

Doubts about Bugliosi's *Divinity of Doubt*

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Note: The following comments are Bugliosi's own words. Italics for his quotations are used throughout this review. The page numbers are also his. For these opening remarks, as the page numbers increase, Bugliosi's observations tend to become increasingly eccentric (and inconsistent).

"Just because religion makes no sense doesn't mean that God doesn't" (p. 58).

"...I'm way out of my depth in this discussion" [on improving human morality] (p. 66).

"...while I do not reject evolution, I am not comfortable with the notion at all" (p. 67).

"...I would think that the principles of evolution set down by Darwin would be nonselective—yes nondiscriminatory..." (p. 77).

"I have no comprehension of things relating to the cosmos..." (p. 88).

"...I find many of the claims of science in the area of evolution and the universe...just as improbable as the most fanciful of religious beliefs I poke fun at in this book" (p. 88).

"And it [the Bible] does so with an unprecedented power and majesty that has resonated down through the centuries" (p. 102). *"...one cannot reasonably question the book's [the Bible's] integrity"* (p. 102).

"They got it [the idea of being born again] from the zaniness of the bible" (p. 109).

¹ I received a PhD in physics from the University of Wisconsin (with a focus in biophysics), completed a post-doctoral fellowship at Stanford University, and then entered a tenure-track professorship in physics at the University of Michigan. I later graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School, completed a residency at USC, and then joined the faculty at Loma Linda University Medical School. While there, I used the proton beam in cancer treatment. I am board certified by the American College of Radiology and have now practiced radiation oncology for 31 years. I was raised in the Assemblies of God (Pentecostal—see Bugliosi's p. 106), during which time I spoke in tongues and experienced a mystic sense of union with the universe. For many years, I taught Sunday School, including multiple classes of college students. I have been a member of the following denominations: Assemblies of God, Southern Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian. I hold no religious membership cards today, but remain an avid spectator in matters of religion. Unlike Bugliosi (despite his avowed denials to the contrary—see p. 151), I am not angry at religion. I prefer simply to understand it. While finalizing this review, I received a 53 minute telephone call from Bugliosi, who offered to send me a copy of the book. Mostly, however, we discussed the JFK assassination—I had reviewed (negatively) his *Reclaiming History*: "A Not-Entirely-Positive Review" (online).

“As to falsehoods, an entire volume could be written to support the position that much of the bible is false” (p. 137).

Introduction

Bugliosi is often wrong, or at least misleading, but he is rarely in doubt.² This swaggering attitude³ characterizes much of his other writing⁴ as well, but it is especially incongruous here. In particular, note the use of “Doubt” in his title. By attacking both theists and atheists, he flaunts his self-righteous open-mindedness about the God issue. However, he (ironically) leaves no doubt that, with respect to the Christian God at least, he is a card-carrying atheist. The title of his book will therefore be highly misleading to most readers. Since he clearly does not believe in the God of contemporary Christians, his tactic of using “Doubt” in the title looks like a public relations ploy.

That he is indeed an atheist (about the contemporary Christian God) need not be argued—he baldly admits as much on multiple pages, as follows.

- A. *The Christian God Cannot Exist* (the title of chapter 3).
- B. *“I’m not an agnostic on the Christian God...”* (p. 25).
- C. *“...the Christian God cannot exist”* (p. 61).
- D. *“For purposes of this discussion only, I am presupposing the existence of the Christian God, whom I do not believe exists”* (p. 188).

That he is an atheist is also proven by the myriad pages that attack the Christian God (or more accurately, the Christian church), although he leaves other forms of monotheism mostly unscathed in his brief summaries. Even though he frequently smirks during these summaries, detailed critiques of these other religions are sorely lacking. Furthermore, he leaves the reader with the distinct impression that he is not agnostic about these other monotheisms—or about other religions in general. In other words, he looks just like an atheist. Most curiously, nowhere does he even acknowledge the following: polytheism, pantheism, panentheism, henotheism, agnostic theism, or impersonal idealism. For a book on the existence of God, the disappearance of these actors from the stage is pure magic.

Deism

Where Bugliosi is indeed an agnostic (about deism), he has surprisingly little to say. Most of the book, in fact, is an unrelenting rant against the practices of contemporary

² AS Max Holland has insightfully stated (regarding Bugliosi’s *Reclaiming History*): “He is absolutely certain even when he is not necessarily right.” This is from Holland’s review in *The Wall Street Journal*, 19–20 May 2007, P8 (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB117953039870208129.html>).

³ Evidence of this swagger can be seen in the following statements. (A) According to Bugliosi, great numbers of “...theologians or religious writers [have not] written sensibly on the subject” (p. 10). (B) “One can slog through hundreds of pages of their writings [of the supposedly fine minds of our time] without picking up one new, meaningful insight... (p. 12).” (C) “...they [the atheists] have virtually nothing of value to say” (p. 57).

⁴ I critique Bugliosi’s style in my review of *Reclaiming History* (online: A Not-Entirely-Positive Review). In the JFK assassination, Bugliosi is clearly never in doubt, even when he should be.

Christianity. Actually, he is so incensed about these practices (aren't most of us?) that he forgets, for many pages, that his true target is the Christian God. Regarding deism, which he touts as a possibility, he offers only one short chapter (6). However, in this chapter, he cites only two arguments: the teleological (design, i.e., the order in the universe) and the cosmological (first cause). Without explanation, he omits the classic ontological argument—and nearly all other arguments, as well. One possible exception should be mentioned: the anthropic argument, but serious disagreement exists about whether this even favors theism (see *The Cosmic Landscape* by Leonard Suskind). He admits that the cosmological argument is “...strong and seems very difficult to get around” (p. 79). If he truly believes this, he might want to convert to deism. Bugliosi concludes that the teleological (design) arguments fail, although his own idiosyncratic scenarios in this chapter often seem merely silly to me. Since I ultimately agree with his conclusion (that the arguments from design fail), I shall move on.

