

Desires, Beliefs, and How We Know Truth

Mako A. Nagasawa

My Story: Give \$\$ to the poor? Really??



Undesirable Desires?

“Our bodies and those of others are composed entirely of filthy, smelly substances such as meat, bones, blood, pus, phlegm, saliva, excrement, urine, etc... the physical body of sentient beings is hardly worth cherishing... Therefore, this impure world is not worth craving or clinging to.”

—Dharma Master Thich Thien Tam, Pure Land Buddhist

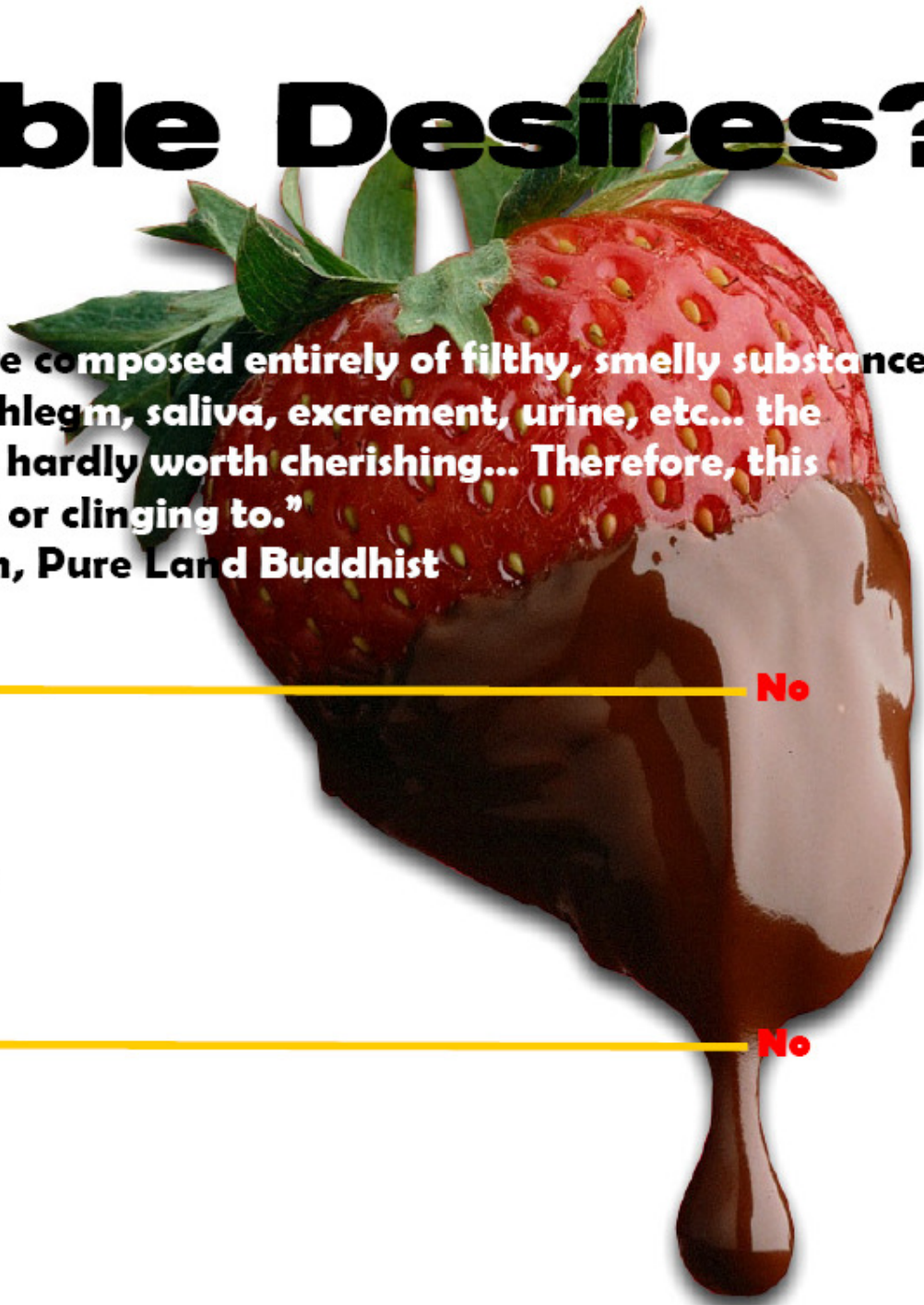
Yes

No

“Do whatever makes you happy.”

