

# Facing the Apologetic Challenges of Scientific Atheism

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## Abstract

The contemporary challenges of scientific atheism to the Christian worldview should be viewed by Christian apologists as a conflict about truth and meaning. The Christian worldview makes sense of the rational intelligibility of the universe, while the reductionist approach of naturalism undermines the clarity of the design in created reality and is a worldview that destroys the ultimate meaning of life. This article focuses on the differences in worldview between Christianity and atheism and discusses some apologetic ways through which Christians can handle the challenges of atheism, often disguised as neutral, scientific realism.

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## I. *The Importance of the Subject*

**S**ince 1965 everyone in Indonesia by law has to have a religion.<sup>1</sup> This implies that in this large country of 260 million people there should be no theoretical atheists—*those who believe that god or gods do not exist*—even though those who live as if a god or gods did not exist probably number millions.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was delivered at the seminar on *Reformed Theology and Its Contribution to the World* in Jakarta, Indonesia, hosted by Sekolah Tinggi Theologi Reformed Ingjili Internasional, Gereja Reformed Injili Indonesia, and World Reformed Fellowship.

Nominal Christians provide opportunities for the church to reach out to them, as is the case in Indonesia. They also give opportunity to atheists to try to convince them to become theoretical atheists, as has been happening in Western countries. In this regard, natural science is a useful vehicle of persuasion in the hands of atheists. At the heart of the matter lies the fact that nominal Christianity and secular living are only a tiny step away from theoretical atheism.

Growing up in South Africa, where almost everyone you know claims to be religious—more than 80% profess the Christian faith, according to national statistics—I am sad to observe the growth of nominalism and practical and theoretical atheism.<sup>2</sup> While theoretical atheists are taking on the Christian worldview in the public arena in a direct and even aggressive way, more and more people are turning away from God. It is uncertain what the influence of this small group of atheists really is in the decline of active religiosity of the people in South Africa. Nevertheless, the way the press and other media are used by atheists and their companions to challenge Christianity is not uncertain at all—it even includes going to court to ban Christianity from South African schools in favor of their so-called neutral atheist worldview.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this article is to gain a better understanding of the differences in worldview between Christianity and atheism, as well as to weigh some apologetic ways Christians can handle the contemporary challenges of atheism disguised as scientific realism and neutrality. While Africa is known as the most religious continent, and Africa south of the Sahara is where Christianity is growing the most rapidly, what is happening in South Africa as a leading country on this continent is important for the rest of the Christian world.

Because the era in which we live can be described as the “scientific” era, atheists use the credibility of science to spread their secular beliefs. In developed and developing societies where there is a dominance of science, religious discourse has lost or is losing its authority. Religious belief only makes sense to many if it can be theoretically (scientifically) demonstrated. The Oxford mathematician and Christian apologist John Lennox was invited to South Africa to talk on university campuses in 2013 and 2014.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> According to research done by WIN-Gallup International, participation in religious activities in South Africa went down from 83% in 2005 to 64% in 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Case no. 29847/14, Gauteng local division, Johannesburg.

<sup>4</sup> John Lennox, the Oxford mathematician, became known after successfully debating (from a Christian life- and worldview) Richard Dawkins, the atheist writer and biologist from Oxford.

From the Cape to Potchefstroom the reaction was phenomenal, the number attending surpassing the capacity of auditoriums designed for hundreds and even thousands of people—showing the interest for arguments by scientists about the existence of God among students and scholars alike.

The influence of natural scientists on the debate about believing or disbelieving in God can also be seen in book sales. Today's bestsellers on God are the fruit of natural scientists such as Lennox, Francis Collins, Robert Winston, Victor Stenger, Robert Spitzer, and Leslie Wickman.<sup>5</sup> Some of these are atheists, trying to give an apologia for their naturalistic worldview and disbelief in God. Others are apologists of the Christian faith, who work on the premise that to practice science means to learn more of the Almighty and his omniscience in his works.

