.

Al Kresta: Eric.

CALLER: Eric from Detroit. Isn't Frank Zindler the perfect example of *not* committing intellectual suicide?

Al Kresta: I don't think so. Because I don't think that we really didn't get to this during the debate. But quite honestly, he does commit intellectual suicide because he, when all is said and done, he cannot justify his own existence or the continuity of personal identity from moment to moment. [127]

CALLER: But, okay, what I'm referring to is, the debate was to prove the existence of God.

Al Kresta: Well, the question asked was "Does God Exist?" Yeah.

CALLER: Right. And we *can't* prove that. That's why throughout the entire conversation, Frank had the upper hand. And if you review the tapes, he talked for most of the program, because - what was his name, John? -

Al Kresta: Yes.

CALLER: - he could not prove - he couldn't even give a *definition!* And we *can't* define God. We can't -

Al Kresta: Well, we certainly can. God is the Center of Personal Consciousness, [128] who acts, and wills, and has emotion. I think John made a mistake at the beginning by not being more forthright in a definition.

CALLER: Okay, what I'm referring to is, we can't subject God to a laboratory and -

Al Kresta: Ah, now that's certainly more true. I mean, God does not - it's like on the scale of existence, what you have are rocks, okay? You can go to rocks, pick up rocks, stick 'em under microscopes. You can do anything you want with rocks. Rocks don't respond to you. You can go

up the scale of existence to, say, to the animal kingdom. And in the animal kingdom it's a little more difficult. There's a little more give and take between the object of study and yourself. You can't just grab an animal anytime you want. You, like a deer, you gotta kinda sneak up on it. They have a chance to run away from you. It's not like a rock that you can just approach. You come up to a human being. If you wanna study human beings, there's even *more* give and take here. The object of study can flatly *refuse* to be studied by you. I can't - Larry Stroh - I just cannot pick up - even though he's my engineer today - I can't pick Larry up and do an autopsy on him until he's dead. [129] You see?

CALLER: But you can define him. You can state what a Larry *looks* like.

Al Kresta: Hold on.

CALLER: You can define Larry, but you can't define a definite God.

Al Kresta: Hold on. Let me finish. Yes you can. Hold on. Let me go up to the next scale -

CALLER: Okay -

Al Kresta: Hold - let me finish. You go up to the next scale of existence, which is God himself. *There* you have almost no give-and-take again. God will only - God will not submit to us as an object of study. We are his subjects. [130] He will reveal himself to us according to his own will. And so, in that sense, one who wants to, quote, prove the existence of God, is at a decided disadvantage. [131]

CALLER: No, because all of it hinges, again, on faith. Faith meaning whether or not I choose to believe the Bible. [132]

Al Kresta: No, no. [133]

CALLER: He doesn't, therefore you are operating out of a totally different arena.

Al Kresta: No. Because now - now you got - you're back to the old problems, why should I believe the Bible?

CALLER: Exactly! And it's *faith*. That's why I believe it!

Al Kresta: Why - well, okay, let's do - let me play devil's advocate with you. I don't believe the Bible. I believe in the Bhagavad-gita. Why should I believe your Bible?

CALLER: That's what you *choose* to believe. And to have a debate between you and I [*sic*] would be fruitless because we're operating on two different planes. [134]

Al Kresta: Nah, nah. You're reducing everything to a matter of opinion as though there's [*sic*] no external criteria on which to judge truth or falsity. [135]

CALLER: No. No. Okay. No. If I read the Bible, I choose whether or not I want to read it. But take for instance the virgin birth. There has never been an instance before nor after of a virgin birth. [136] Yet it *happened*. I can't physically *prove* it. I can only go by what I read. And I believe it because I *choose* to believe the *Bible*. This Frank, he *doesn't*. But, he - has the right to do that because his *intellect*, which is at {word unintelligible} with god, won't - let him *believe* this. So if he choo -

Al Kresta: I understand, Eric, I understand what you're saying.

CALLER: Right.

Al Kresta: But if you reduce everything to presuppositions and prejudice, [137] if you reduce everybody to the point of just their choice to believe in whatever they want, [138] then you end discussion [139] between the believer and the unbeliever. There *is* a common ground between the believer and the unbeliever. It's the world that God created. [140]

CALLER: Exactly.

Al Kresta: And we can argue, we can argue from that world -

CALLER: But the unbeliever believes that evolution created it. What I'm trying to say is, Frank is the perfect example of *not* committing intellectual suicide, because intellectually, you *cannot* get a scholar to believe that a virgin birth occurred. Anyone who believes in evolution, they cannot accept, *physically*, a virgin birth. It's *impossible*.

Al Kresta: Let me, let me, yeah. Let me take it - I - you believe in the doctrine of virgin birth because you have good testimony [141] that such a thing occurred.

CALLER: Well, no, see, we all - well, how come this wasn't brought up to Frank? During - the course of the conversation that came up. Yet, you're gonna argue with *me*? But it was *stone silence* to Frank, because he knew what he was talking about.

Al Kresta: Because I was acting as a moderator with two guests.

CALLER: But, no. If you listen, you were - you could tell that you were *for* John by the comments you made.

Al Kresta: I didn't say I was *unbiased*.

CALLER: Right.

Al Kresta: I said I was acting as a *moderator*, for heaven's sakes. There's a *world* of difference.

CALLER: Right, right, but the way you moderated let me know that you were on the side of Frank. [142]

Al Kresta: Everybody - that's not a secret. This is a Christian talk show.

CALLER: I know that. I know that. So the problem, or the rationale that you've given me, why wasn't it given to Frank?

Al Kresta: It wasn't my place to bring up the best arguments that *I* thought should be explored. That was between John and Frank.

CALLER: If he's hitting at the *foundation* of Christianity, and then there's [*sic*] people out in the audience who may not be as strong as you or I or a lot of people who've been in the faith a while, they *deserve* that, because intellectually what Frank was saying *made a lot of sense!*

Al Kresta: They can - Eric, they can tune in here every day between one and three and hear a biblical world view. [143] This was a case of just plain fairness to two guests who deserve to be treated as human beings made in the image and likeness of God. It was grossly unfair for me to put a two-on-one situation on Frank Zindler. That was agreed *before* we went on the air. [144]

CALLER: I understand that. But, Frank had total run of the conversation: *one*, because he had concrete facts, and *two*, John *didn't*. And what I'm trying to say: Christianity is *based on faith*. We're all looking for something that has never happened before. We're looking for that. But you can't explain that to someone who's operating off of a totally different plane. And that's what you have with an atheist and a Christian. They are - *worlds* apart. So basically, the debate really was for nil, because it served *no* purpose; but it was more confusing to the *weaker* brethren than it was edifying, because Frank had his stuff together. I'm *sorry* .

Al Kresta: If, listen. Eric, if we were to take your approach, then evangelism and the Defense of the Faith has absolutely no value. Because what you're saying, then, is that the unbeliever -

CALLER: Evangelism is done one-on-one. [145]

Al Kresta: Nah, no.

CALLER: If someone *asks* me, then I can defend my faith. But I shouldn't get on a public forum where there are weaker people who *may* be converted, but they hear this man making so much sense till they say, well, wait a minute, this guy can't even defend what he believes.

Al Kresta: Well, it's about time -

CALLER: So why should I accept his beliefs when this other guy is making so much sense? [146]

Al Kresta: Well, first of all, John did an adequate job of demonstrating why he believes. I think the problem here is that, again, Christians by and large, it sounds like yourself included, are just somehow *threatened* by an atheist who puts in a good performance.

CALLER: No, I'm not threatened. I am *not* threatened because I've talked to atheists, and I already know that we are worlds apart. And I'll explain to him *what* I believe and *why* I believe it. But I couldn't go into a laboratory and put it to some test. [147] And trying to *prove* everything *eliminates* faith. We're supposed to operate along faith, not things that we can test and prove. [148]

Al Kresta: I - just think that - we are so far apart on this. I think you're mystifying faith. I think you're mystifying knowledge. And, unfortunately, I've got to move on. On another "open line" [149] why don't you call me back? Let's go into this in a little more depth, because faith and knowledge are not pitted against one another. Jesus not only proclaimed the Kingdom, he demonstrated it to those around him empirically. [150] And he talks in the gospel of Luke about proof. [151] In the book of Acts, we learn about many infallible proofs as well. [152] You're listening to "Talk From The Heart" on WMUZ.

{Commercials}

*Caller alleges god evidences himself
through miracles.*

The case of the empty gas tank

Al Kresta, host: Let's talk now with Nuñé in Milford. Hello, Nuñé?

CALLER: I just wanted to give you a real quick example of -what the Lord does for people, because Frank kept saying, well, what does the Lord do for you? And also -

Al Kresta: "What can your god do?" I think is what he said.

CALLER: Okay, what does he do?

Al Kresta: Yup, what can - what does your God do, Nuñé?

CALLER: Well, he takes care of us. He's concerned about us. He loves us. [153] And, what he did was - I'll try to make this quick 'cause I may get cut off -

Al Kresta: That's okay. We've only got about sixty seconds, so.

CALLER: Oh gosh! Well, anyhow, I'm - my car was empty this particular day, and it didn't have any gas. And evening came. My husband came home. It was Sunday. I needed gas for the morning, so I says [sic] "Give me some money. I'll get gas." Well, all he has [sic] was a gas card. So, I went to the Marathon station five miles from here on an empty tank. [154] The station was closed. I drove to Pontiac on an empty tank. I - went to four stations in Pontiac, all closed. I to - I started out toward home. I thought I would never make it. I got back to Milford, this is over sixty miles now, got back to Milford. I ran out of gas, [155] on the top of Crystal Street. I went downhill, turned a corner, got out of the car, and a car's coming toward me. And, he sto - he passed me by. He turned around and came back. He says, it was bitter cold. He says, do you want a ride? I says yes. It was two miles from here. So I jumped in the car. And he started to bring me home. And, this man, he was telling me, he said, he lives just about fifty [156] miles from here.

Al Kresta: You've got about ten seconds.

CALLER: Okay, well anyhow. The thing was that he - we came to a stoplight and he - he says - I hit a little boy here once. I says, it was my son. [157] And all these years he had been worried about this, my - son. It was twenty-five years later, this was.

Al Kresta: Isn't that something? [158]

CALLER: And the - Lord - and he says, "Is he all right, is he all right?" He had worried about that all that time! And the Lord did all this driving on an empty tank just to let this guy know that John was okay.

Al Kresta: Fascinating stuff, Nuñé. [159]

CALLER: Praise the Lord!

Al Kresta: God bless you.

CALLER: You too.

Al Kresta: Bye bye. And I'll see you tomorrow on "Talk From The Heart." And I enjoyed being with you today. Wish we had had more time for our calls, and perhaps on another open line we can do that. Right now Robin Sullivan's coming up, at 3:00 here. And she'll be with you till seven, and then Barbara Star on with "Reflections." I'll see you tomorrow when we talk again "From The Heart."

