

## Session 5: Common Questions & Criticisms of Christianity

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Recommended text: Doug Powell, *Holman QuickSource Guide to Christian Apologetics*, 2006.

WITH ANSWERS

### I. Introduction

- A. Series overview
- B. Questions and doubts (Matt 11:1-6; Jn 20:24-29; Jude 1:22)
- C. Some remaining critical questions
  - 1. What about science (and evolution)?
  - 2. What about the existence of evil?
  - 3. Miscellaneous questions

### II. What about Science?

- A. Prominent images of science and religion (including Christianity)
  - 1. They necessarily \_\_\_\_\_ **CONFLICT**.
    - a. E.g. Galileo
    - b. E.g. Charles Darwin
    - c. E.g. Richard Dawkins: “When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion, it is called religion” (*The God Delusion*).
  - 2. They are totally \_\_\_\_\_ **SEPARATE** (so no conflict is possible).
  - 3. Neither view is acceptable for a biblical Christian.
    - a. There is some overlap between science and Christianity—so conflict is possible.
    - b. But there is a “positive” relationship between science and biblical Christianity.
- B. Important considerations about science.
  - 1. “Science” is sometimes a *philosophy* (of Naturalism) dressed up in “science” clothes.
    - a. “Science” describes and attempts to explain what is empirically accessible.
    - b. “Scientism” is a *philosophy* that fuses the philosophy of Naturalism with the methods of science.
      - (1) Only physical phenomena and causes are legitimate.
      - (2) Even appeals to “intelligence” to explain the cosmos or the origin of life must be rejected.
    - c. Christianity will necessarily conflict with “scientism,” but not with “science.”
    - d. We need a “hat detector” to determine when someone is speaking as a “scientist” or as a “philosopher” of scientism.

**Richard Dawkins:** “Any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution. Creative intelligences, being evolved, necessarily arrive late in the universe, and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it. God ... is a delusion;...” (*The God Delusion* [Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 2006], 31).

**Jacques Monod:** “Man knows at last that he is alone in the universe’s unfeeling immensity, out of which he emerged only by chance” (*Chance and Necessity*, 1972, 180).

**Stephen Hawking:** “... quantum theory predicts the multiverse—the idea that ours is just one of many universes that appeared spontaneously out of nothing, each with different laws of nature” (emphasis added; Hawking is speaking of his position in his book, *The Grand Design*, 2010).

- 2. Science is not totally objective, purely empirical, or entirely rational.
  - a. Philosophers of science have effectively argued this (e.g. Thomas Kuhn, Karl Popper, Paul Feyerabend).
    - (1) Science incorporates a variety of meta-physical or philosophical assumptions.

- (2) Scientists are often influenced by strong commitments.
- b. Various sciences differ in the extent to which they are empirical and repeatable.
  - (1) Some sciences use repeatable experiments on obviously empirical realities.
  - (2) Some sciences are “not-so-repeatable” and “not-so-empirical” (e.g. detection of dark matter, gamma rays, “strings” in string theory, the evolution from one specie to another).
  - (3) Some sciences deal with apparently one-time events (e.g. historical events, theories about the origin of the cosmos [e.g. Big Bang] and the origin of life [spontaneous generation or abiogenesis—life arising from non-living matter]).
- c. Yet, any appeal to “intelligent design” is categorically excluded from science, because it is presumably not empirically testable and repeatable. (Note the 2005 court decision in Dover, PA case against Intelligent Design in the public school science classroom).

**Judge Jones** (*Kitzmiller vs. Dover Area School Board*): “While supernatural explanations may be important and have merit, they are not part of science. This self-imposed convention of science, which limits inquiry to testable, natural explanations about the natural world, is referred to by philosophers as “methodological naturalism” and is sometimes known as the scientific method. Methodological naturalism is a “ground rule” of science today which requires scientists to seek explanations in the world around us based upon what we can observe, test, replicate, and verify” (John Jones, *Kitzmiller et al. v. Dover Area School District*, Case No. 04cv2688, document 342, filed 12/20/2005; Memorandum Opinion, p. 65). (Emphasis added.)

C. The positive \_\_\_\_\_ **HISTORICAL** relationship between science and Christianity: The pioneers of early modern science were strong creationists and many were devoted Christians.

