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God = ? | NYU Questions World-class Philosopher Alvin Plantinga on Science & Religion

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The Veritas Forum

Yale Philosopher Daniel Greco asks Notre Dame Philosopher Dr. Alvin Plantinga questions regarding science, faith, and philosophy. An archive, 2013 interview hosted by the Veritas Forum at New York University. • Please like, share, subscribe to, and review this podcast. Thank you!

Transcript

Welcome to the Veritas Forum. This is the Veritas Forum Podcast. A place where ideas and beliefs converge.

What I'm really going to be watching is which one has the resources in their worldview to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with. How do we know whether the lives that we're living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are in history, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this in God. Today we hear from analytic philosopher Dr. Alvin Plantinga, the John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame interviewed by Yale philosopher Daniel Greco as he questions Dr. Plantinga on Science, Faith, and Philosophy hosted by the Veritas Forum at New York University.

Let me say it's a pleasure to be here at NYU. I've been here fairly frequently before, and it's a pleasure each time, so it's a pleasure this time too. Now, I'm a philosopher, and my guess is not nearly all of you are either philosophers or majoring in philosophy.

That's a sad truth about the world, but that's the way it is. What I'm going to talk about here for a half hour is philosophy. I have to admit philosophy as sort of a bad press in the world these days, and perhaps with some reason actually, because when you think about philosophy, when you do philosophy, you have to think about some kind of miserable, unpleasant situations.

So for example, there's the idea of being a brain in a vat. You imagine that you are

captured by aliens transported to their planet somewhere, long ways from here. They remove your brain from your skull, keep it artificially alive in a vat of nutrients, attach electrodes to various parts of it, nail their end to their Apple computer, and then they type in what it is they want you to think and feel and believe.

Well, I mean, if that were to happen, everything would seem to you just the way it does seem, right? So how do you know that's not the case? How do you know you're not a brain in a vat? That's a kind of miserable thing to think about, a miserable scenario. Another scenario is that if you're a philosopher, you have to think about solipsism. A solipsist is somebody thinks that he or she is the only thing that exists, everything else being a figment of their imagination, right? So if you're a solipsist, you think that you alone exist, and everything else is a figment of your imagination.

Now, there have been some solipsists, for example, the philosopher Bertrand Russell was a solipsist for a while. Of course, for most anything you pick out, Bertrand Russell was it for a while, so that's not so surprising. According to his report, he once got a letter from a woman, I think Lady Lad Franklin was her name, and she said something like this.

She said she had read what he wrote, Russell had written about solipsism, and she found it really convincing. She thought that's right, solipsism is right, and she said, I wonder why there aren't more of us, which is a little paradoxical maybe. When I was just starting off in philosophy many years ago at Wayne State University in Detroit, I heard that there was a real-life solipsist there, a professor in the medical school.

So I decided I wanted to see what a solipsist looked like, how they would behave and so on, what their reaction would be to me, who would be for them just a figment of their imagination and the like. So I went to see this professor in the medical school, and we had a reasonably friendly chat, a satisfactory chat. He treated me pretty well for a mere figment.

So then finally it became time to leave, so I set out to leave. One of his younger colleagues took me aside and said, we take very good care of Dr. So-and-so, because when he goes, we all go. So that's solipsism.

Now I'm not going to talk about solipsism at all. I'm going to talk about something quite different, namely the relation between science and religion. A lot of people think there is conflict between science and religion, that somehow the two are opposed to each other, or that if you're really serious about science, you can't also be really serious about religion.

And there are several different areas or loci, as you might call them, where these conflicts are supposed to arise. One would be that between, say, miracles and science. So Christians believe in miracles.

They believe that Jesus rose from the dead, that Jesus turned water into wine, walked on water, and so on. Many Christians believe there are miracles that happen nowadays too, and the same goes for other religions. And many people think that there's a conflict between the idea that miracles do, in fact, happen on the one hand, and what science teaches, that there are these laws and so on on the other, because the thought is that if there are miracles, they go contrary to natural law.

They break these, break in quotes, these natural laws, which are promulgated by science, so there's conflict. I'm not going to talk about that. I don't think there is any conflict there, but that's one alleged area.

Another would be scientific scripture scholarship. So the thought is if you look at scripture in a scientific way, study it as a scientific object, you wind up with ideas as to what it reports quite different from those that are held by people who take the Bible seriously as God's word, for example. And there are others as well, but I'm going to talk just about one area where there is alleged to be conflict, and that would be evolution, evolutionary theory.

Many people think there is a conflict between evolution on the one hand and religious belief, Christian belief, belief in God, on the other hand. Some of these people are, you might say, well to the right. They think they are serious, evangelical, maybe fundamentalist Christians.

They think there's a conflict there. Others are well to the left, scientists of various kinds, and others, philosophers, Richard Dawkins, for example, and various others, Daniel Dennett. And they say that there's a conflict here.

