

OpenTheo

Is There Truth Beyond Science? | John Lennox & Larry Shapiro

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The Veritas Forum

This October, over 1,000 students and community members packed out Shannon Hall at the University of Wisconsin in Madison to hear John Lennox (Oxford) and Larry Shapiro (UW-Madison) discuss, "Is There Truth Beyond Science?" In a conversation that featured as much humor as sincerity, Lennox and Shapiro fostered a unique space for honest dialogue and reflection, even in places of disagreement.

Transcript

Genesis does not begin, just in case you didn't realize with the words, "In the beginning God created the bits of the universe I don't understand." It's in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, which is a merism grammatically. He created the whole show, the bits we understand with bits we don't.

[Music] Welcome to the Veritas Forum Podcast.

My name is Caleb Gothart and I'm the Online and Social Media Manager at Veritas. This October, over 1,000 students and community members packed out Shannon Hall at the University of Wisconsin in Madison to hear John Lennox, an Oxford mathematician, and Larry Shapiro, a professor of philosophy at UW-Madison, discuss the question, "Is There Truth Beyond Science?" In a conversation that featured just as much humor as it did sincerity, Lennox and Shapiro foster a unique space for honest dialogue and reflection, even in places of disagreement.

[Music] Wow, wow, wow, look at this full house, welcome, welcome and good evening.

My name is Susan Zeski and I'm the Associate Dean for Arts and Humanities in the College of Letters and Science, and it is truly my honor and pleasure to welcome you tonight to the Veritas Forum, and I congratulate you for committing your time, your intellect, and your energy to engaging in dialogue about a monumental and enduring question, the question of the relationship between science and faith. I would also like to

congratulate you on your willingness to engage in respectful dialogue with people who differ from you, whether in religious belief, race, gender, nationality, or in other ways. Dialogue among belief systems is the heart of this event.

Like the study of the liberal arts, the Veritas Forum seeks to explore big "why" questions of life, so that interlocutors, like yourselves, are challenged to reflect on your belief system, to examine how your worldview addresses some of life's biggest and hardest questions, and to pursue continued dialogue across differences. I also want to congratulate you for having the confidence to challenge your beliefs and for acting out of hope rather than out of fear, and with civility rather than verbal or physical violence. For this week alone, here at UW-Madison, we have born witness to acts of intolerance and incivility, including desecration of the sacred Dejepe fire circle, and social media messages sent by a student calling for the killing of Jews, gays, and lesbians, and free speech advocates.

That's this week, and it's only Tuesday. What we need in our community instead is what we are doing here together tonight, listening and talking with people who differ from ourselves, and with whom we peacefully and respectfully agree to disagree. I congratulate you for making the time and embracing the productive discomfort to dialogue despite difference.

Stressing the need to listen and talk, not to hate, I want to thank a number of organizations for their support and collaborative effort to make tonight's dialogue possible. Thank you to Acts 242, Atheist Humanists and Agnostics at UW-Madison, Badger Catholic, Badger Crew, Blackhawk Church College, Age Ministry, Chi Alpha, Geneva Campus Church, Greek IV, His House, Intervarsity Graduate Christian Fellowship, Intervarsity Undergrad, the Navigators, Upper House, YWAM, Fos House, UW-Madison College of Letters and Science, Departments of Integrative Biology, the Department of Biology, and the Religious Studies Program. And now it is an honor and a pleasure to introduce the moderator for this evening's dialogue, my LNS colleague, Professor Jeff Hardin, who is the chair of the Integrative Biology Department.

Professor Hardin and the team of scientists in his lab used computer-assisted microscopy genetics and molecular biology to study how proteins and cells adhere, move, and change shape. Using embryos from worms called *C. elegans*, Hardin and his team investigate molecular mechanisms that are important for understanding common birth defects and cancer. His research has won numerous awards and has been featured in Science Magazine.

Professor Hardin moreover is a devoted and gifted teacher who teaches key biology courses and is the faculty director of the Bio-CORE program. He joined the faculty in 1991 and earned his PhD in biophysics at the University of California, Berkeley. Before doing so, he earned a master of divinity degree from the International School of

Theology.

He is the only natural scientist in the Religious Studies Program at UW-Madison, and he co-founded the ISMA Society, which seeks to foster dialogue between science and religion on the UW-Madison campus. Given this background, Jeff has given this matter concerted and careful thought, making him an ideal moderator for our conversation this evening. May our time together model a genuine search for knowledge and understanding, and may we exercise our commitment to civility well beyond this place and this moment, and now I give you Jeff Hardin.

[applause] Well, good evening everyone. It's great to see so many of you here. Sue, thank you very much for that.

I think overly kind introduction. As Sue said, I'm my name is Jeff Hardin. I'm the chair of the Department of Integrative Biology.

Some of you may have known that as the Department of Zoology. I'm going to, when the name changed this summer, and I want to reiterate my thanks to the organizers of this event, including the Veritas Forum, the Departments of Philosophy, my own Department of Administrative Biology and the Religious Studies Program, and especially all of the many student groups who have made this event possible. I also want to thank Melissa and the Upper House folks for coordinating the logistics here, making an event like this happen with all of you here is a team effort, and we're grateful.

We're also thankful for all of you here tonight. Thank you so much for coming, because I believe you are in for something important, an important conversation. We're here to discuss the idea of truth beyond science.

The truth is something pretty important at the University of Wisconsin. We take it very seriously. You may know one chair statement here at UW, a statement by the Regents from 1894 that's been memorialized in a plaque on the side of Bascom Hall.

The phrase goes like this, "Whatever may be the limitations which tremble inquiry elsewhere, we believe that the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth may be found." I think it's safe to say that UW views part of its mission as uncovering truth. As wonderful as that sifting and winnowing statement is, though, it raises important questions. Where do we find truth? Are there sources of truth that are simply out of bounds that are no longer credible in the 21st century? What are the limitations on the search for truth? I'm thinking deeply about the answers to these questions as vital today, given the strong sense of uneasiness in our cultural moment that Sue mentioned.

In 2005, that sage of American political analysis, Stephen Colbert, coined the word truthiness to describe the belief that a statement is true based on intuition or personal

perception without regard to evidence, logic, or intellectual examination. In 2016, Colbert's tongue-in-cheek idea was made official by the Oxford English Dictionary. Its word of the year was "post truth." It's safe to say that we live in a moment of cultural confusion about truth.

As a scientist, I place great value on science's ability to uncover deep insights into the natural world. Its spectacular success is made possible by this empirical approach, have unlocked amazing secrets about the universe, this planet, and its creatures. But at science, the only legitimate locus for truth are the fundamental aspects of the world that are disclosed beyond empiricism.

Is there truth beyond science? In one sense, as my colleagues in one of our sponsoring departments, Larry's Department of Philosophy will tell you, there's an easy answer to that question. Of course there is. I guess we could all go home at this point.