Yes

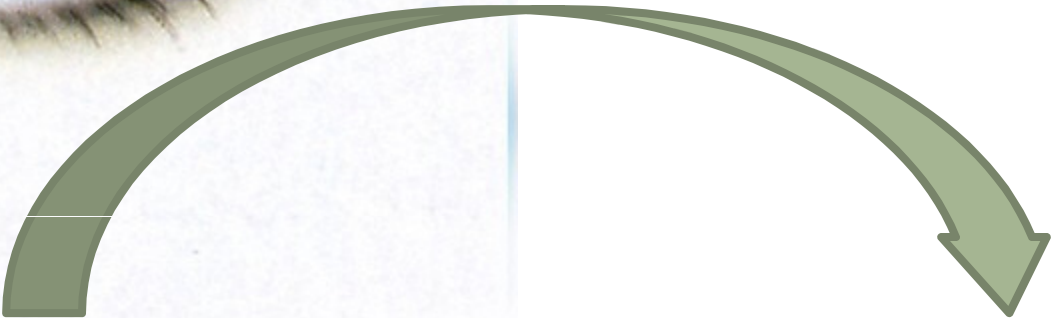
No






?

Is this how we decide what to believe? Do I choose a belief system based on what I already want?



Desires

Beliefs



?

Desires



Beliefs

?

What if this belief system reinterprets my desires? E.g. What if the Buddhist quote (above) is true?

Structure of Belief Systems



Metaphysics
what do we know?

Epistemology
how do we
know?

Ethics
therefore how
do we live?

Structure of Belief Systems

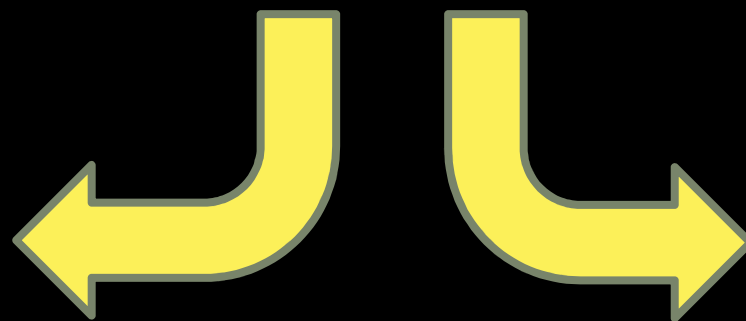


Metaphysics

what do we know?

**(1) No Good
or Evil**

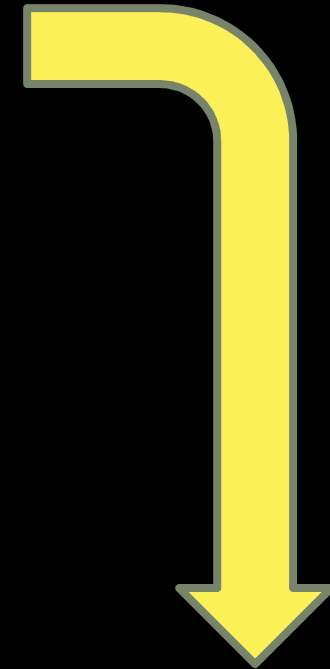
Hinduism,
Buddhism,
Atheism



**(2) Good Will
Defeat Evil**

Judaism,
Christianity,
Islam

Materialistic Atheism



Epistemology
scientific inquiry
into natural world

Metaphysics
just natural world,
no supernatural;
good & evil are
humanly defined

Ethics
???

Materialistic Atheism



Metaphysics

just natural world,
no supernatural?

good & evil are
humanly defined

Ethics

???

