

TCC Sunday 2nd November 2014 – #1 Has science disproved God? – 7 of the best series

Title: “#1 – Has science disproved God”

Purpose: To appreciate better the role of science, that it ...

INTRODUCTION

Ted Talks – Hed Talks

Q. How many people this morning have come across the TED talks?

And the 3 letters stand for: TECHNOLOGY – ENTERTAINMENT – DESIGN.

TED's mission statement begins:

“We believe passionately in the power of ideas to change attitudes, lives and ultimately, the world. So we're building here a clearinghouse that offers free knowledge and inspiration from the world's most inspired thinkers, and also a community of curious souls to engage with ideas and each other.”

And today and through these 7 weeks:

- we too would consider ourselves to be a community of curious souls happy to engage with our community around about us
- we too believe passionately that ideas and knowledge do have the power to change attitudes, lives and make an undeniable mark on the world

Hed Talks

Now for those that don't really know me, my name is Hedley (that's HEDLEY) and so that, I suppose, makes these talks not TED talks but HED talks!!

A bit cheesy, but I could quite help myself.

What's going to happen

I want to take a few moments to just explain how were going to slice and dice things.

And it is worth just saying that this is the first time we have done this sort of thing – so we hope you will bear with us as we feel our way. No doubt as the weeks go by we'll tweak things a bit as we get feedback.

- Now for a while I will speak to the subject in hand: “Has science disproved God?”
- Then we will break for refreshments (this is kind of the carrot that will keep you going – so if it does at any point get a bit heavy going – well just think of the carrot -

(We have at home a very old tape cassette recording of two of our children playing and just as the

youngest one is about to burst into tears – you hear the older one pipes up saying “the baby wants to dress up – don’t worry you’ve got a pear coming”!!!)

So if you’re feeling like bursting into tears – you’ve got a pear coming.

- After that we have a talk back time – and hopefully you will be thinking of questions as we go through.

There is a box on the side where you can put your questions – you don’t have to put your name on them.

If the questions are on topic we’ll do our best to answer them. If they are completely off topic (and that is fine) we will try and give a brief answer (particularly if we are going to specifically be addressing them in other weeks).

Some preliminaries

Now before we get a bit more stuck into this question of whether science has disproved and effectively killed off God, what I want to do is **to put in place A FEW PRELIMINARIES** that may be helpful to us.

And these preliminaries (which are not my own, they’re from the author Michael Ots) will serve really for **ALL OF THE QUESTIONS** that we are going to be covered in this series “**7 OF THE BEST**”.

There are 4 of them and they are these:

- **PRELIMINARY #1** – When it comes to getting ANSWERS to our QUESTIONS, we should understand the difference between having EXHAUSTIVE ANSWERS and having SUFFICIENT ANSWERS.

We are rarely able to give exhaustive answers (unless its questions like what does 2+2 add up to) but we can give sufficient answers – answers which make having faith REASONABLE and not being simply a leap into the dark.

- **PRELIMINARY #2** – Understand that there is a difference between PROVING something and showing something to be REASONABLE OR RATIONAL.

Certain things in Mathematics or in the area of logic you can prove and happily say QED (Quod Erat Demonstrandum) which essentially acts as the sign and seal that what was set out to be proved has in fact been demonstrated.

That said, there are many other areas of life – in fact that vast majority – that you cannot prove – so for example: you cannot prove that your wife/husband, your girlfriend etc. loves you. But of course, the fact that you cannot prove it, does not render the reality of the matter being unreasonable.

- **PRELIMINARY #3** – Be aware that we are all, yes all of us, BIASED.

Nobel Prize winner – **Daniel Kahneman** – wrote a book called: “Thinking, fast and slow”. And he makes the observation that we have a couple of modes of thinking – one is fast the other somewhat slower.

The first type is “fast, instinctive and emotional” – the second type is “slower, more deliberative and more logical.”