What certainly impresses Bugliosi, on the other hand, is the cosmological (first cause) argument: he simply cannot accept the possibility that nothing (i.e., the void) could have preceded the entire material universe. On the contrary, he believes that something must have been there, which for him might open the door to deism. This is really the crux of the book: merely because Bugliosi cannot imagine such a void, he thinks that deism just might be possible. Somewhat amusingly, for a similar lack of imagination he takes Dawkins to task: Bugliosi cites Dawkins as being unable to imagine a certain kind of God (p. 54), which is ultimately why he (Dawkins) has remained an atheist. Bugliosi found this mind-set to be totally unconvincing, but here he (Bugliosi) is—adopting precisely the same basis for his own argument, i.e., merely because Bugliosi cannot imagine such a void, he offers deism as a possible option.⁵

Energy and Entropy

Moreover, he ignores the fact that the total energy of our universe (including the gravitational energy, which is negative) may well be zero, i.e., our universe is probably a free lunch. Even the God of deism could have paid that bill, but so could your local bankrupt bank. But it gets even worse. Physicist Victor Stenger, who Bugliosi does not even cite (*God: The Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows that God Does Not Exist*), argues that, at the instant after creation, the universe was maximally disordered.⁶ Such fingerprints are not likely consistent with any God of order, deistic or otherwise. In the end, therefore, Bugliosi has offered up only feeble fare, especially given his candid—almost childlike—confession:

“*I have no comprehension of things relating to the cosmos...*” (p. 88).

If he seriously means by this that he cannot comprehend fundamental notions of space and time (e.g., the possible collapse of time and space at the very beginning), then

⁵ Actually, because of his ability to argue any case, independent of its truth, Bugliosi might also be called a Sophist.

⁶ On this issue, Bugliosi states (p. 88): “*It also makes no sense to me that a spontaneous, prodigious explosion of matter into space, which could be expected to produce chaos, could somehow result in a universe of perfect harmony and order.*”

he should remain silent about the cosmological argument. But here is the real horror: his only defense against converting to atheism (from deism) is this same cosmological argument! Does Bugliosi truly believe that he can save us all from atheism via such a tenuous lifeline? Given such a perilous tightrope act, he really must revise his book, i.e., he must radically shore up his attack against the cosmological argument for God's existence. At the very least, he must immerse his brain a lot longer in modern physics, or else close up shop. Unfortunately, he has a long way to go—he has not even studied high school physics.⁷ He might begin with Victor Stenger, who actually calculates the probability of the existence of something (rather than nothing): it is over 60%. Another deserving, but overlooked, book is *I Don't Believe in Atheists* by Christopher Hedges. This book is a profound indictment of both Hitchens and Dawkins and is essential reading. Bugliosi's case against both of them is insubstantial in comparison to the case made against them by Hedges. Finally, devotees of the subject may wish to read (online), "Why Steven Hawking's Cosmology Precludes a Creator," by philosopher Quentin Smith.

What Kind of Agnostic is Bugliosi?

Bugliosi thinks that it is nobler to parade as an agnostic rather than as an atheist. In this he is surely mistaken. After all, many highly talented individuals are (and have been) atheists: http://brainz.org/50-most-brilliant-atheists-all-time/#0_undefined_0. The third most famous man from Hibbing, Minnesota would be hard pressed to join this list. Unfortunately, Bugliosi does not use computers, so he has probably not seen this website. Except for one terse footnote (p. 290) he fails even to try to distinguish among the varieties of atheism. Of course, he also fails to note the varieties of agnosticism. I cannot determine whether these extraordinary omissions are merely due to his stubbornness, or solely due to ignorance. To be specific, he states (p. 4) that atheists claim to know (with high certainty) that God does not exist. On the contrary, this is only one form of atheism, a position likely held by only a minority of all atheists.⁸ Many would more accurately be called agnostic atheists, i.e., although they do not believe in God, they don't claim to be certain about this. Even Dawkins (p. 289) rates himself as six (on a scale of seven), when asked about his degree of certainty. Based on his persistent boiling-point frenzies in this book, Bugliosi actually appears to be an agnostic atheist, but he does not so advise his readers.

Bugliosi thinks that refusing an atheist label will leave his character unblemished, almost "holier than thou." Nonetheless, he clearly is an atheist—not only by his own admission, but also as defined by most Americans. His hypocrisy has been unmasked, however, by his failure to attack deism seriously. If he were a pure agnostic, he would pull no punches in his assault on deism. In the end, however, all he offers is his self-admitted poor comprehension of the cosmos and his remarkably second-rate understanding of the cosmological argument. This is very depressing stuff indeed.

⁷ *Reclaiming History*, p. 488.

⁸ Even Dan Barker (an ex-Assemblies of God minister, but currently the co-director of the Freedom from Religion Foundation) states: "Theists claim that there is a god; atheists do not. . . . Atheists claim that god is *unproven*, not *disproved*." I lifted this quote from *Synthese: An International Journal for Epistemology, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, Volume 178, No. 2, January (11) 2011. The article (p. 381) is: "Evolution and Religion: Has Griffin reconciled science and religion?" by James Fetzer. Bugliosi should read this quote—more than once.