While a worldview can be described as “what we presuppose ... a framework of beliefs and convictions that gives a ... unified perspective on meaning of human existence,”<sup>6</sup> it is understandable that scientists who keep on asking questions in their endeavor must also come to basic questions of the origin and purpose of life and the world. This will eventually lead to the questions about God and the field of theology. One of the leading philosophers of our time, James P. Moreland, emphasized this trend: “If Christians are going to develop and propagate an integrated worldview, they must work together to integrate their theological beliefs and the assertions of science that seem reasonable.”<sup>7</sup> The importance of an apologetic approach to the challenges of contemporary atheistic scientism is part of this.

Christians have to integrate their beliefs and scientific assertions if they want to make sense to many in our “scientific” era.

## II. *Apologetics and Christian and Atheist Worldviews*

In his booklet about apologetics, John Njoroge states that apologetics is not the prerogative of only some known figures such as C. S. Lewis; rather, it

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Collins, *The Language of God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007); Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2006); John C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion, 2009); see also John C. Lennox, *God and Stephen Hawking: Whose Design Is It Anyway?* (Oxford: Lion, 2011); Robert J. Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Victor J. Stenger, *God and the Atom* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2013); Leslie Wickman, *God of the Big Bang: How Modern Science Affirms the Creator* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy, 2015); Robert Winston, *The Story of God* (London, Bantam, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Philip G. Ryken, *What Is the Christian Worldview?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 7.

<sup>7</sup> James P. Moreland, “Introduction,” in James P. Moreland, ed., *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 11.

has been an integral part of Christian life for centuries.<sup>8</sup> It is of utmost importance to the well-being and witness of the church and its members to influence culture and to strive for a change of social structures. To make the impact God is calling them to, Christians must understand the content of their calling so that they can take the applications of the truth of the gospel to all areas of life. Christian apologetics gives valuable insights for those seeking to better understand the Word of God on a worldview level.

### **1. Faith and Evidence**

One of the most important questions in apologetic discussion is the authoritative role of experience. Even the best arguments will not be taken seriously if there is a negative view about the speaker's knowledge and insight. While the natural sciences in particular are seen by ordinary people as neutral and objective, philosopher Thomas Kuhn overturned the idea of a neutral science in the previous century by pointing out that even scientists evaluate and interpret their scientific data within such frameworks as their time, circumstances, and background.<sup>9</sup> This aspect must be established early in a discussion about the origin and reason for everything. Like all other people, scientists have paradigms, preconceived beliefs, and worldviews that emerge in their work. All observations are theory laden. This does not mean that science is a subjectivistic and arbitrary social construction; rather, the critical questions scientists ask while doing research rest on their belief that it is worthwhile to search for truth.<sup>10</sup>

For instance, in order to explain to someone what makes research possible, natural scientists have to believe their basic assumptions. Ideas such as constancy in matter and fixed governing laws are essential to scientific work and, in the deepest sense, rest on an act of faith—faith based on the evidence of what happened in the past—while knowing that there must have been a time when things were different (for instance, at creation), and that there will be a time somewhere in future when things will change (as a result of entropy).

On the other hand, the idea people have that the Christian faith is a blind faith must often also be addressed. Faith is not something that exists where there is no evidence, but faith implies confidence that rests on sufficient

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<sup>8</sup> John Njoroge, *Apologetics: Why Your Church Needs It* (Atlanta: Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, 2010), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>10</sup> Lennox, *God's Undertaker*, 62

evidence.<sup>11</sup> Christians do not believe despite the absence of evidence; instead, they find proof in God's creation and written Word as final authority.

God gave us nature and culture, through which we form our understanding of the world. A direct appeal to the Bible is not sufficient in every circumstance. Even when dealing with something as directly biblical as the resurrection of Christ, one should notice that the Bible itself refers us to other evidences outside the written Word, such as the five hundred witnesses of 1 Corinthians 15:6 who could testify that Jesus really rose from the dead. Furthermore, Romans 1 says that God has revealed himself clearly in creation. Extrabiblical evidence can and should therefore be used by apologists, but (because of the influence of sin on humans and nature) always in a way that corresponds to the written Word.