And one basic problem is that we tend to not differentiate these types of thinking – and so we may well make our decisions about science, about faith based upon our faster, more instinctive and gut feeling type of thought because we know that our slower type of thinking is harder and requires more information to do.

Kahneman goes on to give 3 others biases that tend to affect us:

1) He says we suffer from **an AVAILABILITY BIAS** – we tend to ask questions about the availability of data. So, for example, when people were asked whether they thought doctors or politicians would be more likely to enter into extramarital affairs, the overwhelming majority said **POLITICIANS**.

The statistical reality of things was that actually it made very little difference. Q. So what was it that skewed people to be biased towards **POLITICIANS**? Well simply the fact that the amount of data, news stories about **UNFAITHFUL** and **POLITICIANS** that cheated on their spouses – was much more readily available.

2) **A second bias** was the **EXPERIENCE BIAS** – here our 1st experiences weigh very heavily on things and so if your early experience of church, or of Christians was very positive, then you will be favourably biased towards Christianity and the church – and conversely if your first experience of a Christian was of some unpleasant do-gooding hypocritical nut-job – then you will be strongly biased in the other direction.

3) **A third bias** that tends to operate with us is that unconsciously **we tend to substitute a hard question for an easy one.**

So we when we come to answer the question we tell people what we **FEEL** about it **RATHER** than telling people what we **THINK** about it.

- **OK, I did say there were 4 preliminaries – here’s the one -#4 – We need to try to FOCUS ON THE MAIN THING**, on that which is truly, at the end of the day, the heart of the matter.

And **for those of us that would self-define as “Christians”** – we would say that the main thing is **CHRIST**.

Someone once said that “if you take **CHRIST** out of **CHRISTIAN** you left with **IAN** and Ian can’t help you!”

Yes – a bit cheesy but you get the point.

So 4 preliminaries:

- there's a difference between **EXHAUSTIVE ANSWERS** and **SUFFICIENT ANSWERS**
- there's a difference between **PROVING something** and **showing something to be REASONABLE or RATIONAL**
- there is a reality that affects all of us, that **we tend to come to things with our BIASES** and so if we are aware of that it will help us to be more open-minded (though not “empty-minded” or gullible)
- last – **focusing on the main thing**, which for people with a Christian Worldview, **is CHRIST**, something that we'll try not to completely lose sight of

The FIRST VOICE OF GOD

Taking my cue from the last of the preliminaries – let me read introduce you to the FIRST OF THE VOICES OF GOD – it comes in one of the Psalms – Psalm 19 and reads:

“The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
2 Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
3 There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
4 Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

The COSMOS, this UNIVERSE in which we live, SPEAKS and it SPEAKS, says the Bible, of GOD and of His Glory.

One on other Psalm we read something which sounds very disparaging:

Psalm 14 Verse 1 “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”

It is not saying that anyone who says “There is no God” is unintelligent – it is merely saying that this person is lacking in wisdom.

In the NT we read:

“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.
²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools..”

Well this is where the Bible begins – it begins with the statement that God exists and that He is not silent nor invisible.

Birth Certificate

So let's press on into our subject.

I was rummaging around in my filing cabinet and I came across a whole wad of certificates – most of which are not really worth the paper they are written on, to be honest:

- table tennis awards
- certificates in manual handling etc.

But that said, **a few of the certificates** were, in fact, **properly significant**:

- **FIRSTLY** – there was my **birth certificate**
- **AND THEN SECONDLY** – my **marriage certificate**

Q. Which one is the most important?

Well now let me think: “eeny, meeny, miny... I think I’ll go for the first one” – no birth – well no marriage!

Now having said that, there is **one more certificate that is also very significant** – in fact I would wager that none of you would be able to fish it out if you to head off home to look it out:

- it is this one – yes – the **DEATH CERTIFICATE**

One more nail in God's coffin?

And I don't know if you are particularly aware of this BUT it is becoming a “**popularly held impression**” that each new scientific advance is **another NAIL IN GOD'S COFFIN**.

