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Scientific Inquiry and Faith | Ted Davis & Michael Ruse

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The Veritas Forum

This program was recorded at a Veritas Forum event on University of Minnesota in 2017. The original title was "Scientific Inquiry and Faith" and featured Ted Davis, Historian of Science and Religion, and Michael Ruse, Professor and Director of the History and Philosophy of Science Program. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate, review, and subscribe. And, if you're interested in more content from Veritas, check out our Beyond the Forum podcast. Visit veritas.org to learn more about the mission of the Veritas Forum and find more resources to explore the ideas that shape our lives.

Transcript

Hi, this is Carly Regal, the Assistant Producer of Beyond the Forum, a podcast from the Veritas Forum and PRX. The Forum we are about to listen to features a speaker from Beyond the Forum's second season exploring the intersection between science and God. We interviewed Dr. Ted Davis, one of the presenters you're about to listen to, for episode five of our second season.

And we talked with him about the history of science and religion, specifically between Christianity and Enlightenment-era science. You can listen to our interview with Ted for Beyond the Forum wherever you listen to podcast. And you can learn more about the ideas that shape our lives by visiting our website at veritas.org. Thanks for listening and enjoy the Forum.

This is the Veritas Forum podcast, a place for generous dialogue about the ideas that shape our lives. And as a historian, one of the things I do look at sometimes and write about what's in a while is the ways in which science can function as religion, and for some people it does. This is your host Carly Regal.

Today I'm sharing with you a conversation at a Veritas Forum event at the University of Minnesota in January 2017. You'll hear from Dr. Ted Davis of Masai University and Dr. Michael Ruse of Florida State University. They'll discuss the interaction of science and religion from their perspectives as historians of science.

You can learn more about the Veritaas Forum and events like these by visiting veritos.org. I hope you enjoy their conversation. What has been your own journey regarding science and religion? And how have your own views of a relationship between science and faith in shape over time? Ted, would you feel like starting for us? Sure. Okay.

That's right, sorry. Before I actually answer the question, I just want to say how grateful I am that the university has a forum of this kind. You know, this past year has been a tough year in the United States.

And without real conversation happening about a lot of things, and so many people are involved, it seems to me in culture war, in which truth is perhaps one of the first casualties. And so in conversation rather than shouting matches. It's also a nice trick to see that we've got such a big crowd tonight.

Bigger than they had last year, bigger than they go to the next year, bigger than they had in Washington last week. Just a bit less right now, folks. That's a fact.

Is that fake news? So, well, I certainly would not have seen myself doing what I now do, being a person who thinks and writes about the history of science and religion. When I was, before I graduated from college, in fact I had a lot of changes in my life. Some of them before college and some after college, in regards to my career path.

I knew when I went to university as a freshman, I went to a technical university, Drexel, in Philadelphia to study physics. I wanted to be an astrophysicist, and I knew that I wanted to be an astrophysicist, and I knew three things about myself for sure. When I stepped on campus, that was the first thing I knew, I wanted to be an astrophysicist.

And I did get a chance to do some work as an undergraduate at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Charlottesville. So, I got to see astrophysics that might have been the top. Astronomy, research lab in the United States at the time.

And I got to see it from the inside, so it's not like I didn't taste it. But I also knew that I hated the humanities, and that I would never teach. And so, I guess I struck out.

The fact that I'm now a historian of science rather than a lab scientist is part of the story, self-discovery, when I was an undergraduate. I still didn't develop a deep interest in Christianity and science until a few years after, when I was after graduation, I was a high school science teacher. And I started to think about questions of this kind.

I had been a Christian for a long time at that point, but I hadn't thought a great deal about the interface with science. So, it's an interest that developed after I graduated from Drexel. It was only at that point that I thought about it hard and decided I'd want to do something with my life in that way.

There weren't any obvious tracks to take at that point for graduate study. Even in those days, Michael's even a little further down the road than me. And he will know, I think he'll agree with me on this if he doesn't.

I hope he will comment on it. But at the time, in the late '70s, when I went to graduate school, there really wasn't a great deal of interest in academic circles about science and religion. And the route that I decided to take was one of studying the history of science as a way to get into this.

I remember having a conversation with my dissertation advisor at Indiana, who was perhaps the greatest expert on Isaac Newton who's ever lived, Sam Westfall, the great Richard S. Westfall. And he had ironically written his very first book under the title "Science and Religion in 17th Century England." He did not get tenure at Iowa State. And he ended up writing a biography of Newton, a definitive biography of Newton, and teaching at Indiana the history of philosophy of science later.

I've always wondered whether this experience of his may have colored what he told me. When I said to him that I wanted to do my doctoral exams on science and religion, he said, "No one's ever done that." And at the time, that really was an odd thing to do in the history of science. But he said, "We'll do it for you if that's what you want." But I really advise that you do the scientific revolution because then you'll be a known commodity on the job market.

That's how he put it. I did. I took his advice.

I had been studying the scientific revolution anyway, but I did my exams in scientific revolution. And so the committee pulled a fast one on me and all the questions were about science and religion. After I had prepared for a different kind of qualifying exam.

Oh, well. But that's kind of how that went down. But I had a truly life affirming experience as a graduate student at Indiana.

Both to the people on my doctoral committee, Sam Westfall and Ed Grant, Ed is still living. Ed is a leading expert on medieval natural philosophy in the university context. Both of those people were involved in one of the early projects to really redefine the historical study of science and religion.

It was in Madison, Wisconsin in 1981, organized by David Lindbergh and Ronald Numbers. It led to the very well-known book, "God and Nature" with University of California Press. Because both of those people were giving papers at this conference and they knew of my interest in this, they got me an invitation as a graduate student from another school to go to that closed conference.

