

SCIENCE AND FAITH

INTRODUCTION: ARE SCIENCE AND FAITH IN OPPOSITION TO EACH OTHER?

There is a common thought in atheist circles that science has rendered faith redundant. Science explains everything previously explained by religion; humankind no longer has any need of religion.

But is this an accurate picture, a true reflection of reality? Are science and religion really mortal enemies? Or do they have much more in common than some would have us believe? Are they, in fact, co-voyagers on a journey of understanding?

SCIENCE IS RATIONAL; FAITH IS IRRATIONAL

Science *is* rational – it evaluates evidence and data, drawing conclusions after weighing up said evidence. But faith can also be rational. Whilst there is certainly an emotional response involved in faith, many would claim to have made a reasoned approach when questioning the existence of God. People of faith consider evidence – for example, the historical accuracy of the Bible, the evidence for Jesus, personal experience, creation – before making a conscious decision to believe and follow God.

If science and faith are incompatible, then how can we explain the fact that there are many scientists who profess to have faith in God? indeed, over the previous millennium c.60% of Nobel Peace Prize winners have been Christians. Many of these scientists have said that science has helped support their faith, not weaken it.

Possibly the most famous scientist who ever lived is Albert Einstein (1879-1955). He was also a Christian and had absolutely no doubt that God existed. He felt that science didn't have all the answers. He knew that the universe was governed by a set of laws but felt that if he could identify these laws then he could determine that there would be a lawgiver behind them. These laws would point the way.

In his own words:

'God is a mystery. But a comprehensible mystery. I have nothing but awe when I observe the laws of nature. There are not laws without a lawgiver, but how does this lawgiver look? Certainly not like a man magnified.'

(Einstein and the Poet: In Search of the Cosmic Man', William Hermanns, 1983)

There is much evidence to suggest that science, far from undermining religious believers views, often supports them, shedding more light on the big questions humankind have asked since time began.

As Albert Einstein himself stated:

'Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.'

(Science and Religion, Ideas and Opinions', 1954)

RICHARD DAWKINS

The idea that science and faith don't mix - that science has superseded the need for any belief in God in the 21st century, is one that is loudly postulated by atheists. Richard Dawkins rejects religion completely in his book, *'The God Delusion'* (2006). Dawkins states that science explains everything, including how the world began and how the planet is so perfect for all life.

Unfortunately for Dawkins, it is seen in some circles as a weak argument because science and faith can be argued to mutually support each other.

The question of how the world started is a very good example of this. Christians believe that God created the world; there are a number of philosophical arguments to support this view.

Scientists promote the Big Bang as an explanation for the creation of the world. Dawkins claims God had nothing to do with it.

However, many Christians accept that there was a *'big bang'*, but that it was God who caused it to happen: this is how He created the world. Therefore, rather than shredding Christian beliefs of Creationism, the scientific helps strengthens it, offering an explanation as to how God did it.

You can read more about Dawkins views [here](#).

ALISTER MCGRATH

Alister McGrath (1953-), Professor of Divinity at Gresham College, has argued against Dawkins' blanket dismissal of religion having any part of the explanation of how the universe came about.

In his book he states:

'One of the greatest disservices that Dawkins has done to the natural sciences is to portray them relentlessly and inexorably atheistic. They are nothing of the sort; yet Dawkins crusading vigour has led to the growth of this alienating perception in many parts of North American conservative Protestantism.'

(*'The Dawkins Delusion'*, 2007)

McGrath is concerned that Dawkins' popularisation of the notion that science and religion are incompatible has led some Christians, particularly in North America, dismissing scientific theory.

You can read more about McGrath's ideas [here](#).

THE GOD OF THE GAPS?

Dawkins, along with other atheists, argue that Christians are guilty of filling in the gaps in knowledge that science can't provide - for example in the creation of the universe - with the 'God of the Gaps'. The mysterious elements are attributed to God because they are mysterious. Dawkins believes that this is sign of ignorance, hoping that one day science will fill in these gaps.

Christians believe that there is so much evidence for there being a 'lawgiver' that they are not coming from a place of ignorance, but of informed belief. Rather than coming from a place of ignorance, relying on things that they don't know, they rely entirely on what they do know and hold to be true through personal experience or logical argument.

Holding to the anthropic argument - that all things are 'just right' for existence on our planet - and observations from the appearance of the material world which can't be explained by chance, Christians argue that their view is valid and based on rational foundations.

Ultimately, while it is true that science is based on empirical methods, it does not actually disprove the existence of God. Instead, it helps believers better understand the world in which we live; how it came about and operates.

TASKS

1. Conduct some independent research on this topic. Briefly explain the following:
 - a. The scientific and philosophical views on the creation of the universe.
 - b. The debate between Creationism and the Big Bang theory.
 - c. Darwinism and evolutionary theory.
 - d. The debate around 'Intelligent Design' and 'Irreducible Complexity'.
2. What are the strengths of scientific theory? What are its weaknesses?
3. What are the strengths of the philosophical views? What are their weaknesses?
4. Use the internet to research the views of the following with regard to creationism or the Big Bang:
 - Richard Dawkins
 - Peter Atkins
 - John Polkinghorne
 - Jocelyn Bell-Burnell
 - Arthur Peacocke
 - Alister McGrath
 - John Lennox
 - Richard Swinburne
 - Alvin Plantinga

Create a short fact file, summarising their views.

5. Is it possible to accept the findings of modern scientists and still have a faith in God? Explain your answer.
6. 'Science removes any need for belief in a God who created the universe.' Discuss. In your answer, be sure to include:
 - Scientific theories of creation
 - Christian view of creationism
 - Philosophical view - cosmological / teleological / morality / ontological
 - God of the Gaps
 - A conclusion, with your own opinion about the statement