And I want to begin just by talking briefly about that. Now the first thing to note is that evolution covers a variety, covers a wide variety of, according to the New Testament, grace covers a wide variety of sins, according to me. The term evolution covers a wide variety of theses, not necessarily sinful theses, just theses.

So for example, the ancient earth theses, the idea that the world is very old, not barely 5,000 years, not 10,000 years, but maybe 4 billion, maybe even older than that. And second, there's the thesis of descent with modification, the idea that all of the enormous variety we find in the living world, sometimes in your living room too, but I'm thinking about the living world, all the enormous variety you find of different kinds of plants and different kinds of animals and so on, all comes to be by virtue of offspring differing, usually in relatively smallish ways from their parents. The next thesis would be the common ancestry thesis, connected with the previous one, namely that if you pick any two living creatures and trace their ancestry back far enough, you'll come upon a common ancestor, right? So we are all cousins.

We human beings are all cousins of each other, but well beyond that, we're really

cousins of all the other kinds of animals as well as plant life too. So you and the poison ivy and your backyard are really cousins, maybe distant cousins, and maybe in the case of some people it's easier to see than in others, but nonetheless cousins, all right? And then finally the fourth thesis is what we could call Darwinism, which is the thought that the main mechanism driving this process of descent with modification is something like natural selection, I'm sure you've all heard of natural selection, working on some form of genetic variation, the most common candidate being random genetic mutation, all right? So by virtue of natural selection, working on genetic variation that you wind up with all the vast variety that there is in the living world. Well now let's ask whether this is incompatible with Christian or theistic belief, belief in God, all right? When I speak of Christian belief, I'm thinking of what you might call what C.S. Lewis called mirror Christianity.

What you might think of as in common to all the great Christian creeds, the Apostles' Creed, and the Catholic Baltimore Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism from the Reform side of things, and the like. Roughly speaking the intersection of these creeds would be mirror Christianity. And when I think of theism, I'm thinking of the theistic religions, I'm thinking of Christianity and Islam and Judaism, all of which unite in supposing that there is this being God who is the creator of the world, is a person, is unlimited in power, in knowledge, and in love, all right? So if you ask yourself with respect to these four theses, is evolution in its say, mirror Christianity incompatible with the ancient earth theses? Well presumably not.

Some Christians think the world is very young, but that's not part of mirror Christianity, that would be in addition to mirror Christianity. As far as mirror Christianity goes, the earth could be very old, just as it is in fact asserted to be by scientists. Well what about the thesis of descent with modification? Now theists believe that God has created the world, but he could have done so by means of some process of descent with modification.

Again there's no conflict between that and Christian belief, mirror Christianity just as such. And the same would go for the common ancestry thesis, maybe that's how God did things, how he created the living world. But what about Darwinism? The idea that what drives the whole process, what drives the whole thing is this mechanism of natural selection working on some form of genetic variation, say random genetic variation, random genetic mutations of one kind or another.

Well there are two, there's no obvious conflict because God could if he wanted to, he could have done things by, I don't say he did things this way, maybe it's not even plausible to think that he did things this way, but he certainly could have brought it about that we have the kinds of life we have by virtue of such a process. In fact as far as that goes, God could create, he could create the genetic mutations involved, so he gets the right ones at the right time so he could guide the whole process in the direction he wants it to go. As far as I can see there's no conflict there either.

Where there is conflict is between Christianity or the theistic religions generally, between Christianity and the thought that evolution that we have come to be here by way of evolution and that evolution is unguided, unguided, undirected, unplanned, purposeless words of that sort. If evolution is unguided and we have come to be by virtue of evolution then it wouldn't be correct, wouldn't be right to say that God has, for example, created us, created human beings in his image as both Christians and Jews and some Muslims assert. If God has created us in his image what that means is he had a certain thing in mind, he wanted us to be a certain way and then however he accomplished the creation he did it in such a way as to accomplish, bring about that particular end, that there be creatures of that sort and of course that involves guiding and planning and orchestrating.

So I say there is no conflict between evolution just as such and the theistic religions, Christianity, mere Christianity, no conflict there where there is conflict is between Christianity and the thought that evolution is unguided. That's where there is conflict. Conflict between the thought that evolution is unguided on the one hand and on the other hand the idea that God has created us human beings in his image.

Alright? Nevertheless though there are a whole lot of, there's a whole choir of distinguished experts who assert exactly that, that evolution is unguided, is unplanned, unorchestrated by God or by anyone else. So for example here's George Gaylord Simpson, he says man and I would add in parentheses no doubt woman as well, man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that does not have him in mind. I suppose in principle you could say that's true for man and not for woman but it would be a sort of unusual view right.

To think that man is the process of some purposeless natural process but woman isn't. Well I don't want to discuss that much further that could lead to a dangerous territory. Then there is Stephen J. Gould who says if the evolutionary tape were to be rewound and then let go forward again the chances are we'd get creatures of very different sorts.

