

# OpenTheo

## Does Science Point To Atheism? | Satyan Devadoss & Conor Mayo-Wilson

March 10, 2022



### The Veritas Forum

This program was recorded at a Veritas Forum event on University of Washington in 2019. The original title was, "Does Science Point to Atheism?" and featured Satyan Devadoss, University of San Diego Professor, and Conor Mayo-Wilson, University of Washington Professor. 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](http://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

This is the Veritas Forum Podcast, a place for generous dialogue about the ideas that shape our lives. It's not the moral framework that makes me fall in love with something, and to say, oh, that's exciting. Maybe I'm too nerdy, but like the history part of it, I mean, that Christmas Eve makes the historical clean.

This is your host, Carly Regal. Today I'm sharing with you a conversation at a Veritas Forum event at the University of Washington in March 2019. The speakers you will hear from are Sethian Devados of the University of San Diego, and Connor Mayo Wilson of the University of Washington, as they discuss how science and God interact.

You can learn more about the Veritas Forum and talks like these by visiting [veritas.org](http://veritas.org). I hope you enjoy their conversation. [applause] You know, one of my favorite things, dude, this morning I flew from San Diego to Seattle like in non-stop life. One of my favorite things is to send them no seats.

And that way, the person in the window seat has no choice but to listen to me when I talk to them. [laughter] They find out that I'm a mathematician, and two things happen. The first thing they do is they confess their sins.

Father, forgive me. I stopped at trigonometry, and I could go no further. Father, forgive

me.

No calculus killed me. And there's always like a sense of deep brokenness when they think about it. The second thing that happens is they immediately assume that I'm smart.

And so here's something that this little spectrum is going to look like. This is how I grew up in India, and the spectrum is there. And this is how it unfortunately is still here in the states today.

On the right side is now the brilliant, amazing, measurable, talented people in the world today. I got you a map. P.G. [laughter] And then those in physics, biology, econ, history, literature, eventually, you get to be arts.

And there's this notion of kind of finding out how smart somebody is based on what they're working on. Oh, you're an artist. I'm sorry, brother.

I'll pray for you tonight. [laughter] You have no idea if it's one of the world's greatest artists. You don't know if they have their work shown in the moma or the moving ion, but yet, that's all it takes is to know mathematician and an artist.

You see, there's a duality in disciplines today. My friend, here's what this duality looks like. Math and science deals with the measurable humanities and arts emotional.

What is smart? Not smart. One has jobs. [laughter] And the other's jobs.

[laughter] And so, this duality, I think, I think Connor and I are going to speak on this thing is, I think, won't. You see, when we think of science, we somehow think it's the trump card to handle everything. Oh, you're a scientist.

You must have the answers. The truth, the capital T, but that's not true at all. You see, what's really going on is there's a hidden notion of dimension behind the scenes.

And here's what that hidden notion looks like. You see, behind this thing that's measurable and that is totally measurable, there's this hidden notion of complexity. And what happens is math is actually dealing with easy things.

That's how you can measure things really well. Physics is dealing with something more complex. Biology is even dealing with more complex.

You know how to really tell a difference? Look in a math book. Look at that amount of equations you have. Look in the physics book and you'll notice you have less equations.

Look in the chemistry book, you have even less than looking to bio. You almost have not because bio deals with hard things. It deals with living things.

And yet you go down to the list, you have history and economics. You're talking about things that happen in the past. Questions that are far harder.

You get to the artist. They're dealing with emotions and feelings and getting a pulse of the culture we are today. They're not dealing with the clean up things that mathematicians talk about.

So you have hard things to do. So I think of the respect, the spectrum of possibilities that they have. So when we talk about science, you're the right of the spectrum that deals with easy stuff.

And then when you go to the issues of meaning of life and what we are is to be human. Oh my gosh, those are hard questions. Science can begin to nibble at them, but they don't answer them.

So let me tell you what I am excited about. I'm not excited about the really hard things like what it means to talk about beauty. What it means to have meaningful relationships.

What it means to talk about justice. Watch the godfather. And you see like, oh my gosh, yes.

Right? That's notion. What is that? It ain't math and I don't know. It's not a formula that I couldn't do.

The reaction is more than that. That's what humanity is about. Let me give you an example of the messiness of life.

Look on the left side here. This is quantum mechanics, an ancient quantum mechanics. Look at the right side here.

It's a page available. I claim that the left side, although I look weird with exponential functions, and I and square root, is still equations that you have to still down and understand. You make the world so simple that an equation can have to make sense of it.

Be able if you can spend your lifetime understanding and not begin to describe beauty. Let me give you something else. These are my kids.

Okay, yeah, that sounds good. Trust me, it's weird. The older three that talked to me there by a logical kid, my wife is Chinese, so it's cool like Indian blue air, you know, like Indian brown, blended Chinese kid.

But the bottom one is this one. Blonde hair blue light, little with octet. She's by far my favorite child.

[laughter] And already you can see the notion of complexity going on. Like how scoot up

is her life going to be? Pretty scoot up. How do we define that? It didn't have formalized on an equation that there's something else.

Do you deal with the justice, beauty, relationship, this kind of messiness, something else is needed up in science? So to me, you know, the deeper questions that one should be asking in college, the deeper question that you should be asking are exactly the ones of the security guard that you love asks you on Saturdays nights. When they ask you two in the morning, who are you? [laughter] [applause] See, to me, that's what's more than just me. That's actually what the big questions are about.

What are the answers to this? The science has something to say about this. Absolutely. Can this map have something to say about this? Absolutely.

But it's still ill. Then you ask, "What are things about what an artist has to say? What a musician has to say? What a philosopher has to say, now you're dealing with serious things." So let's take that seriously. So let me tell you what I'm thinking about.

To me, I'm thinking every one of us are making claims to these big questions, whether you believe it or not. You might say, "I don't believe any of this thing. I'm an atheist." You're still answering these questions in your own way.

You might say, "It's spiritual, but not religious. It doesn't matter. You're answering these questions in your own way." When you decide what to buy, when you decide how to take care of your mom, when you decide whether you should call the back or not, you're answering these questions in your own way.

We all are playing the game. Nobody's exempt from these rules. So to me, what do I buy? To me, the Christian story is the most probable story, the most believable story to explain the book.

That's why I buy it. To me, I think it probably holistically makes the most sense. It says that the world is beautiful, but it's broken.

It says that God has pursued us and hopes to help us flourish, and that one day he will set the world right. Now, let me be a bit triple. I don't believe in the Christian story because it's emotionally satisfying.

I'm a mathematician, so I have no emotion to satisfy. You see, the reason I have faith in quantum mechanics, one of the most beautiful theories in the world, the reason I have faith in quantum mechanics is the belief that they're invisible, worse than particles. It's not because it emotionally makes me happy.

It's because it best explains the physical world, and the reason I have faith and trust in the Christian story, and it's theory, it's because I think it best explains the physical and the bigger world. You see, we're dealing with harder things, beauty, justice, and

relationships. So let me close by saying that I think one of the reasons I found a Christian story most difficult is because it is the one that deeply values our physical world.

It is not talking about spiritual things, but because of the resurrection, it says that physical world matters. So this is why I built this two-ton sculpture with my colleagues and tickets to Burning Me. And this later, we have to do unsolved questions in math and physics.

Why? Because I think physical math matters. The physical touch matters. You see, our bodies physically crave things.

Why are we buying LPs? When you have digital, lossless music, why are there sales at LPs through the loop? It's really simple because we want to touch things because our bodies matter. And guess what I had right before this thing? It's incredible. The chocolate is one of the best in the world.

The other ones need some work, but the chocolate's not. And this tells me that the physical world matters be great, really good things, our bodies matter. You see, my body personally, I think, is a piece of evidence here as well.

So I'm looking forward to talking to Professor Carter, Professor Bruce, and listening to you all. Thank you so much. OK, so my name is Horamea Wilson.

I teach philosophy of science and epistemology here at UW. And I typically don't get confessions when people tell me or when I tell people that I'm a philosopher. No one says, "Forget me father." I talked out to metaphysics.