It wasn't an open conference. It was really life-changing in terms of a career because almost all the scholars I talked to who were the top names in the field, not going to run

down the whole list of names, affirmed the kinds of things I was interested in and said, the kind of projects I wanted to do were important and I should do it. So that was very, very important to me at the time.

And it really launched me into really being an historian of Christianity and science. Well, as you can tell from my accent, I didn't stuff on the side of the poem. I was born in England just at the beginning of the Second World War.

And my father was a conscientious objector. Last in the war, he and my mother joined the Religious Society of Friends, the Quakers. So I was brought up as a Quaker and I went to a Quaker boarding school.

And I went to a university and it sounded almost pat. I started to do philosophy. And my first philosophy class was on deos meditations.

And 15 minutes into the class, I said, this is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. It was on my way for my asleep and I said, this is where I'm at. And here I am, over 50 years later, and I have never, ever regretted that decision.

Now, the pat thing is, I take up philosophy and I lose my faith. It didn't happen like that at all. It was just that by the age of 21, 22, somehow, although I'd grown up as a Christian, and Quakers in England were firmly Christological, we certainly believe that Jesus was the Son of God.

We were not evangelicals. So about the age of 21 or 22, my faith kind of just faded away. It wasn't a saw on the road to Damascus experience.

I suddenly woke up one day and said, Richard Dawkins is right or something like that. And I'm sure, thank God I never did that. But it just went up.

I have to say, back in my trenches, I said, well, you know, there's lots of time to change my mind. I'm sure by the time I'm 70 and getting close to the end, I'll be keen to get back on board. It just never happened that way.

I became a nonbeliever. I don't think I was ever an ardent atheist, more an agnostic. And that's what I find myself today.

Now, why did I get interested in science and religion? Well, I was looking for a PhD topic and I started to work on biology and the philosophers in the audience will know that back then everybody did philosophy of physics. And so I was looking for the ideal dissertation topic, something that not too many people have worked on and most of the literature is really bad. That's the perfect topic.

Philosophy of biology in those days was perfect. Well, then came Thomas Kuhn, who said, if you want to do the philosophy of science, you've got to do the history of science.

And so I read Charles Darwin's on the origin of speech.

And I loved it. Again, I became a committed Darwinian, not because of the religious side, but because I really love Victorian literature. I love Dickens.

I love Trollope. I'm George Eliot. I love Victorian Britain.

And picking up doing Darwin was just perfect. So that's where I was into my thirties. And then, as you heard, talking about me, the creation of the movement blew up in a big way.

And they started to have some success getting creationist ideas introduced into schools. And the American Civil Liberties Union started to fight back. Well, as biologists say, in a way, I was pre-adapted to take on this fight because I was a philosopher.

I'd done quite a bit on Darwin. I knew all the moves that would be made. So I got involved.

I was a witness in Arkansas. And after that, a number of liberal Christians came up to me and said, "You know, Mike, we're interested. Why don't you--" "We're not trying to convert you." That's the last thing we want to do.

We have one or two conferences that we talk about the sorts of things that are obviously interest you. And we like to hear you like tonight. So I started to mix with some people, liberal Lutherans, others like that, United Church of Christ, some of this-- a few of the failings, even a number of Catholics, Jesuits particularly.

And I felt very, very comfortable. I felt incredibly comfortable doing this, talking about science and religion. I realized at that point, as Thomas Henry Huxley said, that I was-- I was-- I-- by nature, I'm a religious person, but in the total absence of theology, in the sense that I'm really interested in religion, I'm really interested in all of these issues.

And I have-- and I have absolutely no interest or desire or whatever to become a Christian or to become anything else of that nature. I particularly want to go to church on Sundays, and I don't feel pretty strongly about that. But had I married a fellow breaker, I probably-- I might well be going to be eating even now.

It's not a question of feeling some sort of really strong objection to do these things. It just never been part of my culture. And this is where I find myself in my sentences.

I'm very, very interested in science and religion. I think that people like me, and like Ted and others, have a real moral obligation to-- not to come out and cross-letise, but to share the fruits of our labor. You know, this is what we do for a living.

Other people pay us to do these sorts of things. And so I think we have an obligation to share them with others. And I think we both do.

And I think we try to do these things. We think these are interesting issues. We think that these are things that people should talk about.

I see a lot of things which I find deeply offensive about American religion. I see oppression. I see all sorts of oppression and hatred going on.

I see it particularly in our society at the moment. Things like dislike and tension. On the other hand, I see when Katrina came along, I know it was the evangelicals in my town who were out there with blankets and with food and these sorts of things.

I did not see the new atheists out there with food trucks. So I do see these things as very much more complex than simple black and white, or what is it, blue and red. These are very complex issues.

But these are, I think, intensely important issues. I think they're very exciting issues. And I, as an educator, want to share them.

That's why, dear God, I've come to Minnesota in January. Well, I could literally be wearing my shorts and walking my dogs in Florida. If you're up there, you'd middle that for you.

Although you've come during a balmy period. So we have some additional questions. And if you would enter in a conversation, that'd be fine.

Otherwise, I'll keep you to about five minutes and direct you that direction. So the next question students would like to ask is how do you define science and religion? Or you might want to use the word "faith." How do you define those things for the purpose of our discussion tonight, at least? Can we start with you, Michael? Well, I'm a philosopher. You know, we all, the first thing we say is, you know, what do you mean by? And then we usually spend half the semester showing that what you mean by it is not what you should do.

I've taught philosophy of religion a long time and many, many times. And I know that one of the biggest issues is defining what you mean by religion, for instance. I mean, it's clear, for instance, that Catholicism is a religion.