Christianity and science are neither foes that stand against each other nor mutually exclusive, as naturalistic evolutionists sometimes suggest. The contrary is evident, for example, in the fact that Christianity was responsible for the birth of the modern sciences. Rodney Stark describes it as a generally accepted fact among scientists that science as we know it today probably would not exist if it were not for Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Ages of meditation will not bring empirical knowledge—and definitely not science—into existence. However, in an environment in which religion encouraged people to get to know and understand God's workmanship, it gave the opportunity for knowledge to grow and science to originate.

## 2. *Theology and Other Sciences*

Apologetics is not only a theological endeavor, but part of the calling of every Christian, and it should include all the different fields of scientific research. Among other things, Reformed apologetics can make use of nonreductive reformational philosophy because it takes God's revelation in an integral sense—including the radical diversity and totality of created reality. In his *Festschrift*, the apologist and theologian Cornelius Van Til replied positively to the reformational philosopher Hendrik Stoker's suggestions on a methodological combination of Reformed theology and reformational philosophy.<sup>13</sup> In his study on the relation between Reformed apologetics and reformational philosophy, Guilherme Braun puts it as follows:

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<sup>11</sup> John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 57, 60.

<sup>12</sup> Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 124, 149.

<sup>13</sup> E. R. Geehan, ed., *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 71–73.

Stoker's treatment of the relation between faith, knowledge and the revelation of creation converges with Van Til's position concerning the dependence of human consciousness on the Self-revelation of God ....<sup>14</sup> He reaffirms Van Til's approach, while reinforcing the importance of God's Word-Revelation in an integral sense, i.e., including the meaning, diversity and totality of created reality by means of reformational non-reductionism. ... Stoker implicitly suggests a complementation to Van Til's understanding of the Word-revelation, which should not be reduced to Holy Scriptures, but rather include the other forms.<sup>15</sup>

Such philosophical input can help us understand different methods as consisting of the interplay of different theoretical and practical possibilities. Traditionally, methodological differences have led to the formation of different schools of apologetics. But without reducing one to the other, or mutually excluding one another in apologetic practice, methods can and should be used according to the person and situation in a manner that faithfully celebrates and defends the greatness of God in all creation. As sound methods represent different theoretical possibilities, their practice should be also situationally determined. Therefore, theoretical elaborations should not be taken to be exclusive; life encompasses much more than theoretical frameworks ever could.

### 3. Evidence and Proof

The idea of God as planner, creator, and sustainer of the universe is strongly opposed by naturalistic scientists, who see the universe as an accidental product of an aimless naturalistic mechanism. Lawrence Krauss emphasized that science should have nothing to do with God and religion, and referred to Nobel Prize winner Steven L. Weinberg's statement that religion is "an insult to human dignity."<sup>16</sup> This emotional reaction is based on a naturalistic view that the idea of God is a subjectivist human fantasy, and even where there is no other explanation it is not a possibility that should be taken into account when a scientist seeks to explain the universe scientifically.

In discussions on faith and science it is often important to explain why the naturalistic belief that *you cannot believe anything that you do not have proof of* is not a valid one. John Frame answers this by stating that he believes Violet Frame is his mother and that his wife loves him without being able

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<sup>14</sup> Hendrik G. Stoker Sr., "Reconnoitering the Theory of Knowledge of Prof. Dr. Cornelius Van Til," Geehan, ed., *Jerusalem and Athens*, 25–71, esp. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Guilherme Braun, *A Trinitarian Modal-Spherical Method of Apologetics: An Attempt to Combine the Van Tillian Method of Apologetics with Reformational Philosophy* (Potchefstroom: North-West University, 2013), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence M. Krauss, "An Article of Faith: Science and Religion Don't Mix," *Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin* 29.2 (April 2000): 35.

to prove either. However, he has enough evidence to be convinced of its truth.<sup>17</sup> In apologetics the method of sufficient evidence to believe something as being true is used, similar to what is done in court cases and research activities. It is not possible to live only according to what can be proved. Sufficient evidence provides sufficient reason.

