SEVEN QUESTIONS TO GET UNBELIEVING SKEPTICS THINKING

The following topics may be helpful when scientific issues have become a special sticking point for people you wish to reach. As you seek to find some useful common ground with skeptics, consider raising questions that help them see the *lack* of contradictions between the Bible and science:

What does science actually tell us about …

1. …the origin of the universe? From the ancients until Einstein, people who had not been influenced by the Bible assumed that the universe has existed eternally, relieving them of the burden of dealing with ultimate origins. Today, overwhelming evidence has forced over 95 percent of cosmologists to subscribe to the theory of a big bang creation event. For those who care to think about it, this theory requires a mysterious, prior Cause beyond the universe.

A universal beginning provides the most scientifically acceptable explanation for the observed expansion of the universe. As NASA satellite team leader George Smoot wrote in the foreword to my book on modern cosmology: "Until the late 1910's, humans were as ignorant of cosmic origins as they had ever been. Those who didn't take Genesis literally had no reason to believe there had been a beginning."1

2. …the purpose of the universe? Of course, scientists say this topic is outside the scientific domain; yet their observations have made it difficult for them to avoid acknowledging a mysterious phenomenon called *fine-tuning.* It turns out that the fundamental forces of nature — the universe's expansion rate at the beginning, the ratio of the proton and electron masses, and so on — each have values that fall within extremely narrow parameters necessary for life.

Many scientists, with no prompting from theists, speak of the "anthropic principle" as their best explanation. The values of nature's constants can best be predicted when scientists calculate as if *anthros*, or humanity, is the purpose behind them. Psalm 66:5 tells us: "Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf!"

3. …the origin of life on this planet? The theory of evolution has nothing to offer in explaining this event. Though origin-of-life study is an active field of research, no one has come up with a scenario, let alone a theory, that most scientists are willing to accept. One of science's greatest unmet challenges has been to explain the origin of life's DNA code, which information scientist Hubert Yockey calls "mathematically identical" to alphabetic language in its specificity and complexity. The most popular hypothesis speculates that RNA-based life provided an interim step, since RNA is simpler than DNA while also using a code to specify the production of proteins; but RNA would require a predecessor as well.

Modern evidence exacerbates these problems by showing that life appeared on earth almost as soon as the planet provided the conditions for it. This leaves little time for what scientists had expected to be the most time-consuming stage of life's history: the development of the cell and its genetic code.

Modern theories of self-organization and chaos have explained how interesting patterns can be created without intelligence. No theory, however, has been able to overcome the impossible odds against any natural mechanism producing *information,* that is, meaning.

4. …the origin of the major animal groups called phyla? According to Darwin (and modern neo-Darwinists), life evolved from the bottom up; that is, small changes accumulated into larger ones over millions of years. We should therefore find animal groups with the greatest differences between them (called phyla) later in time, nearer the top of the fossil strata. We should be able to categorize animals into more widely separated groups as time passes, and these groups should become more numerous.

"But that story is not true, according to our fossil finds," paleontologist Jun-Yuan Chen told me during my visit to seven Chinese sites containing the world's oldest animal fossils. "The new phyla make their start in the early days, instead of coming at the top." Also, the number of animal phyla become fewer with time, not greater. New phyla have not continued to appear in all the ages since the early Cambrian period. Naturalistic

expectations of a bottom-up pattern are unfulfilled by the evidence, while the actual top-down arrangement observed in the fossil record fits well with the concept of design.

5. …the patterns we find in the fossil record? Neo-Darwinism predicts a gradualistic pattern showing slow transitions from one type of life to another as small changes accumulate. The noted, recently deceased Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould wrote about the true state of affairs: "The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology."2

Rather than seeing obvious connections between organisms fitting neatly into an evolutionary tree, the actual, typical pattern we find for each animal and plant in the fossil record is: (1) sudden appearance, (2) tiny changes over long periods, and (3) extinction.

Again, this mysterious pattern comes as a surprise to naturalistic theorists. We shouldn't jump to the conclusion that the Bible, by contrast, spells out all the creation details, but we can say, very conservatively, that the pattern fits what we'd expect from the hand of God as well or better than a naturalistic theory that ignores life's actual history.

6. ...the development of intelligence? As evolutionary biologists see it, only one species out of an estimated 50 billion developed high intelligence on this planet after 4.6 billion years. Harvard zoologist Ernst Mayr declared that, if intelligence has such high value, we should see more species develop it.3 Stephen Jay Gould viewed the intelligence of *Homo sapiens* "as an ultimate in oddball rarity."4

The biologists' view, however, contradicts science's much cherished Copernican Principle, which tells us that we are typical, not exceptional. Faced with contrary evidence, scientists who are honest must admit that they have to give up either the observation that intelligence appears to be almost impossibly rare or unique or the view that human intelligence is typical in the universe. The Bible sides with the evidence: there is indeed something special about us.

Where did our species get the volitional ability to override our natural instincts? How does "differential reproductive success" explain the human ability to write great literature, compose symphonies, create fine art, and do abstract math? We don't need these abilities to survive.

7. If our intelligence and volition were purposely created, what might be our Creator's purpose for us?

The Creator could have made us like automatons, or like animals, to follow Him instinctively. The fact that He didn't leads us to wonder why one volitional Being would go to the trouble of creating another volitional being, particularly when we can use our wills to defy *His* will — unless He wants to have a *personal relationship* with us. The highest kind of relationship offers parties the ability to reject the relationship. Isn't it reasonable, then, that the Highest Being would want to have the highest kind of relationship — love — the relationship in which each person willingly gives himself or herself to the other?

The Bible tells how the God who is beyond our universe entered His own creation in order to demonstrate His love for us in the most dramatic, personal way possible. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

That's one way to introduce the gospel message. Any of these questions about the Bible and science will serve a worthwhile purpose if they help open your skeptical friend's heart, as well as his or her mind, to the Good News you want to share.

-- Fred Hereen

NOTES

1. George F. Smoot, in Fred Heeren, *Show Me God — What the Message from Space Is Telling Us about God*, rev. ed. (Wheeling, IL: Day Star Publications, 2000), xiii.
2. Stephen Jay Gould, "Evolution's Erratic Pace," *Natural History*, May 1977, 14.
3. Ernst Mayr, "Can SETI Succeed? Not Likely," *Bioastronomy News* 7, 3 (1995).
4. Stephen Jay Gould, "War of the Worldviews," *Natural History*, Dec. 1996–Jan. 1997, 32.