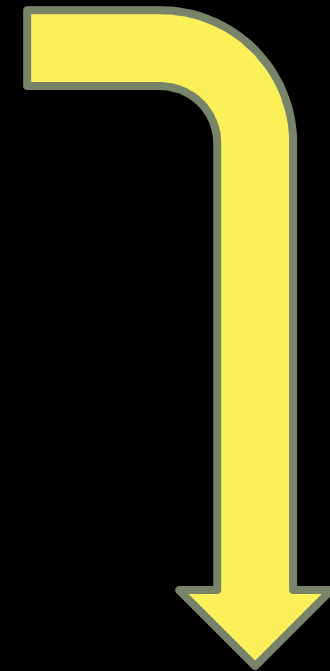
Epistemology
scientific inquiry
into natural world

This is overreaching

“The *God Delusion*
makes me embarrassed
to be an atheist.”

-- Dr. Michael Ruse,
atheist philosopher

Hinduism



Epistemology
all history
is circular

Metaphysics
good & evil are from
one god; karmic
rewards thru
reincarnation

Ethics
karmic
deeds



Problem of evil in Hinduism

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Hindu answers to the problem of evil are different from most answers offered in Western [philosophy](#), partly because the [problem of evil](#) within Hindu thought is differently structured than Western traditions, mainly [Abrahamic](#) traditions.

In the [Hindu](#) tradition the problem of evil is phrased as the **Problem of Injustice**. This problem can be considered in the following manner:

God is Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Just. Yet injustice is observed to persist in the world. How is this possible?

In the [Advaita](#) school of [Vedanta](#), this problem is dealt with in detail by [Sankara](#) in his commentary on the [Brahma Sutras](#), 2.1.34-36:

***Brahma Sutra 2.1.34:** "No partiality and cruelty (can be charged against God) because of (His) taking other factors into consideration."*

[Sankara's](#) commentary explains that God cannot be charged with partiality or cruelty (i.e. injustice) on account of his taking the factors of virtuous and vicious actions ([Karma](#)) performed by an individual in previous lives. If an individual experiences pleasure or pain in this life, it is due to virtuous or vicious action ([Karma](#)) done by that individual in a past life.

***Brahma Sutra 2.1.35:** "If it be argued that it is not possible (to take Karma into consideration in the beginning), since the fruits of work remain still undifferentiated, then we say, no, since the transmigratory state has no beginning."*

The opponent now argues that there could have been no "previous birth" at the very beginning of creation, before which [Karma](#) could not have existed. [Sankara](#) replies that it is not so, for the number of creation cycles is beginningless, vide the next verse:

***Brahma Sutra 2.1.36:** "Moreover, this is logical, and (so) it is met with (in the scriptures)."*

[Sankara](#) provides references from the [Vedas](#) concerning the beginninglessness of Creation: "The Ordainer created the sun and moon like those of previous cycles" ([Rig Veda](#) 10.190.3). This shows the existence of earlier cycles of creation, and hence the number of creation cycles is beginningless.

Thus [Sankara's](#) resolution to the Problem of Injustice is that the existence of injustice in the world is only apparent, for one merely reaps the results of one's moral actions sown in a past life, which is compatible with the Justness of an Omniscient and Omnipotent God.

On the higher level of Existence, however, there is no evil or good, since these are dependent mainly on temporal circumstances. Hence a [jnani](#), one who has realized his true nature, is beyond such dualistic notions.

Sources

[\[edit\]](#)

- Swami Gambhirananda. *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*. Published by the [Ramakrishna Math](#). ISBN 81-7505-105-1
- Mohanty, J.N. *Classical Indian Philosophy*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. ISBN 0-8476-8933-6

See also

[\[edit\]](#)

Content
Tools

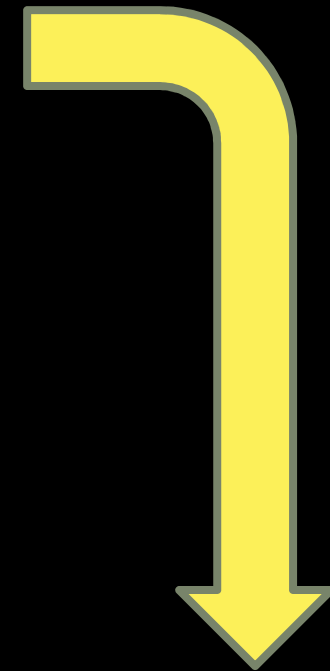
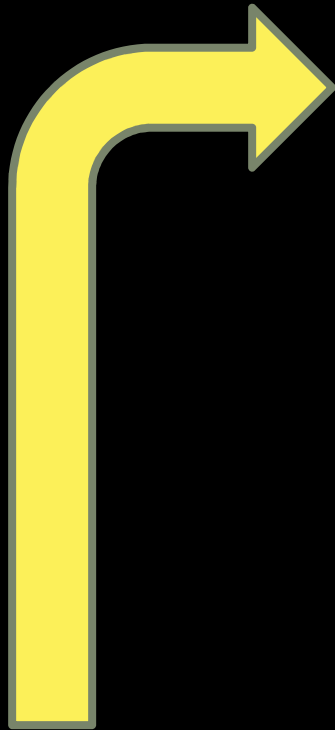
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Hinduism

