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Dialogue w Atheist on Christianity & the Scientific Method

Biblical Evidence for Catholicism

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Dialogue w Atheist on Christianity & the Scientific Method July 8, 2019 Dave Armstrong



From discussions in a forum devoted to the question of God's existence: originally uploaded on 19 July 2001, with the full permission of [Sue Strandberg](#) (self-identified as a secular humanist): whose words will be in blue.

My point was that if a mistaken conclusion is formed from scientific methods it can be and probably will be corrected using the same methods. Nothing shows the critical, crucial importance of science more than bad science. A continuing discussion and dispute on evidence — and a strict accountability to demonstration — will tend to weed out bad theories over time as long as the scientific community is not stifled from open investigation and analysis. The fact that phrenology was discarded by scientists themselves is one indication of this.

I agree; my point was that scientists are no less prone to the usual human shortcomings than the rest of us: a fact of history which is often unknown or ignored by those who think that such properties are the sole possession of religionists. I would say that such unfortunate occurrences are in a sense even more shocking in science, given the very fact of its strict methodology of proof (whereas religion involves many tenets not empirically verifiable, so that much nonsense may possibly be inculcated). But does dogmatism per se surprise me in any person, even a scientist? Not at all . . .

Racism has often been quite respectable in scientific circles. There was this nonsense of measuring skulls and determining “intelligence” and “character” based on that (phrenology). Eugenics was also firmly grounded in supposed “science.” The Nazis enlisted scientists and doctors every step of the way to determine whose life was worthy to be lived (one recalls their bizarre experiments). Margaret Sanger (founder of Planned Parenthood) picked up on this approach and utilized it for her notions of population reduction. This was a way to reduce the “inferior” black population. Steven Jay

Gould wrote:

Racism has often been buttressed by scientists who present a public facade of objectivity to mask their guiding prejudices. (*The Panda's Thumb*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1980, 176)

As religion can be abused for nefarious ends, so can science.

The issue is not belief in God vs. Evolution, but the explanatory scope of miracle explanation vs. science explanation.

But who says truth is determined *solely* by explanatory power? This is one of the fallacies which seems to keep coming up, but to me it appears to be based on the circular reasoning that scientific knowledge is the only sort of reliable knowledge; therefore anything outside of it is either inferior or suspect as irrational and epistemologically unjustifiable, and hence subject to all sorts of excessive and misguided skepticism and cynicism.

Evolution attempts to explain complexity by virtue of being a testable theory which endeavours to unify a large number of observations from geology, biogeography, genetics, zoology, anatomy, molecular and biochemical biology, etc. It tries to break the problem of complex forms of life down into simpler stages in order to understand how and why they formed the way they did through an interaction between genes and environment. And it relies on the same natural laws, interactions, and processes that we can observe today.

That's fine as far as it goes. I simply deny that it has sufficient evidence and scientific data to explain certain rather extraordinary natural phenomena. It is limited just as is virtually any other theory or explanation set forth by us mere mortals. It can't explain *everything*. Why this should be such an amazing and terrible thing

(to point out the obvious) I know not.

What Reality “really” is can be pragmatically assumed as something uncomplicated and basic from which more complicated things emerge due to simple processes working together over time, a coherent series of cause-and-effect which works across different levels of explanation. We can learn to understand the world in terms of smaller and smaller elements, systems, and levels, and then build our understanding from the ground up.

I find it curious that you have no problem accepting the prior axiom of a grand cosmological process of simple-to-complex, (ultimately) based on (it seems to me) numerous materialistic evolutionary assumptions which themselves are unproven, and have little or no explanatory value (the above citations), yet you dismiss the hypothesis of complex-to-complex, which forms the presupposition of theism (cosmological and teleological arguments).

If God exists and is capable of effecting events and elements in the universe, I see no reason why a scientific approach to understanding would be unable to discover this.

Me neither, which is why I think so highly of the cosmological and teleological arguments.

Empiricism doesn't exclude God, it simply doesn't start out with an assumption that couldn't be disproven even if wrong.

That starting-point has been only since (basically) Darwin's time. Before that, science didn't start with materialistic or naturalistic premises. It acknowledged the limitations of its own field of inquiry (matter) and didn't pronounce on ultimate questions of origin and metaphysics as scientists routinely have the arrogance and

chutzpah to do today.

And by demanding that science “explain” DNA or abiogenesis –and by appealing to arguments such as the kalam [cosmological argument] — it seems you are already speaking of explanation in empirical terms yourself. It is then a matter of consistency.

Exactly. I love empiricism. I am only demanding that it stick within its own sphere of knowledge, be applied consistently, and not claim to be the sum and total of *all* knowledge. If materialistic evolutionary science claims to explain the universe better than the theistic concept, then we are merely requiring (“demanding”) of it what it claims for itself: the ability to *explain* materialistic evolutionary processes so that no one need appeal to God as the origin and cause of matter and the processes of natural law.