{Closing Theme Song}

Voice: "Talk From The Heart" is a presentation of WMUZ and the Crawford Broadcasting Company. The views expressed on "Talk From The Heart" are not necessarily those of the staff, management or advertisers of WMUZ. Today's program has been produced by Cathy Schiffrin and Michael Jason. [[160](#)]

Voice: With 50,000 watts of "Praise Power," this is WMUZ Detroit.

[1] The main thesis of Koster's book is that Atheists are mentally ill, having rejected "god" because of unhappy childhood relations with their fathers. A subsidiary theme of the book is the idea that Atheists are biased against evidence for religion. In reality, of course, it is the believers who are playing with less than a full deck. The thesis that religious thought is delusional and that religiosity is a pathological condition is dealt with in my article, "Religiosity as a Mental Disorder," which appeared in the April, 1988, issue of *American Atheist*. Readers desiring a copy of this article may obtain it by writing to either the Michigan or Ohio Division of American Atheists.

[2] Since considerable to-do was made about Koster's ability to read seven languages, I might as well note for the record that the list of language specialists published by my employer lists me as a consultant for chemical literature written in twenty-five modern languages. The fact that Koster claims to be able to read "New Testament Greek" is little short of underwhelming.

[3] This is the closest John Koster ever came in this debate to offering a definition of his god. "God is the Ultimate Being in existence." What does that mean? What is an "ultimate being" anyway? Saying that god is an ultimate being is like saying that a car is an automobile or that Santa Claus is St. Nicholas. It tells us nothing new. It merely passes off a *synonym* for a *definition*. A thinking person would not be fooled by this debater's trick. Koster also said that "God is there whether we want him to be there or not." This is not a definition either; it is a *description*. Cancer, tapeworms, and hurricanes fit this description nicely. They are there whether we want them to be or not! But whether Koster's *god* is "there" is something he must prove, not just allege. Notice that throughout this debate Koster repeatedly refuses to give a real definition of his god - although I try many times to force him to do so. In later notes I discuss his probable reasons for changing the subject every time the host or I asked him to define his god.

[4] Koster's argument here must remind us of the old adage that "God rules only the unknown," and that as the unknown becomes known, god goes into the ranks of the unemployed. Thus, prescientific people, whether they be the ancients such as Cicero or our contemporaries who have been cheated of a knowledge of history and science, can do no better than ascribe to supernatural forces that which they are unable to explain naturally. They are forced into the fallacy of trying to explain the unknown in terms of the even less known.

[5] Although Kresta did not cut me off very often, this particular case was most disturbing because I was about to explain the "verifiability principle of meaning," a principle which would

show that Koster's inability to define his god puts his statements about his god into the ranks of scientifically meaningless sentences. For a proposition to be scientifically "meaningful," one must be able at least to imagine a way to test it. Thus, the statement that "the moon is made of green cheese" was meaningful even a hundred years before rockets were invented, since people could easily imagine tests to perform that would be able to resolve the issue. When the proposition was tested in our time, by astronauts who found that moon dust makes lousy salad dressing, it was found to be *meaningful* but *false*.

By contrast, the statement that "undetected gremlins inhabit the rings of Saturn" is scientifically *meaningless*, since there is no conceivable way to detect undetectable gremlins! No matter how fine the gremlinometers we send to Saturn, they will not be up to the challenge of *undetected* gremlins. Thus, undetectable gremlin sentences are meaningless - they can't even be false. Sentences involving the term 'god,' if it is not defined operationally (i.e., by saying what has to be done to detect the entity), are also meaningless. They can't even be false.

The modern Atheist assumes a much more radical posture than did his predecessors in the period before Darwin and Huxley. In olden times, theists said "god exists." Atheists said "god does not exist." And agnostics said "maybe god exists, maybe she doesn't. I don't have enough evidence to tell." The modern Atheist faults all three positions for tacitly assuming that the pseudoproposition "god exists" was meaningful. Since god statements cannot be tested, the modern Atheist says they aren't even false-they are merely meaningless collocations of sound.

[6] This was a clever ploy to get away from the problem of defining god. Since it allowed me to zap Koster on the subject of neurophysiology, however, I went willingly.

[7] Like creationists painting a picture of modern biologists turning away from evolutionary theory, Koster paints a picture of modern neurophysiologists turning away from a materialistic interpretation of neuronal function and organismal behavior. Following the example of Sir John Eccles, a Catholic Nobelist who is the butt of many merry comments by his fellow neurophysiologists, Koster makes it look as though neurophysiology is in revolt against a materialist *modus operandi*. Nothing could be farther from the truth, of course.

[8] Here Koster is attempting to use the "circumstantial species" of the *ad hominem* fallacy. By the circumstance that I am an Atheist and Freud was an Atheist, I should be expected to agree with Freud across the board! This is a fallacy aimed at the special circumstances of one's opponent. In this case it sets me up as a hypocrite, being harder on Koster than on Freud. I simply pointed out that Koster's book makes claims that are unsupported by facts-that he is guilty of mere armchair psychologizing. Whether or not Freud did the same thing is irrelevant. Koster should have provided facts to support his outrageous character assassinations.

[9] I was most pleasantly astonished by Kresta's return to the question of defining god. I was intending to bring up the question at the beginning of the debate, but Kresta beat me to the draw. Here he is actually helping me hammer home the point! Can he be a closet Atheist?

[10] Despite Kresta's attempt to get Koster back to defining his god, Koster totally ignores the point at issue and tries to escape into electrophysiology.

[11] Hermann Ludwig Ferdinand von Helmholtz (1821-1894) was the father of psychophysics, being the author of the multivolume treatise *Physiological Optics* and the ground-breaking *On The Sensations Of Tone*. He was the first to determine the speed of conduction of nerve impulses and is, to a large extent, the founder of the principle of conservation of energy. Thanks to von Helmholtz, the old doctrine of a vital force (*élan vital*) separating living things from the

nonliving world had to be discarded by biologists. His work on non-Euclidean geometry set the stage for Einstein's theory of relativity. It is little short of shocking that Koster attacks Helmholtz in his book, implying that Helmholtz's scientific approach to mental phenomena led straight to the atrocities of Adolf Hitler.

[12] Sir John C. Eccles shared the 1963 Nobel Prize in neurophysiology with the Atheists Alan L. Hodgkin and Andrew F. Huxley. I came to have some personal contact with Eccles when a former psychobiology student of mine graduated and went to work for a while in Eccles' laboratory in Buffalo, NY.

[13] Sir Charles Scott Sherrington (1857-1952) shared the Nobel Prize in medicine in 1932 with Edgar D. Adrian. Sherrington did fundamental work in the area of spinal reflexes and the mapping of the motor cortex of the brain. Although he lived into his ninety-fifth year, I know of no evidence that he ever lost his mind and embraced beliefs compatible with those of Koster. Atheist Isaac Asimov, in his *Biographical Encyclopedia of Science & Technology* (p. 498) notes that "Sherrington's work, as well as that of Pavlov...helped foster the mechanistic philosophies of men such as Loeb."

It is true that Sherrington was a dualist, believing that humans were composed of body and mind. As far as I can tell (on the basis of John Eccles' biography of Sherrington), Sherrington believed in "Natural Religion," a concept quite incompatible with Christianity. Eccles quotes a passage from Sherrington's *Man On His Nature*, in which Sherrington contrasts the personal deity of traditional religions with the impersonal "deity" of "natural religion":

"If religion has to stir the world, let alone stir man to conflict with the world, the appeal to a Deity which is personal can go far to harness for its purposes the whole dynamism of the psyche. It is equivalent to establishing a 'value' which for its followers resumes all other 'values'. But this source of emotional strength Natural Religion is without, for it sublimes personal Deity to Deity wholly impersonal...

"Granted it can dispense with founding temples and establishing rites, yet it will be incommensurate to its own self-proposed enterprises unless it have passion. Whence then the passion it has? Surely Truth, Beauty, Charity provide passion. The very austerity hedging its acceptance of Truth illustrates the price it puts upon that 'value' and will pay for it. At great cost it would have the truth about Nature - Nature which for it includes man. Its curiosity to know that truth is no mere worship of Reason. Reason it takes for its slave. Reason it says is not a 'value'; it is just a tool for thinking. The aim, the zest, which can employ reason is that which constitutes the 'value'. And that purpose here, is passion to know the 'secrets of Nature', as the old phrase has it." [*Sherrington: His Life and Thought*, by John C. Eccles & William C. Gibson, Springer International, 1979, pages 152-3]

Sherrington accepted the fact of human evolution and the evolution of the human "mind." Koster's hero, Eccles, contradicts Koster's assessment of Sherrington: "there is an enigma that Sherrington presents but cannot explain except by an unsatisfying appeal to panpsychism: It is the origin of recognizable mind at an advanced stage of cerebral evolution. The appeal to Mother Nature will not do, as Sherrington so poignantly and wittily states at the end. **Sherrington will not countenance any reference to the supernatural.** So the enigma remains. **For him it is a mystery but not a miracle.**" [Eccles, p. 154; emphasis added]

[14] Contrary to Koster's claim, Wilder Penfield never won a Nobel Prize. Although I never had the pleasure of meeting Penfield, I have read many of his papers and books and I have lectured about his work to many classes of psychobiology students. His work was the epitome of

mechanistic, materialistic, scientific physiology. Among the papers and books authored by Penfield are such titles as "The cerebral cortex in man. I. The cerebral cortex and consciousness," "Memory mechanisms," "The permanent record of the stream of consciousness," "The brain's record of auditory and visual experience," "The cerebral cortex of man."

I must, however, eat a little bit of crow on the subject of Penfield. Although I can find no evidence that he ever became a Christian, I have learned that in his later years he did wander off into dualism, believing (against the wonderful evidence he himself had amassed!) that mind and brain were two separate entities. He even came to "believe in god" in some sense of the word. I am quite certain, however, that any god invented by Penfield - even in his years of declining intellect - would bear scant resemblance to the primitive manikin worshiped by Koster.

[15] Here Koster is trying to use the fallacy of "appeal to authority."

[16] In his book, Koster makes a less jarring claim, although it starts out with an obvious falsehood: "The whole trend of research in the front lines of neurophysiology has been away from the strictly mechanical explanation. James and such Nobel laureates as Charles Sherrington, Wilder Penfield, and Sir John Carew Eccles all believed in some degree of mind-directed activity." There appears to be quite a distance between "mind-directed activity" and an immortal soul capable of eternal pain! There is more than a touch here of the logical fallacy known as "appeal to authority," a fallacy quite popular with creationists generally.

In the debate, Koster attempts to suggest that because Penfield supposedly believed in souls, I should also! Actually, I will not believe in souls until some good evidence for their existence is presented. Persons interested in learning about illogical arguments of the sort Koster is using here may want to write for a copy of my article "Fallacies for the Faith," which appeared in the March 1988 issue of *American Atheist*.

[17] As Koster has done in other debates of which I have been able to hear tapes, he has succeeded in getting the question away from evidence of gods to the question of evidence of spirits. I had no opportunity to point out that even if someone could come up with incontrovertible evidence for the existence of human spirits, that would hardly constitute evidence for the existence of gods! Every minute that Koster can keep me talking about neurophysiology, however, is one less minute he has to try to keep afloat on the god question.