And nature itself, correctly understood in light of Scripture, reveals God. When talking to unbelievers on the basis of the revelation of God in nature, it is not wrong to focus on evidence from nature.<sup>18</sup> Because of these available evidences, the question can actually be asked whether contemporary atheist scientists want to see. Vern Poythress sums it up as follows:

We can use arguments to present to human beings both the testimony to God in creation and the testimony about the way of salvation opened by God through Christ. ... The arguments take place against the background of the knowledge of God that people already have, and which they suppress in their guilt. Theistic proofs ... may be used to try to awaken people to the reality of the God that they already know, even in their unbelief. ... So it should not be supposed that the unbelievers who listen to the proofs are innocent or entirely ignorant of God to begin with. And it should not be supposed that anyone will be convinced as he ought to be unless he experiences a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, which comes in connection with the application of the work of Christ. So theistic proofs ideally go together with the message of the gospel of Christ, which calls people out of darkness into forgiveness and reconciliation with God.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4. *Methods and Approaches*

Where do we start an apologetic discussion about God and creation, and what method do we use? Because everything is from, through, and for God (Rom 11), there is a wide variety of things that could be mentioned and referred to in an apologetic discussion. There is also a variety of appropriate methods that can be used according to people and circumstances, to open their ears so that they can hear:

There are a wide variety of approaches and methods that we may use, consistent with our overall presuppositional commitment. Since proof is 'person variable' we are particularly interested in choosing an argumentative approach that makes contact with the individual or group we are talking to.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 64.

<sup>18</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), 197.

<sup>19</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *Logic: A God-Centered Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 176–77.

<sup>20</sup> Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 67.

The point is not simply that arguments should be used differently on different occasions to give the audience a better way to hear and digest its impact, but that some arguments are better suited for certain apologists than for others. Natural scientists, for example, can use arguments from their specific field with greater authority than can lawyers, with whom other arguments would fit better, and former cult members could use an approach different from that of other apologists when reaching out to the cults.

Our Lord Jesus Christ set us the example of working differently with different people to open their ears to hear. In their book about the apologetics of Jesus, Norman Geisler and Patrick Zukeran describe different apologetic methods used by Jesus. With the rich man of Mark 10, he uses questions (the so-called Socratic method) to break through the former's wrong view on salvation. He points out logical consequences to demonstrate the absurdity of the Pharisees' accusation that he exorcised demons by the power of the devil: the premise must be wrong because it leads to a contradictory conclusion. When using parables, Jesus uses a parabolic method of apologetics, where a story about a situation that is familiar conveys his truth. "In practice, Jesus offers many different apologetic techniques, depending on what was needed on the occasion."<sup>21</sup>

The classic method of apologetics can be used successfully when linked to the Christian worldview it assumes. This approach can be useful to get certain people to hear the gospel. However, when the partner in dialogue comes from a more consistent and nonconflicting approach, a presuppositional approach is more effective, where the apologist brings the differences in premises and worldviews forward.<sup>22</sup>

### **5. Defense and Attack**

Besides the different apologetic methods suitable for different circumstances, there are also the two basic aspects of defense and attack that form part of doing apologetics. In 2 Corinthians 10 Paul did both. Deceitful persons became part of the congregation and tried to discredit Paul with the purpose of discrediting his message. Paul, knowing the truth of the gospel was at stake, took a strong apologetic stand against those proclaiming another gospel. His words in 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 speak of both defense and attack. An important part of the defense against those hostile to the Christian faith is to try to prevent them advancing. This "is a significant and crucial part of apologetics. . . . But we must also be offensive. We must take up our weapons

<sup>21</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Patrick Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 196.

<sup>22</sup> Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 71–72.

and march against the enemy. ... The offensive team is determined to advance."<sup>23</sup> Then Paul proceeds to proclaim the true faith.

### III. *Defending the Faith*

#### 1. *The Logic Argument*

The naturalistic view and its pretension that science is based on logic, evidence, and neutrality, while faith is illogical, is often one of the first things that has to be handled in apologetic discussion. The logic argument aims at showing that illogicality is actually on the side of the naturalistic view of contemporary scientific atheism.<sup>24</sup> Matter cannot give what it does not have. Yet naturalists claim, according to their atheistic belief, that matter—without life or intelligence in it—created intelligent life. If everything was made by chance, there would also be nothing to enforce logic as normative for us. Scientism is self-destructive, for the assertion that only science can bring truth is itself not derived from science.<sup>25</sup> If this were true, the statement would be false and self-contradictory.

