

Confronting Christianity – Part 7

Hasn't Science Disproved Christianity?

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Oct 16th, 2022

Intro:

- There is a fairly common assumption that Christianity and science do not mix and are opposed to each other. Where did this assumption come from, and is it true that science and Christianity are incompatible?
- This morning we are going to address the question of "hasn't science disproved Christianity?" We will look at the history of scientific study and current emerging scientific fields as they relate to Christians and Christianity, to strengthen your faith and expand your thinking when it comes to Christian theology and scientific claims.

History of scientific study

Christianity and the birth of science

- "Modern science was first developed by Christians. Two Franciscan friars, Roger Bacon (ca. 1214–ca. 1294) and William of Ockham (ca. 1285–ca. 1350) laid the empirical and methodological foundations for the scientific method. Francis Bacon (1561–1626) established and popularized it." "Robert Boyle (1627–1691), whose name is memorialized in Boyle's law, was another key player in the development of science. Boyle was a devout Christian, heavily invested in evangelism and Bible translation. He considered becoming a minister but decided he could serve Jesus better as a scientist." (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 111.)
- Historic Christianity highly valued the life of the mind; monasteries were centers of academics. The first universities were established to train church leaders. Oxford and Cambridge universities were established for this purpose as was Harvard and Yale and other "Ivy League" schools. These all started out as Christian schools.
- Modern science was established and expanded in Christian Europe, not in other parts of the world, primarily because of the underlying connection between a theistic worldview (one that believes in God) and a scientific one. Princeton professor and world-class philosopher of science Hans Halvorson states, "the first scientists believed our universe was designed and created by God according to a blueprint that can be discerned by rational creatures like ourselves." (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 111.)
- Now those who think that Christianity and science have always been opposed to each other point to the example of the condemnation of Galileo by the Catholic church in 1633 as a prime example, but there are a few problems with this. First, Galileo was a Christian. He strongly argued that his understanding that the sun was the center of our universe and not the earth did not undermine the Bible in any way. Second, the view held by the church at that time was based on the model by Aristotle (who was a scientist) and not from the teaching of the Bible, even though the church at that time pointed to verses that seemed to uphold their position. Galileo—a Christian—was not opposing the church; he was opposing the bad science that the church had adopted. The Catholic church at that time was hypersensitive to opposing views (because of the reformation) and therefore condemned Galileo as a heretic and sentenced him to house arrest.

Christian Scientists of history and today

- Isaac Newton (1642–1727) is one of the most influential scientists of all time, famous for formulating the laws of gravity and motion. Newton was an earnest believer in God and wrote more about theology than physics.
- Michael Faraday (1791–1867) is best known for his work on electromagnetism, and his scientific contributions were so significant that he is considered one of the greatest experimental scientists ever. The Faraday constant is named after him, as is the Faraday effect, the Faraday cage, and Faraday waves. Faraday was a passionate Christian, deeply interested in the relationship between science and faith.
- James Clerk Maxwell (1831–1879) has been credited with the second great unification of physics, bringing together electricity, magnetism, and light. He was an evangelical Presbyterian, who became an elder of the Church of Scotland.
- Lord Kelvin (1824–1907), whose name is memorialized in the Kelvin unit of temperature, in a speech to the Christian Evidence Society (of which he was president), declared: "I have long felt that there was a general impression in the non-scientific world, that the scientific world believes science has discovered ways of explaining all the facts of nature without adopting any definite belief in a Creator. I have never doubted that that impression was utterly groundless." (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* pp. 114-115.)
- Gregor Mendel (1822-1884) is considered the pioneer and founding genius in the study of genetics. He was a Roman Catholic friar with a strong religious faith.
- Francis Collins (1950 -) is the former director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). As the longest-serving director of NIH—spanning 12 years and three presidencies—he oversaw the work of the largest supporter of biomedical research in the world, from basic to clinical research. Dr. Collins is a physician-geneticist noted for his landmark discoveries of disease genes and his leadership of the international Human Genome Project. (<https://www.genome.gov/staff/Francis-S-Collins-MD-PhD>). He is one of the most influential scientists in America today and a strong evangelical Christian who has written a number of books on science, medicine, and religion. He founded and served as president of The BioLogos Foundation, which promotes discussion between religion and science.
- There are strong Christians who are notable scientists and researchers in our leading and most esteemed schools and institutions. Dr. McLaughlin has a long list of names from MIT in her book (p 117).
- Now with all this being said, it is true that science professors are more likely to be unbelievers than the general population. McLaughlin records that 34% of science professors at elite universities say they do not believe in God, and an additional 30% say they don't know if there is a God and that there is no way to find out (p. 117). It is also interesting to note, "When interviewed, relatively few science professors at leading research universities tell stories of faith lost through science, and the demographics of science professors bias strongly toward white male Americans, Asian Americans, and Jewish Americans—the demographics least likely to espouse belief in God—and away from the most religious demographics: African Americans and Latino Americans" (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 118).

