

Re: A probabilistic analysis of the resurrection of Jesus

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- *From:* "." <emanswen@xxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Sun, 23 Mar 2008 22:36:48 -0700 (PDT)
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On Mar 22, 4:26 pm, Tim Little <t...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On 2008-03-22, . <emans...@xxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

Do you think that the reasoning is sound? If not, where do you think it goes wrong?

In many places.

The very first numerical statement is unsound: "The initial probability that Jesus rose from the dead $[P(R | K)]$ would therefore be about 9.1×10^{-12} (1 in 110 billion)"

Many people have been known to rise from the dead. Hospitals even keep files of who wants to be brought back from the dead or not, but even apart from that sometimes people are pronounced dead and yet later are found to be alive (or to have been alive at the time).

Then the unjustified assumption that G and C are independent.

The unjustified assumption that $P(C | K) = 0.85$.

More completely unjustified numbers for $P(L \wedge J)$ etc listed as "personal estimates" upon which the whole argument turns.

Then more and more unjustified assumptions.

In short, it goes wrong pretty much everywhere except the actual formal symbolic manipulations, which I didn't even bother to check. Even if they were correct: garbage in, garbage out.

– Tim

I think you are right about G and C not being independent; if Jesus

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was God, then whether or not he would predict his resurrection would depend on whether or not a) God intended to rise from the dead after becoming incarnate, and b) God wanted to reveal this to the world before it happened. So they clearly are not independent.

This being the case, I cannot see any way to get a value for $P(R | K)$. If G and C are independent, then $P(G \& C | K) = P(G | C \& K)P(C | K) = P(C | G \& K)P(G | K)$. I don't see how we can estimate values for $P(G | C \& K)$ or $P(C | G \& K)$ without making tenuous speculations about God's divine plan, requiring a full-blown theology to which I am sure no agnostic or atheist would be willing to commit.

Can anyone else see how we could get a value for $P(R | K)$ without having to rely on such speculations?

If not, it seems that we are stuck with either a very low value for $P(R | K)$ (though not as low as I proposed, as you pointed out) or no value at all. Therefore, $P(R | E \& K)$ would either be probably less than 0.5 or unknown.

As for your problems with my estimations for the other probabilities, they were not supposed to be objective values, but subjective; they represented my personal degree of belief with respect to each proposition or combination of propositions.

Thanks a lot for your reply; it was really helpful.

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