Christianity sees God as a rational, omnipotent being who can be relied upon. The universe is God's personal creation and therefore a rational, lawful, permanent structure, ready for man's logical thinking and understanding of it. In opposition to the idea of polytheism, in which all of the gods act according to their own rules, Christians proclaim a God who rules all things according to his law and order—ordinances which were in place from the beginning of time for man to discover and work with (Gen 1:28; 2:19). Geisler and Frank Turek rightly say that it makes sense to believe that the human mind was established through God's mind, with the effect that it can see truth for what it is and can reason logically about reality, because it was made by the architect of truth, logic, reason, and reality.<sup>26</sup> The universe is a created permanent structure that is reliable.

#### 2. *The Life-Experience Argument*

That naturalism as a presupposition contradicts life experience is an argument that can easily be used in apologetic discussions. Due to the important role science plays in the worldview of many people today, the theory of

<sup>23</sup> K. Scott Oliphint, *The Battle Belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 78.

<sup>24</sup> H. G. Stoker, "Convinced by Scripture and Plain Reason: Reasonable Reformational Apologetics," *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*, Special Issue on Reformed Theology Today (2017).

<sup>25</sup> Lennox, *God's Undertaker*, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Do Not Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 130.

evolution promoted by naturalistic science found wide acceptance. While many ordinary people believe it as a given, it must be explained that within evolutionism everything exists solely because of a physical process. This view puts pressure on people's faith in God. Paul Churchland summarized the view of evolutionary materialism and its consequences this way:

The important point about the standard evolutionary story is that the human species and all of its features are the wholly physical outcome of a pure physical process. ... If this is the correct account of our origins, then there is neither need, nor room, to fit any nonphysical substances or properties into our theoretical account of ourselves. We are creatures of matter. And we should learn to live with that fact.<sup>27</sup>

To live with this naturalistic life and worldview is not easy, because daily life consistently contradicts the heart of these theories. Nancy Pearcey explains the dilemma of naturalistic scientists who state that humans are nothing but a great skin bag full of bio molecules but at the same time uphold that children should not be treated just as physical objects.<sup>28</sup> This discrepancy forces those that honestly look at the dilemma to say: "I maintain two sets of inconsistent beliefs."<sup>29</sup> Hence it is difficult to live with a naturalistic worldview because humans cannot both be treated as physical objects or machines and be viewed as free moral beings.

As part of his rejection of methodological naturalism (as if science could function neutrally), Moreland points out that scientific laws and theories require both observation and associated descriptive terms (e.g., *it is red, zinc*), as well as theoretical concepts and associated descriptive terms (e.g., *it is an electron, it has zero mass*).<sup>30</sup> This is not a neutral process; it is based on prior knowledge, presuppositions, and the focus of the researcher, among other things. In this process, the scientist often seeks to solve empirical and conceptual problems. There are empirical problems related to the observational aspects of science, such as how waves move and why. Conceptual problems can occur internally or externally. Internal conceptual problems arise when a defect or deficiency is found in the theoretical concepts of a theory. External conceptual problems can, for instance, come from philosophy or theology when they conflict with scientific theory.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), 21.

<sup>28</sup> Nancy Pearcey, "Intelligent Design and the Defense of Reason," in William A. Dembski, ed., *Darwin's Nemesis: Phillip Johnson and the Intelligent Design Movement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 238.

<sup>29</sup> Rodney Brooks, *Flesh and Machines* (New York: Pantheon, 2002), 147.

<sup>30</sup> James P. Moreland, "Theistic Science and Methodological Naturalism," in Moreland, ed., *The Creation Hypothesis*, 52–53.

To maintain a consistent evolutionary naturalism, atheistic scientists are constrained by their presuppositions to overlook even obvious things, such as what it means to be human. Strangely, scientists denounce the Christian view of reality as if it were guilty of the very kind of inconsistency of which naturalistic thinking is guilty. Sam Harris states that scientists aim at verifying their statements about the world or, at the very least, at making sure that they are not false, unlike those of religious believers.<sup>31</sup> Yet those who think thus have to admit that in their life-experience human beings in their way of thinking do not simply function like programmed computers. It is not difficult to show them the discrepancy between what they know to be true and the implications of their naturalistic faith in science.