But we will not put up with this poppycock (I’m not saying *you* do this) of claims that the atheist stands on science and rationality and Occam’s Razor with no need of God, while the Christian/theist is supposedly standing on “God of the gaps” and “blind [irrational] faith” and “magic” with no need for (or disdain for) science. It simply isn’t true: and demonstrably so.

Quite the contrary, actually. In being skeptical of certain grandiose and unsubstantiated claims of the theory of evolution, I vigorously and zealously contend that I am being eminently of a scientific mindset. I simply demand empirical evidence before I grant assent to propositions which are strictly within the realm of empirical observation. Atheists, on the other hand, often demand absolute empirical proof of a Being that is Spirit in the first place, which *is* irrational and unreasonable (even though good arguments of that sort exist).

They were never “alternatives to science,” they were untested evidence which stood up to strict investigation and rigid criteria of proof and demonstrated their merit enough to be accepted in the scientific community.

Anything that dares to differ from the medical or scientific establishment is regarded as medieval quackery, alchemy, snake oil stuff, whether it is chiropractic, herbalism, homeopathy, natural childbirth, health food, alternative cancer treatments, vitamins and minerals (this area is the least controversial, thanks to Linus Pauling and others). I know firsthand, because we have explored all of these areas (apart from the cancer treatments, which were used by my brother), to great benefit.

Even your own approach to these things, lumping them in with all sorts of occultic and New Age balderdash, demonstrates a particular type of rationalist intellectual condescension, as if modern science (great as it is) is the be-all and end-all of all knowledge. No one ever figured out how to cure any malady until modern science: all the former healing techniques were mythological nonsense and placebo effect . . .

As one skeptic put it, “there is no such thing as alternative medicine: there is medicine that has been clinically tested and verified and medicine which has not.”

I do my own testing and verification by reading and trying different things (and save hundreds of dollars in the process, thank you very much). As I said, I cured my own hypoglycemia in 1983 from self-diagnosis and treatment (no sugar and white flour; whole foods; various vitamins and minerals). My allergies have been greatly helped. I found another pill that helped my back pain, but it

aggravated my low blood sugar (it had glucose in it).

My wife was taking Zoloft for depression, and it was making her into a “zombie.” I found amino acids which took care of the depression, without the side effects. The amino acids have to do with the part of the brain that is connected with anxiety. Amino acids are manufactured by our body, as the components of protein — nothing “unscientific” or “mystical” there. But doctors would rather have her take Zoloft and be a zombie and spend six times as much, than to take a simple pill which costs about \$4 per 100. *They* may be ignorant about these alternative remedies, but *I* am not. Or they are beholden to the pharmaceutical companies, etc.

Now what would you have me do? Ditch all these wonderful discoveries because they don't fit into your neat little, rationalistic scientific world and worldview? I say that all these things *can* be explained scientifically, now or in the future.

If all these things can be explained scientifically, now or in the future, then they do indeed fit into my neat little rationalistic scientific world and worldview. If they really work for the reasons they say they work — or work, but for different reasons — then they are not in conflict with science at all, they are simply unexplored areas of science.

I agree! Isn't the removal of a migraine headache or a constant runny nose or fever or depression sufficient? If you have a migraine and something takes it away, believe me, you take it. I wouldn't care if it was the ligament from a baboon's knee, or ground-up turtle shells, if it worked. It works for a reason (cause and effect). I may not (almost always don't) know the reason, but I believe that it is discoverable through scientific method.

Science is such a powerful tool because it takes the opposite stance, it works on the assumption that personal experiences need to be examined in the public arena.

But Catholicism is not much different. That's why we draw a clear distinction between private and public revelation. Private revelation (even famous stuff like the Lourdes and Fatima Marian apparitions) are not binding on anyone. This is why we have investigations for scores of years, concerning sainthood, and alleged miraculous occurrences. This *is* a scientific outlook.

If God should be "included in science" then this entails that it is a theory in science. Not having explicable mechanisms is a drawback, but no, this doesn't rule it out.

Okay; well, I would say that religion and philosophy intersect with science at the point of origins and possible teleology. That doesn't "make" them science, but it does mean that science cannot totally explain absolutely everything it comments upon.

Science itself will reduce to philosophy, certainly, since in order to use science you have to make certain metaphysical and epistemic assumptions.

We agree on that.

But I did not think that you were trying to argue that science is an inferior way of knowing things so much as trying to bring God explanations into science.

Again, not into science per se, but into explanations of science which are already going beyond what science has authority to speak on (notably, origins of life and the universe and irreducible complexity).