I would say it's pretty clear, let us say, that rotary is not. But then where do you put the Scientologists, for instance? So where do you put the Unitarians, where do you put all of these things? So I'm much more inclined to say both the science and the religion, that there are clearly certainly well-defined things which are religion, not necessarily good things or the best, but very clearly religion. I mean, there's no question, for instance, that Roman Catholicism is a religion, various aspects of Buddhism, for instance, or Hinduism, or would say, "Unambiguously, this is a religion.

By what we might mean." Clearly, it's the same with science. There's no question that your particle physics is a science or something like that. But then I'm fully aware that

there are things which sort of push you out and push you out.

I mean, what about Quakerism, for instance? They don't have priests. They don't have a creed. We were talking at suffer time, and I asked Ted what sorts of things he has to believe in order to be a faculty member at his church, at his college, rather.

And he said, "Well, you don't have to be a member of the actual denomination that own and run a college, but you have to accept the apostles' creed." And I said, "Well, then, I, as a Quaker, as a child, would not have been able to work at your college, because I didn't accept, never have accepted virgin birth, for instance. But does that mean I wasn't a Christian? Does that mean I wasn't religion? Religious." So I think that you can certainly say, at some level, religious is to do, if you like, with the metaphysical aspects of life. Why are we here? What are we doing? What is the ultimate meaning, how we fall? Science is to do with how does the world work? How does it all click? But I'm very, very hesitant to say there's one defining aspect here, one defining aspect there, and that, as it were.

It's, you know, if you don't have three sides, you're not a triangle. You might be an awfully nice, you know, a pentagon, but it's no good. You're not a trauma uncle.

I don't think science and religion work that way. It doesn't mean to say that they don't have a meaning in that sense. Ten.

Yeah, it's often a good idea to have a philosopher lead off on a definitional question. Thanks, Michael. You've really helped me out here.

My own views are not a lotte-sable thing. Excellent. My own views are really not too dissimilar from Michael's on this one.

As a historian, I would point out, though, that the term religion is a bit of a modern term, modern in the sense of early modern Europe and on, like 16th, 17th, 17th, and on. The Latin word "religio" from which it derives has a less specific meaning than we would give religion today. Less specific in terms of, you know, he was saying there's different religions, plural word, where "religio" more is an attitude of piety and morality that one would hold.

And religions is more of a modern, even strongly enlightened, term that would say, well, that's a religion, that's a different religion, et cetera. The definition that I would probably use most often would be something similar to that used by someone like Paul Tillic, a major 20th century theologian, that religion is about an ultimate commitment that one makes. And so close to what you were saying about a metaphysical framework for valuing things and such.

So in my view, at least, many people who don't believe in God are religious because they will have ultimate commitments in their lives that do struggle. And I know that Richard

Dawkins doesn't think that religion is a good thing at all, any kind of religion, but I think actually Dawkins is probably religious. Yeah, I would agree with you on that.

I think that Dawkins is a deeply religious man. And there are many critical things, I would say, of Dawkins, but I don't think that is in a critical way. And as a historian, one of the things I do look at sometimes and write about that in a while is the ways in which science can function as religion.

And for some people it does. There's one term that's been used to describe this by Jerome Rabbit's social philosopher is folk science as a broader category in which science can be a kind of folk science. I would say someone like Carl, Carl Sagan, represented this where science can function as a religion, as a source of ultimate values and meaning for people.

So I'm not so, the categories for me are a bit blurred. Since I went back to Latin for religion, let me do the same for science. The English word science does derive from a middle French word that ultimately is rooted in the present participle, the ING word, the present participle of the verb to know in Latin.

The word to know in Latin, sci-ens is the participle of scire, the verb to know. And so originally science, as used in prior to the early modern period, really meant knowledge as opposed to mere opinion. That's what science meant.

And it was a very broad term. And that's why it was possible in the Patristic period, the Church Fathers period, for people to hold the view that theology is the queen of the sciences and for the people. And that concept is rooted in the broad understanding of science.

Now, of course, today, in the modern West Italy, when we use this term science, it has a default meaning of natural science in most cases. And you have to park an adjective in front of it if you mean something else, like political science, or social science, or computer science, or what have you. So it's a much narrower sense in which we have today.

But again, as an historian, I find it hard to divide these things sometimes. I'm sure we'll find lots of places to disagree before we finish. But in many respects, I agree with you.

I mean, it's very difficult to be a human being of any value and not have some sense of ultimate commitment. I mean, in the sense that I'm taking your life seriously, whether you're a believer or not, you're going to have views, let's say, about inequality. You're going to have views about race.

You're going to have views about sexuality. And it can be very difficult not to try to build some world picture in the sense that you don't want a bit of an idea here. And oh, that's a good idea over there.

And then a third idea. You try to build some picture like that. Now, I don't think it's necessarily a scientific picture as such.

But I think one can, very clearly, is going to have some kind of worldview. If it is secular, it's going to be deeply influenced by science as you think about things like race, things about sexuality, all of these sorts of things. Well, it's not as though science can cleanly sort out this question of race if you want to use the word.

Biologists will often tell you that race is a human construction. It doesn't exist at the level of the biological being. I've heard people say that.

I'm not a biologist. I can't discourse on that at any length. But there's these categories we have.

You know, science has not raced blind, historically. In fact, I just finished a course at my college for the January term that we have, in which we read an essay by historian Kenneth Manning from MIT. He's an African-American historian of science.

His expertise, actually, has earned him just the great developmental biologist from the early 20th century. Manning has a nice little essay in the MIT magazine, alumni magazine, called "The Complexion of Science," that gets at some of these things quite well. So, you know, sometimes I think we think science is colorblind.