A Negative Verdict

This is an egocentric book, too often superficial, and way too often wrong or misleading (see my appendix for dozens of examples). Like many narrowly-trained experts before him, Bugliosi mistakenly thinks that his brainpower will succeed outside his area of expertise. He is not trained in biology or physics or cosmology or theology or philosophy or, for that matter, in any specialty that makes him required reading on God's existence. He even blunders in history, especially in the history of the early church (see my appendix). Inevitably, therefore, his recurrent idiosyncratic comments are only characteristic of the rank amateur. For these reasons, I cannot even recommend this as an introductory book—the novice reader would not emerge properly grounded. Nor can I recommend it to a moderately sophisticated reader, except possibly for its entertainment value (sometimes unintentional). Such a reader would learn little that was new or valuable. Instead I would strongly propose *Why I Became an Atheist* by John W. Loftus (an ex-minister). My adjectives about this book are at polar opposites of those about Bugliosi's book. As we should now expect, though, Bugliosi does not cite this book either.

The Question of God's Existence

The question of God's existence is indeed profound—for many of us (me, too) it is the most troubling question that life has to offer. That is why I care so much about getting these discussions right. Perhaps Bugliosi can return in ten years with a more mature and less shrill approach (should God will that he lives so long). In my opinion, those who remain theists (e.g., Francis Collins) can do so honestly, although many will disagree with their fundamental assumptions. Michael Novak (*No One Sees God: the Dark Night of Atheists and Believers*), a Catholic and a friend of Hitchens, also makes a solid case for theism. However, for those who have abandoned the God of the Bible (i.e., not necessarily the God of St. Anselm), the answer lies between agnosticism and atheism. Both views can be intellectually respectable. Ultimately though, the choice rests more on one's interpretation of the evidence rather than on any uncensored data file—and for that one's genes (see *The God Gene* by Dean Hamer) and one's environment play huge, often determinative, roles. Many of us, often due to personality quirks, cannot live with the uncertainty of agnosticism. I see nothing wrong with that, so long as the basic data are acknowledged. Some will leave agnosticism for atheism simply because the obligation is seen to be on God's side—i.e., He really should reveal himself to us if He exists. This is a kind of protest position—John K. Roth has even argued for a Protest Theology, in order to protest God's concealment of himself and also to object to the unrelenting evil in the world (especially that caused by Mother Nature). The idea is to shame God into behaving properly! Moreover, even when we choose our own friends, we only choose those who make themselves available to us, but not those who go into hiding.

Chance versus Order in the Universe

Others will choose atheism because they understand at a deep level that chance events can yield a false impression of order and purpose, and the universe does seem to be ordered. This whole subject—of serendipity, karma, kismet, and synchronicity—is so shrouded in mystery, that even our best minds are often sidetracked by this issue. For example (after discussions with Einstein and physics Nobel Laureate Wolfgang Pauli) Carl Gustav Jung wrote a paper with Pauli in which they took synchronicity quite seriously. But order can also arise from underlying natural mechanisms. See *What Darwin Got Wrong*—by two atheists—for a profound discussion of what is wrong with our current understanding of evolution, especially in the matter of biological order. And then there is Stuart A. Kauffman (*Reinventing the Sacred*) and his creative work on self-organizing systems in biology—especially see Chapter 8: “Order for Free.” In short, if initial vacuum fluctuations (at time zero) and self-organizing systems (in biology) can explain away the teleological (design) and cosmological (first cause) arguments, then the door to atheism lies wide open.

Bugliosi is a Precarious Agnostic

Regarding theism versus atheism, the differences are not so great. After all, Christians are atheists about all other religions (for this reason, the Romans actually called them atheists); atheists differ only in rejecting one more God. Insofar as deism goes, it's very hard to argue with a deist, as Bugliosi has proven here. However, it really doesn't matter much, does it? After all, what practical difference exists between a deist and an atheist? With the God of deism quite out of the picture (external to the universe), He makes no difference to my routine rituals, my morals, or my afterlife. The only God who might matter to me is an immanent God, like the traditional God of monotheism. That is ultimately why Bugliosi is so misleading—despite the book's title, he is an atheist about an immanent God. In fact, his only possible theism is deism, but that option hangs by his slender (and highly suspect) thread of the cosmological (first cause) argument. For all practical purposes then, Bugliosi is an atheist. In any case, I suspect that most of his readers will not opt for deism. On the contrary, most of us want to know if God (if He exists) is immanent. Only then does His (or Her) existence matter to us as modern men and women.

My final indictment of this book, after sleeping on it (not the book) for some time, is that it is irresponsible. See my appendix for numerous examples of Bugliosi's cavalier and arrogant misadventures. This is indeed a harsh judgment, but Bugliosi claims to be “...an extremely critical person...” (p. xiii), so perhaps karma exists, after all.

A Short Reading List (second authors have been omitted)

Note: All references cited in this review are from my personal library.

1. Matthew Alper. *The “God” Part of the Brain*
2. Jean Bricmont. “Determinism, Chaos, and Quantum Physics” (online)
3. Francis Collins. *The Language of God*
4. Bart Ehrman. *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*
5. Jerry Fodor. *What Darwin Got Wrong*

6. Jennifer Michael Hecht. *Doubt: A History: The Great Doubters and Their Legacy of Innovation from Socrates and Jesus to Thomas Jefferson and Emily Dickinson*
7. Christopher Hedges. *I Don't Believe in Atheists*
8. John W. Loftus. *Why I Became an Atheist*
9. Hyam Maccoby. *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity*
10. Hyam Maccoby. *Revolution in Judaea*
11. Michael Novak. *No One Sees God: the Dark Night of Atheists and Believers*
12. Victor Stenger. *God: The Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows that God Does Not Exist*
13. Leonard Suskind. *The Cosmic Landscape: String Theory and the Illusion of Intelligent Design*
14. Geza Vermes. *Jesus in His Jewish Context*
15. Nicholas Wade. *The Faith Instinct*

Appendix. Fifty morsels of wisdom from Bugliosi's eggbeater (the allusion is to p. 72)

1. Acknowledgments.

M. (My responses to these numbered items are abbreviated as M—for Mantik). Bugliosi cites no editor. Although the copy editing is nearly perfect (in my manuscript errors are “It’s” on page 106, “efurther” on page 285, and “Marin” on page 288), serious fact checking is glaringly absent, as seen in the following comments.