Both cosmological and design arguments assume the validity and worth of empirical methods such as science: in this thread and others you seem to have been asserting either that science is a path to God,

I think its conclusions lead to (or are at least not at all inconsistent with) a reasonable belief in God.

or that theism is a powerful scientific hypothesis which best explains certain empirical facts about the world and should thus be included in scientific explanations.

No, that's going too far. I think theism picks up where science ends, and that science points to it (if one were to get "metaphysical"). Nothing in theism contradicts true science. Miracles do not because they are exceptions to the rule. Uniformitarianism cannot prove that miracle X will "never ever ever happen."

It is not too far; it is where you have gone. If you claim a miracle has happened and wish to hide behind arguments that say we can't rule anything out (which is true) you cannot then try to gain credence with science, which says we do rule things out on a tentative basis.

Science simply cannot rule out miracles, because they are not part of its study. How could supernatural events come under the category of "natural events"? I explained earlier the distinction between this inability of science to dogmatically say "no miracles/design/creation" and the Christian's perfect right to assert that nothing in science is *inconsistent* with various spiritual or supernatural occurrences. In other words, it is not a perfect "epistemological symmetry," so to speak.

If science is pointing to something then it is pointing to a theory.

That is what science points to, theories that might be wrong, not metaphysical absolutes.

Of course. The statement “the Big Bang is a theory” is a scientific one. The statement “the Big Bang is entirely consistent with the concept of creation *ex nihilo*” is a statement of philosophy of religion, having to do with a scientific subject. Big difference. One can do both. There is no conflict here.

So I don't think it makes sense to both argue that our scientific evidence leads to God as the best explanation for some specific problems in science and at the same time try to undermine science as a good way of knowing things.

How have I ever “undermined” science? To my knowledge, I never have. Simply pointing out what it has not the ability to do is not undermining it, but rather, being truthful and honest about it. I don't respect a tightrope walker by claiming that he is able to walk through thin air without a tightrope. From my perspective, I am *honoring* science by denouncing its “counterfeits.”

Although the theory that God directly intervenes in nature is supposed to be accepted as most likely by scientists when they run up against a problem which is hard to solve, God should not be treated like any other theory in science, it's special. It's outside of science's scope.

That's right, because God is a matter of both science (quite indirectly) and metaphysics (directly). Science is itself the philosophical viewpoint of empiricism. Science *is* philosophy. When we come to the borderlines and intersections of different fields of knowledge, it gets very complex and tricky.

Evolution, for good or bad, is a scientific hypothesis, even in

the “obscure points.” If a God explanation wishes to compete with it on the same level, it ought to provide mechanisms and processes that are equally explanatory.

It cannot, and shouldn't be required to. God is no more the end result of a scientific experiment than He is the end result of a clever syllogism. This demand is irrational, because it is unreasonable to accept something merely because it is deemed superior to an alternate explanation, despite its own grave inconsistencies and shortcomings. The rational thing to do is to withhold judgment on those portions of it which are inadequately supported empirically. But I understand the modern scientific mindset.

If it can't or doesn't do so that won't mean we don't entertain it as a possibility, of course, but, like homeopathy, it won't tell us much about how the world actually works. And it better have very strong additional proof.

How likely is it that a monkey could sit at a typewriter and type out the US Constitution, word-for-word, or assemble a Boeing 747 from junkyard materials? Genetic codes are infinitely more complex than that, yet materialist scientists think nothing about asserting that they could have come about by random mutations, under the ubiquitous “explanation” of natural selection. The rational thing is to conclude that there must be a Designer somewhere along the way. But if one makes Matter God, with all the powers of omnipotence, even omniscience in a sense, this extreme difficulty is magically annihilated.

I am free as a rational mind, with full respect and admiration for scientific method, to reject what I feel is an inadequate scientific

hypothesis (in this case, purely materialistic macroevolution, and origination of the higher complexities of biological life) without immediately adopting another explanation. I am agnostic as to God's methods, and to nature's methods where we don't have enough information to solidly posit a particular process or mechanism of change.

I understand that this is heretical and anathema according to many scientists today, but I don't care. That takes us right back to whether science has the inherent power to determine all knowledge and all truth. It does not, anymore than any other system of thought does. And I say that is self-evident (though rarely acknowledged).

If you are genuinely unconvinced by the evidence for evolution, then by all means you ought to hold back from accepting it, there's nothing wrong with that. But this is different than going on to question the worth of science.

I deny that I have ever done that. Why would you think that I did? I love science and theology alike.

In order to hold God back from being one hypothesis set forth against other hypotheses in science, you will have to keep God safely in the realm of philosophical ethics or metaphysics — where every observation would look exactly the same if God existed or not. Science can't go there. But as long as you insist that God directly interferes in the workings of natural laws and divine intervention can be the 'best explanation' for facts like the Big Bang or the cell I think you should accept the consequences of bringing a "spiritual" Being into the realm of science.

