



Questioning Christianity

Doesn't Science Disprove Religion?

An Apparent Conflict

- As scientific innovation and discovery have provided greater insight into how our world works, a chasm between science and religion has grown.
- While tracing out those interactions would require a course all its own, it's worthwhile to step back and consider, "Why does this apparent conflict exist?"
- There are multiple angles to approach this question; the most significant are below.
- **Differences in worldview.**
 - *"Your worldview represents your most fundamental beliefs and assumptions about the universe you inhabit."*¹
 - A worldview provides the framework for and answers questions of:
 - Origin - Where do we come from?
 - Meaning - Why am I here?
 - Morality - How should I live? (What are good and evil?)
 - Destiny - Where are we going, and what happens when I die?
 - In the West, the most dominant competing worldviews are theism and naturalism.
 - **Theism**, simply put, affirms (1) God and the created realm are distinct but related, and (2) human persons, as products of creation, are unique among terrestrial organisms that fundamentally informs the meaning, value, and purpose of human existence. Humans are not the product of blind forces and eternally-existing materials.
 - **Naturalism** rejects (1) God and the created realm as distinct but related, and (2) that humans are different in any substantive way from the rest of nature. We're merely the product of natural forces and eternally-existing materials.
 - If a worldview rejects the existence or influence of God outright, that worldview will color every realm of inquiry, including science.

¹ *What in the World is a Worldview?*, Article by James Anderson, Crossway.com: [tinyurl.com/23x2sry4](https://www.crossway.com/articles/what-in-the-world-is-a-worldview/)

- **Overgeneralizations and overstepping boundaries.**
 - Science can only answer *how*, it cannot answer *why*. Many have embraced science as a means of answering both, something it is ill-equipped to do.
 - Similarly, religion answers *why*, and may accurately *describe* the world, but the Bible is not a science textbook; our understanding of Scripture's descriptions of the world are often colored and shaped by scientific discovery.
- The tendency is to overstep these boundaries, including embracing faulty interpretations and/or making unfounded extrapolations that may be grounded in an individual's *worldview*, but inconsistent with either science or the Scriptures.
- This leads to errors on both sides, exposing divergent approaches to understanding reality.
- In addressing the question of "science disproving religion", Christians inadvertently cede ground to the premise that science is, indeed, against religion. In reality, this is not true; there are *scientists* who are against religion, and there are anti-science "religionists" too. But the studies of science and religion are not at odds when rightly understood.
- **Framing the "Conflict"**²
 - For Christians, science has increasingly felt like a threat. Opponents of religion take for granted that the results of science have undermined the intellectual respectability of belief in God.³
 - "Science", motivated by a godless worldview and agenda, has established itself as superior to religion, rendering belief in God superfluous and/or unnecessary; scientific discoveries have been integrated and canonized into robust theories that seemingly replace the need for God.
 - In reality, it's not *science* as an abstract concept causing these difficulties, it's *scientists* and others with established pre-commitments to a godless worldview.
 - The supposed conflict between Christianity and science is a conflict of worldview assumptions made by scientists *before* their scientific work, not as a product of it.
- **Common Argument 1: Science defeats religion because it has "filled the gaps".**
 - Especially in modernity, atheists have posited that religion is a product of humanity's imagination, with God being an explanatory hypothesis for undiscovered natural phenomena.
 - As the argument goes, while belief in God was reasonable in the past, as knowledge has informed the *actual* mechanics of the world, the natural has explained away that which was historically given a supernatural cause.

² Adapted from Murray, Michael J. 1999. *Reason for the Hope Within*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 321-325.

³Murray, 320.

- *God doesn't send the rain, evaporation and condensation cycles do.*
- *God doesn't send the tides, it's the gravitational effect of the moon.*
- *God doesn't cause life; biological processes account for how life comes about.*
- **Common Argument 2: Science defeats religion by excluding it.**
 - This argument takes the worldview of naturalism and asserts that science, through its ability to explain the world around us without need of supernatural intervention, has demonstrated naturalism to be the only reasonable foundation for understanding the world.
 - While naturalism may be a *methodological commitment* that "...stipulates that scientific accounts must refer to whole natural phenomena without reference to immediate or direct contributions but non-natural or supernatural forces or agents"⁴, it is errant to assert this therefore requires a *metaphysical naturalism* that excludes religious belief.
 - **Example:** Let's say a chemist is writing a report to explain a chemical reaction in her lab. Just because the processes she observes through repeated experimentation may only deal with natural causes and supernatural phenomena are not included in her report, this does not, by necessity, preclude the existence of the God who made the orderly and "natural" processes to work. Naturalist scientists embrace an assumption that religion would conflict with science and thus "supernaturalism" must be rejected, but this claim is unfounded.