[18] I am unable to find documentation of any word resembling the sounds pronounced by Koster. I was remiss in not asking Koster what language he was citing, since there is no such thing as *the* Sioux language. There is a Siouan *family* of languages, of which such languages as Dakota, Crow, Lakota, etc., are examples. Koster's example smells fishy, but I cannot decide between blowfish, crappie, grunt, or sucker!

[19] It is not surprising that the Sioux should have a word like this. It is altogether possible that the Sioux 'ghost' is really a term meaning something like a zombie, rather than a disembodied person. In the Seneca language, the term *jiske:h*, which is often used for 'ghost,' actually means 'skeleton.' I question the use of the English word 'ghost' to render Amerindian terms that seem to refer to physical bodies (or parts thereof) rather than to disembodied entities.

[20] Here we have another *ad hominem* abusive species fallacy. Darwin and Huxley must have been wrong, because they allegedly were racists. Whether they were or were not racists has no bearing on the question of whether or not evolution has occurred, or whether or not gods exist! Even if they had been baby-eaters, it would not affect these questions.

[21] I was sorely tempted to reply "Ignorance: the same reason why Christians believe in spirits and spooks."

[22] Is Koster just being obtuse? Or is he trying to use the *ad populum* fallacy-the fallacy that says that "Three million Frenchmen can't be wrong"? If the earth is a sphere, why did so many billions of people think it flat for so long?

[23] Once again, Koster succeeds in keeping the discussion away from definitions of god. Near-death experiences, if they prove anything, prove that the more abnormal and decrepit the nervous system, the more it is likely to have experiences that can be interpreted as "religious."

[24] This question demonstrates quite unambiguously that Koster is innocent of any knowledge in the area of neurophysiology, despite his confident pontification upon the subject in his book and in his debates.

[25] This is an "expert" upon whom Christians depend for an understanding of the world?

[26] In this line, as in several others throughout the debate, host Kresta reveals his Christian bias. To maintain logical parallel in his sentence, he should have said "human consciousness and our inability to fully define it, and God himself and our *inability* to fully define him." Instead, he substitutes *ability* for *inability* in the corresponding clauses of his sentence, thus destroying the logical parallel. Thus he suggests that humans cannot define consciousness but that they *can* define god! (This after Koster has been refusing to make such a definition throughout the debate. How deceitful! later on, Al Kresta will say to a caller who attempts to define god (but who finds it necessary to do so in a non-Christian way): "Well, let me just say that this is one of the reasons why I think John was unwilling to do the hard work of definition. It's obviously a very awkward and clumsy attempt." Christians do not dare (and for strategic reasons should not dare!) to define their god in a testable (meaningful) way, because if they do, Atheists will be able to perform a relevant test and show that the god does not exist.

As for the ridiculous assertion that scientists cannot define consciousness: behavioral scientists have various operational definitions which allow them to study consciousness experimentally. To be sure, these definitions change somewhat with time, as more is learned about consciousness (e.g., consciousness in non-human animals) and more refined experiments are designed.

[27] *Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation*, by Michael B. Sabom, Harper & Row, 1982. Sabom is a cardiologist, not a neurologist, and his flight into paranormal explanations probably derives from his inexperience in neurophysiology. A detailed physiological and philosophical critique is beyond the scope of these notes. However, readers can get an idea of Sabom's degree of sophistication by Sabom's comment about his interviewing technique: "the patients were totally unaware of the real intent of the interview until we asked about any experience *while unconscious*." [Emphasis mine] Is it surprising that a man who does not understand the meaning of the term "unconscious" also cannot understand near-death experiences?

[28] I suspect that in many cases, all that was necessary was for the patients to have seen several episodes of *General Hospital*, *The Doctors*, or some of the other TV soaps. Defibrillator pads are not exactly unknown on entertainment television. It should be noted also that Koster is making the very unscientific assumption that there is a "point" of death, and that the patient had gone beyond it. In fact, however, the dividing line between the "living body" and the "dead body" is non-existent. Years ago, when medical science was yet unsophisticated, the "point of death" was reached after only a small deterioration of function. Today, with artificial hearts, lungs, kidneys,

etc., a very great degree of function can be lost before we pronounce the system "dead." Life differs from death as 'hot' differs from 'cold,' not as 'on' differs from 'off.' If this message could be gotten across to children in school, it would seriously hamper their being infected with the Psychodeficiency Virus known as religion. Readers may wish to read my article "What Is Death?" [*American Atheist*, April, 1985], which can be obtained from either the Michigan or Ohio Division of American Atheists.

[29] [Leviticus 24:16](#) in the *New English Bible* reads: "Whoever utters the Name of the Lord shall be put to death: all the community shall stone him; alien or native, if he utters the Name, he shall be put to death," rendering the Hebrew word *naqab* as 'utters.' The King James renders this word as 'blasphemes.' According to the entry at *naqab* in *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, "from this place has arisen the superstitious idea of the Jews that it is forbidden to *pronounce* the name of Jehovah." [Italics in original] The fable of the burning bush and the revelation of the secret name is found in the third chapter of Exodus. The haggling over the secret name involves some word-play made possible by the fact that the name Yahweh can be thought of as deriving from the Hebrew verb *hawah* ('to be, exist'): "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." [[Exodus 3:14](#) b] In point of fact, however, the name Yahweh probably derives from the same root as Jov(is), Ju(piter); the 'J' in ancient Latin was pronounced as a consonantal 'Y.'

[30] Christians, when they can't argue with an excellent point, often pick up on something totally trivial: if someone says "Goddamn it!" they say, "See! I told you so! You *do* believe in god! You just asked god to damn it!" Why don't they also make the claim that we believe in Santa Claus when we speak of him in the literary sense, or Huck Finn, etc.? Readers will note that Koster completely fails to address my point about the "secret name."

[31] As Koster manages to do throughout this debate, here he succeeds in sidetracking the discussion away from what we were supposed to be debating (the existence of god) onto a different question - whether Jesus of Nazareth actually ever existed. Interested readers may wish to request my article, "Did Jesus Exist?" which appeared in the January 1987 issue of *American Atheist*.

[32] Around the year 150 C.E., Justin Martyr gives no indication of knowing who wrote the gospels or even how many of them there were, although he was well acquainted with them. The first person to claim there are just four authentic gospels and to name authors for all four was Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons, in 180 C.E.

[33] Of course, I *should* have quibbled with this! The last 12 verses of the gospel of Mark certainly were not in place until the end of the third century or beginning of the fourth. The virgin birth variants of the genealogies are absent from some third-century manuscripts. The story of the woman taken in adultery has bopped around through all four gospels *up to the present day*, and no one yet can decide even in which gospel it belongs! The trinitarian proof-text, I John 5:7, does not appear in Greek manuscripts until the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries!

[34] This is a breath-taking bit of question-begging. He has not proven that Jesus existed, let alone was crucified in 30 C.E.! It is quite possible that the Jesus myth began to condense 50 to 75 years before the turn of the era. In this case, the gospels even in their second century form would be the result of a lengthy textual evolution. Just such a possibility is discussed by G.R.S. Mead in his book *Did Jesus Live 100 B.C.?* [University Books Inc., New Hyde Park, NY 11040, 1968 reprint of 1903 edition]. Examining the Talmud Jesus stories and an ancient work known as the *Toldoth Jeschu*, Mead pieces together a picture of a Jesus who was a religious teacher of

illegitimate birth, learned magic in Egypt, worked miracles, claimed to be a Messiah, and was executed in the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (104-78 B.C.E.).

[35] I didn't claim the gospels came from the Second Century, as he seems to imply. What I said was that *the identifying superscriptions* "Matthew," "Mark," "Luke," etc. dated from late in the Second Century. It is, of course, possible, that some of the gospels do in fact date from early in the second century.

[36] Tacitus was born in 55 C.E., Josephus in 37 C.E. The crucifixion is variously dated from 28-33 C.E.

[37] The analogy between Josephus and Sandburg is faulty for a number of reasons. First of all, Sandburg had letters and documents written by Lincoln himself to study and analyze; Josephus had no relics of Jesus. Sandburg had eyewitness accounts of Lincoln, and even photographs! I am unaware that Josephus had any such supporting material. (Even with the excellent material at his disposal, however, Sandburg perpetuated the myth that Lincoln had been a Christian. Did he not see any of the abundant evidence that Lincoln was considered to be an infidel by the clergy of his day - and was known to be such by his wife and by his law partner Herndon - or did he ignore it?) Contrary to the case of Sandburg's writings, there is overwhelming evidence that the Jesus passages in Josephus are Christian interpolations. One of the passages has Josephus saying that Jesus was the Messiah and that he was restored to life on the third day after his crucifixion. The church father Origen, however, in 280 C.E. assures us that Josephus *did not* believe in Jesus as the Messiah. The first evidence of the disputed passage in Josephus comes from the church father Eusebius in 324 C.E. It is possible that Eusebius himself was the forger. It is interesting to note that the texts of Josephus survive only because of Christian copyists (the Jews considered him a renegade). Is it then surprising that by the twelfth or thirteenth century, when his *History of the Jewish War* was translated into Old Slavonic, more than two dozen references to Jesus had appeared in the text?

It should be noted that Josephus' father, Matthias, was a member of the high-priestly family, and was a contemporary of Pontius Pilate. Matthias should have been an eye-witness of the wonderful events recorded in the gospels. Isn't it a shame he never told his son about them so he could have given more detail to his histories? It is also interesting to note that Josephus was in Rome at the same time St. Paul is supposed to have been there, yet Josephus makes no mention of Paul or the Christian persecutions which, according to Tacitus writing later on, are supposed to have occurred while Josephus was still in the Eternal City.

[38] Koster seems condemned by his own logic. Indeed, he should not have tried to write about Hitler. Apart from the fact that Hitler was not "killed," but rather committed suicide, by putting a chapter about Hitler in a book on Atheism, Koster gives the false impression that Hitler was an Atheist. In fact, of course, Hitler was a Catholic until he died, and his genocidal war against the Jews can be viewed as merely putting into practice the policies of Martin Luther-another famous non-Atheist.

[39] Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, born 69? C.E., died after 122 C.E. The late date of Suetonius' writings makes it clear that he is merely repeating the teachings of the Christians, whose scriptures by then must have been easily available. Suetonius cannot be taken as corroboration of the scriptures if he was, in fact, dependent upon them. Suetonius reports in his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* (ca. 120 C.E.) that there were punishments of Christians under Nero and Claudius. This may be reasonable evidence of the existence of Christians, but it can hardly be considered evidence of Christ!

[40] Pliny the Younger (Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus), born 62 C.E., died before 114 C.E. In a letter to the emperor Trajan in 112 C.E., Pliny says that there are Christians who regularly assemble on a certain day "to sing responsively a hymn to Christ as if to a god." He could have said the same thing about the worshippers of Mithra. Would Christians have taken that as evidence that Mithra too had been an historical personage?