I agree with the famed paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson that the "results" of metaphysics can be examined by scientific method.

That is an intersection of God/metaphysics and science. But even accepting your challenge, how would one go about proving scientifically that God created any particular thing? It can't possibly be done. God is a spirit and any means of creation would (it seems to me) involve extraordinary processes that are not familiar to us. Yet certain phenomena like the Big Bang are consistent with the notion of God as Creator.

If it can't be proven that God created any particular thing then how can you use it as a theory which explains the Big Bang and the cell? Creation (note: not creationISM) is not a scientific theory.

It is a religious/metaphysical belief that can be shown to be quite consistent with what we presently know in science. That God created is a Christian dogma. One doesn't arrive at these beliefs through scientific experiment, but through other means. When I put forth God as an "explanation" of the Big Bang or the cell, it is not a scientific approach in terms of experiment and observation and testable hypotheses. It is a metaphysical belief without knowledge of all the particulars.

Because it doesn't *claim* to be scientific in the strict sense, there is no obligation to prove mechanism, etc. (if indeed that were even possible). "Explanations" of the evolution of the eye or of life and suchlike, however, are of an entirely different order. They claim to be scientific through and through, yet fall short of the mark because they explain little. They are, in effect, metaphysical theories masking themselves as "scientific explanations." But this is intellectually dishonest, because they are not accurately described for what they are, and there is a pretense of *detailed, technical, scientific understanding* (that doesn't exist) and an unseemly scoffing at those who are skeptical, such as myself. Belief in a

Creator involves no such internal inconsistency.

But using facts in nature to argue specifically for a direct intervention of God over a natural process which is “sustained” by God means you’ve crossed into an area where different levels of proof are required.

Precisely, because this becomes metaphysics, as I have said all along.

Saying that God intervened directly in nature and did a miracle and that the scientific or natural theories that account for the same event are WRONG means that you are no longer in metaphysics. When the claims of science and the claims of religion overlap and contradict each other you can’t say they are in separate areas, nor can you say they are both in metaphysics. They are in the area where we deal with empirical epistemic philosophy; i.e., science.

But they still need not contradict, simply because miracle or divine intervention is an exception to the rule, or interruption of “normality.” I don’t have to throw out science simply because I believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ or the miracle of the loaves (feeding of the 5000). I agree that there is overlap. I strongly disagree that you have revealed some glaring epistemological or logical inconsistency in my thinking in these areas thus far.

I’ll just point out again that while your concern that evolution has not accumulated enough direct empirical evidence may or may not be justified, you are still criticizing evolution on scientific grounds. You are demanding specifics, you want to know exactly HOW it works — you don’t want vague generalizations that it works but we can’t really know how. Your skepticism is based on the assumption that evolution darn well better show its work or you won’t accept it.

Precisely.

The skeptical equivalent on the nontheist side for the inadequacy of God explanations is not “prove to us that God exists” but “an explanation ought to show its work — HOW does God work?”

But isn't that applying a scientific epistemology and methodology to a non-material entity, and religion and metaphysics? On the other hand, I am criticizing evolutionary theory by using its *own* presuppositions.

The fact that this can't be known (unless you are going to claim that God works through nature and thus all natural explanations show how God works) is a problem when it comes to deciding which kind of explanation is a “thoughtful explanation” that gives an adequate grounding for our knowledge.

It is a problem only for one who makes science the end of all knowledge. That's what I've been trying to demonstrate: that this demand itself is unreasonable because it is circular; also that it doesn't take into account that the most fundamental scientific presuppositions also are unprovable and are axioms. Everyone accepts *something* on “faith,” so to speak. This has long been a theme of my thought. I love to get to the bottom of things.

I really don't think we are being selectively skeptical to accept evolution but not accept that the existence of God provides an adequate solution to scientific problems.

Again, it is not so much that God gives “solutions” (*scientific* solution is implicitly implied by you, I think) to “scientific problems.” Rather, it is that the God hypothesis or theism provides solutions to philosophical problems which are often *falsely believed* to be scientific problems (when in fact they go far beyond

science proper). But [materialistic] scientists too often don't admit that their thought is doing that, while the theist freely admits it. So it is a question of intellectual honesty and categorization, to a large extent.

Do you agree that it is *possible* that questions such as the Big Bang, abiogenesis, cell formation, and the origins of the human drive to form moral systems MIGHT have a natural explanation which science can discover?

Of course.

I know you think that the current theories on these subjects are not adequate, sufficient, complete — but is it possible that there COULD be a natural scientific explanation for these factors which would be adequate, sufficient, and complete?

Yes. But of course even if this *were* the case, it wouldn't disprove God. Apples and oranges.

Could there ever be empirical discoveries that would persuade you that naturalist theories on these issues, at least, are scientifically sound ... and that God may exist, but sustains or created or caused the natural means?