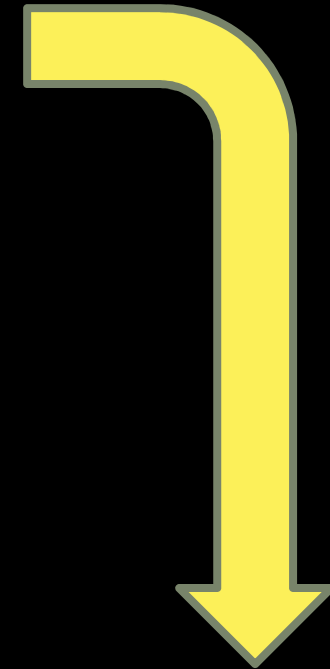


Epistemology
???

Metaphysics
good & evil are from
one god; karmic
rewards thru
reincarnation;
all history is circular

Ethics
karmic
deeds

Buddhism

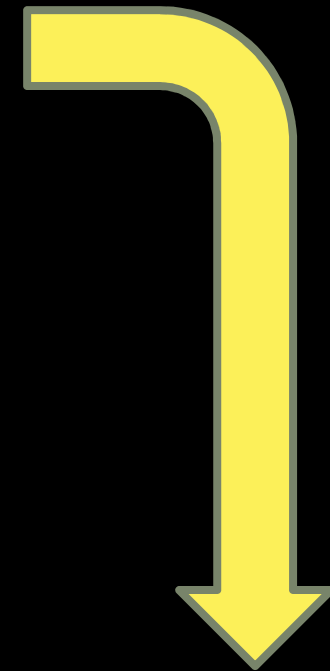
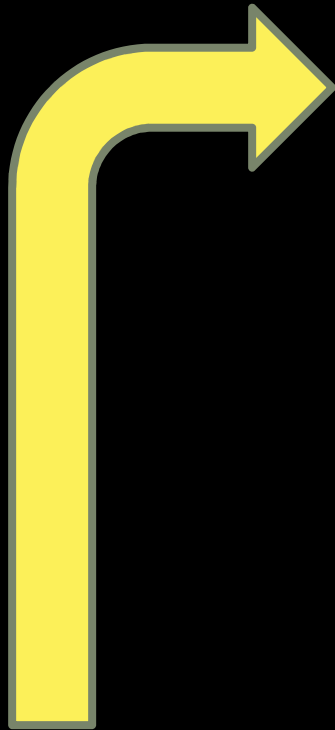


Epistemology
Buddha attained
Nirvana

Metaphysics
good & evil are from
one god; karmic
rewards thru
reincarnation

Ethics
escape via
contentment

Buddhism

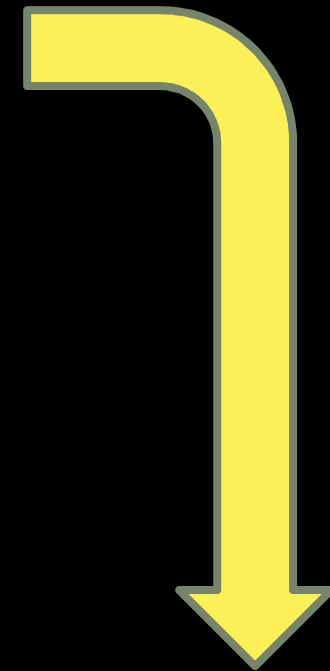


Epistemology
???

