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**Cavin and Colombetti**



**Cavin:  
Background on  
the Problem of  
the Resurrection**

# A Needed Correction to a Recent Christian Myth



**Timothy McGrew**

Robert Greg Cavin was fond of promoting this [the Twin Theory] and actually tried this in a debate with my good friend, Bill Craig, and got destroyed so humiliatingly that, **I am told**, he is willing to debate about the Resurrection of Jesus **but he doesn't use that theory and he stipulates it as a condition of his going into a debate that that not be mentioned. He doesn't want to be reminded that he was once an advocate of this theory.\***

\*"The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," St. Michael Lutheran Church, April 09, 2012

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHofTmolbi0> Video viewed on Sunday, March 29, 2015, 2:30 P.M.

See 00:05:50 to 00:06:50

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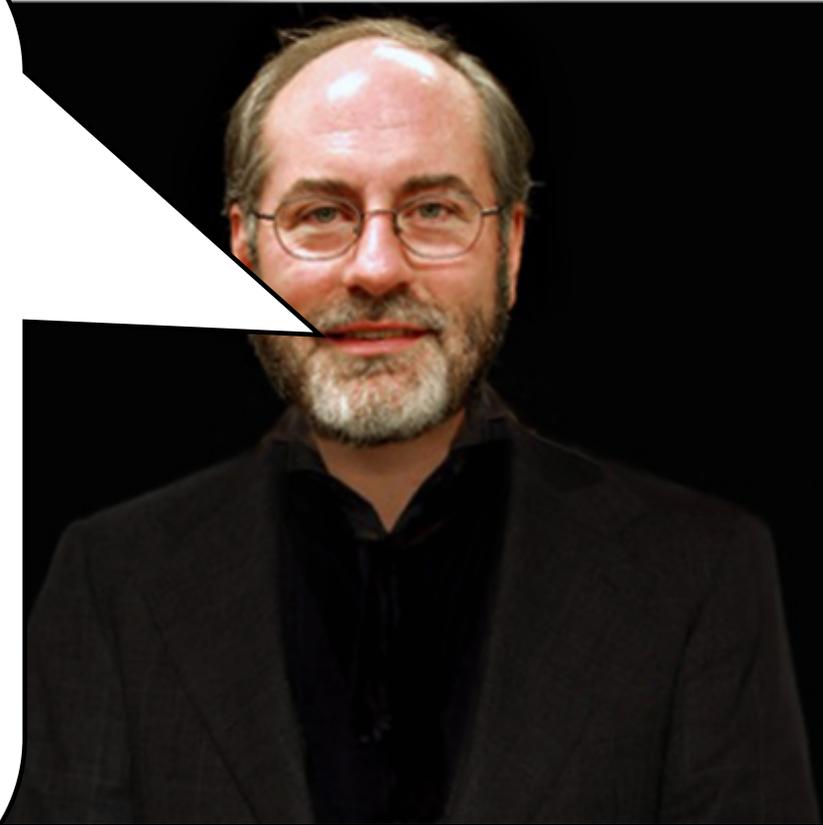
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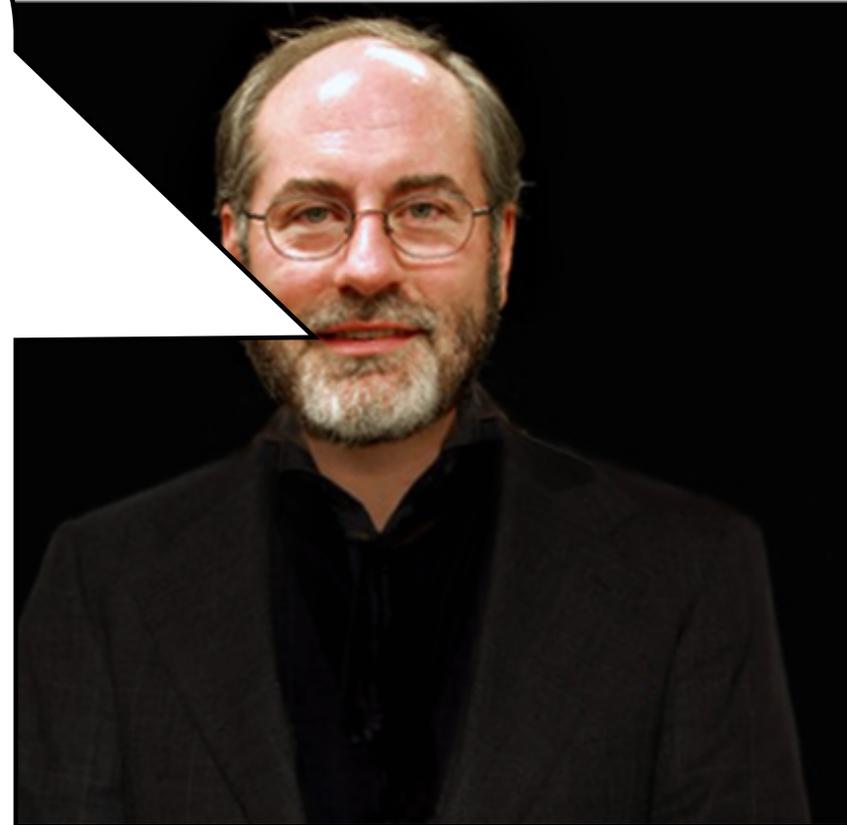
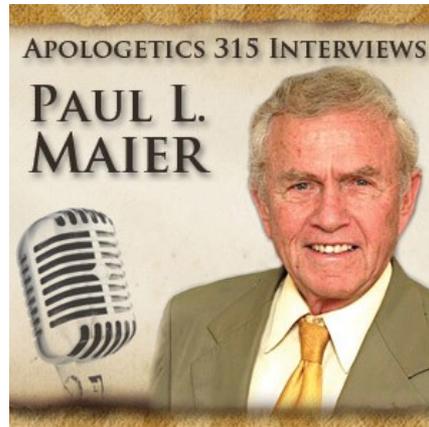
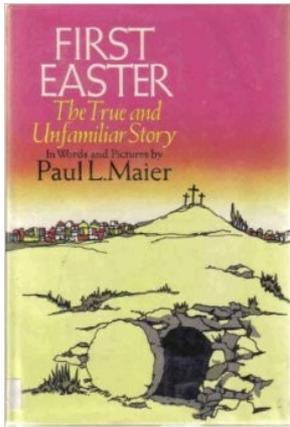
Timothy McGrew fails to cite his source, but what he says is pure **myth**—a **Christian myth**! I do **not** stipulate “as a condition of his going into a debate that [the Twin Theory] not be mentioned.” **No such stipulation has been made in my debate with Calum Miller.** I made this stipulation in my 2012 debate with Michael Licona only to focus attention on the **absurdities** of the Resurrection Theory itself!