- 1. Galileo (1564-1642)
- 2. Isaac Newton (1642-1727)
- 3. Robert Boyle (1635-1703)
- 4. Michael Faraday (1791-1867)

D. The positive \_\_\_\_\_ **PHILOSOPHICAL** relationship between science and Christianity.

- 1. Biblical creationism explains the presuppositions necessary for science that science itself cannot justify.
  - a. Nature is \_\_\_\_\_ **REAL**.
  - b. Nature is \_\_\_\_\_ **RATIONAL** (orderly; uniform).
  - c. The human \_\_\_\_\_ **MIND** is rational and can understand nature (i.e., they are adequately correlated).
  - d. The physical senses are sufficiently \_\_\_\_\_ **RELIABLE**.

B. Biblical creationism supplies a strong \_\_\_\_\_ **MOTIVATION** for doing science.

- 1. Nature is “good” and worthy of study (Gen 1:31).
- 2. Nature must be studied empirically (because God did not have to create it in any particular way).
- 3. Humans have the capacity and responsibility for supervising nature (Gen. 1:26,28 “let them rule” and “subdue” the earth).
- 4. “Fallen” humanity and loving one’s neighbor prompts care and compassion through science and other avenues.

### III. What about Evolution?

A. Overview of positions

- 1. **Naturalistic (Non-Theistic) Evolution: Darwinian Evolution**
  - a. All forms of life on earth are the result of chance mutations and natural selection from earliest life without any purpose or intelligence guiding the process.
  - b. Key advocates:
    - (1) Charles Darwin (*Origin of Species*, 1859; *The Descent of Man*, 1871).

- (2) Richard Dawkins (*The Selfish Gene*, 1976; *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design*, 1986); *Climbing Mount Improbable*, 1996.

## 2. Theistic Evolution

- God has continually “directed” the cosmological and biological process of evolution.
- Some versions see “God” as little more than an impersonal power or force.
- Some view God as a personal creative agent.
- Advocates: Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* [New York: Free Press, 2006] and Denis Lamoureaux, *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock], 2009.)

## 3. Deistic Evolution

- God creates the universe with the built-in capacity to evolve cosmologically and biologically.
- The universe had “functional integrity” to evolve without additional and distinct creative acts by God (e.g. Howard Van Til, *The Fourth Day: What the Bible and the Heavens are Telling Us about the Creation*).

## 4. Periodic Creationism

God periodically creates at distinct times.

- Young Earth Creationism (YEC): The universe is 6,000-10,000 years old. (Advocates: Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis)
- Old Earth Creationism (OEC): The universe may be as old as most cosmologists say—about 14.7 billion years. (Advocates: Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy* [1994])
- Both YEC and OEC hold that God performed distinct actions to create e.g. the heavenly bodies, earth’s materials, and various kinds of life.

## B. Problems with Darwinian Evolution (Naturalistic Macro-Evolution)

### 1. The EVIDENCE (and fossil) problem (see Phillip Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* and Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution*).

- Darwin acknowledged the fossil problem.

“Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely graduated organic chain; and this, perhaps, is the most obvious and gravest objection which can be urged against my theory. The explanation lies, as I believe, in the extreme imperfection of the geological record” (Darwin, *Origin of Species*, in chap 6, “On the Imperfection of the Geological Record”).

- The paradigm problem: The debate among naturalistic evolutionists between *gradualism* and *punctuated equilibrium*.
  - Richard Dawkins: Evolution must be gradual (see *Climbing Mount Improbable*).
  - Stephen Gould: Evolution cannot be gradual and the fossil record shows this. (>> “punctuated equilibrium”)
- Problems and limitations with classic evolutionist examples (e.g. Peppered moths, Darwin’s finches, Haeckel’s drawings, four-winged fruit flies). (See Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution*.)

### 2. The TIME problem and the Cambrian Explosion

- 19<sup>th</sup> century: earth about 100my—not nearly enough time for Darwinian evolution.
- Big Bang in cosmology (universe is 14byo; earth 4.5byo) gives much more time.
- But the “Big Bang” in geology (the “Cambrian Explosion”) occurred within about 10my, and almost all major phyla appear in the fossil record. (See the forthcoming book by Stephen Meyer, *Darwin’s Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design*, 2013.)
- If 100my was not nearly enough time, the Cambrian era allows only 1/10 of that time.