Emerging scientific fields

Science and design

- There are myriad books written on this subject from varied viewpoints. All of these are written with an attempt to explain origins of everything, including us. It is a valid area of study and an important one. There are two main categories when it comes to the understanding of origins, one includes God or "intelligent design" and the other does not.
- A Christian biblical worldview and theology of origins includes God as the creator. This understanding is seen all throughout the scriptures, here is a sampling:

Gen 1:1 ESV

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Gen 1:27 ESV

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Ps 33:6 ESV

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

Isa 40:26 ESV

Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing.

Matt 19:4 ESV

He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female."

Rom 1:20-21 ESV

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Col 1:16-17 ESV

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Heb 11:3 ESV

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Rev 4:11 ESV

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

- Christianity clearly falls on the side of God as creator. Now there is debate as to how this all happened. Was it done in six 24 hour days, or was it done in a process over time? Good Bible believing Christians vary in their understanding of this, but in order for it to be a biblical understanding of origins, God is the beginning and creator.
- In the other main category of understanding origins and design, there is no God and God is not involved in the process, even if there is evidence of a "big bang."
- The truth of the matter is that scientists are looking at the same data and material seeking to understand the cosmos and our existence. Often, our preconditioned worldviews interpret the data in the way of our preexisting beliefs, but sometimes the evidence changes the minds of people who study the evidence.

Science and meaning

- Now some who believe atheistic evolution draw the same conclusion of Gregory House M.D. "We're all just bags of cells and waste with an unknown expiration date; it doesn't mean anything" (McLaughlin, p 119). Whereas others who hold the same belief about origins see this as freedom to create their own reality, that each of us is a "performance piece."
- Science can tell us what we are made of, and it has theories of where we came from, but it cannot supply meaning. It cannot tell us why we are here. The Bible itself calls us "dust." And says "and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). But we are more than just "dust" or a "bag of cells." We were made in the image of God, and He has given us meaning because He loves us and created us to know Him, love Him, and glorify Him now and throughout all eternity in ways we cannot comprehend now.
- The Bible in the book of Genesis is not primarily concerned with science. If it were, it would have started out with myriads of scientific detail. The lack of scientific detail is not an oversight; it a deliberate prioritization of a more important question, the question of meaning: Who are we? What does life mean? How do we relate to God and each other? What is our place in the universe?
- Values and morals held dearly by scripture and Christians, and by and large the world in general—like the fundamental value of humans, human rights, and what is wrong or right—do not come from scientific data. For example, to call rape or child abuse or genocide wrong, we need a narrative about human identity that goes beyond what science or sociology can tell us.
- "Christians ground human uniqueness on the biblical claim that we are made in the image of God. Just as God calls creation into being, so he calls humans to serve as his representatives on earth, in special relationship with their Creator and with each other, and charged with moral responsibility. To maintain their beliefs about goodness, fairness, justice, and so forth, a secular humanist too must hold that humans are moral beings, distinct from other primates. The question is, on what grounds? And, ultimately, the answer cannot be scientific" (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* pp. 122-123).
- Science can provide us with helpful data and insights which have led to so much good. I am grateful for cell phones, and airplanes, and air conditioning, and electricity and all types of medicine and medical advances. Science is still learning and understanding the "what" of the cosmos, but it struggles to give us the "why." For the Christian scientist, the more we know, the greater we glorify God. For others who do not believe in intelligent design, other theories are offered.