[41] *The Babylonian Talmud* was not reduced to writing until the fifth century C.E. Interpretation of what the Talmud does or does not have to say about Jesus is very difficult and confusing. It is possible, however, that the roots of some of the Jeschu (Jesus) anecdotes go back to nearly 100 B.C.E. If this be so, it vitiates the gospel stories and gives us an even more ancient mythology in which to seek the beginnings of the Christ myth.

[42] Considering the morally outrageous stuff which did make it into the Bible, it is hard to believe that any of the Apocrypha could have been thrown out on moral grounds! The fact of the matter is, books got into the Bible or didn't make it on the basis of the political power (or lack thereof) held by the various churches which used them. This and other problems concerning the "Good Book" are described in my article, "The Real Bible: Who's Got It?" in the May 1986 issue of *American Atheist*.

[43] I was too quick to agree. Knowing that Shlomo Pines works with Arabic as well as the ancient classical languages, I foolishly took Koster at his word when he said that Pines had published an Arabic Josephus document in 1971. Although I have searched Pines' output from 1967 to 1989, I have been unable to find any Arabic version of Josephus. So I think Koster is either confused about this or is being a typical Christian apologist. In 1968, Shlomo Pines published an Arabic manuscript containing part of the Ebionite writings ("The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 2, pp. 237-310, Jerusalem). The manuscript dates from the tenth century but incorporates material from the fifth century. The Ebionites were Jewish Christians who opposed St. Paul as a perverter of the "true" gospel. They were persecuted to extinction by the Roman Catholic Church. This has been Pines' most important discovery, and it is possible that Koster confused this with the Josephus problem. On the other hand, there is something rather suspicious about the way Koster handles this subject in his book. On page 61 he says that *in 1972*, not 1971, "a Jewish scholar [not mentioning Pines by name] found a copy of the same passage in a translation from Josephus' original Greek into Arabic..." He gives no reference for this claim, leading me to assume that he was either making up the story or writing with a defective memory. There is also the slight possibility that Pines published his Josephus material in a journal too obscure to be found in the millions of items contained in the Ohio State University Library, a library which has a very fine Jewish & Near Eastern Studies collection.

[44] The story in question is found in Josephus' *Wars of the Jews*, Book VII, Chapter 2. After reading the story I am more puzzled than ever as to why Koster chose to mention it. Was he simply trying to embarrass me, by coming up with an obscure story about which I could have no opinion? In my humble opinion, only someone whose wrappers are coming loose would see a connection between the story of Simon coming out of a cave and the supposed resurrection of Jesus. The expected astonishment probably was supposed to develop out of the fact that Simon "appeared out of the ground in the place where the temple had formerly been." The Romans had just destroyed the temple, and Simon perhaps thought he might spook a few soldiers. As for Koster's claim that "the Romans all knew that something very strange happened after the crucifixion and were frightened," I need only to point out that none of the Roman soldiers present at Simon's inauguration of Groundhog's Day could reasonably be supposed to have been present forty years earlier at Jesus' crucifixion party (assuming it was a historical event).

[45] To Koster, the text of Josephus, like the text of the Bible, appears to be a Rorschach ink blot test; he can see in it whatever he wishes to see.

[46] By now the audience must have forgotten what we were supposed to be debating.

[47] Here he tries to thrust the burden of proof back onto me! There really was no need to get into a technical discourse on the nature of proof. All that was needed was to show that the "evidence" adduced by Koster was inadequate to compel belief.

[48] Because I had just exposed all of Koster's so-called "evidence" for the existence of Jesus as not being convincing, Koster must ignore everything that I have said and pretend that there are "ten" credible writers for the existence of Jesus. Then he makes his crack about the lack of videotapes in order to imply that Atheists want *too much* evidence for the existence of Jesus! Actually, Koster is wrong. All Atheists want is *convincing evidence*. He has not produced any. And the burden of proof is on him. An examination of the so-called evidence for a historical Jesus can be found in my article "Did Jesus Exist?" (*American Atheist*, January, 1987).

[49] A characteristic of religious fanatics that I have noted over the years is that they have no sense of humor. We joke with them at our own peril. Koster by now probably has told the world about the stupid Atheist who didn't know that TV cameras were of modern invention!

[50] Of course autograph manuscripts would be better proof than mere copies of such manuscripts. But, of course, this is a more rigorous test than even I was requesting for Jesus.

[51] This is true with regard to ordinary *human* documents. But the Christian fundamentalists insist the Bible is *inerrant* and *perfect*. Thus absolute consistency is in order.

[52] Kresta tries to argue that I am contradicting myself when I say that (a) we do not have enough evidence that Jesus existed, but that (b) we have enough evidence to know how the Jesus myth developed. Actually Kresta's allegation is wrong. When we see contradictory genealogies of Jesus in early manuscripts of Matthew and Luke, but later genealogies that agree with each other a hundred percent, it is *more probable* that the bible-makers were dishonest (made it all up and were reconciling the contradictions as time went on) than that anyone named Jesus really existed. Therefore, the contradictory manuscripts from the First Century actually provide excellent evidence about how the various competing religious doctrines of the day developed. But they provide extremely weak evidence that Jesus of Nazareth actually lived. In fact, the evidence suggests that the Jesus story is a typical myth that got bigger with the retelling.

[53] It is characteristic of religious persons to suppose that absolute knowledge is possible and that their various oracles have supplied it. Consequently, Kresta expects me to back up my claims with absolute, "certain" proof. Of course, this is not possible. However, one does not need certainty in order to proceed in the world. Every day, we "risk" our lives by acting on evidence which is merely extremely probable. A rapid review of the evidence for Julius Caesar versus the evidence for Jesus of Nazareth shows, I think, that the probability that Caesar actually existed is so high that one is hard-pressed even to find a hint of contrary evidence. In the case of Jesus, however, the "evidence" is so flimsy that only a person blinded by religious passion could suppose it was absolutely certain that Jesus once existed.

[54] Here Koster brilliantly gets us off the track of evidence for Jesus by getting me off into left field on the question of an obscure figure concerning whose existence or non-existence no modern person has ever had to worry.

[55] A reading of the account of Arminius given by Tacitus in his *Annales* will suggest a very large number of people who could have "lived to tell about it," including his wife and brother!

[56] The Arminius I had in mind at this point in the debate was Jacobus Arminius, the Dutch theologian (1560-1609) who founded the doctrine of Arminianism, the rejection of Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Unfortunately, my memory being boggled by this radical and irrelevant turn in the debate, I misplaced Arminius in time, thinking he was much earlier than he really was. I did not know of the Arminius (ca. 18 B.C.E.-19 C.E.) dredged up by Koster.

[57] Actually, I was thinking of a different Arminius, as explained in the note above. However, I knew that Arius (ca. 256-336 C.E.) was definitely associated with the Church Fathers and, supposing that I was more mixed up than I actually was, I accepted Arius as the source of my confusion. All of this shows that an Atheist spokesman has to know everything possible in order to fend off the extraordinarily devious assaults of the true believers.

[58] As a "description of Jesus," the passage in Tacitus' *Annales* leaves much to be desired! Found in Book XV:44, the entire passage reads: "But neither human resources, nor imperial munificence, nor appeasement of the gods, eliminated sinister suspicions that the fire [i.e., the burning of Rome] had been instigated. To suppress this rumour, Nero fabricated scapegoats - and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). Their originator, Christ [it is clear that Tacitus knows so little of his subject that he thinks this is a name rather than a title!], had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilatus. But in spite of this temporary setback the deadly superstition had broken out afresh, not only in Judaea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome. All degraded and shameful practices collect and flourish in the capital. First, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their information, large numbers of others were condemned - not so much for incendiarism as for their anti-social tendencies. Their deaths were made farcical. Dressed in wild animals' skins, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark as substitutes for daylight. Nero provided his Gardens for the spectacle, and exhibited displays in the Circus, at which he mingled with the crowd - or stood in a chariot, dressed as a charioteer. Despite their guilt as Christians, and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man's brutality rather than to the national interest." [*Tacitus: The Annals of Imperial Rome*, translated by Michael Grant, Dorset Press, 1971, pp. 365-6] Curiously, although Josephus was in Rome at this time, he makes no mention of these festivities, making it possible that Tacitus was relaying a Christian account or that the passage is a late interpolation.

[59] Varus actually committed suicide, according to the historical record. Anyone reading Tacitus' account of Arminius and Varus cannot fail to be impressed by the number of ways detailed information about both characters could have been transmitted to Tacitus. Apart from the fact that Tacitus drew upon a now-lost work of Pliny the Elder, who was much closer in time to the events reported, there apparently were numerous Roman soldiers who escaped from Arminius and later led Germanicus to find the remains of Varus' army. Certainly, a great number of eye-witness accounts were available to Pliny. The story told by Tacitus about Arminius reads naturally and coherently. It is highly self-consistent. The gospel stories, by contrast, are jerky, inconsistent, contradictory, and have little of the color of real life. By Koster's own admission, there is more evidence for the existence of Arminius than there is for Jesus. When I asked "how do you know he [Arminius] was a reality?" he replied that there are tombstones. **He cannot make the same reply about Jesus.** Therefore, he cannot make a valid comparison between the two. What he's doing is taking perfectly plausible evidence that Arminius existed, and then saying, "look, only one historian mentions him." It is not the quantity of evidence that counts, it is the quality that counts. I should mention that a good friend of mine who has been to the

Teutoburger Forest saw no tombstones. The *Encyclopedia Americana* (1975 Ed.) in its article on Varus says, with regard to the place of Varus' ill-fated battle, "The exact scene of this battle is disputed." If there are thousands of tombstones, as Koster claims, why is the battle site disputed?

[60] Thousands of tombstones archeologically datable to the time Arminius and Varus are supposed to have existed (on the authority of Tacitus) would actually be very good corroboration! With Jesus, however, we have traditions of three different tombs, and none of the traditions can be traced to within two centuries of the alleged entombment. If, in fact, tombstones are lacking to support the case of Arminius, the case for Arminius is weakened somewhat.

[61] Since Koster had not given any indication of which Cleopatra he had in mind, it seems to me that my Cleopatra was just as good as the one he had in mind. Nevertheless, even if we are talking about the Cleopatra of Antony & Cleopatra fame, there are plenty of eye-witness records, monuments, etc., to make it clear that she was just as real as the Cleopatra of the Rosetta Stone. Ordinary business records commonly were dated by the year of the reigning monarch, and numerous such records survive from the time of ancient Egypt.

[62] I certainly must have been sleeping when I let *this* statement go unchallenged. Ptolemy I had at least one daughter named Arsinoë, who married his second son by Berenice!

[63] What should have been enunciated more clearly here is the principle that the more outrageous the claim, the more compelling must be the evidence.

[64] Of course, I should have said "Varus."