The brilliant professor and insightful commentator on American intellectual life, Professor Henry Jones, you may know him as Indiana Jones, cut to the chase. In a Kurt reply to a student... I'll wait, it's okay, you're doing great. Indy said this, in a Kurt reply to a student who was looking for the wrong class one day when he was giving a lecture, archaeology is the search for facts, not truth.

If it's truth you're looking for, Dr. Tyree's philosophy class is right down the hall. And Indy's point, I think, is one that we can take seriously. There are likely many of us who resonate with 20th century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who wrote in his Tractatus that we feel that even if all scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all.

Now what we want to explore tonight is not a yes or no answer to whether truth is found outside of science. But whether the historic claims that theists, particularly Christian theists make, are reasonable in an age in which the spectacular successes of empiricism are all around us. And this is not intended to be a debate.

We've asked our presenters to share personally, to ask honest questions of each other, and model a conversation that all of us can continue this evening and beyond. Veritas is the Latin word for truth, and the Veritas forms committed to courageous conversations, placing historic Christian faith and dialogue with other beliefs, and inviting participants from all backgrounds to pursue truth together. The organizers hope is that everyone in this room would be challenged.

Whether you're a Christian and adherent of one of the other Abrahamic faiths, count yourself as part of some other religious tradition or outside of any religious tradition. We hope that tonight's conversation will challenge you to reflect on your beliefs with intellectual honesty and rigor, and that tonight's conversation will help you to see to what extent your own worldview adequately addresses some of life's biggest questions.

Right now it's time to introduce our two guests for tonight.

Professors John Lennox and Larry Shapiro. Please join me in giving them a warm welcome. [Applause] Let me introduce each of them, and then we'll get started.

Dr. John Lennox is professor of Mathematics Emeritus at the University of Oxford. Originally from Northern Ireland, John pursued his undergraduate and graduate work at the University of Cambridge, specializing in the branch of Mathematics known as group theory, an area in which he's published widely. He's also a fellow in Mathematics in the philosophy of science at Green Templeton College, Oxford.

John is an internationally renowned speaker, speaking at the interface between science, philosophy, and religion. John's lecture extensively in North America, Eastern, or Western Europe, and Australasia on Mathematics, Philosophy of Science, and Intellectual Defense of Christianity. He's written a number of books on the interface between science, philosophy, and theology, including *God's Undertaker as science buried God*.

God and Stephen Hawking are a response to the grand design, *gunning for God* a book about the new atheism, and *seven days that divide the world* on the early chapters of the book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible. In addition, he's participated in public discussions with many academics on campuses across the planet, including people such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Peter Singer. My colleague Larry Shapiro is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, having received his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania.

His research spans philosophy of mind and philosophy of psychology, but he has a growing interest in philosophy of religion as well. A recent result of this interest is his book, *The Miracle Myth*, why belief in the resurrection and the supernatural is unjustified. Part of Larry's current research aims to examine how both scientists and Christians misuse science to answer the big questions.

His other published works include *The Mind and Carnot*, *The Award-winning Embodied Cognition*, and the *Multiple Realization Book* co-authored with Professor Thomas Polger. Thank you, John, and Larry, for being with us and lending your insights to this conversation. I'm really looking forward to it.

So what I'd like to do to get us going is if you would each take a few minutes, first John, and then Larry, to tell us a little bit about your worldview and anything else you think is important about yourself as it relates to our topic tonight. Is there truth beyond science? John, let's start with you. Well, good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Is there nobody there? The University of Wisconsin is deservedly famous, and it reminds me of Oxford. It's absolutely full of bicycles. And I ought to start by doing something culturally appropriate and say, "Hi, Badgers!" [applause] I'm also honored to be sitting

here with Professor Shapiro and Professor Hodden.

It's always the delight to meet new colleagues. And one of the objectives of an evening like this is to have a friendly discussion, which is made interesting by the fact that we don't agree on everything. But you will discover very rapidly, I think, that Larry and I agree on quite a few things.

And it's important to emphasize those common convictions. In his book, Larry says, "I am dedicated to discovering the truth." I must say my mind rejoiced when I read that, because I have set with many philosophers whose lives are dedicated to denying that there is such a thing as truth. So we share that in common.

Secondly, he's a philosopher. And I'm one of those scientists who has immense respect for philosophy. That work of probing arguments for their strength and weakness.

And emphasizing, as Larry does, it is book the importance of evidence-based reasoning and not being content with facile explanations. That's so important for helping us grasp the elusive concept of what science is. The word "skill" I know from which science comes simply means knowledge.

I know. And so we could use the word "science" for all kinds of knowledge, as it's done in some languages like German. But I suspect tonight, when we think of science, we think of the so-called natural sciences, which are a set of intellectual disciplines like physics, chemistry, biology, and so on, used to explore the natural world.

And at the beginning of his book, Larry helpfully outlines the role in science of very important techniques of reasoning like induction, deduction, and abduction, or inference to the best explanation. The question, is there truth beyond science arises at least in part because there are strong voices in Western culture who say there is not. And that view has come to be called "scienceism." Alex Rosenberg, a distinguished American philosopher, says, being "scientistic" just means treating science as our exclusive guide to reality, to nature, both our own nature and everything else.

Stephen Hawking calls that a "menster." When in his book *The Grand Design* on about page 5, he's talking about all the big questions that we ask. Where do we come from? Where are we going? Is there meaning to life? And when I read that, I thought, "Isn't it going to be interesting to listen to this world-class scientist deal with these questions?" And then suddenly he says, "Philosophy is dead," which is a very odd thing to say at the beginning of a book on the philosophy of science. And he adds that scientists, rather than philosophers, have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge.

I Bertrand Russell, although he didn't quite believe this, once said, "And it's a brilliant formulation of scientism, whatever knowledge is attainable must be attained by scientific

methods, and what science cannot discover mankind cannot know." He was a famous philosopher, mathematician, and logician, but I'm afraid his logic departed him rather sadly when he made that statement. Because the statement that science is the only way to truth is not a statement of science. So if it's true, it's false.

I hope it's not too early in the evening for logic. But it's very important to see that it's actually self-contradictory, and that finishes it in a way. But it's too serious for that.

And it's important to realize that really great scientists rarely ever say anything like Hawking. Schrodinger, one of the Nobel Prize said, "I'm very astonished that the scientific picture of the real world around me is very deficient." And he says, "It cannot tell us a word about red and blue, bitter and sweet physical pain, physical delight. It knows nothing of beautiful and ugly, good or bad, God and eternity." Sometimes for tens to answer questions of these domains.

But the answers are very often so silly that we are not inclined to take them seriously. And another Nobel Prize winner Sir Peter Medawar said, "The existence of a limited science is made clear by its inability to answer child-like elementary questions having to do with first and last things. How did everything begin? What do we all hear for?" And then he adds it is to imaginative literature and religion that we must turn for answers to such questions.