All Christians believe that God created and sustains His creation, whether He used evolution as the means or some form of miraculous special creationism. All theistic evolutionists (guys like Darwin's friends Asa Gray and Kenneth Miller and Lecomte du Nouy) would say that God had to put the initial potentialities into matter to make the subsequent developmental evolution possible in the first place. This is no novel concept. Many Catholics and other Christians are evolutionists.

I'm aware that evolution doesn't directly address the question of God's existence — usually, science itself has nothing to say one way or the other on metaphysical questions which either claim to be about other realities we can't observe or would look the same whether they were true or not. How would one go about trying to prove that everything is, or is not, inside some other totally inaccessible reality, for example? What kind of observation would be to the point?

No scientific one that I can think of. As I wrote before, one can only determine if the scientific explanation is *consistent* with some brand of creationist metaphysics or theistic evolution.

I claim that these questions are indeed scientific questions.

Again, how would one prove in a laboratory that God is sustaining the existence of any physical thing? That can no more be done than an analysis of the cells of Jesus Christ could prove that He was both God and man.

Someone years ago could have insisted that the origin and nature of lightning was not a scientific problem, but a philosophical one. Where is the demarcation point?

At events and amazingly complex systems where we don't have the slightest clue as to origin or process, and where known laws cannot even begin to explain them. As Michael Behe stated: we should have the courage to go where the facts lead, even though it may make us uncomfortable. This is not true at all with lightning, though it may have seemed so at one time. People once thought comets were supernatural things too. With more knowledge, that was shown to be a false assumption.

And with more knowledge, things like “irreducibly complex” cells

might become explained as the result of understandable natural processes in evolution.

Then I might accept the standard evolutionary theory with regard to that point, but not until then.

You say this has not happened yet, but surely you don't mean to then dogmatically claim that it could not happen, especially when so many people are taking reasonable stabs at the question.

Of course not.

Your very demand for stronger empirical proof in evolution shows that you are dealing with a science question and know this.

Scientists are working on the problem (irreducible complexity, etc.), but what they have told us thus far is little more than "empirical metaphysics" at best and fairy tales at worst.

You must have some sort of thing in mind that would persuade you, some finding or experiment or formula or series of discoveries which would give us a "clue" to a natural explanation.

Sure: an explanation that has causal steps and real descriptions of mechanism and process, like that in any number of other scientific areas; something that has substance and is not simply believed because it fits into a larger theory; something that gives us more than reverent, faith-filled invocations of the goddesses of Mutations and Natural Selection, as if the mere stating of the words magically solves the problems under consideration.

You can always keep God above science by keeping it in metaphysics. God-as-theory is far too vague to ever be wrong. Evolution could be wrong. This is what makes it a scientific theory.

It almost seems as if you wish to worship science as this amazing

thing, because it stresses falsifiability. Well, I agree that it is wonderful, but it is only one means of knowing among many. I don't see why science has to be King, while all other knowledge is inferior and scoffed at.

I don't worship science. How can one worship something that scoffs at blind obedience and insists you can be wrong?

Just as I can worship a God who scoffs at blind obedience and insists *I* can be wrong . . .

How can you worship something which has conclusions which are forced to keep changing?

Just as I worship Someone Whose Moral Law "forces" me to keep repenting when I fall short of it.

If you try to define God as a metaphysical assumption, then I don't think you can bring in God in the form of observable miraculous supernatural interventions which can be distinguished from ordinary natural occurrences and thus lead us to belief in God.

We can neither prove nor disprove God from science. But that doesn't mean that one is prohibited from positing that perhaps some sort of Creator/Designer God can provide a good explanation in terms of First Cause for phenomena which remain quite mysterious to us. Even Einstein spoke of some sort of "spirit" in the universe, and I don't think you would question *his* commitment to scientific method. Even David Hume accepted a version of the argument from design.

And of course science *began* in a thoroughly Christian milieu. Naturalism or materialism was not believed to be central or fundamental to the definition of science or its method till basically

after Darwin's time. This dichotomy you speak of was not always there. Relatively little conflict between science and God or Christianity was observed before 1859, though there were occasional exceptions, such as the much-ballyhooed Galileo incident. Newton could be a devout theist (Arian, not Christian), yet discover what he did. Likewise with Copernicus, Mendel, Pasteur (who was very fond of the Rosary), Pascal, Kepler, Boyle, Fleming, Faraday, Agassiz, Maxwell, Linnaeus (all of whom were Christians or theists), and on and on.

What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? ;)

Early science had very much to do with Jerusalem. This was no coincidence at all. And unless the history of science is understood, then much of what I argue falls on deaf ears, because the presently fashionable categories of thought and fields of study do not permit it. The only place it can be relegated to is "the fundamentalist, backward, anti-scientific mentality." That's because the discussion hasn't even been allowed in schools and universities for several generations now.