2. Preface. Bugliosi implies that a Bowery bum deserves a hearing (about World War II) just as much as Winston Churchill.

M. This is a typical Bugliosi ploy. Of course, he’s wrong—no one has time to listen to all the cranks in the world. Any sane person must severely restrict his sources of information. What Bugliosi means is that the basic evidence is what is important, not its source. I agree, but his example goes off track.

3. Page 4. Bugliosi pretends to be in the courtroom and argues that “God” presumes a fact not in evidence.

M. I wonder what he would say if “love” were substituted for “God”—or, for that matter, any other incorporeal thing.

4. Page 4. Bugliosi states that the character of God is more important than his existence.

M. If he truly believes this, why then does he not address this in any detail? In fact, he provides scant details about the character of the God of deism, the only god who he is agnostic about.

5. Page 4. *“I would respond that I’m not in a position to believe or disbelieve in him [God]. You know, the atheists, who not only believe but know there is no God, are just as silly as those who seem to have no doubt that there is [a God].”*

M. As we shall soon see, despite his smug protests here, Bugliosi is indeed an atheist about the Christian God. Moreover, he is definitely not uncertain about that! On the contrary, he only postures as a dispassionate doubter.

6. Page 8. The Christian God is “...*all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful....*”

M. This notion was introduced by St. Anselm, but it is not in the Bible.⁹ The God of the Bible is clearly different, as even Bugliosi often admits. Some forms of Christianity (e.g., process theology—or see Pierre Teilhard de Chardin) do not accept Anselm’s formula either, but Bugliosi loves this straw man. Ezekiel 20:25-26 even questions God’s goodness:

Moreover I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not have life; and I defiled them through their very gifts in making them offer by fire all their first-born, that I might horrify them; I did it that they might know that I am the LORD.

To make matters even worse, Hector Avalos has argued that the God of the Old Testament was not routinely against child sacrifice per se, but that He was against such sacrifice to other gods. And, regarding contemporary notions of ethics, there are no clear rules against slavery in the Bible either. If there had been—because both sides avidly read their Bibles—we might have avoided our Civil War.

7. Page 9. “...*the deist philosophy is free of inherent contradictions.*”

M. Since this is the only theism that Bugliosi is truly agnostic about, he absolutely must develop this thought, but he never does. This is a major oversight.

8. Page 10. “*Instead, because I was an agnostic, subscribing to the doctrine that nothing can be known about the existence of God....*”

M. If nothing can be known about the existence of God, how then can he state (as he just did) that deism is free of inherent contradictions? At least, he must know something about deism, but he fails to tell us exactly what that is. Furthermore, for someone who knows nothing about the existence of God, this is a rather long book.

9. Page 13. “...*I believe that what I don’t know is just more of the nonsense I already do know....*”

M. This is hilarious to me, since Bugliosi had used exactly the opposite argument regarding the Warren Commission. (For my online review of *Reclaiming History* see footnote 3.) Before an audience of 600 trial lawyers he had touted his (supposed) one-minute proof: merely because they had not read all 26 volumes of the Commission, they could not (according to Bugliosi) reasonably take a position on the JFK assassination! This displays a fundamental defect in the mind of the trial lawyer—in disregard of the underlying truth, he will use whatever argument advances his case.¹⁰ The bottom line is

⁹ Although Bugliosi (misleadingly) wants his reader to believe that his description of God is based on the Bible, it is amusing to note (especially given his profession as a trial lawyer) that he nowhere recognizes that our legal code is often based on the Bible! See (online) “Trial Lawyers and the Biblical Basis for What We Do.”

¹⁰ For an egregious case of miscarriage of justice, watch the documentary, *The Thin Blue Line*. Or read about DA Bill Peterson, whose actions were recounted in *The Innocent Man* by John Grisham. I have written a critique of Peterson, whose knowledge of science was as alarmingly defective as Bugliosi’s. Trial

that Bugliosi, as a trial lawyer, has been trained to be result oriented: “*I’m kinda like you, Billy [Graham], results oriented*” (p. 114).

10. Page 21. He claims that no original writing from the four gospels has been found.

M. This is ambiguous, as “writing” could mean an original document, or it could mean an authentic reproduction. Actually, the Rylands Library Papyrus P52 (John 18:31-33) dates to 100–150 CE. Given this early date, it is quite possible that it accurately reflects the original manuscript. Bugliosi himself cites (p. 281) the copying of Isaiah, which remained almost unchanged over a millennium (100 BC – 900 AD).

11. Page 23. “*...we have absolutely no human experience, no framework of reference that tells us that God is responsible for the predictability and harmony of the universe*” (italics in the original).

M. With this one phrase, Bugliosi supposedly destroys one (of only two) classic arguments that he cites for the God of deism. With this so-called teleological (design) argument flat on its back, only one argument for the existence of this God of deism remains for Bugliosi—the cosmological (first cause) argument. On this one tenuous argument then, he bases his entire case for agnosticism. This is rather a thin reed, which barely separates him from full-blown atheism. Given Bugliosi’s obvious raw intelligence, it is difficult to believe that he fails to understand what a watered-down stew he has offered us.