And that's precisely what I do. I hold the Christian biblical worldview which has both a subjective and an objective dimension. I believe that the ultimate reality is God who created and who upholds the universe.

He has revealed certain aspects of his being in nature. Indeed, there's considerable accord among historians of science that the rise of modern science is traceable to the biblical worldview. As C.S. Lewis put it, "Men became scientific because they expected law and nature and they expected law and nature because they believed in the legislature." And I love the words of Johannes Kepler, "The chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order which has been imposed on it by God and which he revealed to us in the language of mathematics." So I see a very strong bond to such an extent that I am not remotely ashamed to be both a scientist and a Christian because arguably it was Christianity gave me my subject.

That's the objective side, part of it at least. But finally, there is more. I believe that God's fullest revelation comes in Jesus Christ, whom I believe is God incarnate, the fact that is demonstrated by his life, teaching, miracles, death, and supremely by his resurrection from the dead.

Now, of course, at this point, the biblical worldview clashes head on with a materialistic or naturalistic worldview that typically holds that the universe is a closed system of cause and effect. That, however, is not a result of science. And I reject it not only as a

Christian but a scientist.

But on the subjective side, being a Christian means not only accepting these facts but following their implications and entering into a real and personal relationship with God through trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, whose death and resurrection provide a basis for sorting out the messy parts of life where I have round others and damaged myself. And declaring me to be in a right relationship with God that is crucially and uniquely as far as religions go, not based on my merit but on trusting him and accepting salvation as a free gift. When it comes to truth, my Christian worldview raises perhaps the most startling claim of all that Jesus made.

He said, "I am the truth." He didn't simply say, "I speak true things," although I believe that was true. He said, "I am the truth." So ultimately, ladies and gentlemen, for me, there is, of course, truth beyond science because ultimately truth is a person who created the world in which science is done. And as an inference to the best explanation, I hold this worldview to be the most satisfying, both intellectually and emotionally.

Thanks, John. Larry? First, I want to thank Veritas and Upper House and the people there, Melissa and John, who organized this. They were terrific.

I've come to rely on Melissa for almost everything and expect I'll continue to do so in the years to come. John mentioned inference to the best explanation, which is a form of inference that scientists and scientifically-minded philosophers use when trying to justify belief in unobservable things or events. So if we want to know whether there are electrons, well, we can't see electrons, so what we do is we set up experiments and we make predictions on the basis of hypotheses about what sort of observations we would like to do.

We have some observations we will make if electrons exist, and we find that these observations occur, or they don't. If they do, we infer that there must be these things, electrons, that are satisfying the predictions that are derived from our hypotheses. I'm an atheist, and I'll come back to inference to the best explanation in a minute, but as far as my worldview goes, I'm an atheist.

That means I don't believe that God exists, but I don't think I'm a bad person because I'm an atheist. In fact, I was just curious today. I thought, I wonder what the proportion of atheists in prison is.

And I looked it up, and it turns out you can't find atheists in prison much, so the message I take from that is... The message I take from that is, if you wanted to live in a very safe community, you'd surround yourself at ACPC. But anyway, I say that we're not bad people because I was watching Fox News the other day. I must have felt I had to do penance for something.

And one of the commentators was trying to figure out what motivated the Las Vegas shooter. And they had ruled out all the obvious reasons. He wasn't a Muslim.

And he was an African American, so what's left? Well, maybe he's an atheist. Maybe his lack of belief in God was what caused him to kill and wound so many people. But I'm an atheist, and John Menson mentioned the philosopher Alex Rosenberg, who's written a book on what he takes the commitments of atheists to believe.

And I disagree with Alex about this. Alex thinks that if you don't believe in God, you should also not believe in right and wrong. He thinks if you don't believe in God, you shouldn't believe that there is free will.

He thinks that a life without God commits you to the belief that life is meaningless. I, on the other hand, am an atheist who thinks that there is such thing as right and wrong. Objectively speaking, there are certain actions that one ought not to do because they're wrong.

I also think that life is meaningful. I regard my own life as meaningful. I think meaning comes from pursuing a life in which you are actively involved and deeply committed to some sort of end that you try to bring about.

And moreover, I think the end should be an important one. So a life devoted to video games, I regard as not a very meaningful life, but a life regarded to teaching, I think, is a meaningful life. I also believe that I have free will.

I believe that I have free will, despite the fact that I don't believe that I have a soul. Philosophers have been working on problems, trying to understand problems with respect to free will for quite a long time, and they're making progress. I believe that there's no life after death.

This is the life I have, and I'm going to do my best to make the most of it. Now, let's return to inference to the best explanation for a moment. I don't believe in God because I regard God as an unobservable.

I've never observed him. I don't know anyone who has directly observed him. And so belief in an unobservable requires evidence.

We can think of the claim that God exists as a hypothesis, and then ask what predictions this hypothesis yields, and then try to find observations that either confirm or disconfirm that hypothesis. And I think the God hypothesis doesn't yield any predictions that we can empirically confirm. So that's why I don't believe in God.

What is the relationship then between science and religion? I don't think there's a conflict between religion, and so far as religion is defined as simply believing in God. I don't think there's a conflict because God presumably exists outside of space and

outside of time. But science is a discipline that's focused on understanding a world in space and in time.

So science is not going to disprove the existence of God, and this is why there's no inconsistency among scientists who also are theists. On the other hand, there are claims that run contrary to religious doctrine, and when these claims are about how the world works, then we're going to find a problem if the claims based on religious doctrine about how the world works come into conflict with what scientists tell us about how the world works. So if a theist believes that the earth stands still, then this is a claim that comes into conflict with science.

Or if a theist believes that the earth is only 50,000 years old as young earth creationists believe, then this again is a claim that's going to conflict with science. So I have some other examples down. I can't think of them.

Origins of species. They're a number of intelligent design theorists who believe that the species that we see around ourselves are the product of an intelligent designer. But this too then runs into conflict with Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection.

So there's one sense in which religion conflicts with science. It does so when it makes particular claims about the empirical world that run counter to what science reveals. But there's another sense in which there's no inconsistency between religion and science because God stands outside space and time, and so it's invisible to the methods of science.

So let's flesh out some of what you guys were talking about here. Historically, I think it's verifiable that truth claims about science developed within a context of at least statistically speaking of religious belief. And many of the early scientists were religious.

In fact, most of them were Christian theists in the West. And the common perception though is that science as science has advanced somehow religious belief retreats to smaller and smaller sectors of our lives. And I'd like you to comment on that.

Do you think that the development of science is somehow, you said they're compatible after a fashion and yet I couldn't help them. I think that your inkling is that the advance of science pushes religion off to the boundaries and makes it less significant. And I just want you to comment on that first Larry and then we'll turn to John.

