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THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SCIENCE AND FAITH

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By: Gavin Ortlund

Views on the relation of science and faith cluster around three basic schools of thought. First, science and faith are perceived to be at war with one another. This is one of the tenets of New Atheism and is also prevalent in some fundamentalist religious groups. Second, science and faith are thought to belong to different domains of human experience and inquiry. Thus they are able to coexist peacefully—so long as they remain separate from one another. A prominent example of this view would be what evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould called non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA).[1] The third camp is the most diverse and arguably the most interesting. If science and faith are neither 1) enemies warring with each other, nor 2) strangers ignoring each other, then the logical alternative is that 3) they are some sort of friends aiding each other.[2]

A variation of this third view is closest to the Christian perspective of the relationship between science and faith. This Christian view differs from NOMA; within the Bible, no one corner of reality can be neatly separated from all others. Science and faith will have necessary points of overlap, because both seek truth and truth is one.

Thus the Bible routinely makes claims about matters of faith—such as the existence and nature of God—on the basis of the natural world: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."[3] "God's invisible qualities... have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made."

THE BIBLE ROUTINELY MAKES CLAIMS ABOUT MATTERS OF FAITH ON THE BASIS OF THE NATURAL WORLD.

The Christian view also stands in contrast to warfare models of science and faith. In Christian thought, all pursuits of knowledge—including the pursuit of knowledge about the natural world (what we today call *science*[4])—are important and noble enterprises.[5] But Christians emphasize that scientific knowledge in and of itself is *value neutral*. For example, science can be used to design bombs as easily as to defuse them, to spread disease as well as to heal it.

1 Steven Jay Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria," *The Unofficial Stephen Jay Gould Archive*, http://www.stephenjaygould.org/library/gould_noma.html.

2 Of course, this third alternative has many possible configurations. To put the relationship metaphorically, science and faith might be considered twin brothers fighting side by side in common aim, or two different alien species attempting to dialogue with each other, or an introvert and extravert complementing each other—and on and on we could go. This is why I suggest the third camp is the most interesting. Enemies and strangers are relatively uniform relationships, but there are all different kinds of friendships.

3 *The Holy Bible*, New International Version © 2011, Psalm 19:1.

4 Science (from the Latin word for knowledge, *scientia*) can be defined as the study of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment.

5 In earlier centuries, the term "naturalist" referred to what we today call scientists.

In Christian thought, knowledge is always governed by a larger worldview or philosophy or faith, whether of the religious variety or not.[6] Christianity thus affirms a harmonious relationship between science and faith in which a certain kind of priority is reserved for faith.

The Value of Knowledge

The Bible's creation narrative repeatedly affirms the goodness of all that God has made, and the New Testament portrays God's creative work as extending to both what is seen and what is unseen.[7] Historically, many religions valued mind more than matter, or matter more than mind. The biblical worldview is relatively unique for its unblushing affirmation of the goodness of both mind *and* matter, both rational *and* material. Thus wherever Christians have gone, they have founded hospitals and schools.[8]

CHRISTIANITY THUS AFFIRMS A HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCIENCE AND FAITH IN WHICH A CERTAIN KIND OF PRIORITY IS RESERVED FOR FAITH.

Given this foundation, it is not surprising that many of the originators of modern science were Christians.[9] Unlike a few prominent contemporary scientists, these pioneers did not fear that belief in a God beyond nature would hinder their observations about nature. Instead, their religious convictions grounded and encouraged their scientific pursuits, providing a kind of stability in which to conduct scientific experiments. After all, if a rational God created a rational universe, it follows that other rational beings could discover its rationality.

Johann Kepler is famous for claiming that science is thinking God's thoughts after him. This statement could be broadened into a kind of manifesto for the Christian view on all rational activity and intellectual pursuit. If a rational God exists, then when human beings consider an *idea* (say the number 11, or a triangle, or the notion of justice), they are not conjuring up something of their own mental construction, but stumbling upon something real and solid that eternally predates them in the mind of God.