12. Pages 31-32. “*...only historians can do that*” [change the past].

M. This is amusing because Bugliosi tried to do precisely that with his *Reclaiming History*.

13. Page 33. “*...the doctrine of free will, without which Protestantism especially could hardly exist, has no more religious weight than that of a vagrant....*”

M. Of course, as a prosecutor, Bugliosi’s entire career presumed the doctrine of free will—precisely what he has just attacked.¹¹ When Kant addressed this issue, he could not reach a conclusion, although many others have, e.g., William James and John-Paul Sartre favored free will. Modern physics (e.g., Jean Bricmont), however, seems still to favor determinism. In my opinion, this question is likely to remain open long after this generation is gone. Bugliosi, however, by pointing fingers at Protestants, is not only self-serving, but also amusingly inconsistent (given his own career in the courtroom).

14. Page 43. Bugliosi complains that Hitchens’s book title (*God is Not Great*) presupposes a God.

M. Of course, Bugliosi here has overlooked his own title—which includes the word “Divinity.” Obviously, both authors opted for marketing over honesty.

lawyers should (but don’t) learn a modicum of science before they are admitted into the contemporary courtroom, which often bristles with scientific experts (e.g., O. J. Simpson).

¹¹ Ironically (and this is typical of Bugliosi) he simultaneously recognizes that Luther—a Protestant if ever there was one—actually opposed free will (p. 288)! As usual though, at the decisive moment, Bugliosi is highly selective in his choice of evidence, even within the confines of this single book.

15. Page 43. Bugliosi complains that Hitchens believes that killing religion also kills God.

M. I agree that this is a non sequitur, but Bugliosi does the same thing: just count the number of his pages devoted to slaying the Christian religion (as practiced today)—versus the number of pages devoted to slaying the Christian God. This is, in fact, a serious defect in the book. By analogy, we could ask: Are the problems of America today due to its constitution—or rather due to our poor execution of the Founders’ intent?

16. Page 49. “...*faith can be defined as the belief in something that cannot be proved by evidence....*”

M. On the contrary, here is the definition from Wikipedia: “Faith is trust, hope and belief in the goodness or trustworthiness, of a person, concept or entity.” Even the second sentence does not support Bugliosi: “Religious faith in a theological context is a belief in a transcendent reality, a religious teacher, a set of teachings or a Supreme Being.” Note that the word “evidence” appears nowhere here. As he often does, Bugliosi has merely tossed another straw man at us. Perhaps we should just duck this one and ask him: “Do you have faith in the legal system?” Or more personally, “Do you have faith in your wife?” For a real zinger, he could try this one: “Do you have faith in the arguments against solipsism?” Or do all of these questions, too, presume facts not in evidence?

17. Page 53. “...*there are certain immutable laws of physics—usually referred to as ‘fundamental constants’....*”

M. Bugliosi here displays his persistent and hopeless confusion about science—the constants are components of the laws, not the laws themselves.

18. Page 56. “*Hence there cannot be multiple universes.*”

M. Bugliosi has obviously not understood the recent work in physics. Even last night I briefly watched a TV program on the multiverse.

19. Page 60. “*Who is more irrational, the theist or the atheist? Although I believe they are both irrational, the theist wins the most irrational honor.*”

M. This is most curious: If Bugliosi truly believes this, why then does he remain an agnostic? This seems instead like a good reason for him to convert to atheism.

20. Pages 62-63. “*Darwin’s theory has been accepted by the scientific community as one about which there can no longer be any reasonable doubt.*”

M. Bugliosi is obviously not familiar with the work of atheists Jerry Fodor and Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini (*What Darwin Got Wrong*). This ignorance, however, characterizes nearly all of Bugliosi’s comments whenever he ventures into science.

21. Page 64. “...*doesn’t the very word, ‘evolution,’ by definition, mean that the previous life form no longer exists?*”

M. This is so absurd that no comment is warranted.

22. Page 65. “...*there will never be an improvement...to television [or radio]....*”

M. Say what?

23. Page 66. *“But other than a surgical operation on human nature, how would this ever be possible?”*

M. Bugliosi here overlooks genetic engineering as a possible option. See *Redesigning Humans: Our Inevitable Genetic Future* by Gregory Stock, or listen to The Teaching Company: “Psychology of Behavior” by David W. Martin, Lecture #35, “Engineering Psychology.”

24. Page 66. *“Memory has been ignored in discussions of evolution.”*

M. Although Bugliosi is an acquaintance of James Fetzer, and even corresponds with him, he apparently has remained ignorant of Fetzer’s work in this area. See *Evolution of Intelligence* by Fetzer. Also, listen to The Teaching Company: “Origins of the Human Mind” by Stephen P. Hinshaw.

25. Page 87. *“To atheists who reject the first cause hypothesis, Catholic philosopher William Lane Craig responds....”*

M. Craig is not a Catholic, but rather an Evangelical. He is discussed at length in the book by John W. Loftus.

26. Page 99. *“Likewise, there should be an internal logic to fairy tales, as Genesis obviously is.”*

M. Bugliosi seems not to understand the role of myth (i.e., not fairy tales) in ancient peoples. See *When They Severed Earth from Sky: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth* by Elizabeth Wayland Barber and Paul Barber.

27. Page 113. *“George W. Bush says it was Graham, during a walk with him on the beach before he became president, who changed his life completely around and made him a born-again Christian.”*

M. Curiously, Billy Graham does not recall this encounter! See *Family of Secrets* by Russ Baker (p. 401) for further discussion of what this means.