### 3. *The Premises Argument*

The naturalistic reduction suggests that the world should be comprehended only by means of what is observable.<sup>32</sup> However, the complex information in creation (e.g., DNA code) points to one who is visible through his works, to a creator. The naturalistic premise that the universe can only be comprehended by what is measurable or observable is itself a presupposition and must be challenged by the apologist. Logically speaking, the premise that only what is measurable or observable is true cannot be verified by observable or measurable means, and therefore must by its very nature be unacceptable according to its own naturalistic approach. A good illustration of this is pointed out by Lennox when he writes that the famous atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell contradicts himself when he says that all human knowledge must come from (physical) science and that what science cannot discover mankind has no knowledge about.<sup>33</sup> How does Russell know this? According to his own definition, his statement is not a scientific statement, and thus he cannot have any knowledge about it. In spite of this, Russell believed it to be true.

The study of the various natural sciences and their respective fields cannot supply answers to everything in the world—as is the case with every specific field of study. Life, for instance, cannot be reduced naturalistically to its nonliving components. Life is more than its chemical composition. It also includes messages or information (DNA) that are expressed in the chemical composition—similar to the way in which messages or information are expressed by words printed in a book through the chemistry of ink

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<sup>31</sup> Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2005), 76.

<sup>32</sup> According to Max Planck, “Wirklichkeit ist, was messbar ist.”

<sup>33</sup> Lennox, *God’s Undertaker*, 40–41

printed on paper. While words on paper show that an intelligent being wrote it, the information that makes life possible also points to an intelligent being. This information is suppressed by naturalists because of their reductionist presuppositions, while Christians can go where the information leads—to an intelligent cause.

#### 4. *The Moral Argument*

The moral argument is one of the most effective and commonly used arguments against scientific naturalism because it shows the impossibility of a moral (and therefore human life) without moral behavior and fixed norms. If human beings originated naturalistically and consist of matter and nothing else, they are not accountable to anyone for their behavior<sup>34</sup> because all behavior follows out of determined natural processes. Without norms and accountability human beings are actually not human any more. Not only will there be no standards such as good or bad, right or wrong, but punishment also will not make sense because humans are slaves to their nature and their actions are results of physical-chemical processes. There would be no difference between killing a human being and killing an animal, a fish, a worm, a plant, or a bacterium, as they are all the result of a physical biological process. Naturalism dehumanizes and reduces man to an animal or less—a slave of a coincidental mechanistic physical processes.

Laws that science discover have an ordering function. Natural laws apply to matter, plants, and animals, as well as to the physical-biological side of man. In contrast, a norm is an order that applies to man made as image of God (Gen 1: 26–27), free to choose responsibly. This applies to all the aspects in which man is more than an animal. According to the twelve modalities that can be identified, seven of the ordering principles apply only to human beings, namely the provisions for the logical, linguistic, aesthetic, economic, juridical, ethical, and religious.<sup>35</sup>

Without norms man would not be more than determined natural processes. Human life is impossible without morals. If man's origin were naturalistic, there would be no right or wrong, good or evil, or responsibility—everything would be allowed.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Except for the norms imposed by society on the individual, if he or she wants to be part of society.

<sup>35</sup> Hendrik G. Stoker Sr., *Philosophy of the Creation Idea* (Potchefstroom, 2010), 96.

<sup>36</sup> See Ivan Karamazov in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. The only constraint would be someone's own limitation and what is imposed by the society on the individual.

### **5. The Freedom and Responsibility Argument**

According to a Christian life and worldview, man has the possibility to choose—choices which are normatively testable. Human beings may choose and ought to choose according to God's will, to fulfill their purpose on earth. In community they should fulfill their duty, obey norms, and be held responsible for choices and even punished for wrongdoing. Beings cannot be human if they cannot think, plan, and live with responsibilities. They should not make choices randomly, because they are called to do what is required of them. Responsibility means that they must be able to justify choices.