Alright and the chances are that we probably wouldn't get anything like Homo sapiens so he thinks. And here's a particularly eloquent statement of this thesis by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Blind Watchmaker*. Now Richard Dawkins has been in the news lately along with others of the so-called new atheist or the four horsemen of atheism, not the four horsemen of the apocalypse, not even the four horsemen of Notre Dame but the four horsemen of atheism.

And one of these four horsemen is Dawkins. This book of his *The Blind Watchmaker* I think is a very good book. He's written a more recent book called *The God Delusion* which I think is a very bad book.

More like an ignorant screed than a real contribution to any particular discussion or discipline. But *The Blind Watchmaker* is a good book and here's what he says. He says

early on in the book he says all appearances to the contrary the only watchmaker in nature is The Blind forces of physics albeit deployed in a very special way.

A true watchmaker has foresight. He designs his cogs and springs and plans their interconnections with a future purpose in his mind's eye. Natural selection, The Blind, unconscious, automatic process which Darwin discovered and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life has no purpose in mind.

It has no mind and has no mind's eye. It does not plan for the future. It has no vision, no foresight, no sight at all.

If it can be said to play the role of watchmaker in nature, it is The Blind Watchmaker. All right, that's The Blind Natural selection is The Blind Watchmaker and the subtitle of his book of this book is now the very subtitle. Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design.

Now why does Dawkins think that natural selection is blind and unguided? Why does he think that the evidence of evolution reveals a universe without design? In this book he really does three things. First he recounts some of the fascinating anatomical details of certain living creatures and of their behavior. So for example he talks about bats and when he does this he's very good.

He's very good in explaining and exploring and describing the natural world. He talks about bats and how they can fly through a completely darkened cave. No light at all with stalag types hanging from the ceiling and stalag might be rising from the floor or maybe it's the other way around but whatever can fly through at an enormous rate of speed and not so much as brush any of them.

By virtue of their they have a kind of sonar, right? The bats send out little squeaky sounds and receive these sounds bounce off various objects that come back. By virtue of them the bat can do this kind of navigation. Secondly he tries to refute arguments for the idea that blind unguided evolution could not have produced some of the wonders of the living world.

So going all the way back to Darwin's time there were people, St. George Mavart for example, who said well there are certain things, certain kinds of features of animals, certain kinds of organs that just could not have come about by virtue of blind unguided evolution. The eye was a kind of favorite example. Well Dawkins does what he can to try to refute these arguments.

And third he makes suggestions as to how these, the ones like eyes and so on and other organic systems, could have developed by way of unguided evolution. All right? The form of his main argument though, here's the form of the main argument, i.e. the argument

for the conclusion that evolution reveals a universe without design. All right? Now if I could I'd write this down on a blackboard but despite our being extremely high-check we don't have a blackboard so so pay very careful attention.

Okay? The premise then, it's an argument that has one, has a premise and a conclusion. The premise is we know of no irrefutable objections to its being biologically possible that all of life has come to be by way of unguided Darwinian processes. All right? We know of no irrefutable objections to its being biologically possible that all of life has come to be by way of unguided evolution.

That's the premise. The conclusion is all of life has come to be by way of unguided Darwinian processes. As far as I can make out that's the form of his main argument.

I mean that is the form of the argument for the conclusion that evolution reveals a universe without design. The argument really is it's possible so it must have happened or nobody has proved it to be impossible therefore it happened. Okay? Now philosophers sometimes give uncoagant arguments and I must confess I've done the same thing myself on occasion but they hardly ever come up with arguments that are as sort of wildly uncoagant as that argument.

I mean the argument is it's possible that this happened therefore it did happen. Imagine if I come home and tell my wife that President Obama has decided there is to be a new medal for philosophy struck and I'm to be the first recipient. Well she says what makes you think that and I say nobody's proved it impossible.

Not a good argument, right? As far as I can see that's the only argument there is in that book for the conclusion that all of life has come to be by way of unguided Darwinian processes or that the evidence of evolution reveals a universe without design. Okay that's the first part of what I want to say. Now I want to go further and I want to argue that there is a real how can I put this? A real tension between evolution, the scientific theory of evolution on the one hand and naturalism on the other.

Where here I take naturalism to be the idea that there is no such person as God or anything like God. All right? Dawkins would be a naturalist, Daniel Dennett would be a naturalist, lots and lots of other philosophers nowadays are naturalists. Some people say that naturalism is the orthodoxy of the academy and that might be right.

In any event that's what naturalism is the idea that there is no such person as God or anything like God. So naturalism is stronger than atheism. You could be an atheist without being a naturalist.

If for example you thought there was something a lot like God but the state from God Plato's ideas for example or the Stoics news or something like that. You could be an atheist without rising to the full heights of naturalism but you couldn't be a naturalist

without being an atheist. Okay? Now what I want to argue is that you can't sensibly believe both naturalism and evolution.

So when I speak of naturalism I'm going to take naturalism to include materialism with respect to human beings. Okay? So I'm taking naturalism to include materialism with respect to human beings. If you object and say well naturalist doesn't have to be a materialist about human beings, okay then what I'm really arguing against is naturalism, materialism and evolution saying you can't sensibly hold all three of those things.