The two misconceptions I deal with most frequently, when I start telling people that I'm a philosopher, is first, I get the question, "Aren't all philosophers dead?" And, you know, I can understand the misconception, but I say, "No, I'm alike." And I'm going to make this to the back of the novel, "All philosophers dead." The second misconception that I get is that all philosophers think about our moral questions. And I think sometimes they get that because very, very difficult, philosophical questions often have to do with morality. So because of you who watch the good place, if you don't watch the good place, you should, it's a wonderful television show.

Right? Mike, the aware that there is a character who's a moral philosopher, and this moral philosopher is always thinking about these deep questions, so much so that he can't figure out whether you ought to have the blueberry muffin or the banana crunch muffin in what else. And the way that I think this misconception, at least when I talk to people and talk to them about what I do, I try to describe what I do in the fall. So many of you will graduate from the University of Washington with a wealth of technical skills that are just absolutely fantastic, super impressive.

You'll go on to these wonderful careers to build robots, to program computers and

develop software really to do things that are actually really amazing. But oftentimes when I talk to engineers, the first question they ask is, "How do I do something?" Whereas the moral philosophers typically interested with the question, "Should I build it?" So when you go off the Facebook, right, that's the first question. When you design a feature that allows people to share information in a particular way, the first question the moral philosopher wants you to ask is, "Should you be doing it rather than kidding?" When I describe to people what I do in Hill Trust, the moral philosopher, I say oftentimes what I do is, what I do is, is to discuss, "Do I know how to build it?" and whether I should.

So that's the epistemological question. It's their questions about how we know what we know, right? And where does this knowledge go? So in general, this knowledge is to ask questions like, "What is knowledge? Do we know anything?" If we do know anything, what is the evidence on which our knowledge is supposedly based? What is good evidence? And why are knowledge and good evidence valuable, if at all? So I don't know how many of you have noticed, but when you walk into Odegard Library, there are these inspirational scenes about how Odegard Library is part of an institution that's created for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. And right now we are in a gigantic auditorium that someone spent lots and lots of money building on a campus, right, the taxpayers of the state of Washington support every year.

And the mission statement of that university is to create and disseminate knowledge. Why do we do that? Epistemologists are also interested in that question. So if you want to learn anything more about this knowledge, the antigen of this knowledge class, this is an advertisement right now.

Next quarter, but also in general, if you have these sort of big questions that we'll talk about tonight, show up in the philosophy department, knock on some doors and just say, "We're happy to talk to you." Is it going to work? No. Alright, minimal. For the philosophers of science often ask these same questions when I tell people that in philosopher science, we often ask these questions about more specific domains.

So I have a colleague, for instance, just philosophy of physics. He asked these questions about physical knowledge, right, and what makes something good evidence in physics. So there is, in some sense, subbranches of epistemology as well.

These are sort of the things that I work on in general. Tonight, though, I'm supposed to be representing the atheistic worldview, whatever that is, I actually think there's a variety of basic worldviews. And I just want to say that tonight, I don't hope to convince an awful lot of these behaviors.

Typically, when I teach classes that involve religious content, I try not to make my religious views not known at all. So as to make it a welcoming space for everyone in the classroom. As part of this form, it was unavailable for me not to disclose the fact that I don't believe in that.

So those of you who take classes from me in the future, right, that's something you know. But I typically try to hide those things because I want to create a welcoming environment for folks. And I hope that tonight's form does that as well.

So the general role I think tonight is to help foster a discussion about hard and important questions concerning science, religion, and ethics. In particular, ones that I think oftentimes young people don't get to discuss very much outside of the college setting. So when you're on the job, right, and someone asks you to do a particular job, you can't stop back and ask the question, like, what is this all about? Great.

Really, should I serve that customer over there? It's not a question you can really ask to time to answer when you're on the job. And so I hope we get to talk about tonight. And I hope that you can take some of the skills and questions when we talk about tonight and bring them to other parts of your life.

So the title of this form is really provocative. It's "The Science Point to Atheism." And I just want to say that I don't think there's any way of dis-invigorating this claim under which the answer to this question is yes, right? So my answer is no. As a person who is supposed to be representing the atheistic worldview, I just don't think that there's a way that one can understand science and religion and atheism, except in a very, very narrow way under which the answer to that question is yes.

But I do want to say that I think that there are certain parts of science, a broadly scientific worldview, that are in tension with some religious claims. And I think through the point of discussion tonight, I want to keep at least three types of religious claims distinct. So philosophers often tend to describe it themselves as professional distinction drawers.

I think this is one of the worst descriptions of my profession possible. It makes us just seem like we're just totally pedantic. But over the course of the evening, you're going to hear me do this on multiple occasions.

I'll say, well, it depends what you need. So I apologize in advance for today. But I think there are at least three types of religious beliefs that folks often mingle together sometimes because they're connected, but I'd like to keep separate and certain when we answer a particular issue.

So there are religious beliefs about the existence or non-existence of deities, right? Is there a God? Right? If so, how many? Right. So. A lot of the world's religions also answer questions about what we ought to do, how we ought to behave.

They answer moral questions. Second type of religious belief. Third type of religious belief concerns history.

And I understand history to be very broad of the universe, of the earth, and all of the

living things on it, including humans and the societies they formed in, you know, over the recent millennia. So the answer is that the reason I want to keep these things separate is that I think when you ask the question, are science and religion in conflict? And if so, how? You have to distinguish these types of religious beliefs, right? My partner is an archeologist here at the University of Washington. She teaches a class on biblical archeology in which they look at archeological evidence for various types of claims that are made in the Bible.

And what you'll do, if you take that class with her, and he's a professor's deputy solver, if you take that class with her, you'll find out that there are certain types of historical claims made in the Bible for which there's more theological evidence. And there are other claims for which we can't actually find particular cities, right? They are described in particular sections of the Bible. At least during the historical period starting in which they should be.

So if you think the lack of that type of archaeological evidence is in conflict with religious belief of a particular type, then you're going to find that certain scientific findings, but with some historical sense made by some religions. I think the broader thing that a lot of folks point to when they point to a debate between science and religion is that what they're really talking about are norms for explanation, right? And norms for evaluating what constitutes evidence. Scientific norms have changed drastically, right, over the last few millennia.

And I'm sure at various points, Bruce will chime into less now, right, just how much science has changed. I think that there are some current scientific norms that recommend disbelief and supernatural deities, right? But at the same time, those are norms that we appeal to engaging in explanation. It's not like there's an experimental finding that's only point to them and say that is proof that there's no God.

I don't think that there could be an experiment of such a type, right, even if there are certain types of norms that we have to appeal to when we explain things in science that recommend disbelief and hope. I actually think the most powerful arguments, if you look at the philosophy of religion against the existence of God, aren't against the existence of God in general. They're against the existence of God's particular type.

So the most powerful arguments I think that exist, right, against the issue of worldviews, the most powerful at least for me is the so-called problem of evil, right? And these are serious problems for belief in God that possesses three problems. The properties of being all-nearly, on mission, all-powerful, omnipotent, right, and all kind, omnivisible, right? But I don't think these arguments against a particular worldview draw from science at all. They're supposed to be about particular types of logical and capabilities with the existence of evil and to God with these particular types of problems.

So, throughout course being, and I think we can talk about this argument, a whole bunch



of other ones, a little bit more in depth, but these are at least the views that I wanted to get out on the table, so they do you know a little bit about me before we started the discussion. I think with that in mind, oops, I wanted to put this up because throughout the form, you're allowed to text in your questions to that particular number if you want to answer some. And so now I'm going to turn it over to Bruce, I guess, and moderate with the discussion.

Okay, so with thanks for those really engaging kind of opening comments. Let me just start by asking what would you ask of each other, having heard those statements. I guess I can go first, because this is from my mind, I think the question of the problem of evil is really important, and it's really difficult and it's not true at all.

There's a Christian viewpoint to it, but I would love to know how you would frame it in your life. In other words, if you see somebody getting hurt or if you see an injustice, it can't be a dismissive notion of, well, there's no God, you could do whatever. There's something in your heart that says there is injustice happening.