The impression is fuelled to quite an extent by a number of pretty influential and particularly vocal scientific thinkers.

So, for example, **Oxford Chemistry Professor - Peter Atkins**

(He was the **first Senior Member of the Oxford University Secular Society** and is an **Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society**.) he writes:

“Humanity should accept that **science has eliminated the justification for believing in cosmic purpose, and that any survival of purpose is inspired only by sentiment.**”

A natural starting point

So it does seem that we have a **very natural starting point** – and hence this is the **FIRST of 7 QUESTIONS**, that we here at **The Community Church** will be looking at over the following month and a half.

The question: “**Q. Has science disproved God?**” – and we could rephrase it in many similar ways:

- “**Q. Has science buried God?**”
- “**Q. Has science relegated God into the category of wishful thinking and sentiment?**”

Slew of recent book over past decade

There has been quite a slew of popular books that have really made quite a splash in the last decade – titles you may well have seen in the window of Waterstones or the like:

- **“God is not great”** by Christopher Hitchens
- **“The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason”** by Sam Harris
- **“Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon”** by Daniel C Dennett
- **“God: The Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist”** by Victor Stenger
- and perhaps one of the best known – **“The God Delusion”** by Richard Dawkins

New Scientist

And we shouldn't think that this momentum is only in the book arena – it is being well-aired and given much space – even pride of place in what you might think would be purely scientific magazine publications.

Just May of this year – this was The New Scientist that hit the magazine racks:

WORLD WITHOUT GOD – what if everyone stopped believing tomorrow?

*****SHOW MAGAZINE *****Notice too: the picture shown on the front cover it portrays a carefully caricatured image of what the Christian church is:

- an **ancient Bakelite “tumbler” light switch**
- an **old-style embossed dymo tape** reading: ***“Could the last person to leave the church please turn out the lights”***
- and just for good measure **an old sepia background colour** just to round off the general effect

The message is pretty clear. **BUT to me looking on:**

- Q. I have to wonder what place a patently biased article has to do with good science?

Richard Dawkins - The God Delusion

Richard Dawkins - the **University of Oxford's Professor for Public Understanding of Science** from 1995 until 2008 – wrote a book in 2006 called **“The God Delusion”**

He dedicates the book to **Douglas Adams** – a staunch Atheist (the writer of The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy) and he says:

(Richard Dawkins) “Isn't it enough to see that a garden is beautiful
without having to believe that there are fairies at the bottom of it?”

Clearly very few of us believe in fairies – yet most of us would consider the universe very incredible in its immensity, in its beauty, in the wonder of its construction and complexity etc. etc.

John Lennox (Oxford Professor of Mathematics and in the Philosophy of Science) comments:

“The fact that you can think about fairies and be enchanted or terrified by them does not mean that they exist. The scientists of whom we are speaking, therefore, are (often, but not always, as we have seen) happy to let people go on thinking about God and religion if they want to, as long as they do not claim that God has any objective existence, or that religious belief constitutes knowledge.”

In other words, science and religion can peacefully co-exist as long as religion does not invade the realm of science.

For, apparently, only science can tell us what is objectively true; apparently only science can deliver knowledge.

The bottom line is: “Science deals with reality, Religion does not.”

False alternatives

Now, to be honest, Dawkins opening dedication, does not really require very much serious thought because when you take a moment to think it through you realise that left as stated all you have is **a proposition of false alternatives** – to effectively say it’s FAIRIES or nothing – as though nothing else could exist in this garden which has fairies at the bottom.

Fairies at the bottom may well be a delusion, but what about:

- the reasonable expectation of finding **A GARDENER in this garden**
- and even more reasonably **AN OWNER to whom the garden belongs**

Bertrand Russell

Bertrand Russell, the noted philosopher, described himself as an agnostic -> "speaking to a purely philosophical audience", but as an atheist -> "speaking popularly", on the basis that he could not disprove the Christian God.