The answer to your question depends I think on, as John would say, significant. For what? We were having this little jug before. It wasn't really that funny.

But if you look to God to give your life purpose, to provide the comforting idea that there's life after death, to make you feel fulfilled, then I see no problem with holding on to those religious beliefs. But you're right that particular claims that theists have made about how the world works can no longer be believed, I think, given what scientists tell

us. So I think if the theist requires belief that species were designed by an intelligent designer, and if they think their belief in God entails that, an evolution shows you that that's wrong, well, then by a very easy inference rule, that shows that their belief in God has to be wrong too.

So you do see in the history of science and the history of religion, certain religious claims being debunked. They're shown to be inconsistent with how we understand the natural world. But, as I was saying, there are other reasons not having to do with trying to understand the physical world to believe in God, and there's no problem with that as far as I can tell.

Great, John. I'd like for us to make a little comment on what you said earlier about atheists not being bad people. I hope you're not disagreeing with me.

I hold the same view. In fact, I'll go further. I can be put to shame that the moral behavior of my atheist friends.

Do you know why that is? It's because from where I sit, every man and woman who I believe in God are not is a moral being of infinite value. That's enormously important. I'm glad Larry mentioned it first because so often, sadly, Christians look down on people that don't share their worldview and put them in a lower moral bracket.

That's point number one. Secondly, I was delighted to hear Larry against his atheist colleague, Alex Rosenberg, assert the existence of right and wrong. He was a famous moral philosopher, Mackey, at Oxford, who said that once you begin to discover that their absolute moral values, you're well on the way to God.

So perhaps you're near to God that you think. The third thing is that not believing in God because he's unobservable would stop you believing in gravity information, the origin of the universe and a whole lot of other things. So I think we'd want a bit more evidence for that.

But coming to your question, I do think there's been a sea change. After all, Isaac Newton, who discovered gravitation, believed in God and gravity was one of the reasons. When he discovered his law, he said, "What a marvelous God who did it that way." He didn't say, "No, we've got an explanation.

We don't need God." And that's because he wasn't like Stephen Hawking. One of the shifts, I think, Jeff is that the concept of God has changed in the mind of many scientists and people like Hawking and Dawkins and others I've encountered. They do not conceive of God as a tri-un eternal God that created the Bible.

They believe in a kind of Greek God of lightning that we now call a God of the gaps. I can't explain it, therefore God did it. And you do a bit of science or atmospheric physics at the University of Wisconsin, and that God disappears.

And so as science advances, the space for God gets less. And suddenly it occurred to me that Hawking's big problem, because Stephen Hawking, who's a brilliant scientist, like years better than me, but he asks young people like yourselves to choose between science and God. And I find that very puzzling until I realized that his definition of God was the problem.

He believes God is an explanatory ex that holds the space until science comes up with a better explanation. Now, if you believe in a God of gaps like that, then of course you have to choose between science and God because that's the way you've defined God. The God of the Bible, the God of whom I believe, is not the God of the gaps.

Genesis does not begin just in case you didn't realize with the words, "In the beginning God created the bits of the universe I don't understand." It's in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, which is a merism grammatically. He created the whole show, the bits we understand live bits we don't. So there's a huge problem with God that's driving this.

The second point of a minute, a second point, lies in the nature of explanation. You see science explains marvelously as Jeff pointed out, but the problem is that explanation comes at different levels. And people think that once they've got a scientific explanation, this is Hawking's view.

He doesn't believe in God why? I quote, "Because there is a law of gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing." I'm not going to point out the three levels of contradiction on that statement. But what he does is we've got a scientific explanation for something, therefore there's no God. But just a minute, why is the water boiling? Well, because the heat energy is agitating the molecules conducted through the kettle bottom, and that's why the water is boiling.

No, it isn't. It's boiling because I'd like a cup of tea. Now you laugh.

Why? Because you see that those two explanations don't actually conflict or contradict. They're different kinds of explanation. One scientific, the others in terms of my volition, the evolution of a personal agent.

Now let me say this to you. And this takes a lot of the steam out of the argument for me. God, no more conflicts with science as an explanation for the universe.

That Henry Ford conflicts with the law of internal combustion as an explanation for a motor car engine. Now that's how I would start to approach this. I think there's a huge epistemological and intellectual confusion out there.

And Hawking, Dawkins and others insist the scientific explanation is the only one. And that's nonsense because the law of gravity, even within science, the one thing it does not explain is gravity. I hope you realize that.

Nobody knows what gravity is. And you can realize that. The law of gravity is a wonderful help to calculate how to put someone in the moon without even Einstein.

But it doesn't tell you what gravity is. And there's a huge myth out there that if you've got a scientific explanation, that's all you need. No it is not.

And therefore I agree with your initial statement Larry. That science cannot off its own methodology. And of course that's difficult to define.

Realize the existence of God. I would want to go a lot further but that can remain. I would want to show that science actually gives us evidence of God.

Maybe we'll come back to that a little later. I want to turn to Larry. And so John you mentioned the word epistemology.

I fear so. That one perhaps a risk. That kind of squirted out didn't it.

So epistemology is a study of how we know things. And Larry's thought a lot about this. So in particular Larry you've written recently on whether it's credible to believe that miracles have occurred.

And part of your argument has to do with how we can know things reliably. I just wonder if you can talk about that. Because your take is that belief in miracles and the supernatural is unjustified.

So can you explain your reasoning? Please briefly. And perhaps more importantly. It will be brief because I want people to buy the book.

Excellent. Okay. I guess in addition though could you talk about what's ultimately at stake based on what you're saying? Okay.

Yes thanks. When philosophers talk about a belief being justified. Or scientists for that matter as well.

Think of a justified belief as a belief that has sufficient evidence so that it's more probable than not. That would be one way of understanding what a justified belief is. When you're looking for justification for different beliefs there are different ways you can go about finding justification.

I was interested in trying to understand why it is Christians believe in the resurrection. It always struck me as it's got to be crazy right. Here you have this guy who reportedly dies and is put into a tomb and three days later he's out walking around again.

That's really unusual. Typical ways of justifying beliefs don't allow you to justify that. One way to justify belief is just through inductive evidence.

If you had seen lots of people dying and coming back three days later then it could be justified in believing that Jesus was resurrected. We need some other way to figure out whether he was resurrected. And one thing you have to do when you think about what would make this a miracle is define a miracle.

As I understand a miracle it's a violation of a law of nature which coming back from the dead is. It's a violation of the law of a law of nature in virtue of some kind of divine intervention. That's what makes it a miracle I think.

Then you ask, well what justifies my belief that Jesus did come back from the dead and his reason or the cause of his returning from the dead was a divine intervention. And when you look at the evidence it's really slim. It's based on gospel accounts written by unknown authors decades after the event occurred.