Metaphysics
good & evil are from
one god; karmic
rewards thru
reincarnation;
**Buddha attained
Nirvana**

Ethics
escape via
contentment

Christianity



Metaphysics

God is good,
defeats human
evil in Jesus, and
offers us his new
humanity

Epistemology
historicity of Jesus'
resurrection

Ethics
Jesus-centered

Christianity



Metaphysics

Epistemology

Jesus offers us a clear epistemology (a historical one about physical facts); others do not

Ethics

Belief in Jesus: Historical Basis

- “The foundation of our religion is a basis of fact--the fact of the birth, ministry, miracles, death, resurrection by the Evangelists as having actually occurred, within their own personal knowledge. Our religion, then, rests on the credit due to these witnesses.”
 - Dr. Simon Greenleaf, *Testimony of the Evangelists*

Dr. Greenleaf (1783 – 1853) was a co-founder of Harvard Law School, and sought to disprove Christianity based on the rules of evidence of the modern courtroom; he became a Christian instead

Historical Knowledge: Jury Example

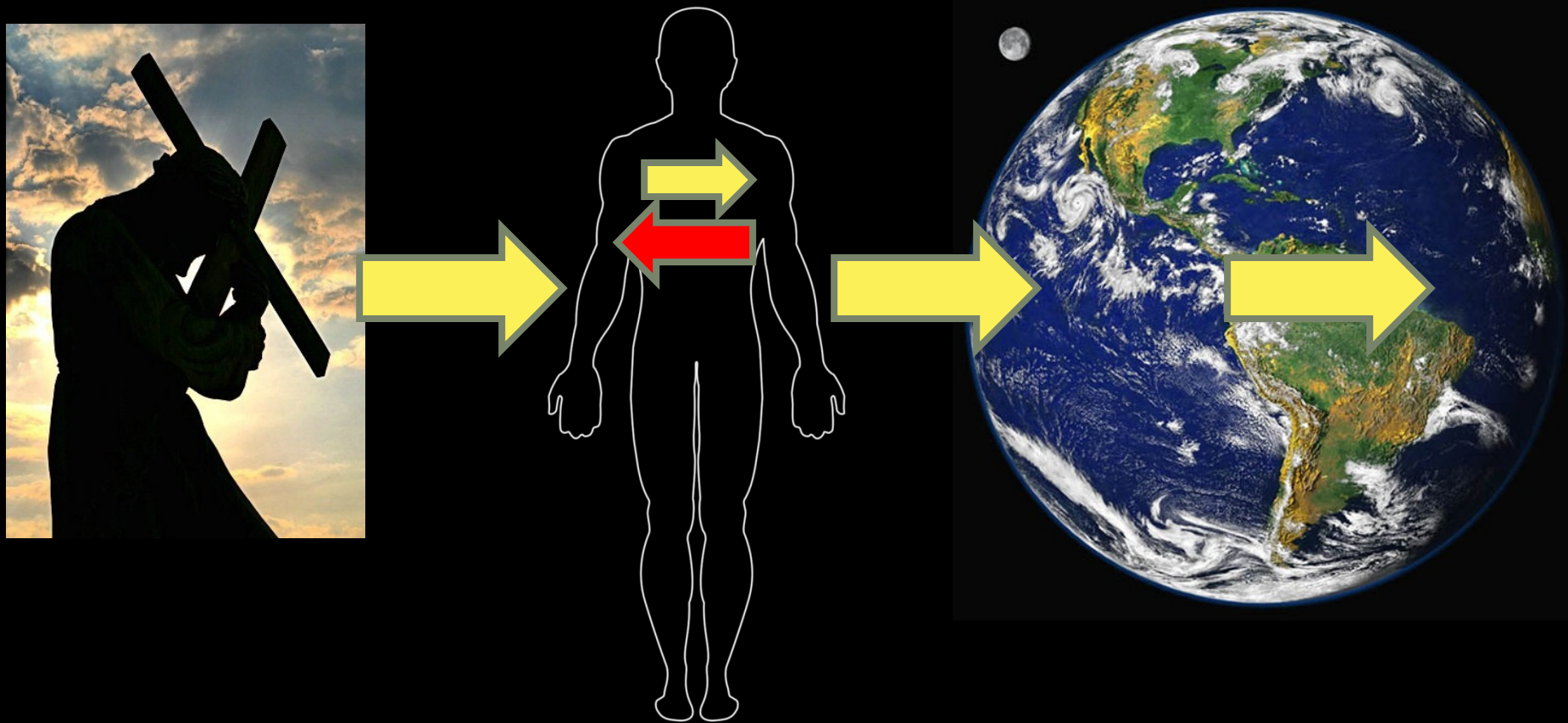
- Goal: to determine truth (guilt or innocence), using:
- Scientific data
- Motivation, human psychology
- Logic
- Eyewitness testimony
- Reliability of witnesses
- Etc.
- Historical knowledge includes scientific knowledge but goes beyond it