[65] Notice how Kresta makes it appear as if Koster had won the earlier exchange about the evidence for the historicity of Jesus. Never mind that Koster had come nowhere near producing credible evidence that Jesus of Nazareth ever existed! In the following exchange, therefore, in discussing whether Jesus was a god-man, I had to assume *for the purposes of argument only* that Jesus had a historical existence. It is very revealing that although Koster was able to accept my making that assumption, a few seconds later he was unable to grasp my identical assumption, *arguendo*, that Isis and Osiris had a historical existence also.

[66] Was Koster making a feeble attempt to be funny here? Or was he trying to make the audience think he had caught me in some sort of logical trap? It is quite clear from the context that I had no more belief in the historical reality of Isis and Osiris than in that of Jesus. Clearly, the mythological *personae* of Isis and Osiris were in the minds of the Egyptians, and the *ideas* of these characters shaped Egyptian history. So too, the *idea* of Jesus has shaped western history. Another phenomenon, related to Koster's strategy here, is the common response of Christians to my "God damn it!" when I stub my toe. "You *do* believe in god! You just called upon his name!" The fact that the uttering of expletives is a speech reflex having nothing to do with philosophical beliefs and disbeliefs seems never to have been learned by Christians.

[67] By Koster's "logic," the flimsy "evidence" for Isis and Osiris ought to be sufficient for him to suppose they were historical figures too! If flimsy evidence is adequate for Jesus, it should be adequate for Osiris too. Yet Koster clearly indicates that he does not accept the historicity of Osiris.

[68] One more attempt to get Koster back to the subject supposedly being debated. An *operational definition* is one which prescribes an *operation* which can be performed in order to experience the thing being defined. For example, in mineralogy one defines "harder than" by the

operation of scratching: if A can scratch the surface of B, A is harder than B. Readers are invited to try to imagine an operational definition of divinity!

[69] It is hard to see how such experiences can be taken as evidence of anything other than the experiences themselves. How would one know whether a given ineffable experience came from Jesus, Yahweh, Jove, Buddha, Isis, the Virgin Mary, or Elvis? It is quite possible that we shall be able to replicate such ineffable experiences by electrical stimulation of specific regions of the brain. Many people claim that psychedelic drugs can do the same thing, hence the use of peyote in certain Amerindian religious ceremonies.

[70] This is another example of the *circumstantial species* of the *ad hominem* fallacy. Since I am not a Freudian, he implies that I cannot agree with anything that Freud ever wrote! Freud also "believed" that 'nine' comes before 'ten.' Since I am not a Freudian, must I deny the number system as well?

[71] This argument is rather disingenuous. Surely Koster realizes that it is the quality of the writers, not their quantity, that is of critical importance. It can be shown that all eight of Koster's "authorities" (including Tacitus) were merely reporting on *Christianity*, not *Christ*. On the other hand, the fact that Tacitus had access to official governmental records *when he wrote about certain things* in his histories may very well make him a credible witness concerning, say, Arminius. It should also be pointed out that Koster has shifted from the *psychiatric* definition of delusion-appropriate when talking about Freud-to the common, conversational definition of delusion ("a false belief or opinion"). The psychiatric definition explains delusion as "a fixed, dominating, or persistent false mental conception resistant to reason with regard to actual things or matters of fact." While my own rejection of the eight "authorities" may or may not be the result of delusion in the everyday sense of the term, it would seem clear that the clinging of Christians (including Koster) to their belief in a world of spirits and spooks is an example of delusion in the psychiatric sense of the term.

[72] Of course, it was only after the debate, after I had read up on Arminius (remember that I had never heard of this particular Arminius) that I was able to discover that the evidence for his existence is rather good-orders of magnitude greater than the evidence of Jesus. His life is recorded in detail in Tacitus' *Annales (The Annals of Imperial Rome)*, and - if Koster is telling the truth - the account of Tacitus is corroborated by thousands of tombstones. There is evidence that after the death of Varus, Tiberius' nephew Julius Caesar Germanicus went to Germany and buried the soldiers of Varus' army. Germanicus captured Arminius' wife, Thusnelda; and it is reasonable to suppose (no absolute proof, however!) that much of what we know of the details of Arminius' triumph over Varus was derived from Germanicus' interrogation of Thusnelda. Also, Arminius' brother Flavus is supposed to have been a military leader in the employ of the Romans.

[73] It is difficult to resist the temptation to do a bit of two-bit arm-chair psychologizing here and wonder if Koster isn't simply projecting his own pathological logic onto me!

[74] Shades of Pascal's Wager! Note that he is twisting what I have been saying. I was referring to the dangers of *not* believing in the historicity of *Jesus* (i.e., going to hell). He now turns that around into the dangers of *believing* in the historicity of Jesus.

[75] Again, Koster is suggesting that quantity of sources counts for more than quality of sources. Does he also think that ten individuals telling lies count for more than one telling the truth? Furthermore, he uses a subtle, fallacious appeal to authority here. Unless I can cite someone else

who agrees with me, his hint goes, I must be wrong. Actually, all that matters is whether I can prove that I am correct, not how many others agree with me.

Note also that Koster never answers my charge that Jesus-belief is quite dangerous, especially when the believer holds a position of great power.

[76] Is Koster's urge to deny Santa Claus also "somewhat subjective"? Why should my denial of Jesus be any different than his denial of Santa Claus? It is clear that the burden of proof must rest on the person alleging the existence of something, not on the person denying. Otherwise, we would have to spend our lives trying to disprove Thor, the Tooth Fairy, Mithra, the golden mountains at the end of the universe, etc.

[77] By asking a loaded question, Koster attempts to trap me. His question assumes not only that Jesus existed (else how could I "see" him as anything, dangerous or otherwise?), but also that *I believe* he existed! If I answer "Yes," then he would argue that I have admitted that Jesus existed. If I say "No," then he would argue that there is no reason for me to be "fighting Christianity"! Either way, Koster tries to make it seem like Atheists haven't thoroughly considered their position.

Koster is disingenuous because he conveniently ignores the fact that whether or not Jesus existed, *people who believe Jesus existed do exist*, and those people, if permitted to infiltrate government, science and the communications media, would be quite dangerous indeed. I had just demonstrated this a few seconds earlier with my comment about President Reagan. The fact that Koster could thereafter smugly ask what dangers there are in Jesus-belief evidences his failure to hear (or at least to respond to) my arguments.

[78] [Mark 9:43-48](#). And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands **to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.** And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to **be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.** And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to **be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.**

[79] Note that while Koster quibbles about who invented eternal torment, he agrees that eternal torment is a Christian doctrine. Eternal torment is actually a *very* Christian doctrine. Why, then, is Christianity preferable to, say, devil-worship? Who would want to worship a god that roasts a person merely for asking that the god's existence be proved? Can a god be "loving" and "moral" if it thinks that a trillion years of torture is insufficient punishment for having the "wrong" religion, or none at all?

[80]In general, I was correct here; but some modification of my absolute statement is required. According to Homer W. Smith in his classic *Man And His Gods*, "...a variety of notions about the spirit existed throughout the Greek states between the time of the Homeric poems (1000 B.C.) and the opening of the Christian Era, but with few exceptions these notions appear to have had this much in common: the dead had no solid substance to be grasped or touched - that was why they were called 'shades' or 'images' - and they were deaf and dumb and impotent to act, for how could a shade, which was a mere fragment of a man, his 'last breath' which he gave up when he expired, hear without ears, talk without tongue, or act without bones and muscles? Even if the shade survived in or near the grave for a short period before its final dissolution, it had no

consciousness of the affairs of this world and no intercourse with other shades, for it had no capacity to think..." [p. 141, Grosset's Universal Library, 1957].

Further corroboration of my "breath theory" of the soul comes from Walter Burkert's book *Greek Religion*, which equates the shade (*psyche*) with breath: "In Homeric language, a something, the psyche, leaves man at the moment of death and enters the house of *Ais*, also known as *Aides*, *Aidoneus* and in Attic as *Hades*. *Psyche* means breath just as *psychein* is the verb to breathe; arrested breathing is the simplest outward sign of death..." [p. 195, Harvard Univ. Press, 1985].

It is not quite correct, however, to say that Christianity invented the doctrine of *eternal* punishment, the first mention of it in the Bible as we know it today is attributed to Jesus. [According to [Mark 3:29](#), blaspheming the Holy Ghost is unforgivable, putting one "in danger of eternal damnation"] It appears that this doctrine was fairly well developed in the later Greek mystery religions, and it was from these Greco-Anatolian religions that the doctrine came into Christianity. Judaism in the period before the turn of the era had no such doctrine. Indeed, the Sadducees - the religious party that controlled the temple service - had no belief in life after death at all.

[81] The reader will remember that "what on the face of it seems to be some good historical evidence" of Jesus is hear-say recorded in four gospels long after the time of the alleged happenings - none of the gospels being the work of eye-witnesses - and hear-say twice removed recorded by ancient historians who vouched for the fact that there were Christians by the year 100 of the common era!

[82] These articles appeared in the February, March, and April issues of *American Atheist*, in 1989. Reprints can be obtained either from the Michigan Division of American Atheists (P.O. Box 4070, Center Line, MI 48015) or from the Ohio Division (P.O. Box 8457, Columbus, OH 43201-0457).

[83] It is clear that what Mr. Koster "knows" doesn't extend very far in this area. Anyone who reads the journals devoted to the subject of life's origin has to be impressed by the high level of science which is being brought to focus on the subject. Unlike the vaporings of religious apologists, the experiments reported in these journals can be repeated and verified by anyone willing to make the effort. Best of all, the findings of new experiments can be added to the findings of old experiments, and our cumulative knowledge continues to grow at an accelerating pace. In the field of religion, however, *knowledge* never increases: new *opinions* simply are substituted for old ones.

[84] Am I mistaken, or were there *ten* authorities a little while ago? [In his book (p. 61) Koster claims that "Jesus and the Christians are mentioned by name by *innumerable* classical Roman authors." That's one hell of a lot more than ten!]

[85] An old - although dishonest - debater's trick is to claim that one has won a point, even if he has failed miserably to do so, and then keep on repeating the claim. Here Koster adds the trick of making it sound as though there are eight (down from ten!) authorities supporting scripture, even though four of the eight are the scriptures themselves!

[86] Here we get off the track again and onto the subject of Koster's book. The part of his book dealing with Darwin and Wallace is a stew of distortions, misunderstanding, and unrestrained hostile imagination. Unfortunately, I had some trouble in hearing what Koster was saying on the phone. When I read this part of the transcript I was quite astonished to see how many false things he had said without my being aware. Koster tries his usual appeal to authority, pretending that

because Wallace became a spiritualist, everyone else should also! Even though Wallace became a spiritualist, proof is still lacking to show that spirits are real, and a great deal of evidence exists proving fraud in the operations of spiritualists.