So whoever talks differently is immediately labeled by many as ignorant of science and its findings, as Behe was when he dared to think differently and not take in the prevailing evolutionary orthodoxy with his mother's milk. I'm not saying *you're* doing this to me. I'm speaking generally.

If you succeed in demonstrating the inadequacy of evolution as explanation you will be supporting science, not attacking it.

That's what I've claimed all along.

Religion is built upon the idea that there are eternal truths which are given to us directly through revelation and intuition, and the most

important thing is to have faith, to believe, to accept. “Question all things,” says Socrates. “Unless ye become as a little child ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven,” says the Bible. At some point any synthesis of these views is going to run into a conflict.

Now Sue, your extreme dichotomies are getting to be a bit too much to take. You act – typically for a modernist or postmodernist – as if science and philosophy involve no axioms and unproven starting-assumptions, and as if religion has nothing whatever to do with rationality and reason. So for you (as with Bertrand Russell) Thomas Aquinas is no philosopher? We believe that there is reason and there is revelation, and that the two do not have to necessarily conflict. They are simply two forms of knowledge.

I’m saying that there is a basic difference in the way science and Greek philosophy approach truth, and the way religion does.

Of course there is, but so what? What’s your point? Are we back to my previous query about your perspective: that science is all there is? Even if atheism were granted as true, this would not be self-evident at all.

Reason is the means of working out solutions to problems.

Revelation is the means of getting an answer without all the fuss and bother.

If God in fact exists, that is the nature of the case, just as I get a “revelation” from a car mechanic or a brain surgeon about my motor or my brain “without all the fuss and bother.” And thank God for that! I have less than no interest in either “philosophical procedure.”

That the two do not necessarily conflict is not important.

It is supremely important. But the fact that you so easily dismiss this

might explain why we keep acting as ships passing in the night.

It is not up to the philosopher to show that revelation is not adequate:

They do all the time by denying that it is a valid category of thought and knowledge.

it is up to the religionist to demonstrate to the philosopher that it is.

One can't do so when the opponent has eliminated the possibility of it by means of a charge (explicit or implied) of "illegitimate category." The atheist obviously has a huge problem with it (it is categorically impossible because there is no God to give it). The deist and the like has less problem, but there is still a huge hurdle to jump. One only has so much time. I can't dismantle Mt. Everest with my hands and rebuild it again.

And without the ability to rationally demonstrate truth, revelation collapses on any terms but its own.

It is testable by things like miracles and fulfilled prophecy; the first is evidence of a superior power over nature, and the second indicates superior knowledge: consistent with omnipotence and omniscience (and possible timelessness).

We already agree that science can give us true knowledge of the world, we stand on common ground here. You have to show me that revelation can give us true knowledge of the world, too, and you can't do it by using revelation, but by using the same approach you and I share for everything else, that of reason and science.

Its evidences are mainly in the realm of historico-legal evidence, and you don't seem to think much of that, either.

Science was done by many Christians, but I do not think it came

out of the mystical revelation of Jerusalem; I think it came out of the rational marketplace of contending ideas that was Athens.

It was both. Greek philosophy more fully interacted with Jewish/Christian thought in the Middle Ages. Out of this milieu came modern science. If it was *solely* Athens, then surely it would have developed back during Aristotle's time. But it required the input of Christianity. Why do you think that is? And how can Christianity be something so allegedly foreign to science, when it was so instrumental in its formation? This is why history is so crucial to study.

The belief that God is rational and understandable enough to be arrived at by reason instead of faith doesn't seem to come out of scripture, but out of the love the Church developed for the power of deductive and inductive reasoning as espoused by the Greeks. Science is, I believe, an historical fluke, not something that was natural to the progression of human thinking, which is religious in nature far more than it is scientific.

Why, then, if the Greeks — to their great credit — constructed all the essential elements of philosophy over hundreds of years, did science not develop by 300 B.C.?

I mentioned some historical factors in the earlier email, such things as capitalism and the development of the printing press. If you're interested in exploring this idea in more depth I would recommend Alan Cromer's *Uncommon Sense: The Heretical Nature of Science*. Good stuff.

Christians (even creationists in many instances), in fact [founded most of the various disciplines of science](#), including bacteriology, calculus, chemistry, electronics, electromagnetics, genetics,

oceanography, paleontology, pathology, physical astronomy, thermodynamics, systematic biology, and several others. Francis Bacon was instrumental in establishing scientific method itself. Leonardo da Vinci was largely using the experimental method even before Bacon! Your attempted dichotomy of science vs. religion/metaphysics would surely appear quite strange to these men. And this is why history is vitally important, to show how we got to where we are, in the world of ideas.