**R. Gregory Cavin**

# I Cannot Claim Credit For The Twin Theory

I cannot claim credit for the Twin Theory. I first read about it in a 1973 book, *First Easter*, written by Western Michigan University historian, Paul L. Maier.



**R. Gregory Cavin**

# I Cannot Claim Credit For The Twin Theory

When I wrote Maier about the theory, he confessed to having “invented” it himself. Although, as a Christian, he **rejects** the theory, as “**wild**,” he stated in a personal letter to me (dated 3-27-1997):

**“Of all the wild theories, that’s the only one that would make a modicum of sense to me.”**



**R. Gregory Cavin**

# What The Twin Theory Shows

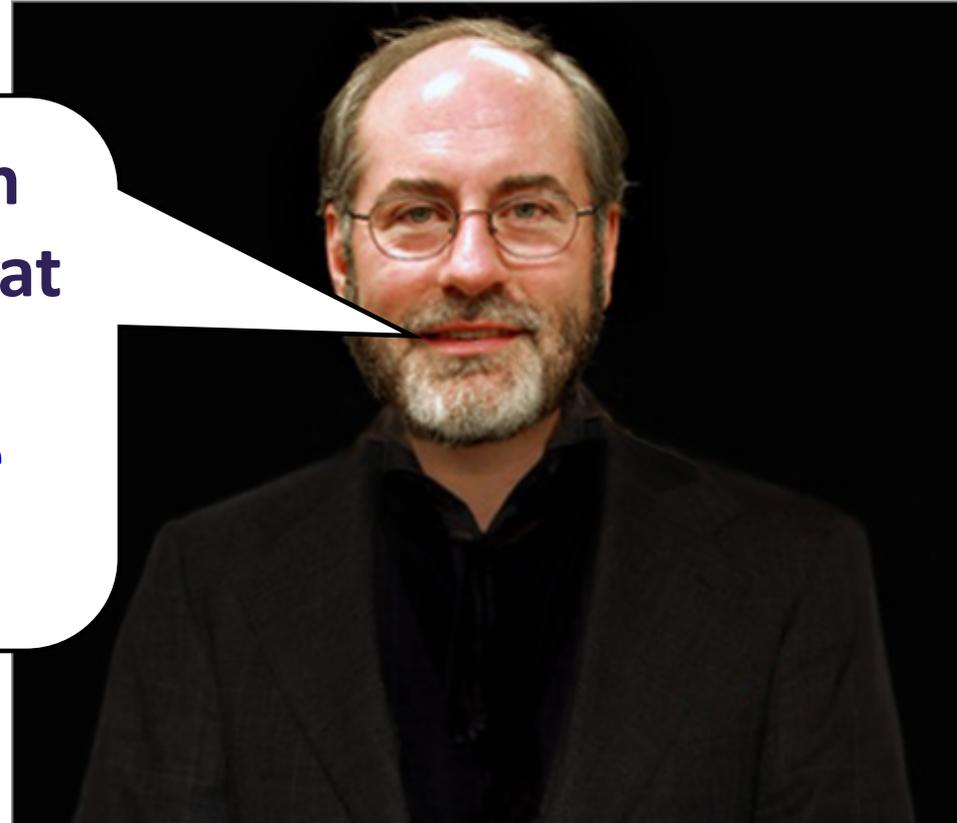
Of course, Maier was right!  
What he didn't—and still doesn't understand—is that the Resurrection Theory is not just “**wild**” but **utterly absurd**! I showed in my 1997 debate with William Lane Craig that even such a “**wild**” theory is **far more probable** on the **alleged** evidence than is the Resurrection Theory!



**R. Gregory Cavin**

# What The Twin Theory Shows

And I won my debate with Craig—proving my point that **even an absurd theory is still vastly more probable than the Resurrection!**



**R. Gregory Cavin**

# Why Use The Twin Theory?

One of the most effective ways of criticizing the argument for the Resurrection is to: (1) assume (but merely for the sake of argument) that all of the (alleged) evidence given in the New Testament for the Resurrection is true, and (2) to formulate an obviously absurd theory and show that, despite its absurdity, the (alleged) New Testament evidence confirms this theory to a much higher degree than it does the Resurrection. One is in no way committed to the absurd theory since the (alleged) New Testament evidence is not genuine, *bona fide*, evidence! There are many absurd theories one can employ in adopting this strategy: the Swoon Theory, the Mass Hallucination Theory, the Space Aliens Theory, and, my own favorite, the Twin Theory.

This is the strategy I adopted in my 1995 debate with Craig. Let **R** and **T** be, respectively, the Resurrection and Twin theories, and let **E** be all of the (alleged) evidence given in the New Testament for **R**. Then what I showed is that  $P(T|E) > P(R|E)$  and, in fact, that  $P(T|E) > 0.5$ . Of course,  $P(E)$  itself is virtually 0 and, for this reason, so is  $P(T)$ . But this strategy is enough to show that the argument for the Resurrection fails. Unfortunately, many conservative Christians state falsely that I hold that  $P(E) > 0.5$ . I only assumed this in my debate to make a point.

If one were to produce a careful Bayesian argument proceeding from the most foundational (ground-level) evidence—call this **F**—on up, I have no doubt that  $P(E|F)$  would be fantastically low,  $P(R|F)$  would be astronomically low, and that some hybrid realist/legend theory (e.g., Crossan's hypothesis that the first disciples merely felt the presence of the risen Jesus and that the massively realistic gospel Easter narratives evolved from these) would be probable on **F**. The evidence is too weak to say exactly what occurred.