[87] When I read this claim in the transcript, I was flabbergasted at the outrageous suggestion that both Darwin and Wallace had used the term "Survival of the fittest" in the papers read before the Linnaean Society. The phrase "survival of the fittest" actually was coined by Herbert Spencer after publication of the first edition of *The Origin of Species*, and then was incorporated into later editions of Darwin's *Origin*. Just to be sure, I have pulled out of my files the actual papers read before the Linnaean Society on June 30, 1858 (the papers were published later, in 1859, in Volume III of the *Journal of the Proceedings of the Linnaean Society - Zoology*, pp. 45-62), and have verified that neither Darwin nor Wallace used the phrase "survival of the fittest" at that time. Moreover, although Wallace clearly advanced the *principle* of natural selection, he did not use the phrase "natural selection." Darwin did, of course, use the term. It is shocking that a man would dare to publish a book containing such outrageous claims without making an attempt to verify them before publication. I strongly suspect that Koster is dependent upon creationist sources for his misinformation on the circumstances of the Darwin-Wallace affair.

[88] Koster's dredging up of this interesting bit of information shows that, in spite of what he said earlier, he *did* know of the joint publication by Darwin and Wallace. In his book he claims that "Wallace's paper was published *before* Darwin's book. Under the house rules of science, Alfred Russel Wallace should be carried on the books as the actual developer of the theory of evolution by natural selection." [p. 37] It is true that Wallace published *a* paper before Darwin published his book, and it is true that the paper caused consternation among Darwin and his friends. But as usual, Koster has not done his homework very well. The paper did *not* articulate the principle of natural selection, although Darwin could see that Wallace was hot on the trail. Koster goes on to write that "Wallace and Darwin, in fact, read a joint paper on natural selection before the Linnaean Society in 1858, before *Origin of Species* was published." Wouldn't a careful scholar have known that Wallace was on the other side of the world when his paper was read? Wouldn't a scholar concerned with truth and fairness have known that the papers were submitted to the Society by Charles Lyell and Joseph Hooker, and that they probably were read aloud by J.J. Bennett, Esq., the Secretary of the Linnaean Society?

[89] It actually makes me angry to see a person who has never added one new fact to the world's store of knowledge malign the memory of great scientists and toilers after truth such as Hooker and Lyell (the founder of modern geology). Here Koster as much as states that Lyell and Hooker were conspiring with Darwin to invent a false priority for Darwin! It is incomprehensible how Koster could have written a book about Darwin without being aware of the evidence of the letters Darwin wrote on natural selection many years prior to 1858 or the evidence of Darwin's journals.

[90] Really, the letters had been written to Gray while he was still in Boston, before coming to the University of Michigan.

[91] For someone who gives all evidence of being a creationist, Koster here gives away the store along with the clothes-racks. It is quite unlikely that two different researchers would come up with the same theory of natural selection if there were not strong evidence in nature itself that the process is real. This is admitting that evolution is real - not an idea maintainable only because Darwin allegedly ignored evidence. [On page 25 of his book, Koster claims that "Darwin turned the discussion of evolution into a crusade, and, *as a result, the scientific data were never properly taken into consideration.*" Of course, no examples of such data are given. On pages 73-4, attacking the great biologist Thomas Henry Huxley, Koster alleges that "To make the facts fit

the theories, he sometimes had to mutate or mutilate the facts. He did this with all the power of a brilliant mind twisted by a flawed and fearful childhood..." Once again, no examples are given to substantiate this vicious libel of one of the greatest liberators of the mind our planet has known.]

[92] The lesson to be learned from this is that the facts of nature compel unbiased minds to conclude that evolution has occurred and that natural selection is at least a part of the cause of evolutionary change. By comparison, we may ask, Is it conceivable that any person not already aware of the first Genesis creation myth could go out into the world of nature and conclude that green plants came into existence before the sun? That birds existed before reptiles? Without knowledge of the second Genesis creation myth, who would come up with the idea that man is older than both plants and animals, but that woman did not come into existence until the last animal species had appeared? Without being brainwashed by the Noah's Ark tale, what geologist would conclude that the whole planet was covered by a shell of water less than 4,500 years ago? What independent observer would conclude that the kiwi, which can neither swim nor fly, came to New Zealand from Mt. Ararat in Turkey but couldn't make it to Greece or Australia? Would anyone conclude that there was once a "firmament" with windows in it and water above it?

[93] The Fox sisters, of Hydesville, N.Y., in 1848, began the spiritualism revival of modern times by tricking people into believing that spirits were communicating with them by means of a coded series of rappings or knocking sounds. Among the believers in the Fox sisters was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Although Margaret Fox, one of the sisters, confessed in 1888 (at the age of 81!) that the whole affair had been a hoax, effected by cracking her toes, Doyle (and Wallace) continued to believe in the reality of the "psychic" phenomena. Against the will to believe, facts are often feeble.

[94] Neither in his book nor in this debate did Koster ever reveal who these people were or what the wonderful phenomena were that Darwin and Huxley chose to ignore. Koster keeps claiming that there is solid evidence for spiritistic phenomena, but nowhere cites evidence. A lie repeated often enough... Amusingly, Koster *does* mention the foolery that began at Lourdes in Southern France on February 11, 1858 (one year before the publication of *On The Origin Of Species*), when Bernadette Soubirous claimed to have had a vision of the Virgin Mary. He simply can't understand why two of the greatest scientists in the world at the time were not disposed to waste their time on the subject!

[95] The *New York Times* letters are by Peter Salwen (June 15, 1989), Ralph Colp (July 4, 1989), and David Adler (July 26, 1989). My memory of the medical journals, however, was a bit off track. The most important article was actually in the *Israel Journal of Medical Science* (Vol. 25, No. 4, April 1989). Written by David Adler, it was titled "Darwin's Illness." It completely demolishes Koster's claim that Darwin's illness was psychosomatic, resulting from guilt over evolution and hatred of his father.

[96] Koster implies that *Atheists* are the biased ones who have already made up their minds about Charles Darwin and are therefore unwilling to reach objective, logical conclusions about him. Not only is this not true, as I demonstrate with my response to Koster, the exact opposite seems to be the case. *Koster and the Christians* are the ones who have made Darwin into a devil-character, and therefore it is *they* who cannot reach logical conclusions about either him or his scientific claims. The fact that Darwin's scientific claims about natural selection are irrefutable seems not to faze Christians. They resort to assassinating his character even though his character has nothing to do with whether he was correct about evolution. Incidentally, the oft-made suggestion that Atheists make a religion of science (Darwin being an "object of worship") is a misuse of both the terms *science* and *religion*.

[97] Koster seems never to understand that the so-called "evidence" rejected by great scientists is rejected not because they have closed minds, but because they have powerful minds - minds more powerful than his. Although Koster cannot perceive what is wrong with the examples of psychic phenomena, great scientists do so quickly, and have no need to investigate perspicuous flummery any further. I cannot resist suggesting to readers that if they want an excellent example of an author who is "totally subjective" and will not "recognize evidence which is put in front of him if he doesn't choose to believe it," they should rush right out and buy a copy of *The Atheist Syndrome*. Mr. Koster should be advised also that there is an immense difference between a mind that is 'open' and a mind that is gaping.

[98] Although one could argue that Mr. Koster is here vainly attempting to make a joke, this line clearly demonstrates Mr. Koster's incessant desire to find a spiritual explanation for every little phenomenon requiring an explanation! Again, one wonders why HE is so biased that he must constantly reject perfectly good non-supernatural explanations.

[99] This is astonishingly good advice from Koster, and it is hard to believe he really would like for me or anyone else to read Darwin's autobiography to see how it has been distorted in Koster's book. Readers are encouraged to obtain it and read it. An easily available version is *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809-1882. With original omissions restored. Edited with appendix and notes by his grand-daughter Nora Barlow. The only complete edition.* Published by W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1958 (paperback).

[100] I couldn't believe my ears when Kresta said these things. I couldn't have said it as well myself. The *argumentum ad hominem* is an old debater's ploy: attack the opponent instead of his argument. Thus, if Joe argues that George Washington was a good president, and Harry replies that Joe doesn't know what Joe is taking about because Joe has AIDS, Harry has used the *argumentum ad hominem*. Whether or not Joe has AIDS has nothing whatsoever to do with the question of Washington having been a good president. Therefore, even if Joe does in fact have AIDS and Harry's statement about Joe be correct, Harry cannot be said to have won the argument. Observe how Koster uses precisely this type of reasoning in his response to the host's question about whether Koster's book uses the *argumentum ad hominem*.

[101] If one substitutes "the evidence *against* human spirituality" for the phrase "the evidence in favor of human spirituality," this becomes a perfect description of how Koster and religious minds function! I had no opportunity to point out the *non sequitur* in claiming that the putative existence of "human spirituality" is evidence of the existence of a god.

[102] Nowhere in his book does Koster provide any evidence for this. This is nothing less than character assassination.

[103] Notice that in the very act of answering the host's question about *ad hominem* argumentation, Koster uses nothing but *ad hominem* arguments! Whether Nietzsche had syphilis or homosexual tendencies, or whether he was a scientist or a philosopher, has absolutely no connection with whether Nietzsche - or anyone else - had good reason to "rave against" god!

[104] Tidied up, this argument applies *a fortiori* to Christians such as Koster. Once he has been pushed by emotion to believe there is a god, no amount of evidence to the contrary will shake him. Despite his apparent study of Darwin's work, Koster remains an antievolutionist. The massive amounts of evidence piled up by Darwin (let alone the evidence amassed in modern times!) made no impression on Koster.

[105] Koster has a nasty talent for drawing negative conclusions from positive traits of character. In his book [page 54] he writes: "Interestingly, Darwin was a devoted and kindly father. He never disciplined his children harshly and they never feared him... I think, his kindness as a father was his way of repudiating his own father for whatever he had suffered during his own childhood." This would be outrageous enough by itself; but what can one say after discovering that Darwin's "suffering" during his own childhood is nothing more than the unsubstantiated psychologizing of a man who has learned how to assassinate dead benefactors of the human race?

[106] It was really only after we had gotten a fair understanding of our animal cousins that we began to see how humankind fits into the "big picture." Darwin approached the human species methodically, building upon what he had discovered about the lower and higher animals. His treatise *The Expression Of The Emotions In Man and Animals* laid the foundation for biopsychology and made possible the scientific study of human behavior. Koster makes no mention of this treatise.

[107] Does Koster really think Darwin was this stupid? As for the vocabulary of 38,000 words, I would like to see documentation of this! Presumably, Koster is referring to the aborigines who were living in Tierra Del Fuego, the remotest point in the Americas. I am unable to find any treatise on the Fuegian language, and so I cannot flatly say that Koster is lying. It is suggestive, however, to note that Wallace L. Chafe's *Seneca Morphology and Dictionary* [Smithsonian Press, 1967] lists only 2146 vocabulary entries for this Iroquoian language. By contrast, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* contains some 450,000 vocabulary entries! Is it believable that an isolated tribe of hunters and gatherers would have eighteen times as many things to talk about as an agricultural tribe which was a member of what amounted to a League of Nations, and which produced a "prophet" named Handsome Lake?

[108] Just because primitive people all over the world believe something doesn't make it true. Practically all prescientific cultures (including the one that produced the Bible) have believed the earth to be flat. Would Koster criticize Darwin for not considering the opinion of the Fuegians in the area of geography too? Unlike Koster, Darwin knew that there is an enormous difference between a mind that is open and a mind that is gaping!