I don't dismiss it, but I do find the idea of irreducible complexity far less plausible than the idea of irreducible simplicity. This is in part because every explanation I have ever heard builds understanding from the ground up, and I have never encountered a phenomenon that is complicated and involved, but it can't be broken down and understood in terms of its parts and their levels of interaction.

Wouldn't the nature of light, sub-atomic particles (quantum mechanics), black holes, and similarly complex notions qualify for such things? Why not brains, DNA, and eyes? It seems to me that you can't explain any of these things in very simple terms.

What science is not capable of discovering is whether or not things that are natural are "sustained" or part of some larger reality which is closed to investigation.

That's right. But the results of scientific investigation can lead one to believe rationally (according to Hume) that the processes are so remarkable as to suggest an Intelligent Designer.

The Cosmological and Teleological Arguments examine the *results* of alleged, theorized creation and we believe they strongly suggest a Creator. They tie into the Big Bang and intelligent design / extreme biological complexity, respectively.

God can be neither proven nor disproven in any absolute sense by science (anymore than science can be disproved by religion or theology), but Creation as a construct can be so examined. If it is then decided that the best explanation for nature is a Creator, then that goes beyond science – but so do Grand Materialist or Atheist Scenarios of the Origins of the Universe and Life. I see no difference whatever once we get back to that initial point of inquiry.

Is scientific knowledge the only reliable sort of knowledge? It may not be the only source of knowledge, but I think we both tend to count it the most reliable source if we are talking about answering empirical questions about the nature of reality.

But of course: that is true by definition, so it is completely uncontroversial. Yet it doesn't rule out things like teleology or a Creator, either, because that is not its domain, and it can't speak on those things (though many atheist scientists deign to do that anyway).

I don't understand. How can you both argue that science and a study of nature can lead one to the conclusion that God exists and there is a design and purpose in the universe and also claim that whether God exists or whether there is design and purpose in the universe are not science's domain and "it can't speak on those things?" According to you it speaks very eloquently indeed.

I was answering specifically your question: "we both tend to count it the most reliable source if we are talking about answering empirical questions." Teleology and God are not directly empirical questions (though, arguably, they are, indirectly, in a sense). All I was saying was that science is the most reliable guide for matter, but that it can't rule out spirit. There is no contradiction here at all. One is a

positive assertion, the other a denial of a negative assertion. I think it is common sense and a self-evident truth.

I think that as long as you claim that God is known because it intervenes in the world in a measurable way which can be distinguished from purely natural causes — as long as you point to scientific evidence for the existence of God — then it is not only legitimate, but obligatory, for science to question the existence of God the way it would any other theory.

All I'm doing is expecting modern science to be consistent with its materialistic premises. If it wants to claim that it has domain over matter, fine. I have no problem with that at all. But when it claims that it can pronounce *negatively and dogmatically* on spiritual matters, it is overstepping its bounds. This is a double standard, but not the best science, as I understand it. It is a corruption of science, and *hubris*. Science needs to understand that it is not the sum of all knowledge, and that it is a branch of philosophy. Philosophy in turn intersects with religion at a certain point.

And religion intersects with science as soon as it makes claims about the nature of reality based on observations in this world — claims that can support theism against atheism. I'm not sure to what extent we can say that metaphysical assumptions about the nature of reality are immune to all criticism. This seems to be a gray area here. If NO observation, experience, experiment, or scientific finding could impact one way or the other on the viewpoint, it may be beyond science because it is also beyond our ability to know.

But this is not true with Christianity. There are a number of things which would theoretically disprove it or cast very strong doubt upon it; for example:

1. Produce proof of the existence of the bones of Jesus.
2. Prove that the New Testament was actually written in, say, 600 A.D. (so that no Apostles or eyewitnesses wrote it).
3. Prove that Jesus never existed.
4. Prove that people have existed eternally.
5. Prove that physical reality is an illusion.

Etc.

To say that belief in God is a metaphysical belief can either mean that no matter what, we can always say God exists: or it can be metaphysical naturalism *disproven* — which means it is a theory. Evidence counted for it. This puts it on par with other theories. And open to scientific confirmation or provisional dismissal.

I think the evidence counts for it in a cumulative sense (many aspects of thought and observation being consistent with it, and making it more plausible than atheism). One can't absolutely disprove God's existence or naturalism, or much of anything, when you really get right down to it. But we all proceed on the basis of axioms anyway, and we all believe things whether or not we are philosophically sophisticated.

The problem I have with your insistence that science is helpless in understanding *spiritual* reality is that you don't seem to understand that spiritual reality might not exist. There might be no God. There might be no miracles, no angel visitations.