That's how he puts it in the essay. But, in fact, it's not as a historical phenomenon. Well, I think this leads nicely into the next couple of questions that students would like to pose.

Does science have a particular worldview attached to it, or set of assumptions? And what about faith? And I had asked about faith in religious possibly separate categories, faith or religion. What particular assumptions might be attached? Metaphysical assumptions, worldview assumptions? Well, certainly that. Yeah, I don't believe that science comes with a particular metaphysics attached at the hit.

Someone like Jerry Coyne, or Richard Dawkins, seems to think that it does, that science virtually acquiesces with atheism. I think that's both historically and philosophically a pretty naive view. I mean, if we accept the idea that science might want to know, you agree with this part, or not, you probably do.

But science is often conceived and has been founded by the creation of Greek, but by the pre-Socratics. Maybe that's right. Maybe it's not.

But it's been around for a long time. And certainly science has been practiced successfully in a great variety of both political systems and metaphysical beliefs that have been found. That have been existing alongside science or sciences within these contexts.

And in some of these contexts that's really done quite well, but a few of those contexts have not been democratic, small D, and quite a few of them have not been post-enlightenment secular. So I would suggest as an historian that there are various multiple metaphysical frameworks within which science has been quite successful. And what about religion or faith as the ultimate commitment or worldview? Religion, as I've defined it earlier, is relating to metaphysics, for sure.

And metaphysics might be a broader category. I'm not sure if I want to go further with that, if I can clearly see what I want to say about that. Yeah, let's start to push apart a bit, okay.

I feel in many respects I want to agree with you. But at the same time, I wonder whether, at least for me, science doesn't have more of a bite at a certain level than I'm hearing from you. Now, I don't want to just pick up on this summertime conversations, but things that the apostles create are the way that people interpret it.

I mean, an awful lot of Christianity certainly involves the idea that we are sinners, that we are tainted, I mean, this is good Augustinian theology, and that Jesus came and died on the cross for our sins. At some level, he took on our sins for us in a way that we were unable to do, and made possible our eternal salvation. Now, the question I ask from the scientific point of view is why the hell are we sinful if God is so bloody good that he created us in his own image in the first place? Now, you turn to me and say, "Oh, well, I've got an answer to that." That because of Adam and Eve, they fell, they sinned, and at that point, sin came into the world.

And again, good Augustinian theology, however it is, it is transmitted. So the gospel is quite clear on this. The youngest baby is tainted at some level.

Now, I want to say, modern science, below is that a part. There is no, there are folks, there was no Adam and Eve. There was always, however small the bottle may cause, there was ten, let's say, there were ten thousand homo-sapiens.

That's true. And more than that, every one of those homo-sapiens had mothers and dads who were as nice and awful as they were. In other words, there wasn't a couple of people out there somewhere in the Saudi desert who suddenly, you know, came across an apple tree or something, and one of them said to the other, "You know, let's have a bite." And "Be young." That was it.

It's not true. It's fairy tales. It really is its little red riding wood.

Now, I want to say, at that level, science really has a nasty bite with respect to a lot of what, I mean, we're not talking about Mormons now, we're not talking about Scientologists, we're not talking about French types, you know, we're not even talking about what you said, we're not even talking about Minnesotans, we're talking about

regular Christians, and you're a regular Christian. And I want to say, modern science really rips it apart. So, I'm all in favour of saying, "I do have a world picture, but at some level, my world picture is better than your voice." Oh, well, that's the most important thing I can do.

You know, I can only answer as one Christian. You forgive me first. I can only answer as one Christian, and as one Christian who on this issue was not an Augustinian.

And I fully agree with you that that's the, I think you gave an accurate rendition of Augustine's picture of how this is. Now, you know, when I read the first three chapters of Genesis, let's just go to that second creation story, the one you're referring to, picking up in the early part of Genesis chapter 2, the story of the Garden of Eden and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life, and the serpent who comes down and talks to, who comes in and talks to the human inhabitants, and God who comes down and looks for Adam and Eve, and they're hiding from him. I see so much anthropomorphism and metaphor in that story that I don't take it, literally.

And, you know, there are many, many Christians who would agree with me on this. And there are many, many who would not. I agree.

I agree. Probably more who would not. And who would? Although I don't have any polling data on that.

However, there's a major point of contact that we have here that I think you've glossed over too easily. And that is what does it mean to be fallen in the sense of what does it mean to be capable of great wickedness? Would you, I would say, that with Chesterton and Edward, that the doctrine of original sin, not meaning this theory of descent from Adam and Eve, but meaning the fact that we are capable of great wickedness, is the most empirically confirmed doctrine of the rims. But you see, my problem is here.

There's nice mozzarella sitting on the second road, who's got a good Italian name, you know, likes pasta and all of these things. But I say, I think you're a phony mark. I think that you're really, you know, I think you're really Irish, but you're pretending to be Italian.

Now, we get to the pointers. We could do DNA studies, and we could look at the genes. And Mark can come back at me a week or a month later and say, "Look, Mike, I have a range of genes which is found pretty much uniquely in this part of Italy.

Yeah, it's much more likely that I am, in fact, Italian origin than I am, let's say, Scotty Chir, something like that." You know, we've got facts. But now, how do I make a decision between you and the Evangelical at Calvin College, who fired John Schneider for refusing to believe in a literal Adam and Eve? How do I make a decision? I mean, why can't I just simply say, "You're nice people. I know it's meaningful for you, but ultimately, you're

making it up, and you're going with what you grew up with, what you're comfortable with, what you've, you know, all of these things." There's no way of deciding.