Addressing the Conflict

- In the collection of essays *Reason for the Hope Within*, Christian philosopher W. Christopher Stewart asserts that Christians conversing about science and religion should not merely address the scientific rationality of the Christian faith, but address the erroneous assumption that science and Christianity are in conflict at all.
- He calls this view that science and theism are in a constant state of conflict, with science considered to have the upper hand, the "Conflict Thesis".
- Debating the results of such faulty thinking isn't as effective as addressing the faulty thinking itself.
- **The conflict thesis is historically misleading.**
 - Historically, science has leaned *heavily* on religion for presupposition and motivation.
 - On the whole, Christianity has had an incredibly positive impact on the development of western science, flowing from our doctrine of creation.
 - It's the doctrine of creation that posits an orderly world exists as the creation of an orderly, intelligent, and omnipotent God; it's these presuppositions that

⁴ Murray, 324.

make experimentation in the natural world rational and fueled much scientific discovery in the seventeenth century and beyond. There was an assumption of uniformity and dependability *because* of religion, not in spite of it.

- "Men became scientific because they expected law in nature and they expected law in nature because they believed in a lawgiver." - C.S. Lewis
- The suggestion that religion has tyrannically dominated and restricted science simply does not align with history; in fact, many pioneers in their respected fields were Christians or theists:
 - Galileo Galilei - Advanced observational astronomy (e.g., moons of Jupiter) and championed the heliocentric model.
 - Johannes Kepler - Formulated the three laws of planetary motion describing elliptical orbits.
 - Blaise Pascal - Contributed to probability theory, fluid mechanics, and invented an early mechanical calculator.
 - Robert Boyle - Founded modern chemistry; best known for Boyle's Law relating pressure and volume of gases.
 - Isaac Newton - Developed the laws of motion and universal gravitation; co-invented calculus; major work in optics.
 - Michael Faraday - Discovered electromagnetic induction, leading to electric motors and generators.
 - Charles Babbage - Designed the first concepts of programmable computers
 - Gregor Mendel - Founded genetics through his laws of inheritance based on pea plant experiments.
 - Louis Pasteur - Pioneered germ theory, pasteurization, and vaccines for diseases like rabies.
 - Lord Kelvin (William Thomson) - Advanced thermodynamics and established the absolute temperature scale (Kelvin).
 - James Clerk Maxwell - Unified electricity and magnetism into Maxwell's equations, laying foundations of modern physics.
 - Leonhard Euler - Made foundational contributions across mathematics, including graph theory, number theory, and key formulas
- At the same time, we must also be careful to note that apparent conflicts between Christianity and science have originated from interpretations of the Bible that have not taken into account the complexities interpretation.
 - Sometimes there are apparent contradictions that, upon more study and or more scientific discovery, it's discovered the Scriptures and science were never in conflict at all.
 - *Example:* Galileo's heliocentric model of the solar system was rejected by the Roman Catholic Church due to complex religious and political

influences related to their response to the Reformation.

- However, even in this case, the historical accounting is much more tame; there were many among the religious leadership that were supportive of Galileo and his studies.
- This example serves to show that those apparent “contradictions” that supposedly wedge science and religion further apart are often not grounded in reality.
- **The conflict thesis exaggerates the force or status of scientific claims about the world.**
 - The idea that science and religion are in conflict is often fueled by the popular misconceptions of science and religion as ways of knowing, especially with science being elevated as, on account of its method, inherently superior.
 - **Assumption 1** - Whereas religion deals in the realm of *opinions*, science deals in the realm of *facts*. Thus, science is inherently objective, and religion is subjective. However, this assumes that objective realities about religion cannot be gleaned through evidence in the same way that science can glean information about the world.
 - **Assumption 2** - Science, unlike religion, is driven by experimentation and observation, and thus is more trustworthy. While it is true (and we’re grateful for the fact) that experimentation can lead us to correct understandings of our world, science by its nature requires making all sorts of hypotheses given what we observe in order to deduce what is the correct explanation. Naturalists are the only ones who cut off an entire realm of possibility for explanation, especially when experimentation is unable to explain certain processes and phenomena (like creation, etc.)