All right? Now a materialist about human beings thinks that there is no immaterial soul or self or anything like that. Descartes for example thought that a human being was really an immaterial substance in that respect like God himself. An immaterial substance that was related to a particular material object namely his or her body.

All right? So Descartes thought what he really was was a thing that wasn't a material object at all but rather an immaterial self or soul something like that which could use a particular body. So for example I can use this body, you can use your body and the leg. All right? The materialist says that isn't true and that a human being is just a material object through and through.

And what I want to argue now is that you really can't sensibly be a naturalist, someone who thinks there's no such person as God and also thinks human beings are material objects and accept believe and evolution. And the first premise of my argument is this, the probability that, well let me back up just a bit. This argument has to do with our, what we could call our cognitive faculties, memory for example and perception whereby you learn about the external world.

Thomas Reed talked about sympathy whereby you can tell what someone else is thinking or feeling quite often just by looking at their face. I can tell sometimes that my wife is annoyed at some little silly thing I did just by looking at her. All right? Maybe induction whereby you can learn about the future from your experience of the past and the like.

These are our cognitive faculties and we take them to be reliable. I mean we just automatically assume that they are. I just automatically assume without any kind of argument that there are lots of people in front of me because that's the way it looks to me.

All right? The first premise of my, of this argument is that the probability that our faculties are reliable, that they give us truth about the world, that the beliefs they produce in us are for the most part true, the probability that they are reliable given naturalism and evolution is low. So there I'm talking about the probability of one proposition given on the assumption that some other proposition is true, right? Conditional probability people call it. So for example the probability that Jack is a

Mormon, given that Jack lives in Scotland, that's pretty low, right? Very few Mormons in Scotland.

The probability that Brigham is a Mormon, given that Brigham lives in Salt Lake City, that'll be much higher, okay? So the idea, the probability of one proposition given another, it's sort of like saying what things would be like if that one, if the other proposition were true. So here what I'm saying is something like this, if naturalism and evolution were true together, then our faculties would probably not be reliable. That's the first premise.

Then the second premise is this, if you see that the first premise is true, and furthermore you believe naturalism and evolution, then you have a defeater for your belief that your faculties are reliable, a reason to give up that belief, a reason not to accept it any longer. So a defeater for a belief I have is another belief I come to have such that as long as I hold that second defeating belief, I can no longer sensibly rationally hold the first belief, the defeated one. So what I say then is that in my second premise, if you accept the first premise and you see that the probability of our faculties are reliable, given naturalism and evolution, if you see that that's low, then you have a defeater for the proposition that your faculties are in fact reliable.

And if you have a defeater for that, you have a defeater for any belief that is formed on the basis of your cognitive faculties, which of course is all of them. So in particular, then you get a defeater for naturalism and evolution, that thing that you started off by believing, you get a defeater for that. And in this way, believing in naturalism and evolution is you might say self-defeating.

It shoots itself in the foot. It's self-referentially inconsistent if you want a more philosophical sounding name for it. Well now with respect to this argument, I think it's the first premise that needs the most defense.

The first premise is the claim that the probability of your faculties being reliable, given naturalism and evolution, naturalism including materialism, is low. Why think that's true? Well here's why you should think that's true. If you think about what a belief would be from the point of view of materialism, right, I've got the belief that all men are mortal, that seven plus five equals twelve, that I live in Michigan and the like.

If you say, well now what sort of thing is a belief if materialism is true? A belief would have to be something like an event, a long standing event or process in your nervous system, or in my nervous system since I was talking about my beliefs. That's what a belief would have to be. And the belief would have two different kinds of properties.

On the one hand, it would have neurophysiological properties. Properties that specified say how many neurons there are in this particular process or event. And what the rate of fire is in the various different parts, the rate of fire of these neurons in various different

parts of this event.

And how the rate of fire in one part depends on the rate of fire in some other part, okay. Neurophysiological properties. Everybody with me so far? Yes.

Neurophysiological properties, but then also it's got another property too. A belief would have to have a content. It would have to be the belief that P for some particular proposition P, it would have to might say somehow reach out and grab a certain proposition that all men are mortal, that seven plus five equals twelve, that I live in Michigan.

It would have to reach out and grab one particular proposition as opposed to all the other ones, right. And that proposition would be its content. And now here's the, here's the nub of the argument for this first premise.

If you ask what makes a given action occur, what causes a given bit of behavior? So I raised my arm. Suppose a belief is involved in that. Suppose let's say I believe I would like to drink of water so I open this cap, all right.

So it's on the basis of that belief. But now what kind of, which are the properties of the two kinds of properties of the belief is relevant to that, to the causation of that behavior? Well, I think it's, what's, I think what the relevant properties are those neurophysiological properties. It's by virtue of this beliefs, this structure sending messages down various nervous channels, these messages arriving in my arm, my arm's going up, or my arm's picking up this, this bottle.