Whereas, is Mark of Italian extraction or Scottish? At least we can do some work on this. There's a great diversity of opinion among Christian thought about this kind of question. And to come back to your earlier point about when you were talking about the substitutionary atonement here, that, of course, is a view that's pretty much put forth by Ansel in the High Middle Ages.

And it's a very important view of what salvation means. It's hardly the only one in Christian history. There are much, many earlier views of it.

Christ is Christ's Victor view, for example, which was common to many of the Church Fathers, and there are others. I mean, I would say, what is the Christian message about? I would quote A. Segret, the first American Darwinian professor, Patnea Harvard, who said that, let me think for a second how he put it. I think that religion, by which he meant Christianity, religion is based on the idea of a divine mind revealing himself to intelligent creatures for moral enemies.

And so, I don't think that's the only thing one can say about Christianity, but I think it is the first thing I would say about Christianity. So I think that students who have posed questions are trying to get at this. What is your ultimate commitment, or your metaphysical position, or your worldview, and then oppose the same thing to ten? I think my ultimate commitment is the following.

I think the way true happiness is to serve other human beings. I don't know whether it's that an ultimate commitment, but it's what I try to teach my children. It's what I try to teach my students, and it's what I try to live my own life by as a teacher.

Quakers talk about the inner life that have God in every person. And I've always, I've not, often have not succeeded, but I've always tried to deal with my students as that of God in every person. Please understand, in an entire secular way, I'm not that, but that isn't that for me.

But at some level, that divine spark. And I feel the South Aragon, but it's not really. I feel as obviously at 76, my life is not going to last that much longer.

But I do feel a sense of self-worth because I feel at some level, I've been very lucky, but we've been philosophers call it moral life. I've been healthy. I've lived in good parts of the world.

I came to the Punjab when the jobs were available. So I've had all of that. But I do feel that for me, the ultimate commitment has been that of service.

And I have found that tremendously, tremendously rewarding. And if you ask me what is

my ultimate commitment, I think when it comes to it, at some level, it's that. And using your talents, I think service does not necessarily mean opening a soup kitchen.

I think that Mozart writing operas was part of that. In other words, I think it's using the power of all the talents, using your talents, but using your talents in a sense that aren't just directed to you. I like to write.

I like to, chat came along and said, I've been reading it, I just had to sit down and talk to you about it. That's a wonderful moment. I was writing it, but able to share it in that sense.

So yes, that's why ultimately that puts. And 10 for you. Welcome back to what I just said about what I think, how great, his understanding of what Christianity is about, this divine mind revealing himself to intelligent creatures from our lens.

I believe as graded in the incarnation, the classical view that the maker of heaven and earth became a human being, took on human form and showed his character, his essence to us, as a way of drawing us to him. And so I, the more we can become like him, the closer we can be to the maker of heaven and earth. And I think that this is tremendously important because at some level, this gets to the bottom of what we're doing.

Ted and I are good friends, we get on very well, but we really are in different paradigms. We are completely un-uttlng in different paradigms. The Ted, I don't think I'm taking words out of your mouth now, you're shaping your life, you're being around divinity around God and his incarnation of some level.

Whereas for me, that's not there, that's absolutely not there. I feel like I'm an existentialist. I have to, my existence preceded my essence.

I have to create my life as it is for myself, within myself. That kind of outside support doesn't exist. I think I might be a parent and characterizing it that way.

I mean, these are jump shot questions and people I think in our culture war environment today expect slam dunk answers to jump shot questions. And they shouldn't be expecting that. I don't think that's a fair expectation at all.

Something we may ask, what is the relationship between this ultimate commitment and the possibilities for science? I'll ask them, Ted, and then of course you. As I said, science has flourished within a variety of political and metaphysical frameworks. There's an enormous historical question, I think, implicit, perhaps implicit in the way you've posed this question to me.

Because science, as we know it today, will be often called modern science does take shape as given birth in the 16th and 17th centuries in the context of Christian Europe.

Now, is there a necessary connection there? Is it merely a contingent connection? I think it's kind of somewhere in between. I do think there are aspects of modern science that are substantially shaped by the fact that it was put together by Christians.

But could some other culture have done it at some other time? Is it a hypothetical question that a historian is really equipped to answer? We have what we have, we have the history that we have, and so what could we infer from that? We can infer at least that the process of modern science is very friendly in and of itself is very friendly to Christian belief. There's a number of places where I think points of contact can go further. I would suggest that the fact that the modern scientific attitude, if I could call it that, I hesitate to speak about the the singular modern scientific method because so many different methods are used in different sciences.

But the modern scientific attitude of searching for truth about the universe through a combination of reason and experience. There's a term that a great historian of the last century used to describe it. He called it, his name was Rire Bruekos.

He called it rational empiricism, rational empiricism, using a component of reason, a component of experience. That's almost exactly on the same page with the notion of a contingent order. That nature is a contingent order.

It's not historically, it's not logically necessary, that nature exists, and it's not even logically necessary that nature have the nature that it does. The nature of nature is contingent, and nature itself is contingent. There's an order there.

How does that make sense? For me, as a theist, that's kind of like, oh, it's a no-brainer, but that would make sense. If nature is freely created by a rational being, then the fact that it's a contingent order that we have to understand with rational empiricism. For me, that's really neatly tied up.

Yes, and again, there's an awful lot I want to agree with you. You see, one of the things the New Atheists are tense about is the very idea that science might be contaminated by religion. I've discovered that they object very strongly to any claims about science having emerged from or having any debt to religion, particularly to the Christian religion.