A Better Approach

- As Christians, we know that God created the universe and is sovereign over it all.
- As a result, we can, with humble confidence, know that science will never contradict a right understanding of the Scriptures.
- Below are a few encouragements for engaging with atheistic or naturalistic friends who may have believed the lie that science and Christianity are at odds.
- **Don’t unintentionally agree that science and religion are in conflict.**
 - In many “hot button” topics, like evolution and creation, our friends are coming to us with the understanding that religion is antithetical to scientific inquiry.
 - We can ironically fuel this assumption by diving into a defense and/or argument with true Scriptural claims but done in a way that’s condescending or jockeying for superiority.
 - Adopt a tone in conversation that expresses appreciation for science as a God-given tool for understanding his creation, and express a willingness to study a topic alongside your friend as evidence that your faith sees no problem with following the facts.

- **Ask questions that uncover faulty worldview assumptions.**
 - In arguments, people will often volley attacks and make defenses that only further entrench them in their positions.
 - While we may be *correct* in our understanding, our goal is to help our friend question their foundations, not merely express agreement with us.
 - When questioned, Jesus often replied with questions to reveal malicious intent, expose faulty foundations, and cause people to examine their own logic.
 - Matthew 21:23-25
 - Matthew 22:41-45
 - Luke 6:9
 - Matthew 22:17-21
 - John 8:3-7
 - Matthew 22:29-32
 - Example:
 - Friend: "Evolution explains where we come from, so there's no need for God creating us."
 - You: "That's an interesting assertion. Can you help me understand how evolution explains where we come from?"
 - Example:
 - Friend: "Well Christians are just anti-science because of their belief in the Bible."
 - You: "What makes you say that? Would your opinion change if I could point you to Christians and theists who made significant contributions to science?"
 - Example:
 - Friend: "Science explains everything, so there's no need for the supernatural."
 - You: "You're right that science can explain a lot. I'm thankful for that! However, I'm not sure you believe that's true. How does science, for example, explain why you're here?"
 - *Note: Remember that science can explain "how" the world functions, but it cannot answer questions of "why." Try to ask questions that expose their faulty belief that science has this ability.*
- **Ask questions that uncover the hypocrisies/failures of their position.**
 - Many of our friends are only repeating what they've heard in other settings and haven't critically thought through their own positions. They've taken for granted that naturalism is the answer to all questions without evaluating underlying inconsistencies or the rotten moral fruit it's produced.

○ **The hypocrisy of "faith."**

- Christians are often derided by atheistic materialists for believing things by faith, meaning (in their view) that we suppress the data to support our views.
- However, this is frequently what atheistic scientists do for their own positions; although the universe is finely tuned and points to an intelligent designer, atheists rule out the possibility in principle. This is the peak of anti-scientific thought.
- Similarly, the theory of evolution would require so much fossil evidence that we should be swimming in fossils of intermediary forms. However, as of yet no such evidence has been found, but naturalists stake their entire understanding of humanity on this belief. Many grasp on to the theory because to deny it would lend credence to theism, not because it's scientifically valid; in fact, many non-Christian scientists have rejected the theory of evolution due to a failure of supporting evidence.
- Some fault Christians for believing in an eternal God yet have no problem embracing the material world as eternal.

○ **Examine the fruits.**

- Most people have not thought the implications of their beliefs, and this is especially true with atheistic scientific claims.
- For example, if macroevolution is true as articulated by atheists and we're just the product of chemicals and molecules adapting over time through random chance, then:
 - Why is racism wrong?
 - Why were the Nazi's wrong?
 - Why is homosexuality (something antithetical to the propagation of our species) often defended alongside evolution?
 - Note: Science cannot explain beauty, value, morals, or purpose, so when this boundary is crossed, it usually produces a lack of cogency.

Some Example Statements

- Below are a few statements that express a naturalistic worldview and the inherent belief that religion and science are fundamentally opposed.
 - Practice thinking of questions you could ask in response to uncover more information about their worldview and/or to expose faults in their understanding. What assumptions undergird these statements, and how might you draw that out in a kind but engaging way?
1. "The Bible says the earth is only a few thousand years old, but science has proven it is 4.5 billion years old."
 2. "Evolution by natural selection eliminates the need for a Creator."
 3. "Prayer has never been proven to work in controlled scientific studies."
 4. "Miracles violate the laws of nature, which science has never observed being broken."
 5. "The brain is nothing more than physical matter – consciousness, soul, and religious experience are just neurochemistry."
 6. "Religion historically has opposed scientific progress – Galileo, Copernicus, and evolution are proof."
 7. "The fine-tuning argument is undermined by the multiverse hypothesis."
 8. "God is an unfalsifiable claim, which puts religion outside the bounds of rational inquiry."
 9. "The problem of natural evil – disease, earthquakes, tsunamis – is better explained by blind natural forces than by a good God."
 10. "Cosmology has replaced God with the Big Bang."