



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

God Is: The Challenge of Science

Romans 1:19-20

David Anguish

Introduction

1. It was “talk radio” before talk radio was cool. And we were getting to listen to it in first period Physiology class! If you knew our teacher, you’d have to think that she was absent and we’d pulled one over on her sub. In her class, we worked. And yet, that day in the 1972-73 school year, we were taking first period to listen to WRNG (“Ring”) radio.
2. A local church member had made arrangements for one of the science teachers from Harding University who happened to be in town to take questions on WRNG on the subject of creation-evolution. One caller tried to discredit the expert’s credentials. What did he teach, and where? What degree did he have (as I recall, it was a Ph.D. in biochemistry)? Well, surely it was from some fly-by-night school. So, he asked his clincher, in a mocking tone: from what school?
3. As I remember it, the professor replied, “the University of Alabama.” What we heard next was a click, followed by a dial tone. The caller simply went away.
4. In the decades since that morning, I’ve developed more understanding for that caller. He was apparently acting on an assumption that is all too common in our world.
 - a. Ravi Zacharias refers to (and discounts) the view that “informed minds have eschewed the idea of God, and that only the pre-scientific, unquestioning, antiquated, or simple-minded have succumbed to this belief, through fear or ignorance.”¹
 - b. Colin Chapman explains their reasoning: “The philosophy of materialism, combined with modern scientific theory, has tended to convince many people that the only things that are real are those that we can see, touch and feel. There is no ‘heaven,’ no supernatural world.”²
5. That so many believe this should not surprise us, for its proponents have been clear about their intent to propagate it based on a non-theistic outlook. Briefly stated: “Any account of nature should pass the tests of scientific evidence; in our judgment, the dogmas and myths of traditional religions do not do so.”³
6. But may I suggest that part of the reason for the widespread prevalence of these views may be surrender by Christians? Many times, believers have either acted as if science is somehow unworthy of serious study, stated as fact things that will not stand the test of investigation, and/or offered a simplistic response to complex questions.⁴

7. The Bible nowhere presents a detailed, logically precise case for God's existence. But it does point us to some important "clues" that send us in the right direction.⁵
8. One important area of study for those clues is the nature of the world [or universe] (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:19-20; cf. Job 12:7-12; Acts 14:17). That is the realm of science.
9. As we think about belief in God, we should consider and be prepared to respond to the challenge presented to us from the study of science. That will be our approach today. I speak not as a scientist,⁶ but as a philosopher (for we are all philosophers, seeking to make sense of things) and theologian capable of asking some questions that all—whether believer or not—should consider.

Body

I. The Value of Science.

A. Some basics about science.

1. Consider.

- a) You're driving in a rain storm when you see the water pooling in a low spot; you slow down or re-direct your car lest you hydro-plane or flood your car.
- b) In bad weather with tornado warnings, your sense of impending danger is heightened when you hear a change in the sound of the wind.
- c) When you throw something into the air, you know to look for it to either catch it or avoid it because "what goes up must come down."
- d) If you visit the doctor and he discovers that your white blood count is elevated, you know that you are facing a potentially serious problem that must be treated.

2. All of these are examples of what science does, seeking to find about our world and how it works through the correct use of the physical senses.

B. Those we call scientists usually (and correctly) go about this process in a more formal way.

1. They analyze multiple phenomena in an effort to not only see (or hear, smell, taste, or touch) this or that thing, but also to see how various things fit and work together.
2. The conclusions from these sense experiments are recorded and a theory is developed that seeks to make the best sense of what is experienced.
 - a) From the Greek word, *theoreō*, meaning "I behold or perceive," a theory is "something conceptual, something I conceive or comprehend, something I behold in a conceptual sense but not in a direct sense.... A theory is a concept that interrelates and unifies the facts of observation. It is an understanding, a comprehension that imposes order and meaning on a body of data."⁷
 - b) Hoover helpfully explains what a good theory does (Hoover, 11).
 - (1) "It explains the facts of observation. It throws the observed data into a configuration that is clear and that makes sense to the reason."
 - (2) "It points to new areas of research.... If it is a good theory, the new data it uncovers will tend to support the original theory."
 - (3) It allows you to predict the future, a prediction that will check out with testing. "The planet Neptune, for example, was discovered, not by random observation, but by a deliberate search. Its existence had been predicted as a necessary implication of the theory of gravitation."