Now, anybody who does history of science at all seriously knows that the only way you can understand the nature of modern science is by looking at its background and seeing the Christian roots, if you like. It's something to say you have to be a Christian to be a scientist. It doesn't mean to say that today's science is Christian because I don't think any of those things are true, but anybody who does history of science sees that you take it by field and evolutionary One of the things which strikes me is that the Greeks, people like Plato and Aristotle, were not evolutionists.

It wasn't that they weren't creationists. In fact, they weren't at all. It was just that those

sorts of questions about origins were not their sorts of questions.

I think it wasn't until Jewish thought came along with a very strong set of questions about origins that in a sense, evolution was an answer to that question, a question which I don't see being asked by the Greeks. Now, does that mean that evolutionary theory, therefore, is a Christian or a Jewish theory? No, of course it doesn't. But it does mean, I think, in order to understand evolution and what's going on there, you have to understand some of the background.

I can well imagine going to another planet where they're entirely intelligent people, where they study organisms very profitably, but where they're not evolutionists. Don't mean they'd be creationists because that's the same sort of question, but where they didn't ask questions in those sorts of ways. They just didn't want to put it together.

It doesn't mean to say they wouldn't know the same facts. But somehow they just rearrange it in some sort of way. I'm always very conscious of that, particularly with evolution with questions about origins.

Given the Plato at Aristotle was such absolutely incredible thinkers, and yet they weren't their questions, particularly Aristotle. Well, I don't think it would be a trivial sideline if I were to ask you in an open sense. I'm not sure what your answer would be.

I'd like to hear what you think as a philosophy. What do you think of Plato's time is? Do you see? Timonius was the unquestionably, in terms of the history of its influence, there's no more significant work that Plato ever wrote than Timonius, because for the first millennium, the only work of Plato's they have a substantial amount of in the whole Roman, post Roman world, and the Latin speaking part of the world was Timonius. They don't have anything else from Plato in any significant form.

They have about two thirds of Timonius. And so, whenever someone in the western part, the northern part of Europe talks about Plato prior to the high Middle Ages, it's only Timonius they're talking about. This is such an enormously influential text, and yet it seems to be what the church fathers thought it was, a kind of Greek Genesis.

Do you think that Plato really did have this notion in some way of an origin story, or was that taking him to literally? What do you think about that? Well, I'm so glad you asked that question. I've just been working on this one. To this is this picture of Plato's talking about the earth.

He's also talking about the universe, and the fact that it's not just thrown randomly together, but it seems designed. And clearly, Plato believes that there is a conscious designer behind it. That was why this whole picture was so very attractive to Augustinians and to Christian generally, because if Plato's designer, they could give it the role of the Christian God.

Now, there's a lot of debate about whether Plato does talk about the designer. Some want to interpret Plato as saying there was an actual time to design them. Others, and I think philosophers are more inclined to say that when he's talking about the designer, he's not talking about now at some actual point in time there was a design went on, and there wasn't any before.

It's much more a principle of ordering or something of this nature. I guess basically, that's the kind of way that I want to go at. But let me just add one more thing.

What I find particularly interesting about the tomatoes is I think if you'd asked people 100 or 200 years ago, they'd have been inclined to say, well, the tomatoes is a great work of the past. But by and large, it's really no more true than let us say Noah's ark or something like that. Now, I think particularly with environmentalism and with the God-how-posters and that sort of thing, I think there's an awful lot of people who feel at some level that Plato had it in some way.

And of course, the other thing you see about Plato is it all comes from the Good or the good or the one. So it's all interconnected. It's all part of a picture.

And of course, an awful lot of environmentalists as well as believers find this whole idea very attractive. It's not me and some animals there and some trees over there and the ocean there and there are all bits of pieces. But we're warm.

And if I muck up the ocean, I'm looking, I'm screwing up Mother Earth. This is my Mother. And so it's very interesting, I find that in fact, I think that Tameus today is speaking more to people.

I suspect that it was 50 years ago, something 100 years ago. But you're not going to get me on the creation one there. Now, there are people I could point you to, but on that way, if I'm going to, because you're going to write articles and refuting me.

But who do you think that there was an actual moment? My senses, it's more of a... It's a principle of ordering rather than an act. You mean the way Plato sees you? Yeah, yeah. I think probably more scholars would agree with that than with the other view.

I was just curious to have your view. But the Stoics wouldn't be with you. Yeah.

So I'm just saying that the Greeks avoided the question of words. I don't think they did. I just think it depends on which Greek you mean.

That's the way that they did or not. Because Aristotle certainly did think the world is eternal. And as you say, for the Greeks, it's not a question of evolution except maybe for some of those crude forms that Epicurus rather loose of this democracy.

And democracies come up with it and Epicurus later Romanizes. But the version I'm

thinking of here is Aristotle is neither a creationist nor an evolutionist. We write that humans have always been here and the world's always been here for Aristotle.

Everything you see, all these things. Yeah, I think that's the important thing to say that he's not an evolutionist. Don't think, "Oh yes, then he was a creationist." He's not asking that question.

There is a question and an issue I think we need to get out somehow, which is we have your ultimate commitment to service. We don't have on the table before us a description of scientists, either religion or a naturalist view, which you have written about, although you may not personally hold it. Are there aspects of science or scientists, people who practice science, who can be described as being religious in their practice of science or treating science as a faith? Well, I would say yes.

I mean, as I say, I see Richard Dawkins as an intentionally religious man. I mean, he would repudiate that. He would certainly think I'm putting him down.

There's many ways I put Richard Dawkins down, but not in that sense. I want to say no. I see, if you like, ultimate commitment in some sense.