[6] One of the common misconceptions in contemporary discussions of faith and reason is that religious people have faith while secular people do not. But, as the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard pointed out, all finite and temporal creatures live on the basis of un-provable assumptions, and thus necessarily operate from faith. Two telling examples of human activities that require faith are reason and science. We cannot use reason to prove reason, because that is circular. Believing in the validity of reason is ultimately an act of faith, as G. K. Chesterton observed: "Reason is itself a matter of faith. It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all" (G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* [New York: Image Books, 2001], 29). Similarly, C. S. Lewis argued that science can only assume, rather than prove, the regularity of the laws of nature. Thus even this requires faith. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (1952; reprint, New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

[7] See *The Holy Bible*, Colossians 1:16.

[8] For a fuller discussion of Christianity's view of the material world in comparison with other religions, see book 2, chapter 1 ("The Rival Conceptions of God") of C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*. Lewis put it simply: "[God] likes matter. He invented it." Lewis, 64.

[9] For example, think of Johann Kepler, Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, Blaise Pascal, Michael Faraday, Robert Boyle, Galileo Galilei, and Louis Pasteur, many of whom were avid students of the Bible and theology as well as science.

Thus, for the Christian, thought and intellectual discovery are intrinsically valuable, not merely instrumentally valuable. Seeing truth—about anything—is like examining God's footprints or walking into a room he left just moments before. Theism furnishes all intellectual pursuit with optimism and meaning and context. As C. S. Lewis put it, "thirst was made for water; inquiry for truth."[10]

According to the Bible, human beings are created in God's image, which includes a capacity for curiosity, reasoning, and learning, among other things.[11] When King Solomon asked God for wisdom, God was pleased and granted him understanding of trees and animals—the natural world—among other things.[12] The Bible places great value in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding: "Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold."[13]

Even while it affirms the life of the mind, however, the Bible warns against intellectualism and any attempt to discover the ultimate meaning of life through the cumulative accrual of knowledge. King Solomon, whom we mentioned earlier, is held to be the traditional author of the biblical book of Proverbs, which extols the value of wisdom. However, he is also held to have written a book called Ecclesiastes, which warns that, by itself, wisdom is no remedy to the futility of life in a fallen world and the certainty of death. Consider these verses:

IF A RATIONAL GOD CREATED A RATIONAL UNIVERSE, IT FOLLOWS THAT OTHER RATIONAL BEINGS COULD DISCOVER ITS RATIONALITY.

- "I said to myself, 'Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.' Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief." —Ecclesiastes 1:16–18
- "For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die!" —Ecclesiastes 2:16
- "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body." —Ecclesiastes 12:12

For Christians, then, knowledge has great value, but it is not the meat and drink of life, nor the ultimate answer to life's ultimate riddles. In science, however, knowledge is key.

[10] By contrast, it is worth asking how thought can ultimately be trusted to arrive at objective truth in an atheistic worldview. According to a purely naturalistic account of human origins, everything in life is explained according to natural selection and random mutation. Therefore our brains and our thoughts are the way they are simply because that is what helped our ancestors survive. If this is the case, it is difficult to see how our rational thought and scientific observation can be fully trusted. Why should "survival value" always correspond to "objective truth"? For a fuller expression of this argument, see chapter 3 of C. S. Lewis's book *Miracles*.

[11] See *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 1:26–28.

[12] Ibid., 1 Kings 3:9–10, 4:33.

[13] *The Holy Bible*, Proverbs 3:13–14.

Has Science Replaced God?

At the very end of his fascinating book *A Brief History of Time*, after outlining the search for a grand unified theory that explains the entire universe, Stephen Hawking says this:

> Even if there is only one possible unified theory, it is just a set of rules and equations. What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe? The usual approach of science of constructing a mathematical model cannot answer the questions of why there should be a universe for the model to describe. Why does the universe go to the bother of existing?[14]

THE BIBLE PLACES GREAT VALUE IN THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING.