Science and fine tuning

- There is the issue of the "fine tuning" of the universe in order for life to exist. "Cambridge professor and world-class astronomer Martin Rees explained in his book *Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe* that if any of these numbers were even fractionally different, there would be no stars, no earth, and no life."
- Rees presents three possible explanations of this apparent fine-tuning. The first is pure chance. This is so incredibly unlikely that Rees does not find it plausible. The second possibility is that there is a God who intended for the universe to generate life. Rees acknowledges that this is a reasonable view, held by some of his colleagues. But he himself prefers to believe that our universe is one among a mind-boggling number of parallel universes, each governed by different laws and defined by different numbers. Ours happens to be one that sustains life. It is impossible to test this theory experimentally, because we are confined to this universe. But given the choice between believing in a Creator God and believing in a practically infinite number of parallel universes, Rees prefers the latter" (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* pp. 127-128). Enter the "multiverse" which is now being illustrated and dramatized in Marvel movies.

Science and belief

- It has been observed and established by sociologists and anthropologists that humans in all places of the world have an understanding of and belief in God. Where does this come from?
- In his book *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?*, psychologist Justin L. Barrett argues that religious belief is a natural consequence of the kind of minds we have. Barrett is widely regarded as the founding father of the field of evolutionary psychology of religion. He argues that the near universal propensity of humans to hold religious beliefs arises from our bias toward imputing agency.
- Atheists hail this with relief. It helps explain the stubborn refusal of most humans to abandon religion. But Barrett takes a different view. Formerly a senior researcher at the Institute for Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology at Oxford, and now a professor of psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, Barrett sees the human propensity to believe in God as quite consistent with his Christian faith. "If there is a God with whom we are meant to be in a personal relationship," Barrett asks, "then how probable [is it] that engagement in such a relationship would happen to be good for us?" (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* pp. 126-127).
- Simply put, we have the capability to believe in God, not because we have evolved to have this desire and ability, but because God hardwired us this way so that we can know Him.
- "Where Stephen Hawking believed science rendered God unnecessary, Paul Shellard—who directs the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology at Cambridge and was one of Hawking's closest collaborators—sees the same science as quite consistent with his Christian beliefs. Describing the congruence he sees between science and his Christian faith, Nobel Prize-winning physicist William Phillips writes:

I see an orderly, beautiful universe in which nearly all physical phenomena can be understood from a few simple mathematical equations. I see a universe that, had it been constructed slightly differently, would never have given birth to stars and planets, let alone bacteria and people. And there is no good scientific reason for why the universe should not have been different. Many good scientists have concluded from these observations that an intelligent God must have

chosen to create the universe with such beautiful, simple, and life-giving properties. Many other equally good scientists are nevertheless atheists" (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 129).

Conclusion and Communion

- You and I have to choose based on the evidence of the sciences, the natural world, and what the Bible records as to where to place our faith. Science and Christianity are not incompatible but provide evidence to the true nature of reality. We don't have to abandon one to embrace the other. I, for one, have put my faith in Jesus, who claimed not just in God creating all things but claimed to be God incarnate. I trust His words and the words of the Bible over all other words or worlds or theories or revelations. I place my faith in Him and invite you to place your faith in Him as well.
- You have an invitation to place your faith in Him, and for those of us we have the opportunity to renew our faith in Jesus by our participation in Communion together.
- Sharing in Communion and benediction.
- Next Sunday, we will deal with the question of "doesn't Christianity denigrate women?"

*This sermon series is guided by the book *Confronting Christianity – 12 hard questions for the world's largest religion* by Rebecca McLaughlin.