

## Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?

October 22, 2018 - Eric Chabot\*

J.P. Moreland has a new book out called *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology*. I am in the midst of reading it and can't offer a full review here.

One of the main themes that runs through discussions on college campuses and in academia is that faith/theology and science are diametrically opposed to one another. Since science tests the observable, is this the correct way to approach the existence of God?

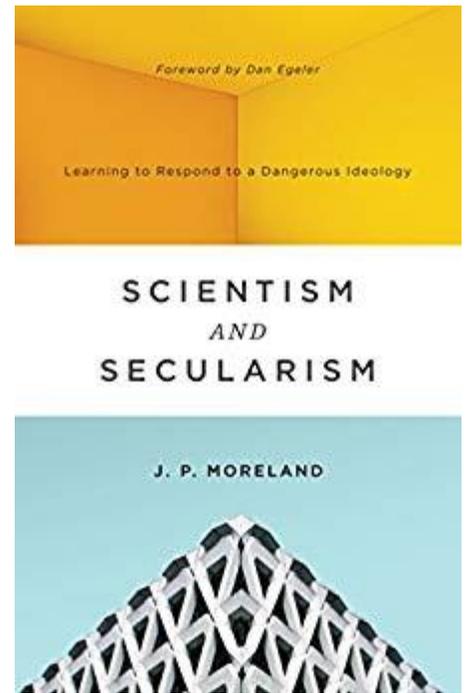
In my view, one of the best solutions to handling the issue of evidence and arguments for God's existence is to utilize what is called inference to the best explanation.

Since we can't see God as a material object, we have to look at the effects in the world and make rational inferences to the cause of the effect. Hence, we have to look to see if God has left us any pointers that lead the way to finding Him.

The inference to the best explanation model takes into account the best available explanation in our whole range of experience and reflection. For example, when we look at these features of reality, which provides a more satisfactory explanation:

- How do you explain the **Origin of the Universe**?
- How do you explain the **Mathematical Fine-Tuning** of the Universe?
- How do you explain the **Terrestrial Fine-Tuning** of Planet Earth?
- How do you explain the **Informational Fine-Tuning** of the DNA molecule?
- How do you explain the Origin of **Mathematical Laws**?
- How do you explain the Origin of **Logical Laws**?
- How do you explain the Origin of **Physical/Natural Laws**?
- How do you explain the Origin of **the First Cell**?
- How do you explain the Origin of **Human Reason**?
- How do you explain the Origin of **Human Consciousness**?
- How do you explain the Origin of **Objective Morality**?
- How do you explain **Ultimate Meaning** in Life?
- How do you explain **Ultimate Value** in Life?
- How do you explain **Ultimate Purpose** in Life?

Abduction can operate when people on both sides of an argument agree on what needs to be explained (certain features of reality) but they disagree on why this feature of reality exists.



Why does this feature of reality exist? Is it the result of nature itself or something outside nature? Remember, when we look at the questions above, if you are committed to philosophical naturalism (the idea that nothing exists outside the natural realm of the material universe), you'll find a way to interpret every piece of data to confirm your naturalistic presuppositions, even if the best inference from evidence points to something else.

You can see this approach in [The Return of the God Hypothesis by Stephen C. Meyer](#) or [Paul Copan's God: The Best Explanation](#).

## Science or Scientism: Philosophical Errors and Presuppositions

Science is a method of gaining knowledge of the natural world by inference through observation, experimentation, and making predictions, based upon cause and effect relationships. Scientism is an epistemology (theory of knowledge) which reduces all knowledge to the aforementioned scientific method; this means that the *only* way to know things are true is through the *natural* sciences. This approach is illegitimate. That is because it reduces humanity's knowledge of all of reality to this one area alone, and it argues in a circle. The assertion "All truth claims must be scientifically verifiable" makes a **philosophical assumption**: the very statement itself is not scientifically verifiable.

What needs to be remembered is that science is dependent upon certain **philosophical presuppositions** such as:

1. The existence of a theory- independent, external world
2. The orderly nature of the external world
3. The knowability of the external world
4. The existence of truth
5. The laws of logic
6. The reliability of our cognitive and sensory faculties to serve as truth-gatherers and as a source of justified beliefs in our intellectual environment.
7. The adequacy of language to describe the real world
8. The existence of values used in science (e.g., "test theories fairly and report test results honestly")
9. The uniformity of nature and induction
10. The existence of numbers (1)

A theist asserts that the physical universe is not all there is. There is an infinite, personal God who created it, sustains it and can act within it in a natural and non-natural way. As I can say without hesitation that I am ignorant about many things, I generally find that many people are generally ignorant about the history between theism and science. In the words of physicist Paul Davies, "*Science began as an outgrowth of theology, and all scientists, whether atheists or theists.....accept an essentially theological worldview.*" (2)

In John Haught's book *Science and Faith: A New Introduction*, he says there are three current models about the relationship between faith and science:

1. Conflict Model: Faith is rooted in fantasy, whereas science is based on observable, empirically available data. Faith is highly emotional and subjective, whereas science is dispassionate, impersonal, and objective.