And so is there an answer you would have, I mean, not saying there's a trivial answer, but is there some kind of a framework you've built to frame it? No, I think one of the things, so typically there's one dismissive version of the problem of evil, which is supposed to show that there's a logical incompatibility with a God with these three properties in the existence of any evil. And I don't believe that. I don't think, for instance, if I saw one person being harmed in one circumstance, I said, well, that's it, there's no God with these properties.

I think what bothers me personally is that it's not just that there's some evil, it seems to be particularly widespread. Like every day, there are lots of people who suffer, and for reasons that seem inexplicable to me. And I think that's a very distressing thing, right, to imagine that there is a being that is supposedly all kind who would permit those types of things to happen to us.

And I should also say that the type of evil that I'm imagining isn't just with regard to human affairs. Sometimes you walk by an animal on a street, like you can see an animal that's been fallen out of a tree if it's a bird, or if you're in the woods and you see something that's harmed, and you think to yourself, this doesn't look human-caused in any way. It doesn't matter what my sins are.

This animal doesn't look like it should have to suffer. And so I think the fact that suffering is so widespread is what is disconcerting not to me, not just that it's one instance. Sorry, what I meant was like, that makes sense, but in your framework as an atheist, how have you found an answer to it? That's what I'm saying.

What do you mean? How have you wrestled with that question and found a framing for it? Do you know what I'm saying? Or is that not even a weird question to ask? I guess I

don't... Or maybe that question doesn't even exist. Yeah, it's a good question, right? So in a certain sense, I think that this is something, this question that arises for a particular theistic view. Not for all theists, but theists who are committed to a particular type of God.

Absolutely. I typically don't think atheists are on the hook to answer the question of why there is so much evil. Right? It's just out there, it's one of the facts about the world, and it's an unfortunate one.

Cool. Cool. Yeah.

I guess I was going to ask you more about how you came to your particular, if I were to ask you a question. How you came to be a Catholic, where you raised Catholic, right? Is this a worldview that you think you found really, really consonant at a young age? Or did you, at some point, when you were a teenager or a college, think to yourself, "Great. I feel as much certainty in this in terms of the arguments I can give as, for instance, I would feel in a particular type of mathematical proof." Cool.

Yeah. So I guess I would say I'm a Christian. I don't think I am a Catholic.

I'd say maybe a Protestant is kind of the way for it. Okay. But my, I grew up from India, so my dad is Hindu, and you kind of renounced Hinduism to marry my mom, but he would not say he's a Christian.

He would not say that he's a theist, right? But he would say the Christian faith is somehow special. My mom's side was in the Christian faith. And so I was in the middle of the, taking the theism seriously with my family around.

I think it wasn't until grad school when I really questioned things seriously. Like in other words, is this, there are a lot of claims that this is making. And so at what point do we kind of buy into it, and do we push back against it? And so it started making more sense and less sense as I kind of wrestle with my stuff.

So that's the background of it. But the DNA of theism was certainly my family. Well, if we just sort of build on that a little bit, the sort of the problem of evil and sort of, you know, situating yourself with respect to the metaphysical structures of the world is how do those things relate maybe to kind of questions of good and evil on a personal level? Questions of morality and ethics.

You know, if there's a, if you conceive of a kind of omni-benevolent God, what would that sort of look like in practice? And in yourselves. I mean, for me, I think you talked about deities, morality, and history. Remember in your parts of the sort of religious frameworks? The morality doesn't excite.

And what I mean by that is that it's not the moral framework that makes me fall in love

with something and to say, "Oh, that's exciting." Maybe I'm too nerdy, but like the history part of it, I mean the Christian faith makes historical claims. Right? And like the Judea Christian faith, as you were talking about, you know, your partner talking about the biblical findings, whether they were there or not, that it's not a theoretical claim, it's a historical claim. So to me, that's exciting, whether you can prove or disprove it, or whether you know what percentage of it's making sense.

And Jesus, the fact he was a man who died is not really negotiable, but the fact that the resurrection is kind of a totally up-for-debate kind of a thing. Right? So to me, that's exciting. And the notion of whether there could be a God and the notion of evil is also interesting to me.

So going back to this notion of morality, you guys, I think to me, it's almost like, I think of it almost like stained glass windows at a church. Like from the outside, you're like, that's dumb, it's all black, but it's like a black windows. And from the inside, it's like, dude, it's gorgeous.

And so now I see the purpose of them. So it's, you know, the light kind of is designed so you can see through from the sun shines from the inside. So that's what I think of morality is like, if you kind of buy into it based on some truths, there's a reason how things work.

And to me, that's how I would kind of go backwards. Like somehow morality doesn't excite me to get into it first place. Can you say, can I maybe ask a question? So when you say that God is the best explanation of the entire package, not just the physical world, what are these other worlds that you're talking about? Because for instance, one of the most common arguments that I hear for belief in God is that God explains the moral facts.

There are things that are right or wrong. And the best explanation for these objective moral facts is a deity that commands us to behave in particular ways. To me, I'm not dismissing or emphasizing those arguments.

It's just those arguments were never attracting me. So partly because I'm an idiot. Like when it comes to that, really not.

I mean, another one is like great minds that thought about those things and wrestled with it. And I feel like it's just beyond me to play that game and to understand it. But some things that are exciting to me is the notion of justice.

Like the fact that we all kind of burn, like this is going back to like if you've watched 12 years this late or, you know, the Godfather, there's this notion of like you want things set right. Like there are like a thousand movies about some guy's daughter getting kidnapped and he kills everybody to get a bath. You know, like every year there's like

three movies, I don't know, I've never seen any of them.

But I can only imagine the reason why that's exciting. It's like, you know, this notion of vengeance to set things right. And the Christian faith really says, dude, that's a big deal.

That's like a huge part of the Christian faith is the resetting of justice happening. Partly for the notion of evil, I mean, like the punchline of the Christian faith is Jesus somehow is setting the world right through all this evil that has been happening. So I think like things like that about the notion of justice, the notion of why we find things beautiful, the notion of why we rather be at a rock concert rather than listening to a CBB.

Right? It's like you want to be in a community of people, right? And one answer could be, well, that's evolutionally the way we are, you know, we're community beings. That's totally fair to say that the Christian faith also says we're built for community. So it's just kind of like eventually these probabilistic kind of things add up.

So I kind of say this makes the most sense to me of all the things out there. So those are those examples of them. Can you give us the sort of 17 cent schema for ethics and morality? [inaudible] Ready? Go.

Go. I guess one thing I did want to say that I think is important for folks who have heard these types of arguments. And I expected when you said that the Christian worldview explains a lot of things, is that you were going to rehearse to call moral arguments for the existence of God.

And at first when I heard these arguments, I actually found them really compelling. But when I started to think about them, or I had as many questions about them as I had about questions about morality in an atheistic worldview. So for instance, one of the questions, if you read, there's a very famous dialogue by Plato called the Yuthafro, in which Socrates and Cowenuse Yuthafro on the court stepphouses are on the steps of the courthouse.

And Yuthafro is brought in on charges. I think actually the charges are he's led a slave die. And he defends himself by saying this action would have been pleasing to the gods.

And Socrates then asks him, it begins a time for discussion of piety, and he says, well, is an action pious because the gods do it or approve of it, or do the gods approve of it because it's pious? And what Socrates wants to suggest in the rest of the dialogue is that it's the latter. Right? Does it come out fully, I guess, and say it? But he wants to suggest that there are independent standards for morality. And one of the ways that I try to motivate that oftentimes when I think about it is that I really think it would be impossible for God to will that murder be right.

Or that the Holocaust would have been okay. Right? I just don't think that there is a God that could do that. Right? And if I don't think that there's a God could do that, that

means I think that there are some independent moral standards, right? That a God would must necessarily abide by.

But once you have those independent moral standards, right, then the moral arguments power for the existence of God seems to go away a little bit. Because you say, you've already got these standards for judging what's right or wrong. You don't need the actual deity in there to make the standards objectively, right, more or well-founded in any particular way.

I could of course talk about, there's a large theory about what grounds moral claims and the history of philosophy. And we can do some of those other theories later, but I think actually, Sethians moving the conversation elsewhere. I know it's good.