### 3. The MECHANISM problem

- Charles Darwin (gradualism) vs. Michael Behe (irreducible complexity)

**Darwin:** “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down” (*Origin of Species*).

**Behe:** “An irreducibly complex biological system, if there is such a thing would be a powerful challenge to Darwinian evolution. Since natural selection can only choose systems that are already working, then

if a biological system cannot be produced gradually, it would have to arise as an integrated unit, in one fell swoop, for natural selection to have anything to act on” (*Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, p. 39).

- b. Behe: Even the “simplest” organisms are incredibly complex units with many interdependent parts (e.g. a mousetrap; the bacterial flagellum).
- c. See Dean Kenyon, *Of Pandas and People*.
  - (1) Kenyon was once a leading evolutionist and co-author of *Biochemical Predestination* (1969), a widely used naturalistic evolutionary textbook.
  - (2) He has since rejected his view, claiming that the problems are insurmountable for “chemical evolution” according to which the chemical materials are somehow “self-organizing.”

#### 4. The ORIGIN OF LIFE problem

- a. Darwinism does not address or explain the origin of life. Life must already exist for natural selection to have anything to act on.
- b. See Stephen Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperOne, 2009) and William Dembski, *Intelligent Design*.
- c. William Dembski: living organisms possess “complex specified information” (CSI)—vast amounts of “information” to specify sequences for amino acids to form proteins. But such information is in the DNA, which does not exist until after the existence of the organism. So how did the living organism arise to begin with? Where did this information come from?
- d. Life requires: (See notes from session 2, “Questions about God,” section III.)
  - (1) The right materials (e.g. 20 amino acids that are only “left-handed”)
  - (2) The right sequencing of the materials.
  - (3) Information (and a communication system) to direct the processes.
- e. Purely naturalistic processes cannot generate information content, so some “intelligence” is necessary to account for the origin of life itself.

### IV. The Problem(s) of Evil

#### A. The reality of evil

- 1. Forms of evil
  - a. Natural
  - b. Moral
  - c. Mixed
- 2. Evil is not only a problem for Christianity but a problem for Atheism as well.
  - a. How can Atheism (Naturalism) account for “evil” to begin with?
  - b. Pain and suffering might occur, but why is anything “evil”?
  - c. If evil objectively exists, then this is actually an argument in favor of God’s existence.

“The problem of evil is known as ‘the rock of atheism’” (Loftus, *Why I Became an Atheist*, 228).

VS.

“If evil does exist, such a fact would point us in the direction of God’s existence ....” (Paul Copan, *That’s Just Your Interpretation*, 91). “Rightly understood, evil surprisingly point us *to* a good God rather than away from him, to a confidence that goodness *must* exist, to hope rather than despair” (Copan, *Loving Wisdom*, 127).

- 3. Buddhism and Suffering: The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism
  - a. All is dukka (suffering).
  - b. Suffering is caused by desire.
  - c. Cease desire in order to cease suffering.
  - d. Following the 8-fold path to cease desire.
- 4. Contrast Buddhism approach to suffering to that of the Christian God.

#### B. The classic problem of evil for Christianity: It is contradictory or highly improbable that the Christian God exists in light of evil.

- 1. Evil exists.
- 2. If God were all-good (omnibenevolent), He would want to eliminate evil.

3. If God were all-knowing (omniscient), He would know how to eliminate evil.
4. If God were all-powerful (omnipotent), He would be able to eliminate evil.
5. Since evil exists, God must either not exist at all or not be all-good, all-knowing, or all-powerful.

### C. Types of apologetic responses (“theodicy” = *theos*, God + *dikaiois*, justice).

“The time to discuss the problem of evil is when someone is not staring it in the face” (R. Knopp).