Many people in contemporary culture have come to think that the more science advances in explaining the universe, the less need there is for a God. Carl Sagan once said, "As science advances, there seems to be less and less for God to do... Whatever it is we cannot explain lately is attributed to God... And then, after a while, we explain it, and so that's no longer God's realm."[15]

But Hawking's statement exposes the superficiality of this perspective: Even if we could exhaustively understand everything that happens in the physical universe, we would still have to face the larger philosophical questions. Why is there a universe in the first place? What makes its laws and gives them their consistency?

In the Christian view, since science studies the natural universe and the biblical understanding of God situates him outside the natural universe, advances in science will never displace God. On the contrary, scientific advance makes the possibility of God more intriguing and more urgent. Greater knowledge about *how* the universe works makes more pressing the further question of *why* it works that way—and why it is here at all. Expecting scientific advance to displace the need for a Creator is like getting two-thirds of the way through *Hamlet* and expecting the ending of the play to displace the need for Shakespeare.

How Old Is the Universe?

One reason people often perceive science to be at odds with faith is the common misconception that the Bible teaches that the universe is just a few thousand years old. In reality, the Bible makes no claims about the age of the universe, and most thoughtful Christians have no difficulty accepting the scientific evidence that the universe is much, much older.[16]

[14] Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, updated and expanded 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), 190.

[15] Carl Sagan, *The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 64.

[16] See Tim Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Dutton, 2008). On page 262, Keller notes this historical fact: "Despite widespread impression to the contrary, both inside and outside the church, modern Creation Science was not the traditional response of conservative and evangelical Protestants in the nineteenth century when Darwin's theory first became known. There was widespread acceptance of the fact that Genesis 1 may be been speaking of long ages rather than literal days. R. A. Torrey, the fundamentalist editor of *The Fundamentals* (published from 1910–1915, which gave definition to the term 'fundamentalist'), said that it was possible 'to believe thoroughly in the infallibility of the Bible and still be an evolutionist of a certain type...' The man who defined the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy, B. B. Warfield of Princeton (d. 1921) believed that God may have used something like evolution to bring about life-forms."

Evidence for an older earth is not limited to radiometric dating. Everywhere we look we find evidence of an older earth and an even older universe. The very light we see from many of the stars in our sky comes from millions of light years away and, using powerful telescopes, we can see light from galaxies billions of light years away.

There is nothing in the Bible that contradicts this data. When we approach a passage in the Bible—say, Genesis 1—with a contemporary question in mind, it is easy to overextend the text's meaning, or apply it to issues it was never intended to address, or impose later categories of thought onto it that would be foreign to the original writer and readers. The Genesis 1 creation narrative is not a technical, scientific report written to resolve modern origin debates. Rather, the creation narrative was written—part and parcel with the stories that follow it—to the first- and second-generation Israelites about to enter the land of Canaan in order to explain to them their identity as the covenant people of the God of the whole world. The main point is this: "You know the God who just led you out of Egypt and gave you his law? Well, he's no tribal deity! He is the Creator God of the whole world." To make this point, the author of the text employs a literary device (or framework) in which he compares God's creative work to a human workweek.[17]

Believing in the truthfulness of Scripture is not tantamount to believing that the days of Genesis 1 are 24-hour periods, or even that they are sequential—no more than believing in the truthfulness of Psalm 104:5 is tantamount to believing in geo-centrism. We must interpret the Bible according to its original intended meaning.

SCIENTIFIC ADVANCE MAKES THE POSSIBILITY OF GOD MORE INTRIGUING AND MORE URGENT.

Evolution

One of the focal points of debate concerning science and faith is the question of human origins. However, the common antithesis between the terms can be misleading. "Creation" and "evolution" are not parallel, mutually exclusive theories of origins. In fact, nearly every advocate of intelligent design (ID)—from the Bible-thumping fundamentalist to an accomplished scientist like Francis Collins—acknowledges that evolution is one *mechanism of* creation. Some think evolution can explain almost everything; others believe it explains very little; and a good number, such as myself, fall somewhere in between.