I mean, one way to maybe sort of broaden this out a little bit is to, and as you can tell from seeing me, you know, fondle this iPad. So I'm also getting questions from the audience that I'm trying to weave in here. So I'm not watching basketball or anything down here.

So one way to maybe broaden this out a little bit, but in a useful way, maybe would be to ask, you know, is morality sort of uniquely tied to religion as opposed to science? And is science somehow more dynamic, you know, constantly changing, constantly progressing, whereas religion represents, you know, fixed truths that remain constant? And do those two somehow connect? I guess, you know, I'm a postmodernist in many sense, but I'm also a modernist in some sense. So what I mean by that is like, I do think there's something called truth of the capital T. Like, it doesn't matter what we think two plus two is for the Gaspone Theater, and it's one of the most beautiful theorems in the world. I mean, we could just talk about this list of amazing mathematical results that are phenomenal, that are truth.

Like, if I take the curvature of a sphere and deform it, the total sum of the curvature is going to be constant. It's amazing. Great.

I'd accept that. The way we view that is through biased lenses. So in that sense, I'm a postmodernist.

In other words, we're looking at absolute truth, but I don't have the full picture. And to claim that I do is deep arrogance to say that, right, like, I get it all, I see it all in, isn't it true that every religion is the same? Well, that's a pretty amazing statement to say for you to have seen every religion and evaluated to say that you have the right to say they're the same. So I am biased, you know, through my background, how I grew up in India, how I came here and all that stuff in the way I see this thing.

But at the same time, I think we're gifted enough as humans to measure things. So we're trying our best to measure and quantify truth, you know, through that lens. So when we

talk about science and faith or science and God, you know, I think that whether there is a God or not is a truth that is going to be there.

And then through our weapons of science, through our weapons of mathematics and history, we're kind of bringing it and our own biases to see and to understand whether it's going to be good enough. So I asked sort of specifically about sort of science and morality. Whether morality has to be uniquely tied to religion or whether it can, you know, find another foundation.

But let me just press you a little bit on the example you brought up because I think mathematics is really interesting as an example. You know, one of the most important events in the history of mathematics was the separation of pure mathematics from applied mathematics. So at the end of the 19th century, in the beginning of the 20th century, there was this decision that to really most fully develop mathematics, you had to cut it loose from any connection to the world and allow it to exist in a world of its own, which didn't necessarily have any connection to this world at all.

And that was as opposed to applied mathematics. So I think, you know, when folks ask questions about morality, partly that has to do with the platonic problem, right, what world are we talking about? And what world do we have access to? And should we dodge back and forth, you know, from one to another when we try to wrestle with some of these questions? Yeah, I mean, Bert and Russell talked about, you know, getting away from this disgusting, broken world and to create these cosmos of glory, right, of math that's kind of pure. And I think we're realizing, going back to autonomous, even saying that every statement we're trying to make and every theorem is going to have consequences, right? So we can talk about the notion of what is the ideal way of finding those with mathematics as optimization, geometric structure, going from here, point A to point E index, it's kind of fastest.

What's the best way? Geometric calculations, algorithmic design, but then somebody can say, well, isn't that a great tool to create weapons? So at the end of the day, you have this theoretical math question, which is a beautiful geometric algebraic structure, and then they can have devastating effects and consequences. So this, I think it's a deep falsehood to say that we are free from consequences. In other words, there's nothing called pure math.

I think mathematics is amazing, but anything can be worked into a tool. And so it's always being applied as humans. We're always being creative in taking those ideas and saying, what's the best way to use it this way? So we should be accountable for those kinds of things.

I think morality is deeply linked to say that I just want to study the way electrons and atoms split for the sake of theory and not realize it's going to lead to the bomb. Is it interesting? So I promise not to intervene with historical commentary, so I'm going to

pass over some possible historic criticisms. But, and, you know... It must be hard for you to think in right here.

No, I'm a model of restraint. And, and, and because, you know, I'm rewarded for my goodness, the iPad has cut off. So as you all suspected, as professors now, we no longer care what you think.

There's no questions coming up here, so we can talk about whatever we want. Nope, it says, please feel free to do what you want. So that's great.

Okay, so, have we, should we move on? Is there more to be said about science, morality, and extra scientific foundations for morality? You know, I think I might want to say one or two things here, which is oftentimes now when I teach classes, people draw a strict divide between mathematics and reasoning about math and reasoning about morality. They take one of these oftentimes when I walk into college classrooms, students will say, "Well, morality, that's just your opinion, man." Right? And, and mathematical questions that are, those are deep truths, right? You know, you're so wrong. Right.

QED. Yeah, QED. Right.

And, and so I'm glad that, I'm glad that you reacted that way, because I just wanted folks to hear that there's an alternative way of thinking about these things in many ways. So historically, there have been lots of thinkers who have actually thought that mathematics and morality were actually very alike. Right.

Because there are these facts about the world. There are facts about numbers. We can't necessarily, or facts about continuous functions in vector spaces.

We can't touch or feel them. Right. But they're out there.

There are facts about these abstract objects. And similarly, right, those folks will say, "There are facts about what's good." Right. And what's bad and what's just.

Right. And feel morality. Right.

But there are nonetheless facts about it. And so people have drawn analogies between the two fields. Right.

To say that just as you think that there sure are these objective facts out there about mathematical objects that you can't necessarily verify the experiment. It would be absurd, for instance. Right.

To think to yourself, "Well, I want to check the two plus three is five. So I'm going to go ask, you know, a hundred math professors to add two to three. Right.

Check what percentage of them get five. Right. Test it for statistical significance.

Great to see if they deviate from five and some sort of degree and declare, "Oh, two plus three doesn't equal five. You know, this percentage of the time." Right. And I think that similarly, there are facts about morality that a lot of philosophers have historically thought aren't empirical.

Right. And they're sort of on par. So if you want, I was going to make a reading recommendation.

I actually don't know the book is out. There's a professor at Columbia's named Justin Clark-Done. He's written a book called Mathematics and Morality, The Analogy.

Right. And explain the similarities and differences between the two fields. Really? Yeah.

So it's a great book. And what he wants to do is argue that a lot of the purported reasons that try to drive a divide between these two subjects are actually more superficial than you might think. So I'd be happy to talk about those as well.

I don't think, I don't agree with the conclusion of the book, but I think it's thought provoking. And I think the point of this form is to encourage people to ask questions and think about these issues. So maybe Bruce, I want to go back and clarify my mistakes.

But let me just say one thing about just going back to morality in that class because you keep talking a little bit more about this planner. And I think of how technology is related to this. So let me just say a word about that.

If I have a cell phone or computer, I think those are beautiful things that have created. But it has a whole lot of us. You know, like we have these studies showing how much it controls us.

Rather than thinking about all these things and we're digitally going somewhere else. And I think in an ideal setting, we could look at technology as a beautiful thing without having to control our arts. And so I think in an ideal setting, we could look at mathematics as a beautiful thing without having these deep, you know, the brokenness that we have and how it relates to these consequences.

So I think in the new habit and the new art, in my dream, I can do mathematics in a glorious way without having to worry about how it can be taken and warped and broken. But in this fallen world, we can't pretend there are no consequences. So we have to be here.

So arguably, so the themes of morality and ethics are kind of a subset of this broader question of how do we arrive at truth? How do we satisfy ourselves as we move through the world that we have at least a working understanding of truth? And so I think it's often proposed that science and religion represent two routes to truth. And sometimes those routes are represented as conflicting. Sometimes they're represented as



complementary.

But do you see sort of similarities and differences in the ways that science and religion find their way to truth? Sure, so maybe I think I'm going to do the philosopher thing. I'm going to draw a distinction. One of the things I think that might help to do is distinguish between the types of truths that you might be interested in.

No one's going to say, "Father, are there quirks?" I mean, maybe you do, but I don't think you're going to get a very satisfying answer. And similarly, if you walked up to your physics professor and said, "What is the nature of justice?" You're likewise not going to get a particular answer. I remember actually as a graduate student, I was taking a general relativity class and I asked a question in the physicists.