[109] Science attempts to find truth. Something is considered closer to being the truth when it has good, solid evidence supporting it. It doesn't matter *who* says the idea under discussion, or what *other* ideas the same person had. All that matters is the evidence for it. Koster simply doesn't understand this. A person could be absolutely correct about one thing (Hitler for example, saying that the square root of 9 is 3), and be totally whacko in some other area. The one has absolutely no effect upon the other. Koster throughout this very interview is using the *ad hominem* attack over and over and over and over.

[110] Koster's comment, combined with his others on Freud, suggests that if a person says one thing that is ridiculous (such as Freud on certain topics in psychology) then whatever else that person says is therefore discredited, and if a person says something that makes sense (e.g., Pasteur on germ theory), then everything else he says is correct. (Note that under Koster's formulation there is no objective way to decide which of two statements offered by a particular person is the ridiculous idea that discredits the other, or the sensible idea that gives credibility to something else. I wonder how Koster would address the following problem: If Adolf Hitler were to claim that the square root of 9 is 3, would we therefore have to conclude tht Hitler was correct in his political philosophy too? Or would we have to conclude that the square root of 9 is not 3?

Koster here must *assume* that Freud was wrong about hallucinations and that Pasteur was right about Catholicism, because he cannot *prove* either of these assertions. To hide the fact that he is assuming instead of proving, however, Koster derives his assumptions from the facts that Freud was wrong about some things in psychology (therefore, he must be wrong about hallucinations, too), and that Pasteur was correct about germ theory (so Pasteur must be correct about Catholicism, too). Thus, Koster actually uses a sophisticated amalgam of both the *ad hominem* fallacy (against Freud) and the appeal-to-authority fallacy (with Pasteur). No, we do not want to correct Pasteur (or Freud) "too thoroughly"; we wish to correct them only where they were wrong.

The *ad hominem* and other fallacies are explained in more detail in my article, "Fallacies for the Faith," which appeared in the March 1988 issue of *American Atheist*.

[111] It was the medical doctors, not the scientists, who had to be convinced. It appears that Koster (or his creationist advisors) has combined the biography of Pasteur with those of Semmelweiss and Lister. Ignaz Semmelweiss (1818-1865) was the Hungarian physician who tried to convince the medical doctors of Vienna that childbed fever was transmitted by physicians' hands dirtied during autopsy dissections. Joseph Lister (1827-1912) was the founder of antiseptic surgery. He too fought hard to get other surgeons to follow his lead. Pasteur did some good work in this area too, but the really classical case was that of Semmelweiss' fight with the medics of Vienna.

[112] Koster here is twisting what I just had said. Just because Pasteur was correct about germ theory does not mean he is automatically correct about anything else. The fact that he was a Catholic is not the reason we should discount his views on religion. The fact that Pasteur, like all religionists, *could not prove his religious assertions* is why we should discount his views in religion. The correctness of his views on germ theory has no relevance to his views on religion. I sardonically agreed with Koster only because the debate clock had run out at this point.

[113] From the context it would appear that this caller is attempting to provide a definition of god that Atheists can test, and which - once tested - could prove the god's existence. However, as in the case of the undetectable gremlins, this caller simply plays with words. He can allege until he is out of breath that "God is the center of all," or that "God is something that was in existence and that created everything out of itself," *but he must still prove that such is true*. Merely *defining* the word 'god' as something that exists does not make it so. We could just as easily define Santa Claus as a cute, fat man living near the North Pole who brings gifts to all the world's children in December. *But offering such a definition does not make the object of definition exist*, no matter how much we may wish it so!

It should be noted that non-Christian debaters often have no problem whatsoever with providing testable definitions of god. Some Amerindians, for example, say that god is the wind. Some cultures to this day worship the sun or moon as deities. Given such definitions, even Atheists will admit that 'god' exists!

[114] It is obvious that this caller has no idea that the subject of language evolution is well understood. No god created the Michigan dialect of English!

[115] Notice that the caller did not say "he." The caller simply said "*something* that was in existence that created *everything* out of *it*." Al Kresta cannot get away from his pre-conceived notions of the Christian god, which supposedly has a penis.

[116] WMUZ callers are really on top of things, aren't they?

[117] Where was this guy when Mary Baker Eddy needed him? This word-hash appears to be an excellent example of schizophrenic speech. It would be interesting to know if this person has ever been hospitalized for this problem.

[118] The caller appears to have at least *some* grasp of reality!

[119] Actually, the WMUZ screening process must have worked rather well. Not one Atheist caller was to be heard on the WMUZ airwaves that day, at least between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m., the period monitored by American Atheists.

[120] The first time I listened to this part of the program (the questions from callers came after Koster and I had left the program), I missed the significance of what Kresta is doing here. John Sikos has pointed out that by implying that Atheists aspire to immortality, and then reducing the idea to an absurdity, Kresta has created a "straw-man argument." Atheists do not, of course, aspire to immortality - at least not the type that has to be "lived" without benefit of brains or genitals! The only type of "immortality" a sane person can aspire to at present involves our personal achievements -the things that we have done which endure or which set into motion a sequence of events that continues long after our physical demise. We do good things now, not because we'll be gloating over it sometime later as a spirit, but because it makes us happy *now*. In the near future, however, as Atheist scientists continue to learn how to control and, ultimately, reverse the aging process, a type of physical immortality - life of indefinitely long duration -will become a reality. When that occurs, the pseudoimmortality sold by the religionists will become unsellable, even at discount prices. Even so, at present we may simply note the absurdity in saying "I'm lonely. There's nobody *there*." Of course there's nobody *there*. Everybody is *here*, and there is no real reason to be lonely.

[121] Although this was probably intended to be a put-down of the Atheist condition, it is actually a fair assessment. As emotionally and intellectually mature persons, Atheists know that the search for absolute and ultimate answers is, to an extremely high degree of probability, futile. They can walk without crutches, thank you, and enjoy the scenery as they go. The religionists, on the other hand, have been conditioned into emotional and intellectual dependency. They are afraid to think for themselves because they know they are fallible. They are trained to fear freedom, and they escape from freedom to avoid the anxiety associated with decision-making. Atheists have learned to live with this low-level anxiety and make the most of it. They have also learned that the more they know about the world, the better their decision-making skills become - hence the love-affair Atheists have with education and learning.

[122] He left out abortion clinics. There is no such thing as the American Atheist Union. Christians apparently equate American Atheists, Inc. with the American Civil Liberties Union - another evil group that defends the First Amendment.

[123] Why not? If a group of people pursues the principle of "enlightened self-interest," it is clear that they have more to profit by cooperation than by blind, selfish competition. It is to everyone's best interest to have fairness and justice rule their affairs, since this maximizes benefits for all. I have dealt with this problem in an *American Atheist* article [February, 1985] titled "Ethics Without Gods." It can be obtained from either the Michigan or Ohio Division of American Atheists.

With regard to Kresta's silly assertion that controversies can only be settled by "The State," and not by "any sense of fairness or morality or justice," why do all fifty states and the federal government provide a judicial system? Is Kresta implying that judges know nothing about fairness, justice, or morality? Why is it not "fair" for the state to protect a university from being

bombed? Or is that "fair" simply because Kresta's god supposedly would do the same - if granted existence and the power?

Kresta implies that *his god alone* is just, and that without that particular deity to settle conflicts there can be no fairness, justice, or morality. There are at least two problems with this. Firstly, it is possible to have justice, etc., without Al Kresta's god. Secondly, his god - the one described in the Bible - knows nothing about such things.

My friend Dennis McKinsey, the editor of the newsletter called *Biblical Errancy*, once made a long list of lovely things Mr. Koster's god did or recommended. Sampling just a part of his list, we find that the Bible god created evil [[Isaiah 45:7](#)], deceived people [[Jer. 4:10](#), [15:18](#), [20:7](#), [2 Chron. 18:22](#), [Ezek. 14:9](#), and [2 Thess. 2:9-12](#)], and told people to lie [[Exod. 3:18](#), [1 Sam. 16:2](#)].

Kresta's god rewarded liars [[Exod. 1:15-20](#)], ordered stealing [[Ezek. 39:10](#), [Exod. 3:22](#)], and ordered mass killing, without regard to the innocence of those killed [[Lev. 26:7-8](#), [Num. 25:4-5](#)]. He discriminates against bastards for being illegitimate [[Deut. 23:2](#)], punished many people for the acts of one [[Gen. 3:16-17](#), [20:18](#)], and punished children for the sins of their fathers [[Exod. 12:29](#), [30:5](#), [Deut. 5:9](#)]. Kresta's source of all morality supported human sacrifices [[Lev. 27:29](#), [Exod. 22:29-30](#), [Ezek. 20:26](#)], ordered cannibalism [[Lev. 26:29](#), [Jer. 19:9](#)], demanded virgin human females as plunder of war [[Num. 31:31-36](#)], and killed the righteous along with the wicked [[Ezek. 21:3-5](#)].

No matter how one stretches the definition of 'justice,' it is impossible to conclude that Al Kresta's god knows anything of the concept. Readers may reflect on how just or fair or moral that deity was when he decided to punish the whole human race because two individuals, Adam and Eve, ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [[Gen. 2:17](#), [3:16-17](#)] - *before* they could know the meaning of 'disobedience' or 'sin'!

[124] Our caller doubtlessly studied science in a "Christian school." The ground contains silica, not silicone. Silicone is a synthetic material not found in nature, nor is it used in computers. Metallic *silicon* (which also is unknown in nature, with the possible exception of certain meteorites) is used for that purpose. Is it a cause of wonderment that this caller also has no understanding of organic evolution?

[125] The caller here is making a feeble attempt to use the old "argument from design." The argument falsely compares natural objects with human-designed artifacts. If a house requires a designer, the argument goes, so too does the tree from which its wood was taken. But the analogy is false. Of necessity, we distinguish artifacts from natural objects simply because artifacts differ from anything found in nature. Natural things are perceived as such simply because they *do not* require intelligent design for their coming into existence. Artifacts such as houses and airplanes, by contrast, are recognized as being artificial and not natural due to the fact that their existence is obviously contingent on the existence of an intelligent designer.

Whereas boards and windowpanes do not spontaneously assemble themselves into houses, elements do spontaneously assemble themselves into amino acids and amino acids can spontaneously assemble themselves into protein-like polymers. Although copper wire and insulating tape do not spontaneously assemble themselves into the wiring tracks of houses, phospholipid molecules do spontaneously assemble themselves into cell membrane-like structures.

One final criticism of the argument from design: if the objects of our world are so complex and marvelous that they can only be accounted for if they are the product of a creative intelligence, then that creative intelligence is something even more complex and all the more in need of being explained as the product of an even higher-order intelligence! An infinite regress of created creators immediately develops.

[126] Of course my view of the geological column is not the only explanation available. It is, however, the only explanation that can be *used*. With regard to the argument from design ("every watch implies a watch-maker"), perhaps the greatest achievement of Darwin's theory of natural selection was its explanation of how the appearance of design - adaptation - can come about naturally. Details of this can be found in any modern evolution textbook.