It's by virtue of those neurophysiological properties that a belief causes, whatever it does. It doesn't cause whatever it causes, by virtue of its content. If it had a different content but the same neurophysiological properties, it would still cause the same, have the same causal effects with respect to behavior.

And that means that evolution can't really, evolution natural selection can't really see belief content at all. It can, it can modify our behavior in the direction of greater fitness, and also modify various mental, various neuronal structures and the like, various brain processes and structures, structures in the direction of greater adaptiveness. But it can't modify structures with respect to whether or not they have a certain content.

Evolution wouldn't care one way or the other what the content was. And that means if you think about the given, if you think about say some other creatures on another planet who like us hold beliefs and are also as materials, themselves, just material objects, that means if you ask what the likelihood that any particular belief that they've got has true content, it's going to be more or less 50/50, could be true, could be false. Evolution would have had no way of modifying its, this creature's faculties in the direction of greater, of greater truth or more truth with respect to the contents of these beliefs.

So if, and if that's true, if the probability with respect to any belief is, that are being true as 50/50, then the likelihood that your cognitive faculties are reliable that say they produce a predominance of true beliefs over false, that's going to be pretty low. If you have say a hundred different independent beliefs and the probability with respect to any one of them that is true is roughly 50/50, then the likelihood that say three quarters of those beliefs are true, that's going to be very low. That'll be something like one out of a million or so.

So then that's the argument for the first premise that the probability of our faculties being reliable on naturalism and evolution is low. And I'm trusting that you remember the rest of the argument because I've used up my time and I won't say anything more. But just by way of conclusion, here I said I wouldn't say anything more and I just made a liar out of myself.

By way of conclusion, I don't think there's any conflict at all between Christian belief or theistic belief more generally and evolution, but I do think there is conflict between evolution on the one hand and naturalism on the other. Thank you. So in the first part of your presentation, you argued that there isn't any inconsistency between evolution on the one hand and religious belief on the other.

Let's ask if you think a weaker claim, a claim weaker than the claim that evolution and religious belief are inconsistent. It might still be true. So we might think even if they're not inconsistent, there is a tension between evolutionary theory on the one hand and religious belief on the other.

So imagine life before Darwin. We really have no idea how structures like eyes or nervous systems or brains or hearts could come about if not for the activity of some designer. In our experience, complex systems, whenever we know how they came about, it's because there was some intelligent creature designing them like watches or water mills or things like that.

But then once we get evolutionary theory, we have an alternative explanation. Maybe the alternative explanation doesn't entail that religious beliefs are false. But you might still think it takes a lot of the plausibility away from religious beliefs.

Before, we were forced to accept religious beliefs. That's not entirely uncontroversial. David Hume thought we weren't.

But I think a lot of philosophers would agree that before Darwin, we were almost forced to accept religious beliefs. Whereas afterwards, the availability of an alternative explanation means that we don't have to. Maybe we can go even a little bit further and appeal to something like Occam's razor.

It says, "If you don't need to appeal to some entity like God to explain the evidence

you've got, if you've got a more parsimonious explanation that has fewer moving parts, appeals to fewer entities, something like that, it's simpler." Then that's the more plausible explanation in light of your total evidence. So as I understood the first part of your talk, nothing really told against that kind of view about there being attention, if not an inconsistency between evolutionary theory on the one hand and religious belief on the other. Okay.

Can you still hear me? Yeah. By the way, you can ask questions about my talk too. All right? I don't know if those are the... If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask them.

Now, with respect to your suggestion, Dan, it seems to me that depends on the idea that one believes in God as a kind of theory or an explanation. So God is, "Why do I believe in God?" Well, because it's the best explanation of this, that or the other thing. And my idea is that people don't typically believe in God in that way.

They don't look around the world and say, "This world is really complicated. Look at all these amazing things." And so on. Must be there's a powerful being, holy good, and so on, who has created the world.

I don't think that's how it goes. There are lots of beliefs we hold, and some of them are among the most important beliefs to us, that we don't hold by virtue of finding explanation, finding them as an explanation for other things, or finding evidence for them in the sense of other beliefs we've got that support the belief that we're talking about. So for example, we all believe that there are other persons.

And philosophers from the time of Descartes all the way to Hume tried to figure out, "Well, what's the evidence for that? That there are other persons?" Of course, there are, let's suppose it's clear that there are bodies. But what's my evidence for thinking that these bodies, all the ones I see before me, are connected with minds or that there are centers of consciousness connected with these bodies. After all, I can't see such a center of consciousness.

I can't feel it. I don't have any sort of direct access to it. What makes me think that there is any such thing? And the conclusion from modern philosophy up through Hume, roughly speaking, is, "Well, there really doesn't seem to be much by way of a decent argument there.