It was about the topic of material in the class. And the professor basically said, "That's a math question. It's not a physics question." And I thought that was super interesting.

But I think that it also goes to show you something, is that folks in large portions of the sciences are unwilling to answer particular types of questions because they recognize that they have expertise in particular fields. And similarly, religious figures have expertise in particular fields and they don't want to necessarily move their domain over and other things. So on this sort of joint set of truths on which religion and scientists might speak, claims about the past of human societies, in some cases, whether or not the earth stands still, large historical example.

I do think that there are different norms for explanation, but oftentimes religious arguments are just as much based on some sort of empirical research as are the scientific ones. So the norms I want to talk about, I think, that are sort of interesting, is that oftentimes now it's just unacceptable to appeal to, for instance, desires or beliefs of entities when giving particular types of scientific explanations. So if you say something like the pin will move towards the magnet, you can't say because the pin wanted to, or desired to make union with the magnet or something like that.

That would be an unacceptable explanation for scientists. So attributing feelings, desires, and so on are types of things that have been eliminated. It's up for instance from psychological explanations.

Of course, if our explanations concern human beings, beliefs and desires are the types of things that we trade in. The other type of thing I think that religion avails itself as a way to give explanations that scientists don't are moral facts. So I oftentimes hear people who are deeply religious will say things like, "Well, grandma died because it was her time.

She was suffering. And it was bad that she was suffering. So that's why she died." That's just not going to cut it in sort of like a medical coroner's office.

They're just not allowed to make such an explanation. And in a certain way, I'm not sure what I think about these standards for explanation, but I do want to say that the differences here, right, sometimes between science and religion aren't necessarily between what's based more in fact, but on the ways that we can actually or the tools that we have to give explanations. One of them will actually allow it sort of a wider range of particular types of explanatory courses, whereas I think the folks that you would meet at this university will constrain themselves in terms of the way that they would meet.

And they will use the same type of things that they will use in explanations for empirical form. That's also recent, by the way. So for the folks I actually see, I have one or two students here from my history of philosophy of science class, I had taught last spring.

They read some passages of Descartes, where Descartes gives an argument, "Motion is conserved. Why is motion conserved?" Because God created the universe with a certain amount of motion and wants that to be the amount of motion. So that norm for explanation, that banishes particular types of desires and entities from the explanations, a new one.

It's not a norm that's existed for a while. And you find similar sorts of passages in Newton, not quite of the same tenor, but similar. And a lot of scientists historically.

I agree with what you're saying. I think of it when it comes to, for example, reading the Bible. If you look at Genesis 1, a lot of people say, "Well, let's read this as a scientific document." You know, like, "Here's quantum mechanics, here's Genesis 1, God said seven days." And they kind of take it quite literally.

And then you read the funny part, it's going to be Genesis 2, and it's actually a deep contradiction to what Genesis 1 is. Genesis 1 is like a punchline, it's a man who was made at the end of the chapter 6th day. And then Genesis 2 is like, "God started with man." And then he went from there, it's like, "Wait a minute." It wasn't like they even tried to hide it and have a cook.

You know, like somewhere, I guess, like right in the next page, you're like, "Oh, come on!" If you're kind of getting away with this, just slip it in somewhere. So, I mean, if you look at it from this kind of scientific framework, you're thinking, "Either they're just a bunch of idiots." Or, like, whoever wrote this and crafted it and put it together, we're really serious about the intentionality. Of putting Genesis 1 and 2, which seems like deeply in conflict, next to each other.

And so, to me, when we think of these fake statements and these religious statements, like, "How is it written and who's the audience born? What are they trying to say?" And to me, I find this a very post-modern document, as the punchlines of what Genesis 1 and 2 is. And so, it doesn't, you can't just, I think, transcribe things literally, like a poem. It's not, say, "I'm looking for a scientific meaning in this song." And so, they're saying very

different, deeper things.

So, I agree with you in this kind of thing. So, you're saying there's kind of no common route or means to truth. These are two separate realms.

You mean, you need the two Genesis versions or something? No, between science and religion. I wouldn't say there are two different realms. I just, I wouldn't, I think they do intersect, but I wouldn't overlap them.

I wouldn't find this kind of isomorphic byjection of taking the weapons of one and just applying directly onto the other one. I'm not saying they're independent. Of course, they speak to one another.

And one, we live in a world that can be measured scientifically and has a still, certainly, if you're making claims from a religious perspective on that world, then it has to hold water to the scientific ways you're seeing that world. So, they're still leading that world. Can you say a little bit about how you balance those particular things when you look at a particular type of document? So, if you're interested in one and two as an example or... No, that's really hard.

Not yet. That's an answer for Genesis 1 and 2. That actually makes sense. Okay.

Go forth. Maybe, maybe. I mean, this is how I balance it.

So, the only thing that's particularly important, right? So, the time that, you know, this was being done is doing the Babylonian epic, where there's a classic notion of man being created in lots of different fake religion statements. And man was being created as a slave, as a slave for the gods, right? So, like, you know, T.M.O.D. was like ripped up as a goddess, had the earths who were made, and then these gods were, you know, using man as slaves. And if you read Genesis 1, it actually fits right into it.

You know, God made this and God made this and God made that end on the sixth day. He's like, you know what? Let's make some slaves. And you don't really know what the point of Genesis 1 is.

It feels like the punchline could be the first day. It could be the punchline could be the second. You don't even know what the punchline is.

It just feels like an order of things and a structure of what God's doing, which you don't see the intentionality. And Genesis 2 kind of pauses and saying, oh, by the way, in case there's any doubt as to what where man fits into this thing, man was at the center of God's will when he made all of this. So, to me, Genesis 2 is a clarification of Genesis 1. As Genesis 1, I almost think of it, this is a very bad word to say, but almost a historical document of how things could have happened, like in the order of God being in control of creation.

But Genesis 2 tells you the purpose of what he did in that context. So, there is this tension, and I think if you actually look at the Jewish Bible, it's really filled with these deep tensions that those in the West want to break all the time. And I think the wonderful thing about the Jewish faith, I think, is the fact that you learn to live in that.

There's this notion of like, you know, one thing it says, if you do good, then bad things won't happen to you. And then the next page is like the book of Job, the guy who's doing it. I was like, "Oh, come on!" The next to this, you know? And again, there's this tension of like, "Well, that's it." You know, that's this complicated stuff of what it means to be in this broken world where the God who loves it.

So, there's no cleanliness to this thing. Anyway, that's one attempt of an answer today. Yeah, I don't know if that actually makes religious belief that much different from science, and maybe you can speak a little bit about it.

It seems like there are all sorts of theories in our various sciences that create certain types of tensions. Right? You know, we postulate that entities, you know, seem to, or organisms seem to behave, you know, in order to propagate, right, their own DNA and genes in particular ways. And yet, organisms seem to engage in particular types of altruistic behavior.

And of course, there's a lot of biological science that goes into explain this. But resolving those tensions, right, I think seems to be part of science too. It seems to say on one surface, it looks like there's a claim, right, that we should expect, you know, everyone in this room really to just be hitting each other and stealing each other's money and food by the end of the session.

Right? And on the other hand, right, you know, what we observe is a bunch of people cooperatively sitting here and texting some questions to Bruce, but not as many as we had hoped. Right? And so it just strikes me that this type of reconciling, difficult, you know, potentially contradictory beliefs is part of a scientific enterprise as well. That's true.

I think it's a human thing in some sense, right? Absolutely. Yeah. So I guess among the kind of human elements that are maybe most relevant are things like faith and doubt.

I mean, so arguably both science and religion require faith both deal with doubt. So is there a kind of, is that a place where there's a sort of meeting of the two realms is on questions of say doubt, for example? I'm a philosopher, so all I do is doubt. Yeah.

You know, I'm constantly questioning what I'm... You doubt if you've drawn enough distinctions. I doubt if I've drawn enough distinctions. Yeah.

Whether I've doubted enough. It's an endless cycle. Yeah.

Yeah. And of course one of the most famous philosophical pieces in Western philosophy is Descartes' Meditations, where he preaches the method of doubt. Right? But that's also a nice instance of someone who was doing both what we would consider modern science and was deeply religious.