Pearcey rightly criticizes the naturalistic approach when she points out that a worldview must describe the entire world and not just a part of it.<sup>37</sup> When evolutionary naturalists identify features that are characteristic of human beings, they have to acknowledge that human dignity and what gives meaning to their lives are not actually real. She refers to the natural scientist Marvin Minsky, who described the human brain in consistently naturalistic terms as nothing more than a three-pound computer made of meat. Yet Minsky admits that while in the materialistic world there is no place for a person's own choices and decision, he acknowledges that decision making is a concept without which the workings of the mind cannot be understood. He then states that there is no choice but to maintain that humans have freedom of decision, "even though we know this statement is false."<sup>38</sup> When defending the faith, it is important to refer to this discrepancy to invite naturalists to reconsider their views.

In direct contrast to the evolutionistic naturalistic view that reduces man to matter and his actions to chemical processes, biblical anthropology calls humans in the special service of God to realize God's destiny for the cosmos. By doing what they are intended to do, they fulfill their calling to the honor and glory of God.

### **6. The Modalities Argument**

When defending the faith, it is important to highlight the higher functions of man and to set them in contrast to the degrading of humanity to physical and chemical processes by contemporary scientific atheism. Gilbert Chesterton regards it as surprising that the naturalistic view is accepted as a liberal, free-thinking philosophy, when in fact it is much more restrictive than views that are open towards transcendence and make room for the possibility of explanations beyond naturalism.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Pearcey, "Intelligent Design and the Defense of Reason," 238.

<sup>38</sup> Marvin Minsky, *The Society of Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 307.

<sup>39</sup> Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Heretics / Orthodoxy* (Nashville: Nelson, 2000), 279–80.

The modalities argument rejects the notion of naturalism—that is, what is important is matter and numbers, “experimental reasoning concerning matter” or “abstract reasoning concerning quality or number.”<sup>40</sup> Within God’s creation different modal spheres can be distinguished. Besides basic ones, such as number, space, and physical, biotic spheres, which are also a feature of plants and animals, the physic/sensitive is unique to animals and humans. Furthermore, there are also higher or normative spheres that are exclusive to human beings. These are the logical, linguistic, aesthetic, economic, juridical, ethical, and religious. These twelve modalities are mutually and radically distinctive modal spheres.<sup>41</sup> Thus, according to modal theory, naturalism reduces the higher modalities to the lower ones—stating something similar to the idea that the printed words in a book are only ink chemically bound to paper and nothing more. In the modalities argument, the higher functions of humans can be set in contrast to degradation to physical and chemical processes propagated by contemporary scientific atheism.

In the debate between Christian philosopher William Lane Craig and the atheistic evolutionist Peter Atkins, Atkins made the statement that we do not need the concept of God to explain anything and challenged Craig to mention something that cannot be explained by science. Craig mentions the following five points (as summarized by Geisler and Turek) that cannot be scientifically proven, but are all accepted as rational:

1. Mathematics and logic (science cannot prove, but presupposes it)
2. Metaphysical truths (for example that there are other minds than my own)
3. Ethical judgments (it cannot be scientifically proven that the Nazis acted wrongly, because morality is not subject to the method of natural science)
4. Aesthetic judgment (like the good, beauty cannot be scientifically proven)
5. Science itself (the belief that the scientific method discovers truth cannot be proven by the scientific method itself).<sup>42</sup>

Plants, animals, and people can exist because of the laws of nature. But only people are able to reflect responsibly on what they do and should do

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<sup>40</sup> The views of David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2004), 123.

<sup>41</sup> Stoker, *Philosophy of the Creation Idea*, 96.

<sup>42</sup> Geisler and Turek, *I Do Not Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 126–27.

by the application of laws that are knowingly or unknowingly applied, either by scientific methods or intuitively. Therefore, the things Craig stated go beyond what can be established by natural law and relate to essential characteristics of man. This is to say that normative modalities are uniquely present in human beings. Humans' design must thus be distinguished from physical matter and other created entities. As the normative modalities (the logical, linguistic, aesthetic, economic, juridical, ethical, and religious) are alone part of human experience, man's design is unique. Only man is made after the image of God.