1. **Free Will Theodicy.**
  - a. God granted free will to humanity.
  - b. God’s omnipotence does NOT mean that God can literally do *absolutely anything*.
    - (1) Even God cannot create a rock so big that He cannot lift it.
    - (2) Even God cannot create a round square.
    - (3) God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18).
    - (4) God cannot look on wickedness with favor (Hab 1:13).
    - (5) God cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13).
  - c. Even God could not create humans with free will and guarantee that they would not inevitably sin.
  - d. When human sin occurred, it adversely affected all of the following:
    - (1) Our relationship with GOD (spiritual death).
    - (2) Our relationship with SELF.
    - (3) Our relationships with OTHERS.
    - (4) Our relationship with NATURE (including physical death).
  - e. This helps explain much of “moral evil” and “natural evil.”
2. **Natural Law Theodicy.**
  - a. There is a natural order in the universe.
  - b. This is necessary for moral good and for moral evil.
  - c. Both moral good and evil require “accountability”; and accountability requires that we be able to predict consequences and make rational decisions based on an orderly context.
  - d. Such natural order invariably leads to suffering and death (e.g. walking off a cliff).
3. **Soul-Making Theodicy.**
  - a. The virtues take time to develop (e.g. reliance on God; patience; forgiveness).
  - b. Humanity “learns” righteousness (Isa 26:9-11; Lk 13:4-5).
  - c. Humanity experiences finiteness with pain and evil.

“Pain plants the flag of truth within a rebel fortress” (C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 120).

4. These considerations are valuable but not sufficient in themselves.

### D. Additional theological considerations

“Philosophical responses to evil must be placed within the broader theological framework of God’s revelation and work in Jesus Christ” (Paul Copan, *That’s Just Your Interpretation*, 92).

1. Sin is real and has consequences.
  - a. God’s righteousness demands righteousness.
  - b. Sin necessarily separates from God.
  - c. Spiritual and physical death are consequences of sin.
2. God *has acted* to eliminate sin and evil!
  - a. God’s redemptive work throughout human history.
  - b. God’s incarnation and crucifixion.
    - (1) Based on Mt 26:9 (“if it be possible, let this cup pass from me”), it was apparently not possible for humanity to be redeemed without the death of Jesus.
    - (2) An all-loving and righteous God still could not forgive without the presence of suffering—even the death of His own Son.
  - c. God gives forgiveness for moral evil.
  - d. God gives grace to overcome temptation and evil.

“... more important than a logical answer to the problem of evil theoretically is a personal answer to the problem of evil practically. More important than an apologist is a Savior” (Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 143).

3. Any suffering must be understood in the context of an eternal, righteous, and merciful judgment.
  - a. Implications of “natural law”: An orderly universe cannot have a God “jumping in” every time someone is e.g. about to get killed or die of cancer.
  - b. E.g. Rom 8:18 “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”
4. Satan is real and a “cosmic struggle” with God has existed since *before* the creation of this physical universe.
  - a. **Is 14:12-15** (cf. Lk 10:18; Rev 12:4): “How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! 13 But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’” (NASV)
  - b. **Lk 13:16**; Mt 17:14-21 Satan & the demons inflict disease.
  - c. **2 Pet 2:4** “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.”
  - d. **Jude 6** “And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”
  - e. **Eph 6:12** “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.”
  - f. **1 Jn 3:8** “<sup>8</sup> the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”
  - g. **Mt 25:41** “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.’”
5. R. Knopp: I personally believe that God created our universe as He did (with human free will and eventual evil and suffering) *for good reasons* and that these reasons are connected to His ultimate resolution to this “cosmic struggle” with Satan.

## Conclusion

- A. Our topics
- B. Our strategies
  1. **Negative apologetics** (responded to specific criticisms and showing that Christianity is NOT FALSE).
  2. **Positive apologetics** (offered reasons for rationally believing that Christianity is TRUE).
  3. **Neutralizing apologetics** (given reasons why other worldviews or ways of life are highly problematic and inadequate).
- C. Our objectives
  1. To **EXHILARATE** the faith of Christians.
  2. To **INSTIGATE** reflection by non-Christians (and Christians).
  3. To **FACILITATE** being a more effective witness
    - a. 1 Pet 3:15-16 “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer [*apologia*] to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” (NIV).
    - b. Jn 9:25-30 “... One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.”
- D. Our personal plans
  1. Be personal and love.

2. Be sensitive and care.
3. Be inquisitive and listen.
4. Be courageous and share (Acts 4:13-20; James 4:13-15; I John 3:9-10).