Right? And saw the method of doubt as being part of both of those things. It was his common method of finding out about the world and also his method for ultimately finding the foundations of all of his knowledge. And that's why in the book three of the meditations he could approve of the existence of God.

Right? So I would hope that this is a sort of common ground that, you know, I assume that you likewise, I think, are someone who has self-doubt about your religious beliefs. Yeah. I mean, I wouldn't... I guess going back to your point earlier, I wouldn't say that... I wouldn't... I guess connect religion and science that closely.

In other words, I guess it depends on what we're talking about really what we mean by science. Do we mean science as the word like knowledge? Or do you mean science as in the scientific method, you know, from the scientific revolution of the way to know this through repeatable experiments? If it's the latter, then, "God, that's a cool way to know." But there are a lot of other ways to know. They're historical ways of knowing you can't kill Abraham Lincoln over and over again.

And he'll be like, "Oh, check it out, is he dead?" Right? So it's not like... it's not like, "Well, since you can't repeat it, I don't believe it." That doesn't make any sense to us. Right? They're historical shoes, they're artistic shoes, they're musical shoes, they're scientific shoes according to this experiment way of measuring truth. So in that sense, I don't think... if I'm using that definition, I would have put science religion in the same category of what it is, because one is asking very big questions and one is talking about a repeatable thing.

But if we mean the pursuit of knowledge, then absolutely as a mathematician we're always looking to see even great theorems that have been existing. We're like, "Wait, why is that working? Wait, is it really supposed to work?" Because I got this piece of evidence either I'm wrong and gosh, I don't think I'm wrong because I'm good. You know, so, "Well, wait a minute, no, that was done." So you're always pushing either something has to give, right? So I think this notion of doubt is always there.

And that's true for raising parents. Mary, did I grade my class correctly? Was I too mean? Was I too kind? Like, there's always the seed of doubt that's kind of floating in there. That's true even for my faith.

Because the Christian claim is pretty crazy. I mean, it's like a huge remarkable claim. You kind of have to re-evaluate it once in a while.

Over and over again, just be like, "Does that mesh with the new step I've learned in the past six months? Or is that clicked with this relationship? Or, you know, this kid we did foster care for? My daughter, who we adopted, there were two men who were with us and one person was the person who does placement. And what that means is he finds kids in the foster program and he finds homes to place them in. And the other person is the one who's an investigator.

And he's the one who gets the call at three in the morning, breaks into a house and takes a kid away before that kid gets killed. And so he says, "I have seen things that guarantee my mind there is no God." And so, you know, the three of us would get a beer once a month. And I have to listen to those conversations and say, "Does that fit with my world here?" And is that planning seeds of that? Is it naked, me, read that? And it absolutely is true that I have to take those questions in it.

That I can't be dismissive of those great things. Absolutely. Maybe can I say one thing, though, at the very beginning here.

So I agree there are also ways of finding out about the world. And a lot of them don't fit neatly into contemporary scientific norms. But I also do think, for instance, there are scientific questions that people ask that can discern things that aren't in any sense repeatable, at least in any sort of practical sense.

Right? You know, scientists are interesting questions about like the extinction of dinosaurs, right? Or, for instance, the Earth's history. Right? Yes. You know, those just aren't things that barring some really, really fancy advances in experimental methods that we're going to be able to repeat.

Right. And so, you know, I just don't -- that was the one characterization where I would say. I wouldn't agree that the scientists are contributing only to those particular types of things.

Thank you. You know, I also think there's the distinction that I sort of draw very often in classes is that what makes science interesting is that science sort of commands a cent. Which is to say that many of the examples that we sort of grapple with in our daily lives and certainly in history sort of take the form of, you know, I'm okay, you're okay.

Right? So, you know, you like the good place. Right? I like Speed Racer. Okay.

So, I'm okay, you're okay. You know, we like different kinds of music. I'm okay, you're okay.

You know, we have different political views. We have different views on art. I'm okay, you're okay.

When it comes to science, it's, you know, I'm okay, you're an idiot. Right? So, there's a

right answer. There's a reason why we have the right answer and the answer might change.

But it's, you know, it's not open for kind of negotiation. Right? 9.8 meters per second per second. Everybody at the end of the ditto, the end of the problem set.

If you don't get 9.8 meters per second per second, you're an idiot. So, I mean, it seems to me there may well be truths embedded in music or art. But still, we treat science differently because it represents this realm in which we're all supposed to agree on the same answer and you're compelled to do so, in all sorts of ways.

Methodological, social, you know. So, I mean, shouldn't we draw that kind of distinction? I mean, if you go back to that spectrum kind of example that I did, you were dealing with things way more measurable in that corner of science and mathematics. So, I think there should be deeper agreement over there.

You know, as you kind of walk down that spectrum of what it means to talk about addition or equations and truths of mathematics. And as you walk this way, it gets a little less buzzy. So, biological questions.

You know, we can ask and it's going to be a harder thing for us to get united behind. That doesn't mean that we have independent opinions and both of those opinions are equally evaporated. So, if you can talk about cubism, like talking about beauty, like, is it true that, you know, Degas or is it true that Picasso was a genius? Like, that he's one of the most, you could say, "Well, I don't like cubism.

It's dumb." You know, so, no, I don't think he's a genius. Well, I mean, it doesn't matter what you think to a certain degree that we think that there's this notion in the artistic community of what it means to be brilliant because there are these markers that were set. So, even when things get less and less measurable, I mean, go back to what we are.

We're academics. So, somebody gets tenure. So, you know, somebody who's a poet is going to get tenure and somebody isn't.

Regardless of how we think poetry doesn't matter, we're so quantifying poetry to say, "This is a great, this is the poet lord of America. This person isn't." So, even then, it's measurable things. Yeah, I would hope that the other thing is, although I do think that science oftentimes commands a cent and that there are other areas of inquiry that might likewise command a cent, I also think that sometimes it's important to appeal to scientific methods or findings even when it doesn't command a cent.

So, I teach large lecture classes and small classes every year as does everyone on this stage. And one of the things I do is I look to educational literature about the best teaching methods that exist in various forms. Educational research is a disaster.

It's just a total list. There are small samples of classrooms in particular universities with very specific types of interventions. I used the clicker question in this following circumstance.

And then we're supposed to draw some inference about how all students, regardless of their background, regardless of their geographical location, regardless of their educational training in the previous years, are supposed to respond to particular types of interventions. And the evidence there just doesn't warrant the types of inferences that we'd like to visit, that we'd like. Nonetheless, I often hope that people look at the literature because I think it's the best evidence that we have.

So, I think sometimes that even though it doesn't command a cent, and it shouldn't command a cent, because it's not definitive in the way that I can measure how fast a cannonball falls from a tower. Nonetheless, I think oftentimes when you look at the type of evidence that's being gathered inside the pick settings, it ought to command a particular type of attitude, even if it's not something like full belief. So, I'm going to sort of call an end to this part of the evening, and we're going to kind of move on to the next part, which won't look that much different than the last part.

I'm going to try to make an effort to draw explicitly on some of the questions that have come into our toll free number. And some of these I've kind of woven into what we've done so far, but now we're in the lightning round. So, I'm going to ask, you know, both speakers to sort of move quickly so we can handle as many questions from as many of you as we have time for.

So, where to begin. So, let's imagine a system in which science told us how to act. Right, I mean, certainly there have been such systems proposed.

What would that system look like? I'm just taking this off of the pad. I don't know. If science could tell us how to act, what would it say? Science doesn't tell us how to act.

I don't think so. Okay. But maybe we can get, so I want to take the question seriously because someone asked it honestly.

And let me maybe say some of the common routes that I think I've seen for naturalistic explanations of morality. They're often appeals to how various moral rules would lead to successful cooperation among human beings thereby leading to the success of our species. Right, so there are these evolutionary claims that rules like don't steal, don't lie, don't murder, right, are rules because beings that obey those types of things are the types of beings that can form small societies that succeed well.