#### **IV. *Proclaiming the Truth***

Apologetics is not only defending the faith, but also proclaiming the truth—describing the Christian worldview to those with other worldviews in a way that makes sense to them. It is not always easy to know when to defend the faith by showing the problems in another view and when to proclaim the truth. Usually, the discussion will have some of both, describing the Christian faith in such a way that those with other ideas can understand it and highlighting the flaws of other worldviews. Because it is not only about reasoning, but about faith and the convincing work of the Holy Spirit, any apologetic conversation should prayerfully seek God's guidance. It is he who prepares the hearts of people.

What follows is a short description of some arguments that proclaim the Christian worldview to those who do not accept the Bible as authoritative.

##### **1. *The Epistemological Argument***

Albert Einstein described the comprehensibility of the world as a miracle. This miracle is constantly reinforced as our knowledge grows. The epistemological argument focuses on this and proclaims that the human mind and logic were specifically created to correlate with the structures of the world and to make sense of it. If the world had evolved by accident, there would be no reason why man and his understanding of experiences should flow directly into each other. The famous physicist John Polkinghorne finds the reason for the reasonableness of man, which logically corresponds to the reasonableness of the universe, in that they have the same origin—the much deeper reasonableness of God's "intellect."<sup>43</sup> God is the absolute origin, he is the only absolute, and therefore he is the one who enables rationality.

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<sup>43</sup> John Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation: The Search for Understanding* (London: SPCK, 1988), 20–21.

## ***2. The Teleological Argument***

The teleological argument focuses on the purpose evident in the design of things. Scientific investigation only makes sense because things are designed with a purpose. Science tells us of a universe that is fine-tuned and delicately balanced to create the right conditions to exist and allow life. It is evident that it is part of a magnificent plan and that a planner is behind it. Therefore, by proclaiming an eternal God who is not bound to time, Christianity perfectly fits the picture of what enables science to exist and make sense.

## ***3. The Cosmological Argument***

The first verse in the Bible proclaims that there was a beginning, and that heaven and earth were created. At a given point in eternity, time and space came into existence. Centuries later, through their study of the universe, scientists came to the same conclusion: Time and space have originated. The cosmological argument states that because of the beginning of time and space in which the world came to existence, the universe has a cause. The first verse of Genesis goes even further. It states that there was a cause that brought space and time into being from spacelessness and timelessness. This cause, called God, is not bound to time and space, but eternal and omnipresent, capable of bringing forth space and time where there was no matter or duration. The cosmological argument assumes that finite reality depends on an infinite God. Furthermore, the fact that the world has a cause underlines the Christian idea that everything happens for a reason—according to God’s plan.

## **Conclusion**

Christianity proclaims that human beings are created in the image of God and therefore have responsibility and freedom that call for actualization. Without any relation to God the creator, who is the absolute origin of the cosmos, man would not have had the motivation to practice science and would not have seen the universe as designed with and for a purpose. Without both freedom and responsibility, the practice of science would not have emerged. Naturalism, on the other hand, undermines the clarity of the design of created reality. It is a worldview that destroys the ultimate meaning of life.

One should not stop at the contrast between the Christian and the naturalistic worldview, but also indicate the positive impact of Christianity upon a scientific attitude and motivation. Christianity encourages science. To the believer, the practice of science leads to the growth of admiration for God the Creator.

The biblical view of the relationship between faith and science is thus a positive one, and it is this that Christian apologetics should defend and proclaim. A Christian approach to science not only deals with specific questions in an isolated or “neutral” manner, but also seeks to reconnect insights to the whole and its absolute origin (God), integrating what it discovers into a life-encompassing framework. Accordingly, scientific practice is a deepening of experience and an activity through which the self opens to the cosmos. This may lead to a first or deepening experience of God as Creator.

An important task for contemporary apologetics is to show the consistency of the Christian worldview in its approach to faith and science. For if the challenges of scientific atheism are to be overcome, Christian answers will have to come with power and clarity.