28. Page 124. *“What figure in history has had a more warped and twisted sense of justice than the Christian and Jewish God (italics in the original)?”*

M. I wonder: Where exactly does Bugliosi place Allah in this pantheon?

29. Page 131. *“Indeed, he [Jesus] lived a life of asceticism.”*

M. This is an odd comment. I wonder how Bugliosi reconciles this with Jesus’ enemies, who accused him of dining with the publicans and sinners. Even the Buddha, after a fling with asceticism, later recognized his error and instead discovered the Middle Way. Bugliosi presumes that asceticism is praiseworthy, but for most of us it is merely (quite) uncomfortable and often a dead end. Contrary to Bugliosi’s intent, describing Jesus as an ascetic is actually not an accolade.

30. Page 132. *“...why would he [Jesus] claim to be the Son of God (John 10:30)?”*

M. Here we have a major issue: What exactly does “Son of God” mean? Bugliosi entirely evades this issue, but given his ignorance of theology that is no surprise. The phrase in Hebrew can simply refer to someone who was chosen by God for a divine

purpose. One example is Solomon in II Samuel 7:14. (Watch Bart Ehrman discuss “Son of God” on You Tube.) When Gentiles, not familiar with the Hebrew meaning, encountered this phrase it underwent a radical change. For them, especially with the passage of time, it evolved into its current meaning, as in the Trinity. For the early Christians, though, especially for the Nazarenes (including James, the brother of Jesus) it had no such meaning—to them Jesus was merely human, although especially anointed by God. Another point must be made: many scholars believe that the phrase, Son of God, evolved even in the New Testament, i.e., in going from Mark (the earliest gospel) to John (the latest gospel), Jesus becomes more and more divine. Furthermore, something more significant probably occurred: even before Mark was written, Jesus’ divinity likely became more prominent in the retelling of these stories as oral traditions. One powerful argument for this view derives from the *Didache*, an anonymous document that dates to the early second century. It is almost as old as some New Testament books; in some circles at that time it was nearly treated as canonical. It does not cite Jesus’ divinity (instead, he is “the servant” of the Father), nor even the resurrection or the substitutionary atonement. And there is no hint of the Trinity, either. The bottom line is this: “Son of God” is not the same thing as divinity—not even as used in the New Testament, and it surely does not imply the Trinity. The latter construct arrived only centuries after the New Testament was written. For further discussion see *From Jesus to Constantine* by Bart Ehrman.

31. Page 133. “*Even more tellingly, Jesus’ own family didn’t believe in him.*”

M. Although Mark and John both report this, there is more to the story. For example, Acts 1:14 reports that, after the crucifixion, “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” Furthermore, James Tabor (*The Jesus Dynasty*) offers a very persuasive argument that James the Just, the brother of Jesus, was actually one of the original twelve disciples. Although the disciple James is described in the gospels as the son of Alphaeus, Tabor argues that Alphaeus is merely an alternate name for Clophas (or Clopas or Cleophas or Cleophus), who was likely the brother of Joseph (Jesus’ father). The strongest argument for James as an original disciple is this: James (not Peter) was the leader of the early Jerusalem church. Think about this: If James had not been an original disciple, then would the other disciples (immediately after the crucifixion) have followed James—a brother who had supposedly not even accepted Jesus’ ministry? Furthermore, such a dramatic conversion (of a brother of Jesus) would surely have been noted in the New Testament, but it is not there. Tabor’s argument is even stronger though: the second leader (AD 62) of the Jerusalem church was another brother of Jesus (Simon). Finally, it is likely that the third leader was also a brother: Jude—sometimes said to be the author of the New Testament Epistle of Jude.¹² (See Mark 6:3 for a list of four brothers, including Joses.) So all of these early leaders were brothers of Jesus! Deplorably, Bugliosi fails to tell us any of this.

¹² The Douay-Rheims version of Luke 6:16 describes one of the twelve disciples: “And Jude, the brother of James...” (presumably referring to James, the son of Alphaeus). This implies that at least two of the original twelve were Jesus’ half brothers (or possibly his stepbrothers).

32. Page 134. *“But it would not be too far-fetched to suggest that he may have been suffering from a...delusion of grandeur, a belief that he was the messiah and the Son of God.”*

M. This is truly extraordinary. If Bugliosi were a psychiatrist, I might give this a slight chance, but even then only a slight chance. (I now know too much about these specialists.) Ever since *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* by Albert Schweitzer, a growing (and now convincing) consensus has emerged: Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet. There is no need for Bugliosi to wander off into left field on this matter. In this particular belief (of an imminent Kingdom of God) Jesus was quite ordinary for his time. We see it also in St. Paul, but this belief was not even confined to Christianity. Bugliosi seems to be quite unaware of this modern scholarship, so we can only wonder what he has been reading.

33. Page 134-135. *“...it wasn't they [the disciples] but Jesus, believing he was the messiah and trying to convince everyone of his divinity, who was the one consciously seeking to fulfill the prophecies.”*

M. Bugliosi here writes from a modern point of view, assuming that divinity meant to Jesus what it does to contemporary Christians. That simply won't work—most likely Jesus saw himself merely as the servant of God, although possibly a special one. Furthermore, no Jew of the time would have anticipated a suffering Messiah. On the contrary, the Messiah was widely expected to be a great leader, possibly even a military one. The notion of a suffering Messiah was a later addition to the canon.

34. Page 175. *“...Lucrezia Borgia, who came to symbolize through the ages the evil treachery of a woman.”*

M. Bugliosi has here merely perpetuated another myth. According to biographer Sarah Bradford (*Lucrezia Borgia*), Lucrezia's reputation is now recovering: “The truth is that in a world where the dice were heavily loaded in favour of men, Lucrezia operated within the circumstances of her time to forge her own destiny.”