Belief in Jesus: Historical Basis

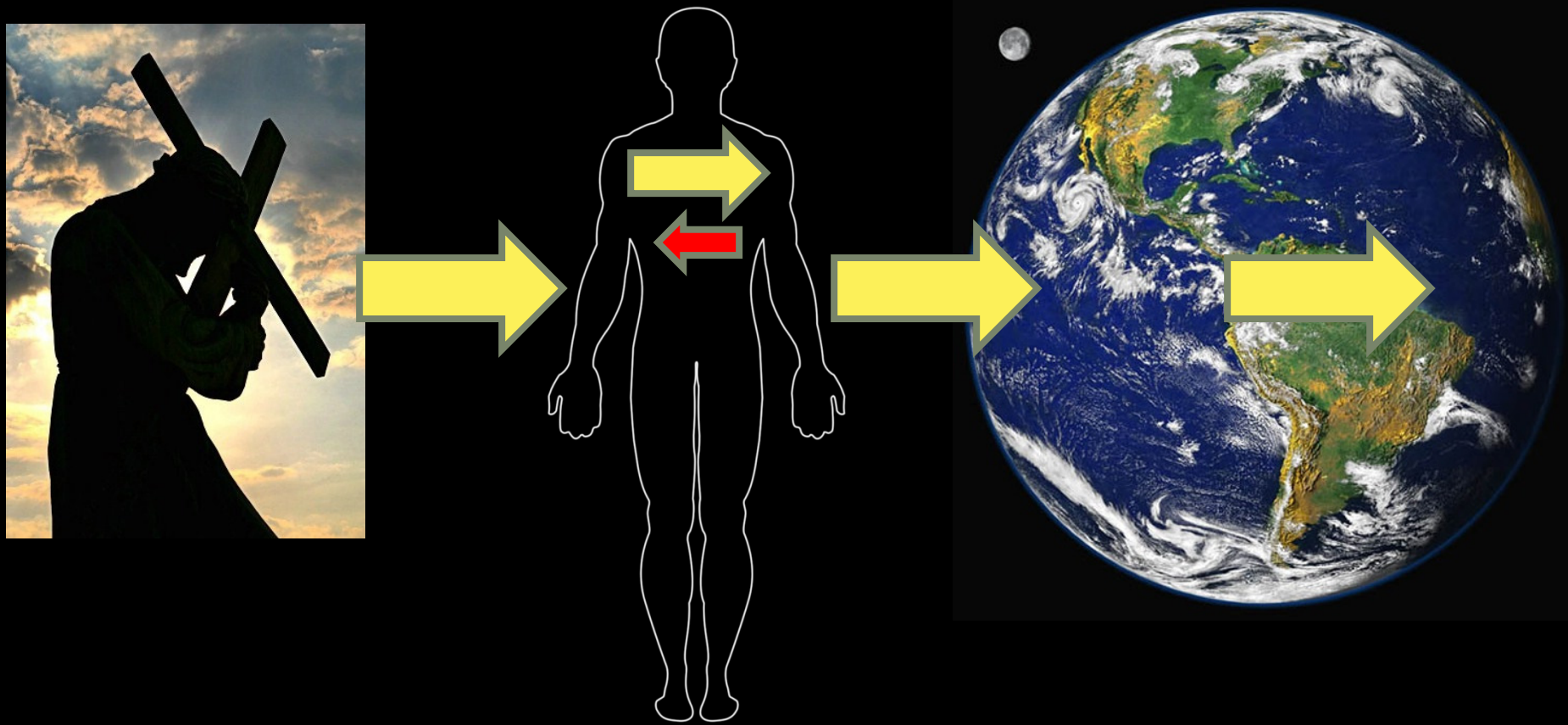
- Jesus' life, death, and resurrection in the context of Second Temple Judaism and Imperial Rome
 - “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise... and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins...” (Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:14 – 17)
- Historically, the Old Testament was already finalized and present, and is part of the historical witness to Jesus

Human Desire and Jesus' Desire



Some of our desires agree with Jesus already. Others resist him. Jesus' new humanity means that he strengthens some of our desires and reshapes/challenges others.