C. Few people will argue that we have not benefitted from the work of science.

1. We understand our world better and generally find it an easier place to live.

2. What many may not realize—especially in a world where we hear the sentiment expressed that science and religion are at odds—is that the Bible teaches the principles that give rise to scientific pursuit (Genesis 1:28; cf. Job 12:7-8; 26:7-14; 38:31-33).
3. But what many also do not seem to realize is that, as valuable as it is, science has some significant limitations.

II. The Limits of Science.

- A. Many “have an unscientific attitude toward science, a religious attitude toward science. There is no scientific proof that only scientific proofs are good proofs; no way to prove by the scientific method that the scientific method is the only valid method.”⁸
- B. Though many talk as if science is the way to knowledge, experience teaches us differently.
 1. “Science is neither metaphysical nor monolithic, and the true scientist should study his subject with caution and humility, retaining a judicious agnosticism about the limitations of the scientific understanding of man. If he does not, he transgresses and makes a metaphysical leap, turning science into scientism” (Zacharias, 33).
 - a) “Scientism is an uncritical worship of the empirical scientific method, an excessive veneration of laboratory technique” (Hoover, 19).
 - b) Useful as it is, knowledge of science “does not yield truth about the essential nature of things, the significance of its own place in the universe, or how it should conduct its life.”⁹
 - c) We must recognize that we learn what we know from a convergence of several ways of knowing, not just empirical evidence.
 2. There are some things that science, strictly understood, can never answer.
- C. One example of how this has tripped up some comes was reported renowned astronomer Dr. Robert Jastrow.¹⁰
 1. Jastrow summarized the generally accepted view of modern astronomy.
 - a) The universe had, in some sense, a beginning at a certain moment in time.
 - b) The universe is expanding, with “all the galaxies around us moving apart from us and from one another at enormous speeds. The universe is blowing up before our eyes as if we are witnessing the aftermath of a giant explosion” (Jastrow, 12).
 - c) Retracing the motions of these outward moving bodies backward in time, astronomers concluded that there was a time when they were all together.
 2. This view is commonly called the “Big-Bang” theory.
 - a) “The essential element in the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis is the same; the chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply, at a definite moment in time, in a flash of light and energy” (Jastrow, 14).
 - b) Theist William Lane Craig, a philosopher who has dealt with the philosophy of science, calls this “the standard paradigm of contemporary cosmology. I would say that its broad framework is very securely established as a scientific fact.”¹¹
 3. The reaction of some scientists to this discovery is revealing.
 - a) Albert Einstein’s theory of general relativity led to the surprising (for him) conclusion that the universe was expanding, a conclusion that implied a point of beginning. He resisted an effort to point out an error in his calculations before grudgingly accepting it and at least an impersonal view of God.¹²

- b) British cosmologist Sir Arthur Eddington admitted that “Philosophically, the notion of a beginning of the present order of Nature is repugnant.... I should like to find a genuine loophole.”¹³
- c) Bill Bryson acknowledged the evidence, but denied the implications: “It seems impossible that you could get something from nothing,” he said, “but the fact that once there was nothing and now there is a universe is evident proof that you can.”¹⁴
- 4. The bias here is evident, confirming Kreeft’s claim that many today have a “religious attitude toward science.”
 - a) Science can take its practitioners far, but just so far. They can observe the data, and trace things backward in time. But, *as scientists*, they cannot answer what happened before that. That is a question for philosophy, one view of which is advocated by theologians.

III. Insights from Science.

- A. With these things in mind, we return to the clues we have from the nature of the universe.
- B. Briefly, here is the case, based on the clue suggested in Romans 1:19-20.
 - 1. Beginning with what we observe in our universe (through science), we conclude that the things we observe are effects that demand causes “big enough” to explain them.
 - 2. We also notice that it is the nature of the universe to be temporary.
 - 3. The best explanation for these observations is that there must be an *uncaused cause*, some cause that has always existed and is capable of producing everything else that exists.¹⁵
 - 4. Matter and mind are the only options for what this uncaused cause must be. Which is more reasonable, in light of what we know of the universe?