In our setting, however, the word "evolution" is often used to refer not merely to a biological process, but to an all-encompassing philosophical worldview that everything can be explained by random mutation and natural selection. In this sense, "evolution" is indeed an alternative to creation, because it *defines* the entire process as random and unsupervised. In fact, in 1996, the National Association of Biology Teachers defined evolution as an "unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable, and natural process."[18]

[17] For more information, see Meredith G. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," *Westminster Theological Journal* 20 (May 1958): 146–57; Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

[18] "NABT unveils new statement on teaching evolution," *American Biology Teacher 58* (January 1996): 61–62. The NATB has since altered this exact wording, but maintains the notion that evolution occurs without plan or purpose.

While basically all theists accept the notion of evolution as change over time, no thoughtful theist can accept this more technical definition of evolution, because no theist believes the story of life is an "unsupervised" process. In this light, we can see that the ultimate divide is not between creation and evolution *per se*, but between teleological accounts of origins (which may assign a greater or lesser role to evolution) and blind, chance accounts of origins. The real divide is philosophical, not mechanical. The Christian faith is nowhere at odds with the notion that species adapt over time. But it does affirm that, whatever process God employed for different things, all things are created by the purposeful intention of God. The Bible is pro-science, but it does oppose the philosophical naturalism implicit in much of contemporary Western scientific thought.[19]

WE MUST INTERPRET THE BIBLE ACCORDING TO ITS ORIGINAL INTENDED MEANING.

Different Christians fall in different places on the "How *much* can evolution explain?" spectrum. Personally, I find it impossible to fathom how naturalistic causes could account for, say, the first cell. When it comes to supposing further that love, reason, and my favorite pieces of literature all came about ultimately via randomness and chance, I'm completely engulfed with incredulity. Yet this view is the logical conclusion of the reigning paradigm among much of the current scientific establishment.

Intelligent Design

In fact, it is often claimed that intelligent design is not really science at all, but creationism in disguise. But ID is only not science if science is limited to that which has naturalistic, random causation. But this is a rather restrictive definition of science that is not itself based on any empirical observations of the world. This is not the definition of science under which Newton or Kepler or Einstein worked, nor is it clear why intelligent causes must be out of bounds in order for something to be studied scientifically.

Opponents of ID often claim that there is no real debate among scientists about evolution; they claim that ID is really "pseudo-science" that no credible scientist takes seriously. But this is simply wrong. There are a growing number in the scientific community with strong academic credentials who question whether naturalistic evolution can explain all the facts—Michael Behe, Stephen Meyer, Jonathan Wells, and David Berlinski, to name a few. There is only no debate if you dismiss one side as nonexistent. Though it may be a lopsided debate, to claim that there is none is simply untrue.

Robust debate between proponents of the intelligent design movement and advocates of philosophical naturalism should be encouraged. If the truth is really as obvious as some voices claim, then debate should settle it fairly clearly. But labeling one side "pseudo-science" seems more likely to reinforce divisions than engender mutual understanding. Whether ID is right or wrong, people should be given all the facts, hear all the arguments, be free to ask any questions, and follow the evidence wherever it leads. This is the essence of free academic inquiry. The potential philosophical or religious implications of a viewpoint should not preclude any findings.

[19] Naturalism is the philosophy that nothing exists beyond the natural world.

For example, take the genesis of the first cell, or the sudden diversification in the fossil record known as the Cambrian Explosion. Scientists are not in agreement as to how one explains these phenomena. In the face of this uncertainty, why shouldn't we consider all possibilities, regardless of their potential implications? Aren't open-mindedness and a willingness to question the status quo at the heart of the spirit of true science? Isn't this what allowed Darwin to do what he did in the first place?

Adam and Eve

But what about the Bible's teaching on Adam and Eve? Some Christians believe in a literal Adam and Eve living in a literal Garden of Eden. Others read the Bible figuratively and believe that Adam and Eve were not real people. There are several reasons, however, to take the Genesis account of Adam and Eve very seriously.

THE BIBLE IS PRO-SCIENCE, BUT IT DOES OPPOSE THE PHILOSOPHICAL NATURALISM IMPLICIT IN MUCH OF CONTEMPORARY WESTERN SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT.