Human Desire and Jesus' Desire



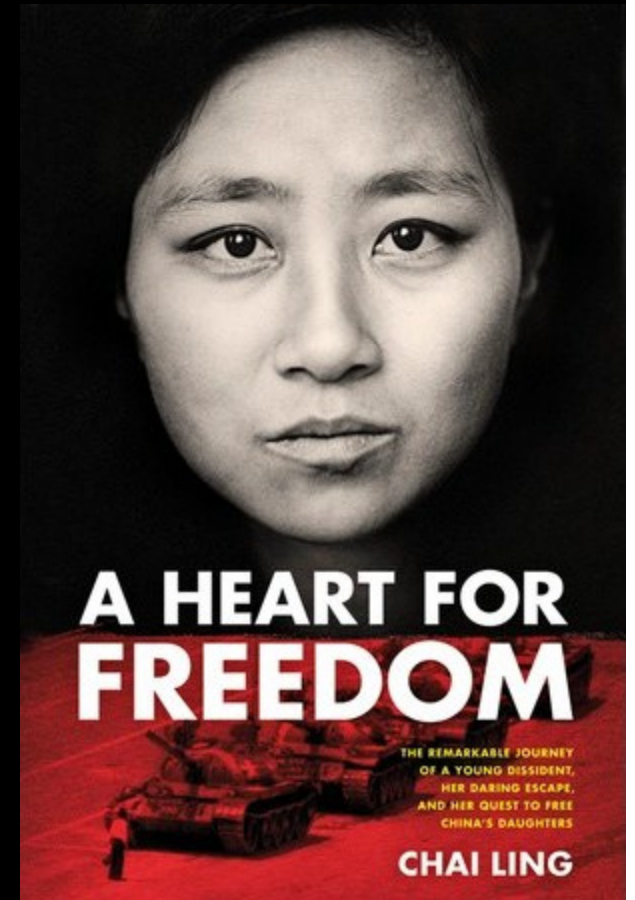
Over time, Jesus shapes our desires to be more and more like his.

Human Desire and Jesus' Desire

- Hindu student at MA College of Pharmacy & Health Sci
- I asked her, “Are your desires for love, meaning, and justice illusory?”
 - “This student, confronted by this massive possibility, deliberated late into the night and finally decided to trade in all her “gods” for the unique and exclusive but life-saving power of Jesus. She wanted to be free from the past, free from the controlling power of karma, and free to enter into the joy and life of Jesus.”

Human Desire and Jesus' Desire

- Chai Ling, founder of All Girls Allowed:
 - Reggie explained how God had prepared her for her current work. In addition to law school, she had spent three years in divinity school, learning how to study and interpret the Bible...Out of [a] near-death experience was birthed a love for the women of China who were suffering forced abortions. She believed God had given her a vision for exposing this massive crime...Tears welled up in my eyes as I hung up the phone. There is nothing that can describe the feeling of being embraced and understood...I was deeply touched to the core. Looking up, I said, “All my life I have wanted to save China. But I can’t do it. If you can, Jesus, I will give my life to you.” (p.290 – 291)



Human Desire and Jesus' Desire

- My story: I've come to like personally giving to the poor! I co-wrote curriculum on simplicity and generosity
- 12 Young adults in Austin, Texas gave \$51,000 using it!
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Y6n-XxoXuo>