Speaking of religion and science said:

“Whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods; and **what science cannot discover, mankind cannot know.**”

But if we now ask HOW does Russell has come to know what he has just asserted – given that it is *not* a scientific statement as science did not discover it – then we realise that this is in the category of something that “mankind cannot know”.

The statement is one that is “self-refuting” rather like saying something like:

- “all statements are false”
- **OR** “the golden rule is that there are no golden rules”

I rather like the phrase that "**Hank Hanegraaff** – Christian apologist uses – he calls these sorts of statements: "**Self-referentially incoherent**"

So it is very important that we get our definitions properly lined up.

DEFINITIONS

Tryon Edwards (the American theologian) had this to say about **DEFINITIONS**:

"Most controversies would soon be ended, if those engaged in them **would first accurately define their terms, and then adhere to their definitions.**"

And I guess most of us would agree that to talk about something successfully does require that various definitions and terms are explained.

Science

If you went to Wikipedia – under the heading "Scientific Method" – It opens like this:

The **scientific method** is a body of techniques for investigating phenomena, acquiring new knowledge, or correcting and integrating previous knowledge.

To be termed scientific, a method of inquiry must be based on empirical and measurable evidence subject to specific principles of reasoning.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the scientific method as:

"a method or procedure that has characterized natural science since the 17th century, consisting in systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses."

Ok well that's science and I guess we are familiar with that.

Let me introduce another pair of closely related terms that you may *not* be so familiar with – they are:

- **SCIENTISM** (as opposed to **Science**)
- and **SCIENTISTIC** (as opposed to **Scientific**):

Scientism

Philosopher Tom Sorell from his book "***Scientism: Philosophy and the Infatuation with Science***" offers a more precise definition:

"**Scientism** is a matter of putting too high a value on natural science in comparison with other branches of learning or culture."

Massachusetts Institute of Technology physicist Ian Hutchinson offers a good example of a rather typical

SCIENTIFIC STATEMENT:

“Science, modelled on the natural sciences, is the ***ONLY SOURCE OF REAL KNOWLEDGE***.”

William Lane Craig clip

I want to play to you a short clip, 3 and a half minute clip by the **philosopher** and **apologist**–
William Lane Craig (author of the book “**Reasonable Faith**”):

***PLAY VIDEO CLIP ***

To use the words of the late **Stephen Jay Gould** (September 10, 1941 – May 20, 2002) American **paleontologist**, **evolutionary biologist** and **historian of science**:

“To say it for all my colleagues and for the umpteenth millionth time (from college bull sessions to learned treatises): science simply cannot (by its legitimate methods) adjudicate the issue of God's possible superintendence of nature. We neither affirm nor deny it; we simply can't comment on it as scientists.”

NOMA - Non-overlapping magisteria

It was Gould who came up with the idea of “NOMA” – “**Non-overlapping magisteria**”: the principle whereby, as he explains it:

"The magisterium of [science](#) covers the [empirical](#) realm: what the Universe is made of (fact) and why does it work in this way (theory).

The magisterium of religion extends over questions of [ultimate meaning](#) and moral value.

These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry (consider, for example, the magisterium of art and the meaning of beauty)."

January 2005 – 2 extraordinary events

In January 2005, two remarkable events occurred.

THE FIRST was that Oxford atheist and Darwinian scientist, **Richard Dawkins**, was publicly asked “**Q. What he believed to be true but could not prove?**”

This was an interesting question because he is on record as saying:

“Next time that somebody tells you that something is true, why not say to them: “What kind of evidence is there for that?” And if they can't give you a good answer, I hope you'll think very carefully before you believe a word they say.”

But now he concedes that:

"I believe, but I cannot prove, that all life, all intelligence, all creativity and all design anywhere in the universe is the direct or indirect product of Darwinian natural selection."

He continued, "Design cannot precede evolution and therefore cannot underlie the universe."

In other words, he admits that much of what he believes, including his fundamental assumptions about the universe, are a **blind leap of faith**, unsupported by evidence.