And it's written by people, it was reported to these authors who lived in different places and spoke different languages by a very superstitious group of people. These are people who thought demons possessed each other. These are people who thought that I once looked up, I bought a book, what did these people believe? And all sorts of stuff that today no four year old would believe.

So this is the evidence and it just doesn't suffice to warrant belief in something so incredibly unlikely. Here's another epistemological point that- Where's that word again? Another point about knowledge and justification. Thank you Larry.

Which actually has a kind of basis in mathematics which John is an expert on on thinking of basis theorem. He was a good man and he was a minister for religion. He was a reverend.

Yes he was. But you know William Ewell was also a reverend. Anyway, here's the point.

The less probable an event, and I think we should all agree that coming back from the dead is pretty improbable. The less probable an event, the stronger the evidence needs to be to justify our belief in that event. This is why if you come across a disease that has a frequency of something like only one in a million people will be infected.

If you have a test that goes wrong only one in a thousand times, that's a terrible test. It's going to tell you that a thousand people in this population of one million have the disease when in fact only one does. So the rarer the disease, the better your test needs to be if you're to believe that a positive test result actually tells you you have the disease.

And so think of a miracle as something really really improbable. Well that means we need a really really good test in order to justify our belief in it. And the evidence we have, it's not even as good as the evidence we have for things like Vesuvius destroying Pompeii or the Civil War.

We have really good evidence for those sorts of things, and there are even not that unlikely. So that's my reason for not believing in miracles or in the resurrection in particular. Let me now turn to the second part of your question about what's at stake.

This depends on how you see your commitment to religion playing out in your everyday life. So there are lots of very religious people in this country who are voting and organizing in order to impose their views on others. Now this puts I think a very special burden on religious people because it's one thing simply to believe something for which you don't have adequate evidence and keep it to yourself.

Every fall I sit down and I think this is the year the Packers are going to win the Super Bowl. This is the year the Badgers are going to win the Rose Bowl. But there's nothing really at stake here.

But suppose I then decided now because I believe that the Packers are the best team in the country, I'm going to require that Vikings fans not use birth control and not be allowed to have abortions. It just follows from my view about Packers. Or suppose I think that because of my commitment to the Badgers, I want to make sure that there are no same fan team marriages.

I don't know why I would do that. But if my belief in the sanctity of the Badgers and the Packers drives me to curtail the behavior of others, then I think I have a special responsibility to be really well justified in what I'm believing. Since it's not just my own life now that is being guided by these beliefs, but others too.

And that's why I think it's important to think about our justification for beliefs and miracles. Thanks Larry, that's great. John, now I think it's safe to say that you hold a different view.

Marginally. You've actually often argued for how belief in the resurrection makes sense. I just wonder how you think about how a scientist can believe in the resurrection.

Well first of all, just thinking of what Larry says, I do not believe that miracles are violations of the laws of nature. I think that Hume was wrong and his major interpreter, Anthony Flue before he died, told me he was wrong. You see, that's where the problem starts.

We have this idea that there's a law, like the law of the land. You know, I see these notices in car parks here. Violators will be told.

We don't have notices like that. But to cut a long story short, I find CS Lewis is an analogy very helpful. I'm staying in a lovely hotel here.

And the night before last I put \$1,000 in the drawer. And then last night I put \$2,000 in the drawer. One on one makes two, three.

So the 3,000. But I woke up this morning and I found \$500 in the drawer. Now what has been broken? The laws of arithmetic are the laws of Wisconsin state.

Now think about it. It's the laws of the state have been broken because the laws of arithmetic have not been broken. And that's where the confusion lies in this whole thing.

You see, in order to recognize a miracle, it's not a violation of laws. It's an apparent exception to perceive regularities which have been set in the universe by the creator. If they weren't there, you wouldn't be able to recognize any miracle.

Because if you didn't know that the norm was, the dead people stayed dead, you wouldn't think anything of someone popping up from the dead. So you need two things. You need regularities.

And where I think Larry and I differ profoundly is those regularities which we encapsulate in the laws of science are not laws in the sense that they constrain anything. They're simply as Wittgenstein said. They are descriptions of what normally happens.

Now God, who is the creator, he can feed a new event into the system and the laws take over. What I mean by that is this, if I were claiming that Jesus rose from the dead by natural processes, of course it would be violating laws of nature. But I'm claiming no such thing.

I'm claiming that he rose from the dead. He was raised from the dead by the power of God. So I simply do not recognize that description of laws.

The second point is this. I was puzzled by your book, I must say Larry, because you quoted it just now. These records which are very slim, written decades after the events.

But in your book you quote with approval, evidence of Caesar crossing the Rubicon. I checked out your authorities and they're 200 years after the actual date. So if you accept 200, what are a few decades? But what bothered me more than anything was that having started by saying we need to check the best evidence, your two major sources are Bart Airman and Richard Carrier.

Now they are the absolute extreme. Carrier against all, practically all, distinguished ancient historians even denies the existence of Jesus. And oddly enough, Bart Airman doesn't hold your view on the scantiness of the evidence.

He says that we can reconstruct the majority of the New Testament, although probably I'm quoting, not 100% accuracy. But the scholars are convinced, Erbund says we can reconstruct the original words of the New Testament. The historical evidence for the authenticity of the New Testament in particular is vastly better than the historical evidence for all classical works that are known.

So I don't recognize this slimness. The next point was superstition in the ancient world. Yes, it existed as it exists today.

But Luke opens his gospel dealing as a medical scientist with this problem because he tells the story of a priest who's praying and an angel says you're good of a child. The priest is very old. He says don't be ridiculous.

I'm far too old. He wasn't the superstitious chapter believed every story. He knew exactly as clearly as a modern gynecologist that you get mercifully.

I nearly said you get too old of children. And he rejected it. And it's very interesting that Luke starts his gospel by raising this question of our antipathy towards the miraculous.

Now I certainly find Bay's theorem very helpful. And of course Bay's theorem makes the point that if you've got a very improbable thing, if you bring background information in, that background information can help either increase or decrease the probability. Now you see, when it comes to the resurrection, it is by definition highly improbable.

How do we get at it? We don't get out of by induction because by definition it's unique in history. So you have to come at it by abduction, inference to the best explanation. And I've spent most of my life thinking about this.

Starting off at Cambridge when I heard one of the world's top lawyers making a forensic investigation of the historical evidence for the resurrection. It's cumulative. It's not absolute proof.

But as I look at it again and again, it seems to me that ever increasingly that this is based on absolutely solid evidence. Now it's a big deal. And what's at stake? I would like to bring in very briefly is this, that if Jesus is raised from the dead, there's another way of proving or establishing rather that the resurrection happened.

And that is, it's logical if he's raised from the dead that he can be encountered. I've lived long enough to see many people's lives transformed. Transformed from narcotic dependence to peace and a meaningful life and happiness.

Food on the table where there was none before. Despair turning into joy. I've seen that again and again, particularly among students.