There doesn't really seem to be much by way of evidence that should drive me out of, say, solipsism into the idea that there are lots of other people, other centers of consciousness as well as myself." And in fact, tiny children from the time they were six months old, maybe even earlier, show signs of holding beliefs about the thoughts and feelings of others, of their parents, their mother, for example. It's something we just automatically do. We form such beliefs, you might say, in the basic way, not on the basis

of other beliefs, but themselves as among our basic beliefs, the ones that we form, that we use as evidence for other things.

Well, that's how I'm inclined to think it goes with respect to belief in God for most people. It's not that most of us believe in the existence of God, those of us who do, on the basis of propositional evidence or anything like that, not that we're looking for an explanation on God is the explanation. It's rather that we just find ourselves with a belief.

It just seems right. And in fact, I guess there is now evidence from the cognitive science or religion that the vast majority of the world's peoples do believe in something like in God or something like God, in a creator worthy of worship and the like or something like that. So I would say, I don't think that discovering that if we were using God for the explanation of something, now we've got another explanation.

I don't think that does any damage to religious belief or theistic belief at all. Do you think it depends on what attitudes you start out with? So I can imagine for somebody who starts out finding it very plausible that God exists, they'll treat the belief as innocent until proven guilty. So if evolutionary theory comes along, as long as it's not inconsistent with this belief, then I'll continue believing it.

But imagine somebody who starts out relatively agnostic. Before Darwin, they do think, you know, even if initially they're not quite sure whether there's a God or not, they see these arguments based on the existence of these complex structures. Do you think for somebody like that, then evolutionary theory does undermine one reason to believe in God? Yeah, I think if someone's main motivation for believing in God is that they think God is a good explanation of the features of the world, including the very complex, enormous variety we find in the living world, if that's if that's someone's basis for belief in God, then discovering some alternative explanation would reduce its probability or its likelihood, right, right.

I wanted to ask a question about the second part of your talk to the argument that belief in evolution not only doesn't conflict with belief in religion, but that it actually conflicts with naturalism. So in particular, I wanted to ask about the first premise of that argument. So let's start by just presenting some prima facie reasons to be skeptical about it, and then we can see how that, um, how that interacts with the more detailed argument you gave for the first premise.

Okay. So just the top of my head, it feels like there are reasons why, evolution ought to care about whether certain of my beliefs are true. If I have false beliefs about where the food is or about whether the tiger over there is, you know, coming towards me or running away from me, then it seems like that's, uh, I might not get to reproduce.

Those are the sort of things that are hazardous to your health, having false beliefs about those matters. Right. So if that's right, then there must be something, something wrong

with the argument for the first premise, and I wanted to try and get it at what that might be.

So if I understood the argument right, it seemed like you were thinking that we can distinguish between these neural and physiological properties of beliefs and these content properties of beliefs, and they can vary pretty much independently, you know, hold fixed, the neural physiological properties, and the content could be, you know, pretty much whatever you like. And it seems to me that on some, you know, materialistic views about belief, that's not going to be true. So here's, um, maybe a sort of crude materialistic view of belief, but I hope that what I say about this sort of view might carry over to more sophisticated materialistic views about belief.

So say you have a sort of behaviorist view where you think that, uh, say having a belief that it's going to rain, just is a matter of being in some neural state that causes you to behave in certain ways. Which ways? All the ways that make sense if it's going to rain, maybe, uh, it makes sense if it's going to rain. Maybe ways, you know, causes you to take an umbrella, um, causes you to, uh, put galashes on.

I think this is certainly going to be too crude for reasons that lots of philosophers have argued, but for now let's, um, set that aside for just a sec. So if you had that kind of behaviorist view, um, then you're not going to be able to, to independently vary the neural and physiological properties of a belief and the content properties. Because if I start out, disposed to carry an umbrella, but then we monkey with my brain so that I'm not disposed to carry with an umbrella, well, that belief no longer has the same content that it did.

It's no longer a belief that it's going to rain. Right. Yeah.

Mm hmm. Well, yeah, if, I don't know, behaviorism were, were true things would go quite differently. But I guess you and I and everybody else agrees that behaviorism isn't true.

So I mean, um, if, if you try to, behaviorism would be the idea that you can analyze a given belief, you could say what that really, what that belief really is in terms of the behavior and circumstances of the believer. But if you try that in any particular case, it simply doesn't work out. Right.

I mean, so, um, I don't know, I, I say that I believe that all men are mortal. Um, well, that's a bit of behavior and I might be motivated. I might say that, um, because I really do believe that all men are mortal, or I might not be telling the truth, or a wide variety of other circumstances.

And if you try to find some list of circumstances together with my behavior that together entails that I form, that I have that belief, well, you really can't do it. Nobody's ever been able to do that. So I guess my answer would be, well, okay, if behaviorism were true,

maybe, maybe you'd be right.

But you and I agree that it isn't true. Um, and, and I guess I don't see how it would carry over to more sensible views, materialist views as to what a belief is. So my thought was that, um, yeah, well, it's, it's true.