THE SECOND event was that the internationally respected "old-man" of philosophical atheism, Professor Anthony Flew, who died in 2010 at the age of 87, publicly announced that **he has abandoned his atheism, and had done so on the basis of scientific arguments, which now persuade him that there is a God.**

I want to play you a brief clip where he explains his basic reasoning for the life-change.

Let me just explain 2 terms that come up:

- "integrated complexity" – this is simply where **something inorganic OR something living** has an **underlying high degree of complexity BUT** at the very same time **all that complexity MESHES COHERENTLY and SEEMLESSLY TOGETHER.**
- a fortiori – Latin – lit. "from stronger" and it is **a line of argument that reasons from the lesser to the greater** so for e.g. An adult might say: "If my two year old can lift it then I'm pretty sure that I can!"

***SHOW VIDEO CLIP – Anthony Flew *** (2 mins)

THE INCREDIBLE FINE TUNING OF THE UNIVERSE

Q. So what was it that really took hold of Anthony Flew and has done so for many others?

Well it is this aspect of **THE INCREDIBLE FINE TUNING OF THE UNIVERSE** that must exist in order for us human beings to exist.

Stephen Hawking suggested (in his book "A Brief History of Time") that it is like a hoard of monkeys hammering away on typewriters and by pure chance eventually producing one of Shakespeare's sonnets.

It is estimated that there are some 50 fundamental numbers or physical constants present at the moment of the Big Bang that must be precisely fine-tuned in the way they were for human life to become possible.

Hawking wrote: "*It seems clear that there are relatively few ranges of values for the (fundamental) numbers that would allow the development of any form of intelligent life. Most sets of values would give rise to universes that, although they might be very beautiful, would contain no one able to wonder at their beauty.*" (aBHoT p.125)

Physicist Paul Davies calculated:

- **In order for planets to exist**, the relevant initial conditions had to be fine-tuned to a precision of one part in 10 followed by a thousand billion billion zeroes at least.
- **For electromagnetism**, he estimated a change of only one part in 10 to the power of 40 would have spelled disaster for stars, like our sun, thereby precluding the existence of planets.
- **Gravitational force** must be what it is, for planets to have stable orbits around the sun.

Otherwise if they had a **greater force** they would fall into the sun and burn up
or **if weaker**, they would escape from their orbit into a very cold, outer darkness.

It is estimated that a change in gravity by only one part in 10 to the power of 100 would have prevented a life permitting universe.

- **If the electric charge on an electron** were only slightly different, stars would be unable to burn hydrogen and helium and produce the chemical elements such as carbon and oxygen that make up our bodies.

Similarly, the orbit of electrons in atoms would not be stable, so matter as we know it would not exist.

Stephen Hawking wrote, *“If the rate of expansion one second after the big bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand million million, the universe would have re-collapsed before it ever reached its present size.”* (aBHoT p.122)

Well let me conclude and simply wrap up with a question – that you can ponder – when you head out of here:

CONCLUSION

Q. What term or label would best fit yourself?

- Would you say you were definitely **AN ATHEIST**?

Someone who believes it to be a fact that God or gods do not exist.

- Would you say you were **AN AGNOSTIC**?

Someone who is sitting on the fence – not really sure one way or the other.

- Perhaps, as a third choice you might term yourself more as **AN APATHEIST**?

Someone who is **altogether APATHETIC and UNCONCERNED about the issue of whether there is a God or whether there is not a God.**

- Perhaps, like the late Anthony Flew you are **A THEIST**.

Someone who believes that there is an **ULTIMATE REALITY – GOD** behind the universe.

- Perhaps you would go one step further and say that you are a particular flavour of theist – believing not just in a general concept – but that you are **A GOSPEL CHRISTIAN**.

You accept the God of the Bible and you accept that Jesus is the Son of God who came to die for your sins.

Well perhaps we should do as Plato's teacher Socrates said:

to simply - "Follow the evidence, wherever it leads."