First of all, while Genesis 1:1–2:3 is quasi-poetic, Genesis 2:4 and following is a narrative of the same genre as the rest of the book of Genesis and much of the Pentateuch.[20] It was clearly intended to be as historical as the story of Abraham in Genesis 12 was. Moreover, the Apostle Paul placed great emphasis on Adam as a parallel figure to Christ in his theology.[21] If there was no Adam, much of his argument in these chapters would break down, just as it would if Christ were not a historical figure. Furthermore, if we abandon a historical Adam and Eve, we have some pretty thorny theological questions to face: At what point did the soul develop—if it did? When did evil enter the human race, and with it human death?

Moreover, believing in Adam and Eve as historical individuals is not necessarily at odds with all forms of evolution. An increasing number of Christians are advocating various accounts of how the creation of Adam and Eve might fit together with the existence of other hominids.[22] Meanwhile, the great value of the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2–3 is not dependent on the precise relation of Adam and Eve to modern science. Regardless of how all the details are interpreted and what harmonization with modern evolutionary theory may be required, Genesis 2–3 provides answers to some of the most important questions concerning our existence—including our awareness of right and wrong, our sense that something has gone terribly awry with the human race, and our recurring desire for redemption.

In his commentary on the book of Genesis, Derek Kidner makes the following observation:

> The accounts of the world [of science and Scripture] are as distinct (and each as legitimate) as an artist's portrait and an anatomist's diagram, of which no composite picture will be satisfactory, for their common ground is only in the total reality to which they both attend... [Scripture's] bold selectiveness, like that of a great painting, is its power.[23]

[20] The Pentateuch refers to the first five books of the Bible, whose authorship is traditionally credited to Moses.

[21] See *The Holy Bible*, Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15.

[22] See works such as Tim Keller, "Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople," http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/Keller_white_paper.pdf, accessed July 15, 2013; C. John Collins, *Adam and Eve: Who They Were and Why You Should Care* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: HarperOne, 2009), chapter 5.

[23] Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1967), 31.

To put what I am trying to say in Kidner's terms: We don't need to figure out the anatomist's diagram in all its details in order to appreciate fully the artist's portrait. Whatever that anatomist's diagram may or may not show, the artist's portrait already rings true to the human heart and conscience and sufficiently says what must be said, theologically, about human origins. Its bold selectiveness is its great power.

The Cosmological Argument

There are a number of testimonies to the reality of God within the natural order. For the sake of time and space, let's consider just one of them. It is perhaps the most basic and intuitive reason for believing the universe requires a Creator, and it can be broached by asking one of the most basic and important questions ever asked: Why is there something rather than nothing?

The cosmological argument states essentially this: "1) Everything that exists has a cause of its existence. 2) The universe exists. Therefore, 3) The universe has a cause of its existence."[24]

Modern cosmology has that the universe is not eternal nor absolute. Space and time are relative and interdependent; the space–time universe is finite and contingent. In light of the kind of universe we seem to find ourselves in, the most obvious question to ask is simply this: Where did it all come from? If it hasn't always been here, how did it come to be?

According to standard Big Bang cosmology, the universe came into being out of nothing roughly 13 billion years ago. Before this event, there was absolutely nothing—not even empty space. It's impossible to conceive of real nothingness. When we try, we usually think of blackness or darkness, but blackness and darkness are each something—the opposites of light and color and whiteness.

THERE ARE A GROWING NUMBER IN THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY WHO QUESTION WHETHER NATURALISTIC EVOLUTION CAN EXPLAIN ALL THE FACTS.

To suppose that the Big Bang simply went "bang" and arbitrarily popped the universe into existence from nothing is, ironically, quite a leap of faith. It goes against every natural intuition we have—the very intuitions which drive the scientific enterprise. There must be something "behind" the universe, so to speak. There must be a *cause*.