Right, and therefore propagate. Okay, so according to those particular types of origins of morality, the types of rules that you get out are precisely the types of things that you would expect you need to get out in order for humans to engage in cooperative activity



and successfully reproduce, but nothing more. Right.

So in particular, for instance, a lot of those systems won't tell you what to do with your with your ailing grandmother who, you know, or grandfather who has become senile, right, and had particular wishes when they were, you know, of one mind and now has different wishes now, right, that, you know, that maybe they're a little bit more incapacitated. Right, typically these these evolutionary expectations will say, you know, might tell us something about what beings would do in order to successfully reproduce, right, and, but they're not going to tell us what to do with folks once they're way past particular sets of ages and of use, right, to this slide is a question. I think this notion of maybe even calling up on this optimization, like maximizing something and minimizing something, you know, we want to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, these kinds of things.

I think they just get really dangerous because you could talk about big frameworks, but when it comes to your family's life, when it comes to your parents life, all of a sudden, you don't really want to optimize. All of a sudden you want to say, like, what will it take to honor them? What will it take to spend my time, not efficiently, like, how contributing to society and make money, but like, actually, giving up my job, sitting next to my mom and just taking care of her in the past five years of her life. So all of a sudden the things that we think are ideal for society just goes out the window when it actually comes to showing love and compassion.

So I think, I don't know if that's the scientific way of dreaming, I think he's a little careful about that. And I think even the notion of what science says when you think about it with a great scientist, like, think about a movie or basically the great scientist mathematicians who've been there, they usually say, you know, God is there and I can't wait to explore and understand the notion of gravity and the way the world works to see how he has created it. I can't imagine them to say, and then you're the rules in which one must obey.

I think it's kind of the course kind of thing. They're doing it to understand God's framework rather than to say, from those rules God can even build it. Okay.

Now, remember, lightning round. I don't want to start singing the Jeopardy song, but I will if I have to. Let me go back to one I kind of threw out and you guys didn't really pick up on.

It's often the case that science is portrayed as dynamic and ever-changing. Religion is portrayed as fixed. Is that, does that seem plausible to you? That science is fluid, religion is fixed, and that's one of the crucial differences.

I guess it's been now we have to come up with religion needs to be mean and understanding of how God works or who God is. And that's certainly not true because I

think the simple analogy is, let's just take a simple relationship that I know, which is my wife or not. Every night we have ice cream in front of our kids and make sure they don't share it with us.

Just to show that this relationship is important, right? It's like, you're not inviting, it's just us. And it's worth it for you to watch a speed and paint for \$5.99 because their marriage is good. That makes you happy.

So trust us. So, but is it possible that one night I go there, my wife's like, "Hey baby, try this in a chocolate chip." And she could have poisoned it. And the answer is totally as possible, but there's a chance of 20 years and years that it hasn't worked yet.

So I think that history of that relationship I've had is going to impact how I view that next super-life scream that she might give me. And the reason I'm saying that is, we learn more about God. In other words, if I really believe that there is a God who's a personal being, then yes, it is going to change.

So it is not this fixed. So would that apply to the exegesis of the text, of biblical texts? It could be. Yeah.

Now we're understanding more about historical context. You know, people used to say, "Well, the Pharisees," right? But like if you read it through the eyes of Luther and Calvin during the Reformation, they would say, "Well, the Pharisees are just like the Roman Catholic Church." Right? They're just trying to stick these laws and hold on to the one, the only way to take going to God's presence is to follow these rules. And now we're finding out more and more that that's actually through the lens of the Roman Catholic Church at that time period.

The Pharisees were really the gatekeepers to make sure that people don't look too much like Rome. It's like, dude, the last time we looked like Rome, a Syria white to souther and that one white to souther, let's be distinctive and keep the sadness, not because it's to earn God's love. Dear Lord, that hasn't worked at all.

God already loves us, but it's to make sure we're distinct from the culture. So the way we look at the text again has definitely changed as we learn more about history and as we learn more about the science. Absolutely.

Yeah, I think you set us up to answer the question, "No." Religion isn't static. Okay. You know, there are obvious examples, you know, of, of course, for instance, there's a long tradition of Torah interpretation of scholars, you know, debating and refining, how to understand the text.

And of course, I think the Catholics in the room probably actually knew things about how the Catholic Church has used on a particular matter as if it changed over time. So I think it was in the mid-90s that the Catholic Church said evolution, okay, right? Maybe '96, '97,

I don't remember exactly. But they said the soul, or the human soul wasn't something that was subject to evolutionary forces.

So if you believe, you know, John Paul II was infallible, right? And, you know, making proclamations, right, about the truth. Like the Catholic Church seems to have changed its verdict on evolution. So it strikes me that religions are dynamic in all sorts of ways.

Okay. I'm trying to think of ones I haven't hit here. Yeah.

Shai Nel, the jeopardy. Yeah, you should hum the jeopardy, sing some. So, so what do we make sort of, I guess, historically, logically, scientifically, of the kind of proliferation of religion? Proliferation of religious denominations, right? So, or different faith traditions.

I mean, can we sort of appeal scientifically to Christianity or even Protestantism as, you know, the most probable religious explanation of the reunification of the world? I mean, certainly a lot of our history of science and religion has roots in basically kind of anti-Catholic writing in the 19th century. So we have to unpack all of that. But can we make a case for Christianity over other faith traditions? I mean, I don't know about the different denominations, but I can, here's my framing for it that makes sense to me a little bit, is we are unique and at the same time broken.

So in other words, if you have a church in India, it should taste and smell a look different than a church in Alabama than a church in Seattle. And so, to say that what we value as a society here is going to be exactly as a society in South India is going to be weird. There should be some themes like honoring God, reading scripture, music, maybe, expression over bodies in different ways, but the way it's going to look is going to be different.

So you can imagine these denominations forming. On the other hand, you can keep seeing our brokenness into this thing into saying that this denomination is the way, right, to somehow that they have a trump card over everything, right, and somehow that's the unique expression of it. So when I see these different denominations, I see brokenness, and at the same time I see reflections of who we are through culture.

What about Christianity versus other faith traditions? So Christianity makes some remarkable claims that if you look at the different denominations, I don't think they make that much claim. So the amount of distinctions of the claims they make is actually quite small. Compared to the amount of radically difference that Islam would make to the Christian faith.

Islam says that Jesus never died. Well, if you got that, then the whole Christian game is gone. And the Jewish faith says that Jesus never resurrected.

Well, if you got that, then what's the point of the Christian? So you're making amazingly radically deep claims. The Hindu faith says, well, Jesus is one of the several gods, right?

And so there are radical things that the Judea-Christian faith wouldn't say. Whereas if you look at the different denominations, I think there are little epsilon tweaks of one another that all have a central core.

So there's some kind of epistemological significance to the proliferation of metaphysical traditions. Some people think the disagreement is supposed to be a reason to suspend judgment, right? When a bunch of reasonable people seem to have different matters on view. The reasonable thing that a lot of epistemologists would say to do is that you ought to hold your judgment with a little less confidence than you did before.

If you recognize that there's someone with whom you disagree and who seems equally informed. Given what you've said, though, I'm not super sure exactly what the extent of that is. Because if you think that there are epsilon tweaks on each other, right? That's a very math-y way of putting... Yeah.

Right. Right. But... It's all I got.

Right. But in those cases, you might not take as much epistemological significance. But I do think that the latter thing, if you take that idea that disagreement is a symptom of one-on-one to suspend judgment, then it looks like the radically different religious faiths.

If you recognize that someone can be reasonable, right, and be Muslim and be reasonable and be Jewish, right? I would wonder why that doesn't make you think that, well, maybe I ought to suspend judgment and whether or not. You know, Christ was resurrected. Yeah.

I mean, certainly it's true that if I do see somebody who's thought through and say, "Listen, man, I've looked at the evidence." Let's take you as an example. I was like, "I just don't buy this thing. I believe, you know, 80 is in this story.

The way to go is secular view, and it's this." And I have friends deeply committed who are Hindu, right? A lot of my family back home in Muslim. And for me, at the end of the day, we're all making opposing faith claims. We're making opposing claims on truth.