35. Page 141. *“...Christianity ...has never said that there are two completely different Gods and that the one in the Old Testament has little to do with the one in the New Testament.”*

M. Has Bugliosi truly never read the works of the Gnostics—in which precisely two such Gods were proposed?

36. Page 207. *“The great problem I have with this Manichaeian view is that in Christian eschatology Satan is merely an angel....”*

M. I know of no modern Christian who is a Manichean. Although St. Augustine spent nine years among the Manicheans, that was before he became a Christian. Perhaps Bugliosi knows all this, but even to use this word in a metaphorical fashion just muddies the water. It is simply too confusing and should not be done.

37. Page 213. The Franciscan sisters in La Crosse, Wisconsin, have prayed for world peace, apparently without a minute's break, since 1878. Bugliosi uses this to argue that their prayers have been useless.

M. Of course, this proves precisely nothing—Bugliosi, astonishingly enough, has simply forgotten that no controls were set up. What should have been done, of course, is this: they should have prayed at specific, randomly selected intervals (and stopped praying at those intervals not selected), then monitored the world for outbreaks of peace and, finally, correlated these outbreaks (if any) to the pertinent time intervals.

38. Page 224. *“We also know that the more religious a group of people gets, the more fanatical and vicious it becomes to unbelievers....”*

M. Of course, we know that this does not apply some theists, e.g., to polytheists or to henotheists. In fact, the ancient world is quite amazing to us for its religious tolerance. The problem came when religions became exclusive—i.e., only one religion was right and all others were wrong. Even the Romans were (usually) remarkably tolerant—for example, persecutions of Christians (with some exceptions) were typically only local and temporary. See *From Jesus to Constantine: A History of Early Christianity* by Bart Ehrman.

39. Pages 226-227. *“But isn’t it interesting to note that one never hears of atheists killing and torturing people and blowing up buildings?”*

M. One possible counterexample (of Hindus) concerns the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka. Sam Harris (*The End of Faith*, p. 239) describes them as “...not explicitly religious...”. He implies, however, that they “...often harbor potent religious beliefs.” Most likely, Bugliosi is correct in his conclusion. Before the advent of exclusive religions tolerance was common in the ancient world—although religion typically played a role (often a major one) during wartime.

40. Page 239. *“...his [Muhammed’s] wife Aisha was Jewish....”*

M. This is a pure blunder by Bugliosi. “Aisha was the daughter of Abu Bakr of Mecca. They belonged to the Bani Tamim clan of the tribe of the Quraysh, the tribe to which Muhammad belonged. Aisha is said to have followed her father in accepting Islam when she was still young.” (The quotation is from <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Aisha>.)

41. Page 272. Bugliosi conjures up an astonishing scenario, designed for the international media, in which a condemned convict publicly challenges God. Bugliosi wants to suggest that no response from God would prove His non-existence.

M. Of course, this is asinine. A non-response would prove nothing. It could well prove (again) that God is still too shy to show himself. We would learn nothing from this.

42. Page 283. *“...the gospel of Thomas is much more like the Jesus we would expect, not the Jesus of the four canonical gospels.”*

M. This is truly eccentric—how would Bugliosi know what to expect from Jesus? Does he claim that his ESP is truly superior to that of the prophets?

43. Page 289. *“The result would be a completely lawless society, with no punishment as a deterrent to crime.”*

M. From a trial lawyer, especially, this is a remarkable statement. Although he has ridiculed Protestants for believing in free will, Bugliosi here, quite ironically, strongly affirms his own belief in free will. Even worse, though, it is not even certain that his statement is routinely true. For example, Janet Chan and Deborah Oxley (*Crime and Justice Bulletin*, No. 84, October 2004) state: “The majority of studies show that the use of capital punishment did not deter the commission of homicide.” Furthermore, Jeffrey Fagan of Columbia Law School testified to the New York State Assembly (January 21, 2005) as follows.

Recent studies claiming that executions reduce murders have fueled the revival of deterrence as a rationale to expand the use of capital punishment.... These new studies are fraught with technical and conceptual errors: inappropriate methods of statistical analysis, failures to consider all the relevant factors that drive murder rates, missing data on key variables in key states, the tyranny of a few outlier states and years, and the absence of any direct test of deterrence. These studies fail to reach the demanding standards of social science to make such strong claims, standards such as replication and basic comparisons with other scenarios. Some simple examples and contrasts, including a careful analysis of the experience in New York State compared to others, lead to a rejection of the idea that either death sentences or executions deter murder.
(<http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/FaganTestimony.pdf>)

44. Page 294. “...*what’s at the end of the universe? Certainly not a fence or a wall. An invisible line? But if so, what’s on the other side?*”

M. Oh my, where would one even begin with this? Bugliosi is hopelessly stuck in a Euclidean universe.

45. Page 303. “...*we can’t ignore the fact that Jesus’ disciples, convinced of his divinity....*”

M. Most likely they did not think of him as the Son of God, as this phrase is currently understood. The Nazarenes surely did not—and that group included James, the brother of Jesus. We don’t even know exactly how the early Christians understood the resurrection. For example, the last twelve verses of Mark (about the empty tomb) are not in any early manuscripts of Mark (the style is different, too). It is even possible that the disciples would not have been surprised later to see Jesus’ body in a tomb. They may instead have believed that his resurrection had been spiritual—or else that his body had been reconstructed (with new and different atoms) into a different kind of physical body (such that the old one was merely irrelevant). St. Paul surely paid no attention to the empty tomb, a fact that is often overlooked, but is, in fact, quite extraordinary. In short, Bugliosi should begin reading some histories of the early Christian church.