# For the Record



**Timothy McGrew**

**Timothy McGrew was invited on my behalf by Aaron Shelenberger to participate in this debate.**

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**McGrew declined the invitation!**

# For the Record



**William Lane Craig**



**Michael R. Licona**

**Both Craig and Licona were invited on my behalf by Aaron Shelenberger to participate in this debate.**

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**Declined!**

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**Declined!**

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# For the Record

From: Robert Greg Cavin  
Sent: Friday, April 11, 2014 1:32 PM  
To: Shelenberger, Aaron T  
Subject: RE: Law Article and Timothy McGrew Debate

Aaron,

You are quite welcome! I'm very happy to offer all the help I can. Attached you will find a PDF of the Law article that Colombetti and I have written.

Regarding a debate between Timothy McGrew and myself on the Resurrection: if Professor McGrew were willing to participate in the debate, I would be very pleased to do so as well. I certainly agree with Professor McGrew that Bayes's Theorem can be used to determine the degree of probability of the Resurrection theory with respect to the relevant historical evidence. Where we disagree, of course, is on the degree to which this evidence makes the Resurrection theory probable. Using Professor McGrew's symbols, my view is that  $P(R|F)$  is extremely low whereas Professor McGrew's view is that  $P(R|F)$  is high. Since Professor McGrew and I are both Bayesians and yet we reach opposite positions on the probability of the Resurrection given the same evidence, I think this would be a very interesting debate -- and one that, for this reason, would be exceptionally well attended. However, I would lay down one stipulation for the debate: I would want it to be held at Cypress College -- not at Michigan State University or a Christian university, e.g., BIOLA University. My reason for this stipulation is to build up the prestige of Cypress College, and, in particular,

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our Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. Holding the debate at Cypress College should not be a problem. First, we have a huge auditorium for the debate, and, second, I am sure that Timothy McGrew makes his way out to Southern California to speak at BIOLA University periodically. Richard Swinburne, Mike Licona, and other Christian philosophers do so frequently. Cypress College is just 15 minutes drive south from BIOLA on Valley View Road. So it would be a simple matter to arrange for the debate to be held during one of Professor McGrew's visits to BIOLA. Moreover, when Mike Licona speaks at BIOLA, he actually stays at a very nice hotel which is just a few minutes away from Cypress College. Professor McGrew could stay at the same hotel, and I would be very pleased to drive him around. I think your idea for such a debate between us is great! I say, "Yes!"

Greg Cavin

# For the Record

From: Shelenberger, Aaron T  
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2015 11:32 AM  
To: Robert Cavin; Aaron Shelenberger  
Subject: RE: Setting the Record Straight

Greg, I'd be willing to testify that, in your challenge to debate Tim McGrew and to have a rematch with Bill Craig and Mike Licon, you did never say anything about debating or not debating the Twin Theory, if you were to debate any of these gentlemen. The conditions for the possible debate with any of them didn't even come up, since they've declined at the outset. (I had a direct contact with McGrew and Licon via Facebook, and I had an indirect contact with Craig through Licon.) Further, when I got you and Calum Miller hooked up, I knew nothing about the conditions you two had set; and neither did you ever mention anything about discussing or not discussing the Twin Theory, as a condition. Currently, I don't have a blog where I could make this statement. If you wish, you may use this email exchange at your disposal. I just ask that you not disclose my email information.

An alternative is for us to include Calum and your friend Carlos A. Colombetti in this email exchange. This way they see what I say, and they could testify that I said so. I hope this would help clear your name, at least in terms of the possible debates with the three gentlemen above. Let me know please.

BTW, you misspelled my last name on your ppt. This is at time 14:52. The correct spelling is Shelenberger.

Best regards,

Aaron Shelenberger

**If anyone should believe in the Twin Theory,  
it is Timothy McGrew, since he believes that  
the disciples had sensory, polymodal, interactive,  
parallel experiences of the risen Jesus!**