It's not the fact that we have different lenses and look at truths differently. It's just the fact that what we think is the center is radically different, right? And so someone has to be right. Or maybe most likely, maybe we're all wrong, right? But to me, my guess is, well, from what I can see, from my perspective, it seems like this is it.

To dismiss them, to say that the other person is wrong, I'm completely comfortable saying that. To dismiss them as less than human, that's incredibly dangerous, right? To say that, conner, man, I just, well, from what you think, it's cool, but I just don't buy it. I think you got this wrong.

That's okay. But to say that, and because of that, I'm going to view you less than I find

incredibly dangerous and incredibly wrong. So I think it's okay to actually disagree, right? And to say we're actually doing different things, and we just don't buy it.

I think one of us has to be right along. I'm comfortable to live in that. And I would like to honor and trust my friends who are struggling with these things along with me.

But I would have judged that in that sense. So let me ask each of you as we're sort of winding down a little bit towards the end. I mean, in a somewhat, you know, kind of contrived way, you've been sort of tasked with taking two different sides, right? You each sit on a different side of me.

[laughter] And so let me ask, under what circumstances could you conceive of trading places? That is, what could you conceive of that would cause you to move from a more atheist position to a theist position? And what could you conceive of as a factor that would cause you to move in the opposite direction? You know, to me, I'm one of the biggest, I guess one of the central core things that pulled me to the Christian viewpoint, other than Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, secular, human, viewpoint, is actually the resurrection. To me, that is like a big linchpin of why I believe certain things. And if you don't have the resurrection of Jesus, this man who died on us again, then I think we've lost it.

So that would be happy to relinquish it. And let me just give you like one simple example of why. During the time of Jesus, there are a lot of messiahs, and they all died.

And so, you know, people claim to be messiah, and when you're messiah, you're supposed to do three things. You're supposed to bring peace, you're supposed to bring justice, and you're supposed to restore the temple. To make it like Solomon's temple where you can hang out with God again.

And every messiah who claimed to be messiah would fight Rome, would try to kill Rome, and destroy Rome and take over, and then would try to actually accept the temple right. So King Herod actually kind of took care of the temple and built this beautiful temple. He had peace with the Romans, but he did not wipe them out.

So he had two out of the three goings. He wanted to be messiah. So Jesus, you know, he claimed to be messiah.

And what I found really amazing is that after he died, people still thought he was messiah. When he didn't do any of the three things you're supposed to do as messiah. He did none of them.

Like, that's just a really dumb argument to say like, you did it. Well, he didn't do anything, dude, and why do you call him messiah? Like, he's dead. So like, you know, a lot of these little nuggets as an example have pushed me to think that they're not just to take the resurrection more seriously.

Like, is it really true? And historically, what are the very most to think of it? So if there's a way that I can be persuaded to think about the resurrection and say, "Listen, it's not as great as you think it is because of these other pieces than I've been happy with." Then I think, you know, the thing I'm standing on goes away. Thanks. I don't know about being convinced of a particular worldview, but I do think I could be convinced to be a theist of some type.

Eliot's Uber as a flossard science makes a throwaway remark at one point in a paper saying that there could never be any empirical evidence for or against the existence of God. And I just think that's wrong, right? Like, you know, if a flaming asteroid comes towards the planet and a face comes out and says, "You know, I am your creator speaking through this large flaming mass." And right now, I will disintegrate violating all the laws of physics, right? And, you know, I say to myself, "Yeah, it's time to pick up the book." Right? I have. But I know it's a silly example, but I just want to point out that I think there are actually all sorts of things that we can imagine that would change our opinions if we just think, you know, hard enough about the type of evidence in question.

I think one of the things that truthfully would convince me, but it's also something of which I'm pretty ignorant, is actually understanding, you know, more of the actual historical data involving biblical claims, what types of archaeological evidence does and does not exist, what types of other, you know, the relationship between the Bible and other texts, right? And whether or not there are coherence arguments that one could be made for the truth of particular claims in there. I think that would be convincing to me that that would be the type of thing that I would look for if I wanted to have, you know, greater faith in a particular historical document. To be convinced of some supernatural deity or another, like I can imagine all sorts of weird things happening, that, you know, bring it to the theist.

But, you know, I don't see them in the same way that the, I don't see, for instance, the son rises evidence of God in the same way that some people did. Right? It would take something more than that, for me. Okay.

Okay. So now I'm supposed to ask the final question. [audience laughs] So, let's imagine, I mean, I know it's difficult for us to imagine.

Let's imagine someone disagrees with us, right? But hardly anyone ever does because you grade them as being wrong. [audience laughs] So it's difficult, you know, it's really very hard. But imagine someone who disagrees with you in the kind of the program that you've laid out, the arguments you've made.

But you want to persuade them, you want to engage them. What are the next steps they should take to kind of follow your argument and maybe be persuaded? After tonight, they go forth. I don't know.

I don't really know if I necessarily want to persuade people that they ought not believe in God. I'm not sure what exactly the point of that would be, to be completely honest, because I think a lot of people find very, very deep meaning, writing their religious beliefs in it helps guide their personal decisions, and that without those, you know, beliefs, they would feel a sort of type of, you know, emotional, psychological stress that I wouldn't want people to endure. So one of the saddest things I think I've read is accounts of people who read Darwin and just totally lost their faith, right? There are some of these passages in Philip Kitcher's book.

It's called something like Science, Truth, and Democracy. And he, you know, regales, says, "I'm sure Bruce, you've read some of these passages as well." And it makes me really sad, actually. I just sort of think to myself, these people weren't made any better.

Their lives weren't made any better by losing their religious faith. So what I do think, though, is that if you have any questions whatsoever, if you, I don't want to persuade you, but you can find homes in a number of different arts, humanities, and social science departments on this campus, right? And with other people in this room. And I would say that find people not only who disagree with you, but who agree with you, who agree with you somewhat, right? And just have discussions about questions that, you know, are of concern to you.

I'm supposed to advertise the philosophy department. So we have a webpage and there are events on it. And you should attend some of those, too, because those are other places that you can ask questions about science, religion, morality, justice, and the like, even if you agree with some of the things that I've said, right, tonight.

Okay. So we'll give you the final word. And thank you very much for coming all the way from San Diego.

Thank you. It was beautiful. They had told you today, I was nervous.

It was worth the flight. I told them to close the story. It's a story about Karl Barth.

And Karl Barth was one of the greatest New Testament scholars and religious scholars of the Bible. And he was coming out of a church service once, and this astronomer goes up to him. And he says, "Professor Barth, is it true that all of the Christian faith, in fact, all of religion can be summarized by a sentence?" And Karl Barth, in his lifetime, pouring over the minutiae of Acts and the world words of just the New Testament, much less other scriptures.

And he goes, "What is the sentence that can summarize my life's work?" And this guy goes, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Isn't that basically the point of all the stuff you're talking about? And Karl Barth thought about those effects at a point, then. Isn't it true that all of astronomy can also be summarized by a sentence?

And this astronomer is thinking, "Black holes, curvature of space and time, and quasars, you know, the big, big, big, and how one sentence is there that can encapsulate all of the stuff?" And Karl Barth says, "Twinkle, twinkle, little stuff." [laughter] And so, my encouragement to you is that, you know, when we look at somebody with a different viewpoint of faith, a viewpoint of thought, that we can just compress their ideas into a Twitter group and say, "Listen, all you're doing is Acts, whereas I have death in my family, in my background, in my thought." And my encouragement, I think, I love just talking to Connor and Chris about this thing, is like, just the willingness to listen, and the patience to hear their story about. Because you can summarize them into a sentence and dismiss them, and that's the easy way out.

But the harder thing is to actually show patience, get a beer, get some pizza, and listen, and hang out. Well, maybe not beers if you're not coming home, but whatever. [laughter] And stay out, listen to their stories.

That's how they encourage you. Thank you for listening to this podcast episode from the Veritas Forum event archives. If you enjoyed this discussion, please rate, review, and subscribe.

And if you'd like more Veritas Forum content, visit us at [Veritas.org](http://Veritas.org). Thank you again for joining us as we explore the ideas that shape our lives.

(gentle music)