So I see Richard Dawkins in many respects as an intentionally religious person. Because I laugh about this because Freud talked about the narcissism of small differences. Freud said, because the thing is, once you get churches going, that they start to divide.

Look at the Presbyterians. And they divide over the smallest things. The rest of us can't believe that people are disagreeing about this.

They say, but you believe in all of this, but there's just this little bit and you hate each other. You've formed different churches. You have your own colleges.

And I see this with the new 80s. I mean, I believe 99.99% say this, Dawkins. But because I'm prepared to say, I don't think that all religious people are stupid or whatever it is.

I'm cast into the outer wilderness or whatever it is or something like that. I'm very happy to be that. But don't misunderstand me.

I love it. But it is. Yeah.

So even there, I see this attitude of, oh my God, unless you belong and you actually sign up and that you believe this aspect of the creed, but not that aspect. And it's 143,000. They're going to be saved on the 146,000 or something like that.

And I see this in the New Atheist right down the line. I see them sociologically religious as well as metaphysically religious. I don't think I can improve on that answer, actually.

I could think of many other historical examples of science functioning as a kind of

religion. I mean, perhaps the most extreme examples are the kind of religion of what did they call this in Germany in Heckles day. What matters of monism.

Monism under which people like Ostholz, the chemist, and Burns Teckel, the biologist, who is so white and red in his book sell hundreds and hundreds of thousands of maybe millions of copies for that matter. Books with titles like The Riddle of the Universe, things like this, which science answers all of these ultimate questions for people without a traditional God anywhere in the picture. But science can function as religion for people.

I think it's perhaps easier to see that. Some of the traditional functions of religion are to provide ultimate meaning to be the source of every good and perfect gift. God is the source of every good and perfect gift.

God is the source of ultimate meaning. God is the source of hope. Science can function that way for many people.

Well, of course, we haven't used the H word yet. Humanism is a word which comes up very frequently in this. Certainly people like Ed Wilson or Julian Huxley would have described themselves as evolutionary humanists of some sort in an entirely atheistic way.

But certainly somebody like Edward O. Wilson is quite open about being religious and thinks of his evolutionary humanism as a secular religion. Or are we still good enough? Someone like that. And of course, I think that religion can sometimes try to function as science.

An example of that would be the kind of creationism that can have football. Oh yeah, the stuff you get down in Cincinnati. Yeah.

No, it's okay. Actually, it's in Kentucky. It's just southern.

Can I just simply say, if you get a chance to go to the Creationist Museum, do please go. It is, I mean, sociologically in many other ways, it's fascinating. And they have a better display on natural selection than the Field Museum in Chicago.

Because all the creationists believe in natural selection. They think that after the animals got out of the arc, they all evolved. You know, in 5,000 years they did what the rest of us took 5 billion years.

So they have a wonderful display on natural selection of the Galapagos finches. And all of these things. Very interesting.

Very interesting museum indeed. Yeah, that's a more recent trend in creationism in the last 20 years or so. To take, to take, to have this much more open stance on Darwin's theory.

The fact that they think they, Darwin did get it right for what they will call adaptation. Or what they often used to call micro of illusion. And so that, that's actually Darwin on steroids, as you said, under which the creatures in Australia, those kinds of crazy things that exist nowhere else in the world, they, on creationist theory, they must have become so different from everything else since the time of the flood.

Since, you know, roughly 4,000 years. You have to have done that with you. One of the very interesting thing, it's a bit of a footnote, is if you go to the museum, you'll see that an awful lot of the people attend going there are black African Americans.

Now you might say, how on earth can these people go to something like this, which thinks that they were tasted because of, you know, one of the sons of Noah getting drunk. It's not there at all. No, and then, and doesn't believe it.

Absolutely. It's fascinating. The extent to which creationism is something that I use the word, involves almost a rapidly, a sudden starts.

It's absolutely fascinating to see how creationism is not a static doctrine and how it's changed very rapidly over the last hundred years. That's right. And in an older generation of creationism, the type that came out of Henry Morris and John Wickham, generation, that generation, it was quite common to accept that traditional notion of the curse of ham being responsible for dark skin and a lower status as humans, etc.

That's a very old view of you. I don't know how old it is. It was prevalent in the 17th century, among other times.

I don't know how old it actually goes. But that was quite a few of the earlier generation of creationists believed that. But Ham absolutely doesn't.

He never has, as far as I can tell. He repudiates that view. And in his view, the real source of racism is belief and evolution.

It's a view of what Bob said. I do not share that view. But that's what Ham thinks of.

That's just to illustrate how far away he is from that older first generation creationist view. Well, this takes us to another question that students would like to pose, which is, it seems obvious that religion can account for a moral code or provide a foundation for things like human value and dignity. And you certainly personally have done that, Michael.

But can science provide this? And I'll ask this to both of you. We'll start with Ted and give you a chance to relax. Well, science has been claimed to be able to provide that by various people at different times.

Can it really? Well, do the philosophers of science agree with one another about whether

science is value-free? I think that's another way of putting the question. I imagine the answer is going to be no. That philosophers of science themselves don't agree whether science is value-free or not.

I'm curious to know what you think, Michael, as a philosopher of science, is science value-free? No, I don't think that science is necessarily value-free. I think anybody who sees the movie, Kinsey, for instance, is fully aware that the whole of social science is completely and utterly full of values. I don't mean that in a nasty sense.

Personally, I think Kinsey was a very brave pioneer, but I think anybody who thinks that kind of science is value-free. Now, I don't know. Working on planets value-free, I'm not sure.

By the time physicists get into things like quantum entanglement, I begin to wonder whether the values are starting to slip back in again, as you start to talk about information being transmitted across the universe. It wouldn't surprise me to find the 10th day this is of two centuries' heads, writing dissertations showing that 20th century or 21st century physics was anything but value-free. I'm not uncomfortable with that notion.