Conclusion

- 1. As we think about the “challenge of science,” we should see that, as Christians, we do not need to shy away from science. Nor should we abandon it in our pursuit of truth. But our interest in the truth about God must never lead us to make poor use of science in an effort to make points the evidence will not support.
- 2. Perhaps of most importance, we should remember that science is not the enemy to our quest to determine the nature of reality that many—both in and outside the Christian community—have imagined it to be. As William Craig has said,

... there has never been a time in history when the hard evidence of science was more confirmatory of belief in God than today....

... it is the atheist who has to maintain, by faith, despite all of the evidence to the contrary, that the universe did not have a beginning a finite time ago but is in some inexplicable way eternal after all. So the shoe is on the other foot. The Christian can stand confidently within biblical truth, knowing it’s in line with mainstream astrophysics and cosmology. It’s the atheist who feels very uncomfortable and marginalized today.¹⁶
- 3. Marshaling all the evidence of our world, including science, we can be confident that God “exists ... and rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Do you believe?

April 5, 2009
www.davidanguish.com

Notes

¹ Ravi Zacharias, *A Shattered Visage: The Real Face of Atheism*, 13.

² Colin Chapman, *The Case for Christianity*, 33.

³ Paul Kurtz, ed., *Humanist Manifestos I and II*, 16. On the same page, the authors of *Manifesto II* declare their fundamental premise of naturalism: "We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of the survival and fulfillment of the human race. As non-theists, we begin with humans, not God, nature not deity."

⁴ To quote Zacharias, "The danger of a simple faith is simplistic answers" (p. 29).

⁵ For the development of a similar concept to the idea of "clues" for God's existence, see Clark Pinnock's *Reason Enough: A Case for Christian Faith*. Consider, too, this statement from Zacharias about our place in regard to the evidence: "God has put enough evidence to make faith in Him a most reasonable thing, and He has left enough out to make it impossible to live by sheer reason or observation alone" (Zacharias, 119).

⁶ I mean "scientist" in the formal sense. I, too, have experienced things about our world and drawn both tentative and more definite conclusions about what I've experienced. As we'll see, in a nutshell, that is what scientists do.

⁷ Arlie J. Hoover, "Evolution and the Ways of Science," in J. D. Thomas, ed., *Evolution and Faith*, 10.

⁸ Peter Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering*, 93.

⁹ Mary Hesse, *Religious Studies II* (1975), as quoted in Zacharias, 34. Zacharias also cites a book by Hesse, *Criteria of Truth in Science and Technology*.

¹⁰ Dr. Jastrow served as Professor of Geology and Astronomy at Columbia University and Professor of Earth Science at Dartmouth College; he was also once the Director of NASA's Goddard Space Institute. He illustrated the point we are making in his *God and the Astronomers*. At the time he wrote the book [1st edition, 1978], he was a self-proclaimed agnostic with regard to God's existence. Page numbers cited here are from the book's second edition [1992].

¹¹ From an interview with Lee Strobel, reported in Strobel's *The Case for a Creator*, 107. Craig's doctoral dissertation presented a form of the cosmological argument for God's existence.

¹² Jastrow tells this story on pp. 17ff.

¹³ Arthur S. Eddington, "The End of the World: From the Standpoint of Mathematical Physics," *Nature* 127 (1931), page 450, in Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Greatest Scientific Discoveries of the Century Reveal God*, 51

¹⁴ Bill Bryson, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, 13, in Strobel, 95.

¹⁵ Many people intuitively understand the point here. Even the musical Sound of Music says that "nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could" (see "Maria and the Captain - Something Good Lyrics," The Sound of Music Soundtrack Lyrics, <https://www.lyricsondemand.com/soundtracks/s/thesoundofmusiclyrics/somethinggoodlyrics.html>. Accessed November 27, 2018).

¹⁶ From an interview with Lee Strobel, as reported in Strobel, 121, 123.