And when you ask them, "What has happened to you?" They say something like, "I met Christ. I met the risen Christ. I became a Christian." Whatever way they put it, you end up by adding two and two and making four.

So I believe there is an inductive method of establishing it. And that is making the experiment that Jesus himself suggested, that if we trust him, he will give us peace with God, forgiveness and so on. And when you've experienced that, that is a very strong

piece of experiential evidence that it is true.

So I'm sorry that I have to say I find the evidence that I read in your book very convincing of the truth of my Christian position. No, I think that's quite fascinating. Larry, go ahead.

When thinking about the resurrection, there's, we have to make a distinction between a few things. Is the historical record or the gospels we read today authentic copies of the original gospels? And you're right, I'm citing people like Bart Airman and Richard Carrier. So let's just forget about that if you don't like those authorities.

It's not that I don't like them, I read them. What concerns me is if you're putting an argument, you've got to take the opposition's best evidence. And I was surprised that that was absent, that's all.

I read Airman and I read, well not so much Carrier because he's written off by most scholars completely. But certainly controversy about the authenticity of the gospels. But let's put that aside.

I give you everything you want that the gospels we're reading today are copies with perfect fidelity from... No, I didn't say that. I'm glad you have it. I'm giving it to you.

Take it. Go ahead Larry, let Larry finish the call. Come on Larry, carry off.

Next we hear more. Come down John. Next we have to ask, let's suppose now that the authors of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were provided with the news that they recorded 30 to 70 years after the event.

And let's suppose that the news was transmitted faithfully to them. Now, the next question we ask. People are at the tomb, what do they actually see? Were what these people reporting accurate reports? Sometimes as we all know people misperceive things, they don't understand the situation.

So that's something we have to think about. Next question, let's suppose that what they're reporting was in fact accurate. Jesus in fact died and in fact came walking out of the tomb three days later.

You'll have to choose which gospel account you want because the gospel is different on this. But let's just take them to say Jesus walked out of the tomb three days later. Now, what's the best explanation for why Jesus died and came back to life? Here's where we have a hypothesis.

One hypothesis is that the best explanation is that God caused the resurrection of Jesus. The problem with that hypothesis is it doesn't actually make any predictions without the addition of some assumptions. Assumptions about God's intentions, assumptions about

what God wanted people to see.

And we have no way to independently verify these additional assumptions. And I can come up with other hypotheses like aliens raised Jesus from the dead. Or two gods raised Jesus from the dead.

All of these hypotheses do an equally good job explaining why Jesus came back three days after his death. And if inference of the best explanation requires that you choose the best explanation among the hypotheses, but all the hypotheses are equally good in explaining why we see Jesus rise from the tomb three days later, then you're not justified in believing your preferred explanation. You're preferred? The problem there, of course, lies in the fact that you just said they're equally valid explanations.

I reject that completely. I don't think aliens. Why is that an worse than God? Because the criteria that you laid down two minutes ago are satisfied.

You see, the event of the resurrection is not in isolation. The resurrection was predicted during Jesus' lifetime. It also fits into the grand scheme.

And this is where I take a much bigger view of the prophets who had all through history, and developing from Abraham, conveyed the idea that there was a special person coming into the world, who would suffer and die. And those prophets also indicated that the language became clearer as history went on, that that person would, after having borne the sins of people, he would return to the heavenly world. Now, when you get to the level of the New Testament, you have John the Baptist announcing him.

You have him telling the disciples that he's going to rise from the dead. You then have him dying. They didn't understand either.

So they rejected him when he died, because they didn't understand it. When he rose from the dead, and they saw the evidence of it and met him, then Christianity was unleashed on the world. When Peter explained at the day of Pentecost that there was a very clear mapping out of what would happen.

Because, of course, for the Christians, and incidentally, the first stories of the resurrection weren't spread by Christians at all, but the Jewish authorities who made sure they guarded the tomb. And that means there was no mistake about it. That Peter stood up and he said, "Look, you know what has happened? Here is that Christ has ascended, and this is in fulfillment of the prophecies.

These incredible statements made centuries before. The Lord said unto my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies of it still of your feet, so that there is a huge, prophetic program into which it fits. And therefore, putting that against aliens seems to me to trivialize the whole thing.

It's not an equally good explanation. That's the problem. I'm going to step in here.

Yeah, please do. Because we want time for people in the audience to post some questions. So what I'd like to do now is to first thank you guys for a really wonderful exchange so far.

But you know I've asked both of you to provide two or three minutes of parting thoughts to our audience. So Larry, let's begin with you, and then we'll move to John. I'll return to the question that we're here to discuss today about Truth Beyond Science.

There is Truth Beyond Science, and that's because science is a discipline that has fairly narrow focus, although what it's focusing on is pretty big. It's focusing on understanding how nature works. It's trying to give us explanations of natural phenomena.

So how is it chlorophyll turns light energy into chemical energy? Why do we have rainbows? These are the sorts of questions that scientists are really good at answering. But there are also questions that are just outside the purview of science. And so, as far as these questions have answers that can be true or false, science isn't delivering us all the truths.

Science doesn't tell us why 2 plus 3 equals 5. Science doesn't tell us why we have free will. Science doesn't tell us what is right and what's wrong, but I regard all of these questions as questions that have definitive answers. I will say that I think religion does not do a good job explaining.

Let me give -- do I have time for a quick example? I want to use the quick example. You did say quick, I believe. Please go ahead.

Taking up on John's point that there are different kinds of explanations. We can explain why the water in the kettle is boiling by thinking about the energy and the molecules, or we can explain it in terms of the intention of the person who desires a cup of tea. The problem with trying to draw an analogy between that and between a theistic explanation of the universe is that we have -- we learn nothing.

We gain no knowledge at all. We understand nothing in addition to what we already did when we're told the universe exists because God wanted it to. That's an explanation that leaves me cold.

I want to know, well, why did he want that? How did he make it happen? I think that's a really good question because God is a temporal, a spatial. How does a being like that just cause something to come into existence? Why did he? On the other hand, I have no problem understanding why John might put a kettle of tea on in the morning. He wants a cup of tea and he can reach the kettle and put it on the burner.

So I see science as a far superior way of understanding nature than what religion gives

us. Although as I said at the beginning, there's no conflict between belief in a God who exists outside the natural world with a discipline as sciences that studies how things work within the natural world. Thanks, Larry.

John. Well, I'd just like to say how much I've enjoyed the chat with Ari and Jeff. But I'm going to say something now about is there truth in science? Why do we think there's truth in science? And here I'm going to say something that may surprise some of you.

I believe there's truth in science because human reason is an art post of the supernatural. You don't have to go to the miracles of Jesus or the resurrection. C.S. Lewis helped me when he wrote, "Unless human reasoning is valid, no science can be true.