Of course these things are theoretically possible, but that is another discussion, isn't it? I am trying to show that if these things exist, that they do not inherently conflict with either science or reason. I am arguing (in this dialogue) primarily for the coherence and consistency and rationality (also plausibility) of Christian belief, not

that it is true (which I can hardly do in any single discussion because I believe that conclusion is reached on the basis of a multitude of various evidences taken together).

And if there is not you have insulated yourself from criticism, from finding this out, and from being forced to change your view or be persuaded to another one.

Not at all; this doesn't follow. How one approaches reality and truth claims is a distinct proposition from the truth or falsity of the same claims. I have the same approach to evidence and truth and epistemology whether Christianity is true or false, as you also do, whether humanism is true or false.

When religion does not conflict with science, it swallows it whole. All discoveries are consistent with the existence of God. All discoveries are also consistent with the nonexistence of God. The problem is that you seem to want to have it both ways: science can in no way rule that any discovery is inconsistent with the existence of God — but there are many discoveries which are not only consistent with God's existence, but are **INCONSISTENT** with atheism.

That shouldn't surprise anyone due to the extraordinary, multi-faceted nature of the Christian God, whereas atheism is simply a negative, "minimalist" proposition, that this marvelous God does not in fact exist. So, e.g., one can observe:

1. The theory of gravity is perfectly consistent with the notion that God could have caused the physical universe to perpetually operate under these laws, as a function of design or teleology.

[note that this is merely a logical claim of consistency; not an alleged airtight, undeniable "proof" – and that is all I have ever

claimed in any of my arguments]

But one cannot say:

[2. The theory of gravity proves that God does not and cannot exist.

There is no “epistemological symmetry” here and thus no double standard, because proposition #2 is simply a much more difficult thing to prove, by its very nature. You can substitute the “laws of natural selection” or thermodynamics; it works the same way logically. It’s the old thing about “it’s very difficult to prove a negative.”

Sometimes God is in this shadowy spirit realm of gassy metaphysics outside of our empirical sciences and sometimes God is a competing theory of the universe which walks and talks and sounds just like a science theory, but isn’t because God is a metaphysical being.

What you see as an ethereal and arbitrary inconsistency seems that way because of the nature of the relationship of philosophy, science, and religion. It gets complicated around the edges, where the different types of knowledge intersect. It’s kind of like the edge of a seashore. Where precisely does the shore begin and the sea end? It’s not so easy to determine (especially considering tides). Yet we know there is a shore and a sea.

Or consider “infinite smallness” (one of my favorite thought experiments in philosophy). If we take any material thing and keep dividing it in half, how far can we go till it becomes nothing? Or is that even possible? No matter how small something is, it can be cut in half, right? So are we able to get to a point where it can no longer be cut in half? Can matter merge into non-matter, by successive gradations?

Perhaps that is the difficulty with science and metaphysics/religion. You have already agreed that science is a type of philosophy, and metaphysics is also a type of philosophy, and arguably religion is a particular sort of metaphysics (at least in part). The edges are blurry, and my comments reflect that. Your task would be to demonstrate that the edges are *not* fuzzy, in order to establish that my claims in this area are what are fuzzy, illogical, and arbitrary.

I'm not sure what you wish to argue: do you wish to assert that there can be no real conflict between the claims of your religion and those of science because they will always be consistent and supportive of each other,

Yes, we believe this in faith, and nothing we see currently in science has caused us to revise this opinion. On the other hand, atheists are so uncomfortable with the Big Bang theory that they are now coming up with completely fanciful scenarios of the "oscillating universe" and the "hyper-universe" so that no hint of a possible theistic creation would ever be considered for a moment.

If the Big Bang were to be overthrown, I think that deep reflection would reveal to you that the *apparent* conflict was not a conflict at all, and the new information is just as consistent, if not more so, with God's existence — and the Bible.

I would have to see what the alternative is, to even comment. But clearly, materialistic scientists are every bit as reluctant to admit that anything discovered by science, no matter how remarkable and extraordinary, is consistent with a Designer God, as Christians are to espouse the converse. Both sides work within their grand theories.

From what I can tell, your third way consists of "reconcile." Or

rethink. Or redefine. This way “being wrong” is not an option.

“Wrong” is an option, but exceedingly unlikely, just as is the case with atheists. I don’t see any big difference epistemologically here, granting initial starting-points.

I would submit that atheists within science have been far more irrationally dogmatic and reactionary than Christians making claims based on science. As soon as Darwinian evolution came around it was proclaimed that there was no longer any need for a Creator, as if the theory had anything definitive to say about that. Both Darwin and T. H. Huxley expressly denied this (so would a guy like Catholic evolutionist Kenneth Miller today), yet that was not enough to stop the nonsense and over-confident claims.

Photo credit: Renowned botanist Asa Gray (1810-1888) in 1867. He was a friend and champion of Charles Darwin and a theistic evolutionist [public domain / [Wikimedia Commons](#)]