



The Scientific Revolution

with Dr. Ted Davis

Lecture 10: Why Christianity is Good for Science

Outline:

Why Christianity is good for science?

- Christian faith often complements the picture of the world coming from the sciences.
- Richard Dawkins: “What is the meaning of life?”
 - “...if science has nothing to say, it’s certain that no other discipline can say anything at all.”
- “The existence of a limit to science is made clear by its inability to answer childlike questions having to do with first and last things, questions such as, ‘How did everything begin?’ ‘What are we all here for?’ ‘What is the point of living?’” – Peter Medawar, who also did not believe in God.
 - “It is not to science, therefore, but to metaphysics, imaginative literature, or religion that we must turn for answers to questions having to do with first and last things.” – Peter Medawar
- “The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible.” – Albert Einstein
- Christopher Kaiser wrote, “The basic idea of creation in Scripture is that the entire universe is subject to a code of law which was established at the beginning of time. The idea has two major implications for our view of the world.”
 - “nature functions with a high degree of autonomy (meaning literally, “having its own laws”)
 - The natural world is comprehended by God and therefore comprehensible to human beings created in the divine image.”
 - The Latin term *lex naturae* (law of nature) appears very early in Christian thought, no later than the 4th century.
- The seemingly universal presence of mathematics in nature is a profound fact about our encounter with the universe, and it cries out for a deeper explanation.
- Paul Davis says, “Survival depends on an appreciation of how the world is, not of any hidden underlying order. Certainly it cannot depend on the hidden order within atomic nuclei, or in black holes, or in subatomic particles that are produced on Earth only inside particle accelerator machines.”
 - Mathematics has some element of transcendence about it.
- Physicist, John Polkinghorne, “There is no a priori reason why beautiful equations should prove to be the clue to understanding nature; why



- fundamental physics should be possible; why our minds should have such ready access to the deep structures of the universe.”
- Galileo wrote, “...our discourses must relate to the sensible world and not to one on paper.”
 - Facts pertain to the things God has made, and that data are given to us by the Author of Nature.
 - “As we see, empiricism and metaphysics, and even a very definite kind of metaphysics, the creationist, are closely linked together. What other means, indeed, but observation and experience can we possibly use for the study of a world freely created by an Infinite God?”

What did Christian theology have to do with this debate about how science ought to be done?

- “For [Moses] it seems enough to say that God simply willed the arrangement of matter and it was presently arranged in due order; for he believes everything to be possible with God...We [Greeks] however do not hold this; we say that certain things are impossible by nature and that God does not even attempt such things at all, but that he [only] chooses the best out of the possibilities of becoming.” Galen
- “The business of true philosophy is to derive the natures of things from causes truly existent, and to inquire after those laws on which the Great Creator actually chose to found this most beautiful Frame of the World, not those by which he might have done the same, had he so pleased.” – Isaac Newton
- Anyone “presumptuous enough” to think that he can learn the laws of nature from pure reason “must either suppose that the world exists by necessity, and by the same necessity follows the laws proposed; or if the order of Nature was established by the will of God, that himself a miserable reptile, can tell what was the fittest to be done.” – Isaac Newton (Robert Boyle said the same thing).
- “Faraday drew more than strength from his religion. It gave him both a sense of the necessary unity of the universe derived from the unity and benevolence of its Creator and a profound sense of the fallibility of man. Both are worth stressing.”
 - The origins of field theory are to be found in Faraday’s detailed experimental researches on electricity, but the speculations and imaginings which led him to publish physical heresies owe something to his unquestioning belief in the unity and interconnections of all phenomena. This belief, in turn, derived from his faith in God as both creator and sustainer of the universe.” – L. Pearce Williams
- “Science seems to me to teach in the highest and strongest manner the great truth which is embodied in the Christian conception of entire surrender to the will of God. Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing.” Huxley



Doing science actually enhances the Christian life.

- “though Heaven be an Object, that has been perpetually and conspicuously exposed to Mens view and curiosity, for some thousands of years, yet it still affords new subjects for their wonder: and I scarce doubt but by the farther improvement of Telescopes...Posterity will have its curiosity gratified by the discovery both of new Constellations, and of new Stars, in those [Constellations] that are known to us already. We need not therefore fear [that] our admiration of God should expire, for want of Objects fit to keep it up. That boundless Ocean contains a variety of excellent Objects that is as little to be exhausted as the Creatures that live in our sublunary Ocean or lie on the shores that limit it, can be numbered.” – Robert Boyle
- “For it is precisely the universe which is that Book of Nature in which God the Creator has revealed and depicted His essence and what He wills with man, in a wordless script.” – Johannes Kepler
- “Since we astronomers are Priests of the Most High God with respect to the Book of Nature, it behooves us that we do not aim at the glory of our own spirit, but above everything else at the glory of God.” – Johannes Kepler
- Christianity encourages scientists to seek the glory of God, and the charitable service of our fellow human beings (rather than self-aggrandizement).
- “The higher degree of knowledge” that the scientist attains “seems more likely to puff him up, than to make him humble.” – Robert Boyle
- In regard to the book of God’s word and the book of God’s works, we should “endeavor an endless progress or proficiencie in both; only let men beware that they apply both to charity, and not to swelling [i.e., ego-building]; to use, and not to ostentation; and again, that they do not unwisely mingle or confound these learnings together.” – Francis Bacon
- “railing at a mans person, or wrangling about his Words” is “a quarrelsome and injurious way of writing [that] does very much mis-become both a Philosopher and a Christian.” – Robert Boyle

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