In a notable 2009 debate with William Lane Craig at Biola University, Christopher Hitchens responded to Craig's cosmological argument (the *Kalam* version)[25] with the standard reply: If everything needs a cause, what caused God? Who designed the Designer? But this misses the point. The cosmological argument does not argue that everything needs a cause. It says that everything *that begins to exist* needs a cause. All finite, contingent reality needs a cause. God, by definition, is a different kind of reality—necessary and eternal and uncaused. One can certainly deny that such a reality exists, but then the thing being denied is understood to be the uncaused Causer, the unmoved Mover. Asking who caused him is a category mistake; it's like asking, "How long is eternity?" or "How big is infinity?" The whole point of the cosmological argument is to demonstrate the need for an Uncaused Cause—something outside the system.

[24] "The Cosmological Argument," *Philosophy of Religion*, http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/theistic-proofs/the-cosmological-argument/.

[25] The Kalam argument, a variation of the cosmological argument, was developed by medieval Muslim philosophers and has been popularized in recent years by William Lane Craig.

Whether the cosmological argument gets you to a personal Creator is less obvious. But it suggests there is *some* kind of cause, and it certainly opens the door to the possibility that this cause is a personal God. After all, I would argue that it would be quite surprising if the cause of the universe were less than personal, beautiful, and intelligent, since the universe contains persons, beauty, and intelligence. Effect is generally not greater than the cause.

Einstein's God

One of the most interesting and open-minded perspectives on the intersection of science and faith was that of Albert Einstein. In his celebrated 2007 biography of Einstein, Walter Isaacson devoted one chapter to Einstein's religious views, entitled "Einstein's God."

ALL FINITE, CONTINGENT REALITY NEEDS A CAUSE.

Einstein could be a called a kind of mystical Deist. Let me explain what I mean by this. Einstein was a Deist; he believed in an impersonal "God" who structured the universe but does not intervene in it or take interest in humans. For example, he once said, "I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the lawful harmony of all that exists, but not in a God, who concerns himself with the fate and the doings of mankind."[26] Yet his beliefs were also mystical; he frequently relapsed into personal language when talking of God, and his sense of reverence before the immensity of "God" seemed to border on religious sentiment. Einstein said several things that reveal this. To name just a few:

- "A spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe—a spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble."[27]
- "Human beings, vegetables, or cosmic dust, we all dance to a mysterious tune intoned in the distance by an invisible player."[28]
- "Try and penetrate with our limited means the secrets of nature and you will find that, behind all the discernible laws and connections, there remains something subtle, intangible, and inexplicable."[29]

Whatever label we give to Einstein's point of view, it's clear that he has nothing of the science-has-disproved-God mentality so common among contemporary scientists. While he certainly rejected the idea of a personal God as this ulterior force, he did not do so on *scientific* grounds.

[26] Walter Isaacson, *Einstein: His Life and Universe* (Simon & Schuster, 2007), 388–389.
[27] Ibid., 388.
[28] Ibid., 392.
[29] Ibid., 384.

In an interview with George Viereck just before Einstein's fiftieth birthday, Einstein answered two important questions very directly:

> **Viereck:** You accept the historical existence of Jesus?
> **Einstein:** Unquestionably! No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.
> **Viereck:** Do you believe in God?
> **Einstein:** I'm not an atheist. The problem involved is too vast for our limited minds. We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being toward God.[30]

Wisdom Entered the World

The Christian view finds much to affirm in Einstein's perspective. The metaphor of a child in a vast library is indeed appropriate for our relation to God, given our smallness and frailty when compared to reality. But the Bible claims there is more to be said about the whole matter. To pick up the metaphor, the Bible claims that the Librarian showed up, walked over to the child, and offered to explain the meaning of the books.

IF WE WANT TO FIND GOD, WE HAVE TO BE WILLING TO LOOK WHERE WE WOULD LEAST EXPECT HIM.

According to the Bible, what is whispered and hinted at in the stars above is proclaimed in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."[31] The central message of the Bible is that the God who made everything has become a part of his creation in the person of Christ. In Christ, he is revealing himself to the world—and, what's more, reconciling the world to himself. There is a friendly Librarian walking around the library.