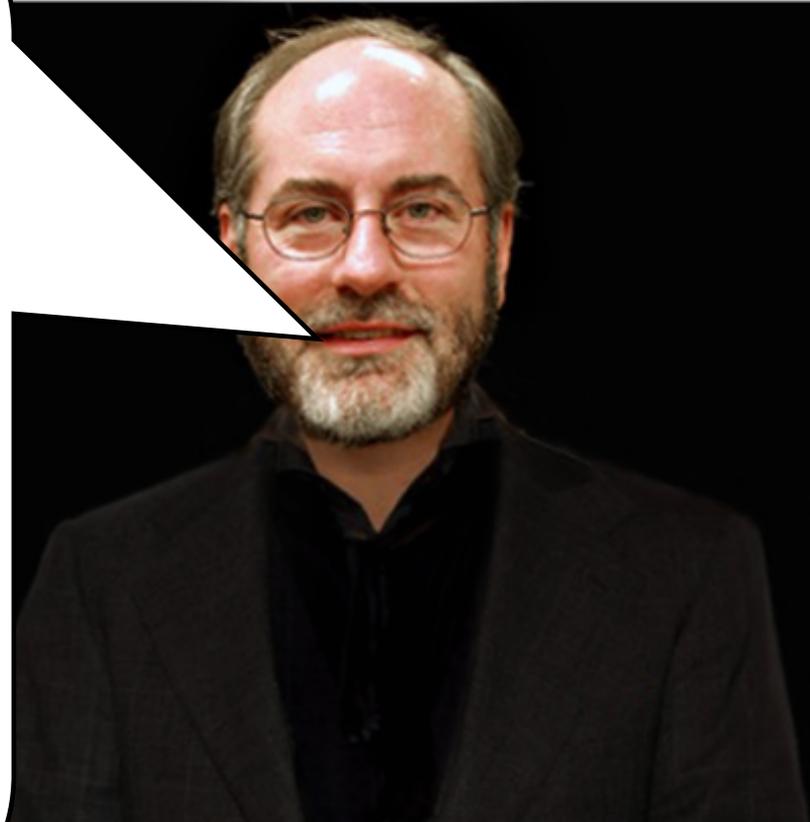


**Timothy McGrew**

# An Open Invitation to Timothy McGrew

I'll be pleased to debate  
McGrew on the Twin Theory  
any time he'd like!

And I'd be just as happy to  
debate him on whether  
theories of **utterly realistic  
hallucinations, space aliens,  
ghosts, etc.**, though **absurd**,  
are **far less absurd** than the  
Resurrection theory!



**R. Gregory Cavin**

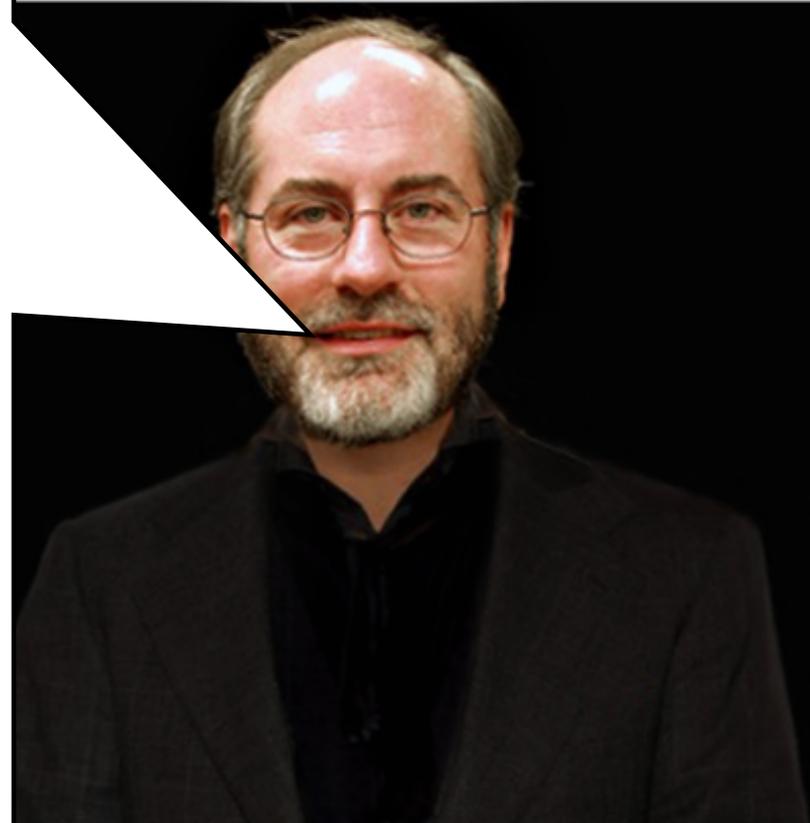
# An Open Invitation to Timothy McGrew

But what I'd really like to  
debate McGrew on is:

**the Myth-Legend Theory!**

Here's my simple question:

