

Science in the Christian Worldview

What should Christians think about science? How do science and Christianity relate to each other?

First, what is science? Science is the systematic study of the universe through cycles of prediction and observation.

In addressing the role of science in the Christian worldview, it makes sense to first look at the Bible.

The Bible makes it clear that faith is not contrary to intellect. However, intellect ought to be used in the appropriate manner: to love God. Indeed, Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God with all of our being, including our mind.

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." – Matthew 22:37

How can we use our minds to love God? There are many possible ways.

Part of loving God is getting to know him better. We can get to know God in two ways: specific revelation through the Bible and general revelation through the creation.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. – Romans 1:20

Although God's qualities are clearly seen from creation, we still don't know everything about it. God has chosen to progressively reveal his plan of salvation using a series of covenants from Abraham to Moses to David to the new covenant of Jesus. Even now not everything is clear.

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. – 1 Corinthians 13:12

Likewise, we also have limited knowledge about the universe, but some have the privilege of learning more about it through science.

*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter;
to search out a matter is the glory of kings. – Proverbs 25:2*

Science also helps us obey God's commandment to rule the earth.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." – Genesis 1:28

Humans are not the strongest or fastest animals. The only way we can subdue the earth is through our minds, or specifically through science and technology.

One example of using science and technology to accomplish God's will is modern medicine. Disease is not in God's will, was not part of Eden, and will not be part of heaven. A significant part of Jesus' ministry was healing. Through biomedical research and the practice of medicine we can participate in Jesus' ministry of healing.

These verses and this interpretation make it seem like science and the Christian worldview should be in perfect harmony. Yet the two are often perceived to be in conflict? What is the source of this conflict?

Although there are outspoken exceptions, most scientists are not directly opposed to Christianity. Rather, they are frustrated because:

-Christians hold ancient texts above the findings of modern technology. This is seen as blind faith.

-Some Christians with little or no scientific training will use poor pseudo-scientific arguments to defend interpretations of these texts. I've heard arguments like evolution violates the second law of thermodynamics – that the entropy of the universe is always increasing. (This reveals a lack of understanding of the second law. There can be local decreases in entropy when accompanied by global increases.) Alternatively, they will use weak scientific evidence to bolster the Biblical text, especially early Genesis. Atheistic scientists would be happy if Christians would leave science to the scientists and leave religion to religious people.

-Christian values are sometimes seen as fetters to scientific progress, i.e. stem cell research.

-the "evangelical Christian" Bush administration has cut science funding

-in a "Christian nation," the American public doesn't make much of an effort to understand science.

As a body of knowledge and as an investigative strategy, science itself is neutral. However, like all other vocations, the scientific community has its own subculture which is distinct from the general public and from Christian culture. It is important for a Christian to consider how their culture (any culture, not just science) affects spirituality in positive, negative, and neutral ways. This is the only way to affirm or reject beliefs and practices rather than just going with the flow.

The conflicts that I described arise from the deep differences in the world view of a typical atheistic scientist and a typical Christian. Here I present a summary:

	Academic Science	Christian Worldview
Causality	Natural law	+ miracles and Logos
Epistemology	Rationality and Reason	+ divine revelation
Values	Knowledge, Skepticism, and	Faith, Hope, and

	Individual Achievement	Love
Origins	Cosmological accidents and unguided biological evolution	Special role of God (various mechanisms)

Much of the discussion around the relationship between Christianity and science has centered on origins. I will describe three basic positions (all simplifications) and my own status as a cosmological agnostic. Scientists often lump together creationism and intelligent design, but I will distinguish the two, as the latter has a firmer scientific basis.

Issue	Creationism (7 day)	Intelligent Design	Naturalism
Age of Universe	Thousands of years	N/A	Billions of years
Fine-tuning of physical parameters	Divine providence	Divine providence	Anthropogenic principle, many universes, or underlying laws
Origin of Life	Special divine acts over a few days	Theistic evolution or divine acts over millions of years	Blind process without teleology
Biological complexity	Divine providence	Evidence of teleology	Evidence of evolution
Fossil record	The Flood	N/A	Over long time

Agnosticism refers to a position in which one doesn't know whether or not God exists. (It is a play on words on Gnosticism, a common heresy in the early church.) Agnosticism can be seen as noble and humble, or a cop-out which sucks up to both theists and atheists while satisfying neither.

A cosmological agnostic doesn't know exactly how the universe came into existence or how life and biological complexity originated. This is not a cop-out because God doesn't specifically ask us to take a position. Sometimes with God we operate on a need-to-know basis. We don't need to know exactly how much of the universes' history proceeded according to business as usual and how much is a supernatural aberration. We can propose a model which best explains the data, but we must acknowledge that we can be wrong. For example, we can state that to the best of our knowledge, the fine-tuning of physical parameters is due to intelligent design, but we should be open to a unifying theory which ties together all the parameters a more fundamental level.

Science is an exploration into the unknown. Not only do we not know, we don't even know what we don't know. And that's what makes it exciting.