2. Contrast: Science and faith are distinct but no conflict can exist between faith and science since they each respond to radically different questions. There is no real competition between them, so there can be no real conflict.
3. Convergence: Science and faith are distinct because they ask different kinds of questions, but they may still interact fruitfully. Convergence tries to move beyond both conflict and allow for an ongoing conversation between science and faith.

One thing to always ask is the following. Which of the following branches of science should demonstrate the existence or nonexistence of God?

1. The natural or physical sciences, such as physics, chemistry, biology, geology, astronomy.
2. The social sciences, such as linguistics, textual hermeneutics, anthropology, and sociology.
3. The mathematical and logical sciences such as engineering, computer science, and theoretical math.

### **When Science Masquerades as Philosophy**

In Alex Rosenberg's *The Atheist's Guide to Reality*, he attempts to demonstrate why science is "our exclusive guide to reality." Here, Rosenberg attempts to provide a neat synopsis of life's big questions, along with what he considers to be scientifically reliable answers. Here are some of life's big questions that he thinks science can answer:

Is there a God? No. What is the nature of reality? What physics says it is. What is the purpose of the universe? There is none. What is the meaning of life? Ditto. Why am I here? Just dumb luck . . . Is there free will? Not a chance. What is the difference between right and wrong, good and bad? There is no moral difference between them. Why should I be moral? Because it makes you feel better than being immoral. Is abortion, euthanasia, suicide, paying taxes, foreign aid, or anything else you don't like forbidden, permissible, or something obligatory? Anything goes.[\[3\]](#)

Here, Rosenberg makes the assumption that what science reveals to us is all that is real. But as Edward Feser points out, Rosenberg is guilty of a reductionist view of reality. Feser illustrates:

1. Metal detectors have had far greater success in finding coins and other metallic objects in more places than any other method has.
2. Therefore, what metal detectors reveal to us (coins and other metallic objects) is probably all that is real.[\[4\]](#)

Anyone who came to this conclusion about metal detectors should visit a doctor, of course. The point is, Rosenberg and others who follow his lead should allow for additional ways besides science to explain reality along with life's big questions. Metal detectors will always find metal and science will always find material/physical explanations to reality. We must ask what kinds of questions science can legitimately answer. Can science answer the "why" questions? Yes, it is true science can say why the universe exists. In other words, they can say the universe exists because of the Big Bang or some other scientific explanation. But, science is generally restricted to study how the mechanisms work behind several features of the natural or physical world. But once science attempts to answer whether or why the universe and several features of reality may have a deeper purpose, design, or an end goal, it enters the realm of philosophy.

One of the best books to read about the relationship between God and science is John Lennox's *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* Give it a read sometime.

**Note:** [See our 22 Suggested Readings on this topic.](#)

### Sources:

1. Moreland, J.P. *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer* (Downers Grove ILL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 16-17.
2. Davies, P. *Are We Alone?* (New York: Basic, 1995), 96.
3. Alexander Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (New York: W.W. Norton. 2012), 2-3.
4. Edward Feser, *Five Proofs for The Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 281.

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#### EDUCATION

- Southern Evangelical Seminary M.A. Religious Studies, 2010
- Cross Examined, Apologetics Instructors Academy, Graduate, 2008
- Memberships: The Evangelical Philosophical Society

#### PRIMARY INTERESTS

Motivating God's people to understand the need for outreach and apologetic training, contemporary issues in the culture, the need for Christians to engage the university, confronting the current intellectual crisis in the local congregation, philosophy of religion, epistemology, the resurrection, Christian origins, the relationship between early Christology and Jewish monotheism, the relationship between the *Tanakh* (acronym that is formed from the first three parts of the Hebrew Bible: Torah (the first five books of the Bible), *Nevi'im* (the Prophets), and *K'tuvim* (the Writings) and the New Testament, the relationship between Israel and the *ekklesia*, worldviews, apologetic systems, historical method, the genre of the New Testament, the relationship between science and theology, and biblical hermeneutics.