

Can Scientific, Intelligent People Still Believe in Christianity?

DISCUSSION

1. Do people see a tension between...
 - a. Being well-educated and being Christian?
 - b. Being intelligent and being Christian?
 - c. Being a scientist and being a Christian?
2. How do most people view the relationship of science and Christianity: conflict, independent, or something else?
3. How do Christians tend to deal with any alleged tensions between science and Christianity? (For example, how have Christian parents and church leaders responded to students' tough questions about science?)

TACTICS

Remember that every position or explanation for evil must be based upon some beliefs. You seek out those beliefs by listening to people. Don't assume that any one position doesn't require explanation. In other words, the burden of proof should apply to someone who explains evil with or without belief in God.

Ask them...

1. What do you mean by that?
2. How did you come to that conclusion?
3. Have you ever considered? ¹

ARE SCIENCE AND CHRISTIANITY AT WAR?

*[F]or over a century scholars have debated the historical relationship between science and Christianity, some maintaining that that two have been mortal enemies, others that they have been allies, and still others that neither conflict nor harmony adequately describes the relationship. (David Lindbert and Ronald Numbers, Ed., *God and Nature*, p.1, cited in J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, p.186.)*

*[Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*,] argues that you cannot be an intelligent scientific thinking and still hold religious beliefs. It is one of the other. To support his thesis he points out that a study in 1998 showed that only about 7 percent of American scientists in the National Academy of Sciences believe in a personal God. This is proof that the more intelligent, rational, and scientifically minded you are, the less you will be able to believe in God. (Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, p.84.*

¹ Again, Greg Koukl in his book *Tactics* suggests these three questions. I think these three questions probably are used by many for years. I've found them helpful for years before I found Koukl's book.

ARE SCIENCE AND CHRISTIANITY INCOMPATIBLE?

While many reasons may be said about why one would argue that science and Christianity are compatible, I'll discuss a few reasons that seem to capture many of the points people commonly make.

1. The Bible is full of miracles, but science has disproved miracles.
 - a. Science has disproved miracles because science has generated explanations for things that were previously inexplicable or believed to be miraculous.
 - b. Thus, science will continue to provide explanations so that eventually, we won't need religion or faith.
2. Faith and religion deal with things that we can't really know, but science is the best and only way to really know things.
 - a. People can test if 2 units of hydrogen and 1 of oxygen make water. Or people can test if certain theories accurately predict things like the rotation and orbit of planets, the outcome of chemical or nuclear reactions, or flight and explosion of an ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile).
 - b. But people can't test or confirm if there's a god or not. And even if there was a god, because scientists hypothesize under the assumption of natural causes, that this makes science incompatible with religion.
3. Science and Christianity are at conflict with each other. And if they disagree, well, then science should win as the way to believe.
 - a. *[I]f science says something is true and Christianity seems to conflict with science, then Christianity needs to be adjusted. The result of this has been the idea that since science always defeats religion in their battles, then perhaps religion was never intended to be a factual, rational way of understanding the world, but rather a private guide for one's practical life. (J.P. Moreland, p.187).*

REFLECTIONS & TALKING POINTS ABOUT SCIENCE AND CHRISTIANITY

1. Some people think science is the only way to know things.
 - a. The scientific method can be formulated in many ways, but let's use this (taken from Wikipedia!):
 - i. Characterize
 - ii. Hypothesize
 - iii. Predict
 - iv. Test/Experiment
 - b. But how do we know science is the only way to really know things? Or to put it another way, can science or the scientific method support or prove claims like "science is the best and only way to know things?" The answer is clearly "no." In order to operate, science relies on many assumptions which not only cannot be proven, but must be believed out of faith.
 - c. *[Some people] suggest that the very practice of science requires that one reject the idea (e.g.) of God raising someone from the*

*dead....[This] argument... is like the drunk who insisted on looking for his lost car keys only under the streetlight on the grounds that the light was better there. In fact, it would go the drunk one better: it would insist that because the keys would be hard to find in the dark, they must be under the light. (Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p.406, cited in Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, p.86.)*

2. Most people believe science can discover the truth about reality. That if scientists in one part of the world discover and provide evidence for some theory, then all scientists should *believe* it unless they prove otherwise. This brings up all sorts of ideas that challenge the modern American mind:
 - a. Most people believe truth is relative... except in things like science and math.
 - b. Most people believe morality is relative... except that all scientists should report their findings honestly and accurately.
3. Most people believe the world came about by the Big Bang and random chance... and yet assume there is an order and uniformity to the universe upon which all scientific inquiry rests. (Including the laws of logic like the Law of Non-Contradiction we studied in Lesson 2!)
4. Most people cite current reigning scientific theories in debates/discussions regarding science and Christianity, yet the theories keep changing. "...the history of science shows an incredible list of cases where science has changed its views and replaced former theories. Admittedly, some theories are retained in and refined by new ones, but others are replaced and drop out altogether as false and outdated... [S]cientists themselves are reluctant to say that current science will resemble the science of two hundred years from now, and the history of science lends support to this attitude." (Moreland, p.204).
 - a. Thus all parties should be mindful of this when basing arguments about science and Christianity on actual scientific theories.
 - b. This affects the issue of creation and evolution, and Christianity and science.
5. Regarding Evolution and Creation...
 - a. I would be glad to dialogue about evolution and creation, but let me at least make some points:
 - b. Evolution is considered a "law" and not a "theory" in the same way that gravity is considered a "law." It's not provable why or that it should operate so, but we believe it's reliable and assume it.
 - c. The terms "creation-science" and "evolution" refer to a body of varied beliefs.
 - i. There are several kinds of evolution, for example, Darwinian, neo-Darwinian, etc. And there are many components to evolutionary theory.
 - ii. There are several kinds of creationist theories: young earth, old earth, theistic evolution, etc.
 - d. Bible scholars argue over proper interpretation of key passages, such as Genesis 1 and 2.

- e. Evolution and creation are issues within a larger discussion. If God exists, created the universe, and has a continual concern with the world, then it's entirely rational that God could intervene amidst the natural laws He created. Such instances are known as "miracles." Furthermore, while one pursues scientific inquiry by seeking natural causes, it would be overreaching to assert that this means there are *only* supernatural causes.
- f. There are many good works produced on this topic. You could read some books by Philip Johnson as a starting point on this topic.

SO HOW DO SCIENCE AND CHRISTIANITY RELATE?

So far we've tried to show that science and Christianity are not as incompatible as many people think. (And I'm suggesting that in conversations, Christians don't always have to argue for their views, but listen to others and ask good questions.) But what about a positive view on how to integrate or relate science and Christianity.

In this limited space, let me just say that whether or not Christianity is true, science can and does flourish within a biblical, Christian framework about life because...

1. God is a god of order... so we can investigate and discover.
2. God is a god of knowledge... so we can hope to grow in knowledge and understanding.
3. God is a god of truth... to the degree that any field of study attempts to explain the world around us, that's a part of the truth which God created, even if it's not explicitly stated in the Bible. (For example, chemistry and physics are very likely true, even though they're not mentioned in the Bible.)