I, I'm not a behaviorist. Not many people still are. I thought was that it's at least not obvious to me that this feature of behaviorism, namely that according to behaviorism, it's not possible to independently vary the neurophysiological properties of beliefs on the one hand and the content properties of beliefs on the other.

That feature might be shared by other more sophisticated views that avoid some of the traditional objections to behaviorism. Well, maybe so we'd have, I'd like to take a look at them so to speak one at a time and see whether that's actually, whether that's actually right. On the face of it, it looks as if they, as if they could perfectly well vary.

You don't, one doesn't see any necessary logical connection anyway between the two. But I'm right. I mean, that would be an avenue for further exploration.

I want to ask one more question about, um, about the relationship between evolutionary theory on one hand and, um, and religious belief on the other before segwaying into some more general questions about your views on philosophy and religion. So here's a different sort of strategy people sometimes appeal to, to argue that there's some kind of tension between belief and evolution on the one hand and religious belief on the other. So the suggestion is that, um, once you go in for evolutionary theory, you can explain your temptation to hold various religious beliefs.

So you referred to the cognitive science of religion and, um, I think, yeah, right, a lot of work shows that belief in, um, at the very least, you know, supernatural entities, maybe not belief in, uh, an all-powerful God, but at least, you know, belief in entities that we don't find in the natural world, um, you know, belief in spirits or, uh, belief in, um, in ghosts. You know, that, these are very, um, they're very natural for us. You know, you find them all over the world.

Um, people, you know, children don't need to be taught that, uh, that spirits or ghosts exist to be disposed to believe in them. They're, um, they need to be taught that they don't exist to be disposed to reject them. Um, and so suppose, uh, you think once we accept these, uh, uh, this view that there was some sort of powerful evolutionary explanation for why we're tempted to hold, um, religious or supernatural beliefs of various sorts, that, that ought to undermine our tendency to take those beliefs seriously.

Um, maybe an analogy, um, here's a very, uh, very common tap- there's a very common taboo against incest and all sorts of cultures. Right. Um, and people will say that incest is wrong even if, say, there's no chance of, um, having a child with various birth defects or

even if there's no chance that the, you know, relationship between the, the parties will, um, you know, you can construct hypothetical scenarios where all the usual sorts of objections to incest don't apply.

People will still say, "That's a terribly wrong thing to do." And you might offer a sort of evolutionary undermining explanation of this. You say, "Well, there's a good reason why, um, from an evolutionary point of view, it's advantageous to have a really strong taboo against incest." But once you see that, that undermines the thought that it applies, even in these very special cases where all the more practical objections, um, don't apply. So I wonder, you know, what you'd say to the suggestion that a similar sort of debunking argument could be offered in the religious case.

You know, once we have an evolutionary explanation of our temptation to hold various religious beliefs, we ought to take that temptation less seriously. Well, I mean, um, there the suggestion basically is that if you can find a kind of natural explanation for our holding religious belief, then that somehow undermines it. Um, but I wonder if that's true.

I mean, you might be able to find a natural explanation for a lot of things about us that we, for example, hold perceptual beliefs. You know, it's really a good thing to hold perceptual beliefs and so on and there's a good evolutionary explanation. If we didn't, if our ancestors hadn't done this, they probably wouldn't have lasted very long, but not have had the chance to reproduce, etc.

That certainly doesn't cast the least doubt on the fact, on our belief that are, on our inclination to accept our perceptual beliefs. We're not going to say, well, for that reason, they're not probably not true or there's some problem about them or maybe they're not, um, they're not justified or they, we've done some kind of damage to them by finding this natural explanation. I don't think there's any reason to think that at all in that case, nor in the case of our belief in other people or a belief in the past and so on.

Um, so I don't see why there should be in the religious case either. I think maybe in some cases you can find a sort of debunking natural explanation for certain kinds of beliefs, but for others finding a natural explanation doesn't debunk them at all. And the question, I guess, just as well, which way is it with respect to belief with God? So here's one strategy for trying to draw a distinction.

I'm not sure how promising it is, but you might think in the person, and actually this probably gets into the issues we were just talking about concerning the evolutionary argument against naturalism. But here's something you might think. In the perceptual case, we do have a naturalistic explanation of our temptation to believe, say, our eyes, you know, to believe that there's a bottle of water here.

But that explanation, the explanation for why it's evolutionarily advantageous for us to

hold these beliefs depends on those beliefs being true. I think why is it advantageous for us to believe our eyes? Well, if we do, then we'll have true beliefs about our environment and be able to identify the sources of food and drink. But you might think nothing like that works in, say, the incest case, the explanation for why it's evolutionarily advantageous to have a taboo against incest.

Doesn't appeal to the idea that incest really is wrong, just that it's harder to spread your genes if you're engaging in incest. Yeah, well, I guess what I'd say about that is that in the case of your suggestion that it's by virtue of their truth that our perceptual beliefs, the explanation proceeds in terms of their truth, by virtue of their truth. Since the world is there, you know, and since be a lot better off, if we can actually perceive it and the like, and if we can't.