Suppose for a moment that, at least hypothetically, something like God exists—an infinitely beautiful and loving Person who made the world. Where might this God reveal himself? Where on the grid might he show up? The Christian view is that God has *hidden* himself in our world. The Bible claims that "in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."[32] That means that if we want to find God, we have to be willing to look where we would least expect him. In the Christian view, God did not come with pomp and parade, with accolades and audience. No, he arrived in a small, unimportant place—a dirty manger in a small village, to be precise.

The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation—the notion that God become man—has extraordinary implications for the (otherwise understandable) skepticism implicit in Einstein's metaphor. It means that if we want to understand this vast library, we don't need to learn how to read all the languages; we need only to seek out the Librarian.

[30] Ibid., 386.
[31] *The Holy Bible*, John 1:18.
[32] Ibid., Colossians 2:3.

The God who made everything has come very close to us. The Highest One took the lowest place. He not only descended down into a manger but ultimately onto a shameful cross, dying in love for the forgiveness of our sins. That is where the Maker of Einstein's vast library is found. "I live in a high and holy place," God said, "but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit."[33]

Dealing with Doubt

Perhaps as you read this article, you are struggling with doubts about faith. Maybe your doubts are related to scientific issues; maybe they are related to something more personal. Maybe both. Either way, here are a few pieces of advice.

Doubt your doubts.

All doubts are based on some alternative faith. For example, imagine I say, "A real God would never hide himself; he would be obvious to see." I'm making a statement based on what I believe God *must* be like. How do I know that proposition is true? Put simply, I don't.

Bring your doubts into the light and interrogate them, just as they are interrogating your faith. Let it be a fair fight. Many doubts that initially feel significant crumble on closer investigation of their hidden premises.

Examine your doubts.

Issues of doubt are never merely intellectual. In the Bible, faith and obedience are always connected. Struggles of faith are often related to struggles of obedience, and struggles of obedience are often related to struggles of faith.

Don't assume the best way to overcome your doubt is to have it answered on an intellectual level. If you're open to it, pray. Ask God to help you. Do your best to live in response to the light he has already given you, and he will show you the next step.

ALL DOUBTS ARE BASED ON SOME ALTERNATIVE FAITH.

See your doubts in context.

Sometimes we get so bogged down because of one question that hasn't been answered that we forget about all the other questions that *have* been answered. The right inquiry is not, "Do I have all my questions answered?" You never will. The better question is: "Do I know *enough* to trust God?"

Where have you seen God already at work in your life? What evidence do you already see of him? See your doubts in context, and then make an informed decision based on everything you see.

[33] Ibid., Isaiah 57:15.

A Final Note

One night during my college years I was up late in the dorm's computer lab, wrestling with doubts about my faith as a result of some science and philosophy courses I was taking. I remember vividly what it felt like to struggle with doubt. It is quite an unnerving experience—like when you get dizzy and the floor starts shifting under your feet, or when you watch *The Sixth Sense* for the first time, or when something compels you to wonder suddenly if someone you've always trusted is actually untrustworthy. If you're struggling with doubt, you know what a painful, jarring experience it can be.

In the throes of it, I had a breakthrough and wrote out the following in my journal. I go back to this passage again and again. I share it in the hope that it might help you:

> Why does anything exist at all? This is the great mystery, says Wittgenstein. Why is there something rather than nothing? Where did the universe come from? What is the Beginning which stands behind all other beginnings, the Reality which gives ground to all other realities? At every level, at every angle, we find ourselves confronted with the necessity of what Barth calls "the Wholly Other." The very fact that we are here to ponder the question is already the greatest miracle, the greatest improbability. Unless theism is presupposed, all thought and action becomes absurd—without purpose and suspended over nothingness. Unless the infinite exists, the finite would never have come to be. What sense does the painting make unless there is paper on which it is drawn? God is the great truth; we are his dream.

Or, as our friend Albert Einstein put it: "The child knows someone must have written those books."[34]

[34] Isaacson, 384.

[35] Photo Credit: Jonathan Borba | Unsplash