[127] This sentence is most mystifying. What is "intellectual suicide" anyhow? How does it depend upon *justifying* one's own existence? As for the "continuity of personal identity," how do Christians reconcile the fact that "they" have no atoms left from the bodies they were born with when "they" die at the age of thirty? At the resurrection, which set of atoms will be associated with their "personal identity"?

[128] There seems to be a confusion of logical categories here. Consciousness is a *process*, a dynamic relation. How can a process have a center? To say "consciousness has a center" makes about as much sense as saying "sixty-miles-an-hour has three sides."

[129] While it is true that rocks and people differ in the ease with which they can be studied, they are nevertheless all observable! Kresta begs the question of god's existence when he goes on to assert that god is difficult to observe - let alone study - because he "will not submit to us as an object of study." This leaves Kresta with *two* assertions in need of proof: [1] god exists, and [2] god doesn't want to be studied!

Continuing the word games we saw earlier in this debate, Kresta is attempting to prove his pet god exists merely by saying that god is not testable by definition! I could just as easily say that Santa Claus exists, but that Santa refuses to let anyone see him. Try to prove me wrong! (I'm serious. Try to prove me wrong. You will find it impossible to do so.) Precisely because anyone can invent any definition for any word one wishes, whether it is an already-existing word or a newly invented one, the burden of proof is on the definer to prove that the thing defined exists. Kresta can claim as often as he wants to that his god will not submit to testing, but that does not prove his god's existence.

[130] A lot of assertions here, but no proof. How can one distinguish between a god who doesn't want to get involved, and a god who doesn't exist? Kresta might as well be defining undetectable gremlins in the WMUZ microphone and make the same claim, that because of the attributes HE gives the object he is claiming to exist, that object cannot be subject to science. All he can do is give us his opinions as to why the god in which he believes won't show himself. It is a pity I could not ask him why his god has chosen to play hide-and-seek with his creation - why his god has apparently chosen *not* to make his existence irrefutably obvious. What kind of a being would behave that way anyhow? The moral implications of this question are left for the reader to puzzle out.

[131] This is an incredible understatement. Remember that the burden of proof is on the person alleging the existence of something. If someone tells me that the Easter Bunny is hiding in somebody's clothes closet somewhere in North America, there is no need for me to search every closet on the continent. The person making the claim has to produce the rabbit or stop wasting my time.

[132] People do not "choose" what to believe. One's acceptance of a given idea as true, false, or uncertain follows involuntarily from the evidence presented to the senses.

[133] Al Kresta cannot let that argument go by, of course, because that would mean you can't intellectually discuss god. Therefore, to him, there must be more than faith to this.

[134] This caller seems to have a live-and-let-live attitude. You believe what you want, and I believe what I want. It falls apart, however, since it assumes that people can (and should) go around believing whatever they want, independent of evidence and truth.

[135] Considering the fact that Kresta thought I was being too stringent in my criteria for judging the historicity of Jesus, one must doubt that he takes the search for "external criteria on which to judge truth or falsity" very seriously. Is it not simply another act of faith to accept historical "evidence" that is noticeably lacking in rigor?

[136] Among mammals, a virgin birth (parthenogenesis) can only produce female offspring, for chromosomal reasons. Messiahs are mammals. Therefore, Jesus was... On the other hand, among turkeys, the chromosomal situation is such that all products of virgin birth are males. So if Jesus was a male, he might also have been...

In pre-Christian mythology, everybody who was anybody was thought to have been born of a virgin. Not only did this include "divinities" such as Buddha, Dionysus, and Mithra, it also included such "immortals" as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Plato!

[137] This is very interesting. I wonder if the axioms of logic are such presuppositions and prejudices. What about the fact that science, by definition, strives for non-supernatural explanations. Is that too a prejudice? Do natural and supernatural explanations exist side-by-side, one no more plausible than the other, simply because science has by definition (i.e., from bias) ruled out the supernatural?

[138] Whatever the intellectual merits of this argument, that is the American way, the way that is now so heavily under attack from the Christian right-wing.

[139] His conclusion does not follow from his premise. The *Christian* way would end discussion. If everyone were a Christian, WMUZ would not be having these occasional (very occasional) two-sided debates, instead of their usual one-sided sermons. It is only when we have a free marketplace of ideas that there *is* discussion. Only if people have a "choice" of beliefs do they have discussions - so that they will know what to "choose," in the word of this caller.

[140] Note how his argument assumes its own conclusion! It is a "circular argument": How did the world get here? God created it. How do you know there's a god? Because of the world he created.

[141] As distinguished from blind faith!!! It is, alas, beyond the scope of these notes to discuss the difference between "good testimony" and "faith."

[142] Judging from the overall context, this caller probably meant to refer to John Koster, the Christian, here, not Frank Zindler, the Atheist. [Footnote by John Sikos.]

[143] Kresta knows full well that an Atheist guest, once in three years, is not going to put a dent in the Christian stronghold!

[144] John Sikos has pointed out that at this point Koster is "cashing in on his Matt. 7:12 strategy." The verse referred to reads: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

[145] This is reminiscent of the earlier schizophrenic caller, who felt he had to meet personally with his prey to "illuminate" him. Why is this necessary for Christians? Don't their arguments carry themselves? Must there always be other things, like emotional, mental or even physical coercion going on, things which require one-on-one manipulation?

[146] If I knew this guy's name and address, I'd send him a thank-you note for all the flattering comment.

[147] This testability business is used by Christians disingenuously. They always use the "laboratory" as an example. You can't take god into a laboratory, which probably doesn't have enough room, because of all the test-tubes and Bunsen burners! Not all tests and experiments have to be done "in" a laboratory of the sort that Christians conjure up in their minds when the word is used (actually quite pejoratively), after they've been through too much Sunday school. A god can be tested logically, once its definition is known. "Can it build a wall that even *it* cannot tear down?" is a logical test of two attributes of a god, and it fails. One or both of the alleged attributes of deity (i.e., omnipotence and existence) cannot be true, laboratory or no laboratory. Period.

[148] This caller, who claims that Christians are supposed to operate solely on faith, not on proof, cannot even get Christian theology straight! The Bible says that Christians should "Prove [i.e., test] all things." ([1 Thess. 5:21](#)) If more Christians would obey this verse there wouldn't be so much friction between Atheists and Christians. Come to think of it, there wouldn't *be* very many Christians if they started obeying this part of the Bible!

[149] I.e., on another show where all the Dial-an-Atheist fans aren't listening, so that they don't have to witness another hole in the Christian argument exposed!

[150] Here, again, he is alleging that Jesus demonstrated "it" to those around him. That is nothing but mere allegation and "demonstrates" nothing, absolutely nothing, to us.

[151] The word 'proof' does not occur in the KJV of the Gospel of Luke. There is, however, one occurrence of the word 'prove,' in [Luke 14:19](#): "And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove [Greek *dokimázô*, 'to try, prove'] them." I cannot doubt that readers will find this verse most edifying.

[152] The verse referred to is [Acts 1:3](#). The introduction to Acts claims that before Jesus went back to heaven, he gave commandments to the apostles "to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs [Greek *tekmérion*, 'a sure token'], being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." It is interesting that no contemporary witnesses ever noticed this fact. It is also interesting, that the oldest of the gospels, Mark, makes no mention of Jesus being seen by anyone after his crucifixion. [The oldest manuscripts of Mark end with [verse 8 of chapter 16](#): "And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid." The last twelve verses were added in the third or fourth century.]

[153] "He" gives us tornadoes, cancers, car accidents, missing children, etc. Muslims, Mormons, and non-Christian religionists make the same claim, with equally "powerful" arguments.

[154] Again we see the bias toward a supernatural explanation. How does she know the tank was empty? Many cars have a buffer under the "E" in the gauge, as a reserve for Christians like this one. If this is the first time the car had ever gotten to that point without running out, it is very likely that she just *thought* it was empty. Why do Christians insist on a supernatural explanation when a natural one requiring a lot fewer assumptions is available?

[155] Prior to this revealing statement, this caller stated four times that her gasoline tank was empty. Yet now she says, "I ran out of gas." Clearly she does not herself believe that her tank was truly empty. Why did the host let this contradiction go by without questioning it? Apparently WMUZ thinks it is more important to create Christian believers than to think rationally and objectively about the truth. Truth is less important to Christians than is the manufacturing of human sheep who will believe the claims of their "pastors."

[156] She may have said fifteen miles. [Footnote by John Sikos]

[157] Shall we assume she corroborated this? Or did she jump to this conclusion as she did with regard to the "empty" tank?

[158] Why did "the lord" wait 25 years? Why does he not reveal this kind of information to everyone, instead of to only a few, who then insist it is proof positive of the existence of a god? Also, why didn't the lord do something really nice, like prevent the accident in the first place? Then there would have been no need for driving on empty. Maybe he could even have made cars that did *not need* gas.

[159] All this goes by without any proof whatsoever that it was Nuñé's particular god that was responsible for these "fascinating" miracles! How do Nuñé and our host know that it was not Allah or Buddha or Elvis or the little plastic Virgin Mary statues on my neighbor's dashboard or Madalyn O'Hair that should be credited with these miracles? This caller, and the host's refusal to question any of it, is typical of the disingenuousness characterizing Christian radio today.

[160] I do not know if these names are here spelled correctly. [Footnote by John Sikos]

Suggestions for Additional Reading:

Articles by Frank Zindler on topics related to issues arising in this debate.

"Ethics Without Gods," dealing with the problem of how to base a system of ethics on the biological characteristics of humans rather than on allegedly transcendental revelation.

"Of Free Will and Flush Toilets," dealing with the illusion of free will from a neurophysiological viewpoint. The religious and legal implications of behavioral determinism are discussed.

"Did Jesus Exist?" deals with the so-called extrabiblical evidence as well as the evidence adduced from the New Testament to attempt to prove the historicity of Jesus. The article shows that there is no convincing reason to suppose Jesus was an historical figure.

"The Real Bible: Who's Got It?" deals with the problem of deciding which individual books should have been included in the Bible, which of the many contradictory individual manuscripts

should be taken as representing the correct wording of a given book, and how to decide how ancient writers intended specific words to be interpreted.

"Rehnquist and the Ten Taboos," deals with the outrageous "morality" associated with the Ten Commandments and Justice Rehnquist's incredible notion that America's judicial philosophy is derived therefrom.

"Creation 'Science' and the Fact of Evolution," deals with the logical basis of evolutionary theory and gives a critique of both creationism and theistic evolution.

"How Did Life Begin?" is a three-part series of articles dealing with a question of great concern to Atheists and Christians alike.

"Fallacies for the Faith," deals with the adroit use of logical fallacies by religious apologists.

"The Case of Big Daddy," is a two-part series examining the lies and fallacies employed in the most widely distributed piece of anti-evolution literature of all time.

"Half a Wing and No Prayer," deals with the problem of how eyes and animal flight could have evolved without the assistance of a supernatural intelligence.