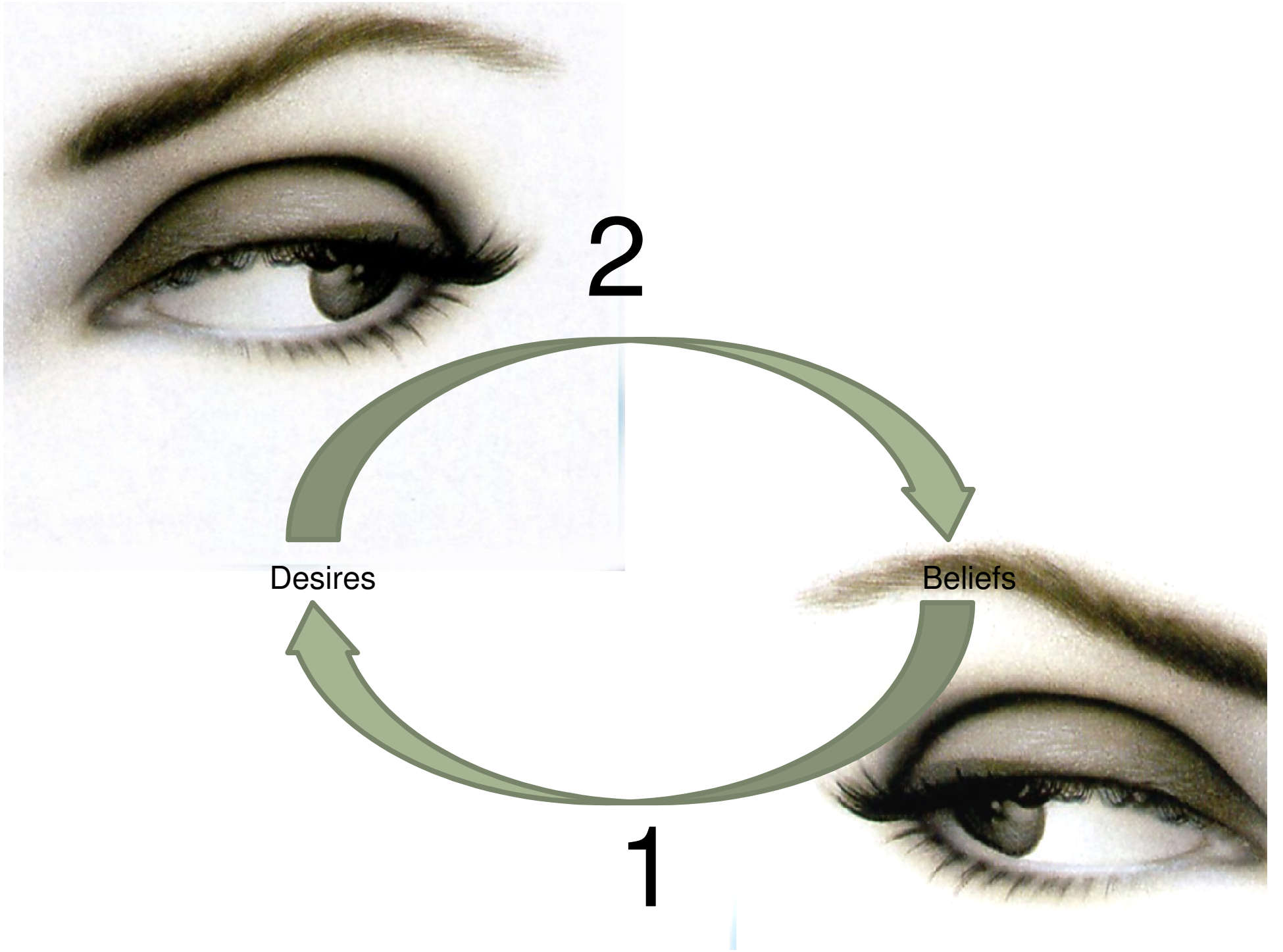
We're committing to giving at least \$41,000 as a group, possibly up to \$55,000, to sponsor a village and drill wells where water is scarce

2

Desires

Beliefs

1



Desires and Beliefs

- Our desires are not a stand-alone foundation for knowing truth (epistemology)
 - Just because you don't desire Jesus fully now doesn't mean that's how you'll always feel
- Our desires suggest that we have both good and evil in us (we're made in the image of God & wounded by sin)
 - This does not prove, but agrees with, the biblical story
 - Some desires can be taken up and expanded by Jesus
 - Other desires, Jesus reshapes or transforms
- Our desires change over time anyway, but Jesus can shape our desires to be more like his