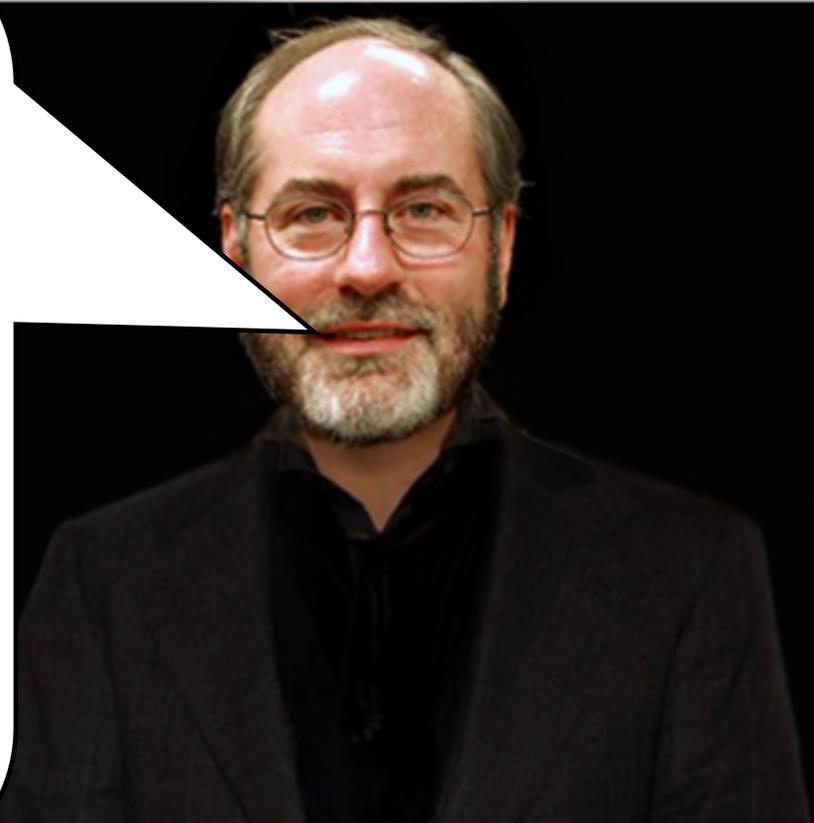
**What's more probable—  
that the Evangelists and Paul  
failed to check their facts  
(just as McGrew failed to  
check his) or that a man rose  
from the dead?!**



**R. Gregory Cavin**

# McGrew's Failure to Check His Source Epitomizes the Mythopoeic Proclivities of Christians

If even top Christian scholars with Ph.D.s **don't bother to check their facts**, then **how much less would we expect the gospel writers of the first century and Paul to do so**—especially in an era prior to contemporary standards of reliability and accuracy!



**R. Gregory Cavin**

# Failure to Check Sources Leads to Legends!



I don't want to get into the Twin Theory in my Mars Hill Debate with Mike Licona.



Antioch/Mars Hill Debate Producers



Unknown Source used by Timothy McGrew



Timothy McGrew



St. Michael Lutheran Church Apologetics Class

Ah! Cavin says he is willing to debate about the Resurrection of Jesus but he doesn't use [the Twin] theory and he stipulates it as a condition of his going into a debate that that not be mentioned. He doesn't want to be reminded that he was once an advocate of this theory.

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I am told that [Cavin] says he is willing to debate about the Resurrection of Jesus but he doesn't use [the Twin] theory and he stipulates it as a condition of his going into a debate that that not be mentioned. He doesn't want to be reminded that he was once an advocate of this theory.

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# How This Debate Will Differ from My First Two

## Craig Debate:

- Comparative Approach
- Assumed alleged evidence E for the sake of argument just to make a point
- Showed T is more probable on E than R

## Licona Debate:

- Non-Comparative Approach
- Assumed alleged evidence E for the sake of argument just to make a point
- Showed Prior Probability of R is astronomically low due to Negative Natural Theology (NNT)
- Showed R lacks Power to explain E

## Miller Debate:

- Combination Approach
- Will again show that Prior Probability of R is astronomically low on NNT
- Will again show that R lacks power to explain E
- Will show that E is not really evidence
- Will give Bayesian argument for version of Legend Theory



**R. Gregory Cavin**