If ultimate reality is not material, not to take this into account in our context is to neglect the most important fact of all. Yet the supernatural dimension has not only been forgotten, it has been ruled out of court by many. The naturalists have been engaged in thinking about nature.

They have not attended to the fact that they were thinking. The moment one attends to this, it is obvious that one's own thinking cannot be merely a natural event. And therefore something other than nature exists.

You see, I believe, the bottom line for me is that the fact that we have discussed rationally about the concept of truth is actually evidence that there's something beyond. Alvin Plantinger, one of your most distinguished philosophers, says that Dawkins is right that we are the product of mindless, unguided natural processes. Then he has given us strong reason to doubt the reliability of human cognitive faculties.

And therefore inevitably to doubt the validity of any belief that they produce, including Dawkins' own atheism. My big problem with atheism, I'm sure Larry would have a lot to say about this, is that it undermines the rationality we need to construct any argument whatsoever. That's a topic for another time.

I would have a lot to say that. We might be able to come back to that. Thank you very much, John.

Let's thank both John and Larry. [applause]

[music] All right, so now as promised, it's time to allow our speakers to field a few questions. Some of these are similar to one another.

Some of these have been touched on by either John or Larry or both of them. So if we don't get to your question, I can attest, looking at the list here on my iPad, that these are all outstanding questions. So the criteria for selection has nothing to do with the intelligence of the questioner.

I just want to point that out. So John, I think you mentioned earlier that when you're in a discussion with someone with whom you disagree, you really want to take on the best that your opponent has to offer and take that seriously. So in that spirit, here's an excellent question.

I have a pretty interesting one. And this is for both of you. So for John, what arguments and approaches do theists use that you find least helpful? And for Larry, what arguments and approaches do atheists use that you find least helpful? Let's be a little bit self-critical here.

Well, I find arguments that are purely subjective, not very helpful. And here, Larry, your book's great. Thank you.

I made a couple of negative comments, and I would like to apologize if they seem too sharp, because that's not fair. But... Well, Oscar is a very thick skin. What you say... Well, I've got one too.

Really? I don't know about that. We should talk about that. But you make the point that wishing a thing to be true is not a good reason for believing it.

And I'm afraid sometimes I make Christians, and they're very like that. And their concept of faith is, close your eyes, commit intellectual suicide. Don't ask for any reasons.

Just commit yourself. I think that is very dangerous in fact. So those kind of arguments need to be trenchantly cut down.

And as I said, Larry, you do a very good job of it. Wishing a thing to be true, of course, doesn't mean it's false. It would be very strange, for instance, as Lewis points out, if we felt hunger and wanted food, we lived in a world where food didn't exist.

But on the other hand, wishing a thing would be true doesn't make it true. We need better evidence than that. So that would be one point anyway.

Great, Larry. You mentioned Alex a while back. We could go back to that, but maybe you had to understand the deal.

I've read a number of books by atheists, so Sam Harris, Dan Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins. And I come away with a sense of embarrassment sometimes, that these people who are very bright intellects have to take such a mocking, disdainful tone toward a belief that is so significant to how a majority of people live their lives. And I think this strategy of defeating by ridicule is an unfortunate one.

Thank you. You must have come across this in your book, Gunning. What is the title? A Gunning for God, yes.

I know. But it's fair to say at the same time that Christians can be very aggressive. I

mean, sometimes they've been very aggressive with me because I debate atheists.

I mean, it's ridiculous. It's ridiculous. It's ridiculous with the wrong crowd.

Well, I don't. And let me say this as well. I have the deepest sympathy with people who don't believe in God, because of deep personal reasons, particularly the problem of pain and suffering.

I think we cannot trivialize that. That's a hard problem, whether you're an atheist or a Christian. Let's move to perhaps a related topic.

We've selected for an unfortunate group of people up here, and that is that we are all university professors. And many of the students out there are used to encountering us on a daily basis in their classes. And we tend to focus on the life of the mind.

There's a question for both of you. How do you think about the accessibility of truths that lie outside of reason? Do you have room for that? And if so, what is the significance of those kinds of things? Because after all, the concept or the topic tonight is truth beyond science. But are there truths that are beyond reason that are nevertheless truths? I find it very difficult to conceive of anything in that sense that there's truth, which is a rational concept that's beyond reason.

What concerns me much more than that is the facile equation of science with reason. That if it's beyond science, it must be beyond reason. Because if scientism, which we mentioned at the beginning were true, you'd have to close half the faculties in this university tomorrow.

Sadly, including philosophy, because it's not science. And to say that because philosophy is not natural science, there's for its beyond reason is silly. But there are people leading people like Christian to do who ought to know better, no bell price winners who talk about that.

That if you're beyond science, you're beyond reason. That is just absurd. That's what would concern me more.

So I'm not sure that I've understood your question. I think the, well, I don't want to speak for the question, but I believe their idea is that there are, you know, the Christian Pascal talked about truths that the heart knows that reason knows not of. I think that's the intent of the question.

Are there truths, kind of heart level truths? Is there a place for that sort of thing? Larry, what's your take on that? I'm skeptical. The idea that you can know a truth because of a feeling you have rather than because of argument or evidence strikes me as the wrong method, a method that is going to not be reliable. That said, there might be truth beyond reason and if what you're thinking of is human reason.

And it could be that take a conjecture like gold box conjecture, it's mathematical conjecture. No one knows whether it's true. It is either true or false.

And it could be that we'll never know because we stand toward that the way my cat stands toward addition problems. It's just, it's too dumb to know. I've encountered some pretty savvy cats.

I don't know. But, you know, when a student falls in love, their reason doesn't get shut out. In fact, it gets into heightened mode because they're reasoning about every little movement of the other.

It's not true, guys. Of course it is. But this idea that there are non-reasoned truths seems to me.

I don't have a skeptic like you. We've, we've, the last got together, Larry. We started together.

Yeah. There's way too much agreement on that. Okay.

So, John, you've already touched on this. So I'm going to let Larry speak to this and, and you can perhaps respond to Larry. Larry, where does your belief in the right and wrong come from? You're really struck by your opening self-disclosure about yourself and that you feel, and I think those of us who know you would agree with you, that you seek to be a moral person.

And you believe there are things that are right and things that are wrong. And yet I think some in our audience might be puzzled as to what the locus is for rightness and wrongness in your worldview. I'm pretty certain where John will go with that.

But let's, can we tease that out a little bit because that's an interesting question. It's a great question. I wish I had an answer.

I have colleagues actively searching for an answer right now. I see some of them here in the audience. Philosophers have been ever since Plato trying to understand the grounding for the rightness or wrongness of certain claims.

I don't see any reason not to think that this can be the case. We believe that mathematics is objective and yet trying to understand what makes it objective is an equally hard question, I think. Also say that I think appeals to God don't take you any distance at all in understanding the objectivity of morality.

I think a theist has the same problem an atheist has in understanding what makes an action right or wrong. My problem is I go along with Dostoevsky, I'm afraid on this. God does not exist.