Oddly enough, resurrection accounts are not confined to the distant past. While in a Bombay hotel on June 19, 1936, Paramhansa Yogananda (*The Autobiography of a Yogi*, Chapter 43, “The Resurrection of Sri Yukteswar”¹³) spent two hours in the presence of his deceased mentor: “Waves of rapture engulfed me as I beheld the flesh and blood form of Sri Yukteswar!” And here is Yukteswar’s description of his resurrected body:

¹³ Chapter 43 is online.

Yes, my child, I am the same. This is a flesh and blood body. Though I see it as ethereal, to your sight it is physical. From the cosmic atoms I created an entirely new body, exactly like that cosmic-dream physical body which you laid beneath the dream sands at Puri....

Two lines later, Yukteswar begs Yogananda: “Won’t you relax your hold a little?” This reminds us of Jesus, who encouraged the doubting Thomas to feel his wounds so that Thomas would know that Jesus was not just a spirit. Jesus also ate in the presence of his disciples, in order to prove that he was flesh and blood.

46. Page 304. *“If Jesus had shown himself to his hostile believers, wouldn’t that have been proof of his divinity...?”*

M. Of course—that’s what he did! Recall St. Paul’s own experience while en route to Damascus.

47. Pages 305-306. Bugliosi notes the presence at the crucifixion of a “Mary,” who was not the mother of Jesus. She is identified as the “mother of James and Joseph.” Bugliosi concludes that this is merely a coincidence, i.e., that Jesus’ brothers had the same names as these two sons. (I would note though that Jesus’ brother, Joseph, is sometimes called by his nickname, Joses.)

M. On the other hand, James Tabor (*The Jesus Dynasty*) argues that the New Testament writers were merely confused in this matter of “Mary.” Tabor proposes that after Jesus’ father died, Mary married Clophas¹⁴ (John 19:25 identifies some Mary as the wife of Clophas). Tabor argues that Clophas and Joseph (the father of Jesus) were brothers, and that this marriage sequence satisfied Jewish custom (with the brother marrying the widow). The gospels identify the disciple James as the son of Alphaeus, but Tabor believes that Alphaeus was merely an alternate name for Clophas. But here is the strongest argument for this scenario (in which Jesus’ mother married Clophas): the three children of this supposed other Mary had exactly the same names—and in the same sequence—as the three children of Mary, the mother of Jesus. If Tabor’s scenario is correct then, Jesus’ brothers were more likely his half-brothers (and all were likely younger than him).

48. Page 306. *“Jesus left no ambiguity that he came from God...he repeatedly referred to himself...as the ‘Son of Man’.”*

M. Bugliosi here targets an eastern professor of religion for (supposedly) misleading us on this matter. He refuses to name this expert, but the description surely

¹⁴ I use Tabor’s spelling in this review, while Bugliosi uses Clophas. John 19:25 (KJV) uses Cleophas, but I have no dog in this quarrel. Eusebius, the early historian of the church (fourth century AD) wrote that Clophas (from the Gospel of St. John) was the brother of Joseph, the husband of Mary. As such, Clophas would have been Jesus’ uncle, but later also his stepfather. Tabor states that the name Clophas derives from the Hebrew root *chalaph*, which means “change” or “replace.” As such, the name Clophas might merely refer to his act of replacing Joseph as Mary’s husband, rather than being his real name. To close this case, the Greek form of the same name is simply Alphaeus. Since there were two James characters among the twelve (and they had no last names), some independent identification was required, hence “son of Alphaeus.” Also recall that the New Testament is in Greek, not Hebrew.

fits Bart Ehrman. (Actually, given Ehrman's profound contributions to a vast number of relevant issues, his total absence from Bugliosi's book is almost beyond belief.) But, much as I personally respect Ehrman, we don't really need his help here. We can instead consult the Jesus Seminar: their members conclude that Jesus was not even referring to himself as the Son of Man. Furthermore, we can listen to Geza Vermes, professor emeritus of Jewish Studies at Oxford, who states (online):

“Son of Man” is a routine expression for man in general. It often serves as an indefinite pronoun. In none of the extant texts does “Son of Man” represent a title.¹⁵

This issue is definitely not ambiguous. Bugliosi has just misled us again.

49. Page 314. *“It should be noted that references in the bible to salvation being based only on good works are not mentioned by either Protestantism or Catholicism for the simple reason that both, even Catholicism, maintain that faith in Jesus is necessary for salvation.”*

M. The Epistle of James is an exception to this. It is noteworthy that James, the brother of Jesus, has sometimes been cited as the author. If true, this would indeed be striking—because James (as an Ebionite) had severe disagreements with St. Paul, especially about Christology and salvation. Note these verses, in particular.

James 1:22. “But be doers of the word and not hearers only....”

James 2:14. “What good is it...if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can his faith save him?”

James 2:18. “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith from my works.”

James 2:20. “Foolish man! Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless?” [This theology would have nauseated St. Paul, and Luther, too, who hated the Epistle of James. Bugliosi should love James, but he does not tell us.]

50. Page 323. *“Not only doesn't morality need religion....”*

M. Beguilingly, religion does not always need morality either! Merely recall the polytheistic era—when the gods often misbehaved, and often in the worst possible ways. (Just recall your Homer.) Followers of such religions did not expect morality from their gods. Mankind was only concerned to appease the gods, typically through offerings and sacrifice.

¹⁵ Also see *Revolution in Judaea* by Hyam Maccoby.