Well, I think it'd be hard to really tease this out in a rigorous way as to whether it would not be. Let me put it like this. I'm pretty sure we agree about this.

The Charles Darwin's version of evolution is heavily rooted in British laissez-faire economics from the early 19th century, both not just from Malthus but also from Adam Smith. Basically, it's free-market economics, read into biology. Then at the end of the 19th century, it goes the other direction.

When people want to say, "Okay, natural selection is true." The phrase that Herbert Spencer invents survival of the fittest, the Darwin then puts himself into the origin of species because he likes it, that phrase is really true, and so we should have the same human society should come from that. We should have survival of the fittest among human society too. You get these forms of scientific races in Germany, in the United States, and many other places.

The values that were put in in the front end, coming in from economic theory into evolution, have come out on the back end as social Darwinism of one kind or another. I think the story is really messy, and I'm not enough of a philosopher to sort these things out carefully to say whether the values really are separate or not. We have just a couple of minutes before we turn the question and answers from the audience.

I'd like to ask both of you to take one moment and describe your areas of difference, and then one more moment to describe your areas of commonality. We'll begin with you for a different time. Well, I think we spend so much time being nice to each other.

I don't think I have to dwell on that one anymore. But thank God I don't have to be nice any longer. No, I think the one thing that Ted and I have not talked about actually talking about values, talking about morality is the following.

Is Ted is a Christian, so ultimately his God is laying down the law. There are certain things that ways that one ought to behave because this is basically what God has decreed. For something like myself who doesn't have that, then I think I've got two options.

One is to say, yes, in some sort of way there is nevertheless an objective morality, like there's an objective mathematics, that is possible for us to discern something and silence, objective in some way. Or I can say, no, basically we're just all animals, we've just evolved, and morality is a no more than just another adaptation. Let's say like sexual desire, you know, genitalia, all of these things, their adaptations they came about through natural selection.

A sense of right and wrong is just the same. Now, let me be quite candid, this I think will make me very different from Ted. Basically my position is that there is no ultimate morality.

We are all, it's just in folks, it's just genes in motion, and it's nothing more than that. It doesn't mean to say that it's relativistic, because we're all part of the same species, there's good reasons to cooperate, and people who don't are going to get thrown at. So I don't mean it's just relativistic, but I do at some very deep sense see my evolutionary perspective, or religion if you like, whatever it is, leads me to some ultimately basic relativity, subjectivity in ethics, which I think is totally alien to Ted's world picture.

At one level that would be right, that it would be totally alien to me. The problem comes in of course, and so far as so many ethical decisions are situational. And so there are principles, if I may sound like for a moment like perhaps a Jewish scholar, which obviously I have not, but one of the great things about the Jewish tradition is engaging the meaning of the biblical text, and realizing that there are these ultimate moral principles that are being taught in scripture, that those are absolutes, but that applying them in practice is often very difficult.

And that's why you have this all this Talmudic literature, and then the other literature that surrounds that. So as they often say, if you have two Jews in a room arguing about a point, you have three opinions, this sort of thing. So it's very difficult in practice sometimes to know exactly what one should do.

And so that's the reality of it. But I do agree with your analysis and so far as there are these ultimate moral principles that one is trying to work with, that are not relative, but putting them into practice is very difficult. So you're saying you have those ultimate commitments? Yes.

Okay. So we have just a couple moments about the three or four. What about areas of commonality? And on a communal note? Death, or the Indian? Commonality.

We're ending to mutilate, so commonality. Michael and I are both human beings. Speak yourself, then speak yourself.

I want to be honest, but speaking at least of what I think of my own, I hope it would be true of myself, that we're people of good will, and that we want to understand one another, and we want to treat one another the way we would want to be treated ourselves, which sounds like a biblical principle somewhere. I think that's true. The thing is, Ted, it's difficult arguing with you, because at some level you want a fairly liberal Christian.

I think if you were evangelical, we could get on very well together, but ultimately you go home and say, well, he's a nice guy, but he's condemned to everlasting domination. I'm not quite sure that you do think that. Well, it's above my pay grade, Michael.

If you were a dean, you could then speak about it. You've used the term evangelical, and I think I would have unhesitatingly used that term myself to describe myself, perhaps 20 years ago. I prefer to use Orthodox with a small "oh" when I talk about myself today, for people when they ask me to describe my approach to favor.

Not so much because my views have changed all that much. In many ways they've not, but because the climate in which one understands the term has changed dramatically. So most of the time today, when I hear the word evangelical, it's being used by someone in a political context, and they're talking about an election, either in the past or an upcoming election, and treating an evangelical as a member of a particular demographic group whose opinions are therefore easily analyzable by social scientists.

I want to back away from that, because as I said before, I think that culture wars often have, as one of their earliest casualties, the truth. The truth is my ultimate commitment. It's how I perceive that truth might be different from how you perceive it, but the truth is my ultimate commitment.

When I say, you may reference earlier tonight to the Apostle's Creed, so did A.C. Gray, who might use to help define my own understanding of faith. He went past that definition of Christianity I offered earlier, and he asked himself, "What are the essential contents of this Christian faith that he has? "That he holds and he says, 'They're briefly summed up in the Apostles and I see in Creeds.'" That's what I mean by Orthodox small up. I believe those things, and I believe them without crossing my fingers.

So I am quite a traditional Christian in every regard. I'm just not sure the term evangelical rightly conveys that to today's population. Thank you for listening to this podcast episode from the Veritas Forum event archives.

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(gentle music)