Everything is permissible. He was not saying that atheists are bad. He was saying that at

the base level there appears to be no rational justification for morality.

If you reject God, let me give you an example of that. A very famous example of it. I love your take on this actually.

You'll get it. I thought I would. You see Richard Dawkins is conflicted very obviously because in a very famous statement he said, you know, this universe is just what you'd expect it to be.

If at the bottom I quote, "There is no good, there is no evil, there is no justice." DNA just is that we dance towards music. Now if that's true, the Las Vegas gunman was just dancing to the music of his DNA and there's no blame attaching, there's no good, no evil. So Dawkins is claiming that the categories don't exist, which is very odd for a man who rails against the Bible and talks about an evil God when he doesn't even have a concept.

But then he discovers that he's a moral being and something inside him reacts against that and he writes much to the laughter of serious philosophers. He writes, "We are the only creatures who could rebel against our selfish genes." And there's one other point to doubt if we are simply our selfish genes. What immaterial principle can help us rebel against them? So I see out there the atheist world.

Now Larry, believe me, I don't put all atheists in the same category as Richard Dawkins. That would be unfair, very unfair as you pointed out the aggression and so on. But this analysis that if you take atheism to its logical conclusion, you end up with no morality.

I noticed that as being believed all over Europe. And I would dare to say it's why there's such moral confusion around the place. So it's a big issue, so I love your take on it.

Well, as I said, surround yourself with atheists if you want a safe community. Do you work with that view? Dostoyevsky is committing a fallacy. Do you think so? There's no connection between the existence of God and right or wrong that I can see.

There's no connection between belief in the existence of God and right and wrong that I can see. You didn't say how it is that God does guarantee that certain things are right or certain things are wrong. We've known since Plato a fatal objection to this view.

Think about it this way. Suppose you want to learn piano and you're interviewing piano teachers. And the first piano teacher comes in and you say, "Play for me." Because you want to know whether this piano teacher is capable of playing good music.

And she bangs on the keys and jumps up down on the piano and says, "That is good music." And you think, "Wow, I'm not going to hire this teacher." And she insists, "That's good music." And then you bring in the next piano teacher and she plays beautifully. And she says, "That is good music." And you agree. That is good music.

Now, both teachers have said, "That is good music." The fact that they say it makes no difference to whether the music is good. The music is good or it's not. And likewise, when God says, "Thou shalt not kill," either you shouldn't and God recognizes that and tells you so.

Or you should and God is wrong, but it doesn't make a difference what God says. It's right or wrong independently of what he says. And so I don't see... The youthful froth.

Yes, exactly. Well, first of all, music in its relative goodness is not raising a moral issue. So I think the analogy is slightly suspicious.

Secondly, I think the youthful froth problem falls down on the fact that it confuses God's will with his character. And again, you see, we're dealing with things that are incredibly difficult to define. But where God comes into it for me is that at the scientific level, I believe the fact that we can do science points to an intelligence behind the universe.

I believe that the fact that we discover ourselves to be moral beings points to a moral being behind the universe. Now, that works as far as I'm concerned as an inference to the best explanation, especially when I discover a document, the Bible covering many centuries, which has at its heart. The whole question of relationship with God and morality is hugely important issues.

And I can't prove that to you mathematically any more than I can prove that my wife loves me mathematically. But I'd risk my life on it because it seems to me there's sufficient evidence to buy into it. Because for me, it's a better explanation than the reductionist one.

We haven't used that word tonight. I'm not a reductionist. No, I suspected you weren't, which is why I kept back from it.

But Dawkins is, and many people influencing the culture are, and that nothing but, we are nothing but atoms and molecules and so on. That really destroys morality. So if you found a place for morality, I think that's marvelous.

From where I sit, that's because you're recognizing that you're a being made in the image of God. And I find that... Maybe we better stop that there. I like to think I am.

Well, that's wonderful. We'll talk later. So... So we've hit on something fairly important, and I want to conclude with one final question, which I think is very interesting one.

Which hasn't come up so far. It's hard. We have a sense of rightness and wrongness.

Both of you do. I do too. It may be hard for us to understand where it comes from or how it is an objective sense.

We talked about gravity. I think string theorists are hoping they'll be able to understand

gravity one day, John. And we're just because we don't understand it.

Maybe they will, maybe they won't. We all admit though that gravity acts. So we don't need to know how it works to affirm that it works.

And so we're kind of agnostic relative to the mechanism. Now you're a theist. You're an atheist.

But there is this middle position of agnosticism. So let's think about that. Who would like to tackle that one first? The philosopher, clearly.

Go ahead, Larry. I can understand why some people are agnostics. An agnostic is someone who just doesn't offer judgment on God's existence.

Maybe an agnostic is someone who hasn't thought carefully enough one way or the other to come to a conclusion. Maybe an agnostic has a very high standard of justification such that they never believe that they're in a position to make a conclusion about God's existence. As an atheist, I think that the evidence is simply not there for God's existence.

And it's certainly no better for God's existence than for the existence of the flying spaghetti monster or three gods. I don't think it's a Dawkins construct, but he likes it a lot. I like spaghetti.

I've got a picture of it in my office. I do too. Do you have a crucifix in your office? I don't either.

But I think there's... We're getting conflicted, aren't we? There's simply not enough evidence available to me to discriminate between hypotheses like this. There's one God. There's a Christian God.

There are three gods. There's a flying spaghetti monster. And given that I can't discriminate between those hypotheses, I don't feel justified in accepting any of them.

And so I'm just going to... I think God doesn't do anything for me. I don't need to believe in him. I don't see that our understanding of the world is improved by believing in him, and so I just reject it.

So that's a bit different from categorically denying the possibility of God's existence or something like that. I can't prove God doesn't exist. Okay, yeah, that's... Which is where a lot of theists would go with no one can be an atheist because they would have to have knowledge equal to that of what Christians claim God to have.

And that's kind of self-stultifying. So I was kind of thinking that's how you were thinking about these terms. John, you want to wrap things up.

Agostasis is of what it comes from the Greek word aginosco, which means "I don't know." And "Why am I an agnostic?" There's so much stuff I just don't know. I know so very little about mathematics. I know so little, very little about the world.

I don't know as much about the Bible that I would like to know. So I'm an agnostic, you see. But some people define agnosticism as "I don't know and you can't know." That's a very interesting position to be in.

Because if they don't know, how can they know that "I don't know"? You know, when I meet people and they say, "I'm an agnostic," I say, "So am I. What is it you don't know?" Perhaps I can help you with what you don't know and you let me with what I don't know. (Laughter) But it does tend often to be a stated position of "I don't know and you cannot know," which is logically absurd to my mind. Well, I think actually the two of you are in fair amount of agreement on that particular point.

And that's a great place for us to end this discussion. Let's thank these two.

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