So the explanation, the explanation of our tendency to hold these beliefs proceeds in terms of the truth of those beliefs. It presupposes the truth of those beliefs. We know that the world is there and so on, and it's like we think it is by virtue of perception.

Well, we can offer that kind of explanation in the religious case too. Why is it that we aren't inclined to believe in God? Well, the explanation is that God has created us in such a way that we naturally form beliefs about him because he wanted us to know of his existence. So I would say that belief, that kind of explanation is the mate, so to speak, of the one you were giving.

And if you can use the very sort of belief that you're trying to explain in stating the explanation, and giving the explanation in the one case, then you can do it in the other case too. So what if there's an evolutionary explanation of religious beliefs that doesn't go via the truth of religious beliefs? Maybe one that appeals to the value of social cohesion and says that I go say a community that has religious or supernatural beliefs of various sorts is more likely to be stable in various ways. Maybe people are less likely to violate its norms than it doesn't.

Yeah, I mean, suppose I learned that. Would that sort of reduce my inclination to accept the religious beliefs I do? In fact, except I learned that they are useful for cohesion, that they make society function better and the like. I wouldn't think so.

I might take that as further evidence. I mean, I don't say I do believe on the basis of evidence, but it's sort of confirmation or something like that. I'd like to segue into the more general questions about interviews on philosophy and religion.

These are based in part on some questionnaires that the people at Veritas handed out to the NYU students and that they've been handing out over the last few weeks. So Professor Planiga has written a whole lot on philosophy and religion and this is these questions amount to ask him to just expound on some of his views. So the first one is a big one, something you've thought a lot about.

So a lot of people ask variants of the following question. You know, how is it that you can reconcile the existence of all sorts of bad things in the world? People do terrible things to one another. People get diseases, they're earthquakes, tornadoes, stuff like that.

How can you reconcile all that with the existence of a God who knows about these things because he's omniscient and who's able to stop them because he's omnipotent and who you might think would prefer to stop them because he's good and would prefer that terrible things like this not happen. Right. Well, I think the first thing to be said about that is that's a very serious question for believers in God.

It goes all the way back at very least to the book of Job in the Old Testament where Job is afflicted in the prologue to the book. The devil and God are talking about Job and the devil says, "Well, Job's belief in you only goes skin deep. Let me afflict him a bit and he'll turn on you and reject you altogether." And God says, "No, that's not true, but he lets the devil afflict Job.

And Job's comforters, and so Job becomes, he winds up suffering from sores of various kinds and his family is killed and the like. He's in really miserable conditions sitting on an ash heap scraping away at his sores in the back and the like. And Job's comforters and quotes gather around him and they suggest some of them at least that he should just curse God and die.

Forget this whole God business altogether. Look what's happening to you. Job doesn't do this, but it's a very serious question.

And in some ways, if you think about some of the horrifying things that go on in our world, the holocaust, for example, but that's just one example. Although it's a particularly awful example, it sometimes can seem insensitive or improper to talk about it in a kind of academic fashion in a kind of reflective fashion. But I would say, first of all, that suppose you do think that there's a kind of, that there's something I've evidence against belief in God from the existence of evil.

Suppose you think that you might still all things considered given whatever it is that pushes you towards believing in God, you might all things consider still wind up believing and doing so perfectly sensibly. But I'd like to suggest something else. People talk about theodicies ways of justifying the ways of God to mankind, theodicies from God and justice.

You can think about it like this. Imagine God before he's created. There are all these different possible worlds he could create.

He could make this world or that world or this world, that world. But he wants, of course, to make a really good world that's his aim to create a really good world. And now suppose we ask ourselves, what is it that makes one world a good world, maybe a better

world, that's some other world? What would be good making properties among these worlds which are open to God? He could create any one of them, let's say.

Well, when I think about that, and it's not only me who has thought this, when I think about that, I think that one feature of a world that can make it a really good world is the truth of the whole Christian story in that world. I mean, think about the Christian story. Here is God, the first being of the universe, all powerful, all knowing and the like, who creates human beings.

These human beings turn on him, they reject him, they prefer their own glory to his glory. They reject this being that's created them, they turn away from him, they sin against him, sometimes they mock him and the like. Well, now what is God's response, according to the Christian story? The response is not like that of some eastern potentate, to have them all boiled and oiled or something like that.

No. God's response is to send his only his son, the second person of the Trinity, into the world to suffer, to suffer and die, to die, to suffer and die at the hands of the Romans, Pontius, Pilate, and the like of that. So the second person of the Trinity has to undergo the suffering involved in this, and the first person, God, the Father, has to undergo the suffering involved in seeing his son treated in this way, and this is to make it possible once more for human beings to be in fellowship with God, to be justified before God, to be right in God's sight.

Now, if you think about it, that's a display of, that's a kind of an absolutely over the top amazing display of love, and it makes sense to me, to reiterate, to say that worlds in which this occur are very, very good worlds. That is an extremely powerful, good-making property of worlds. So if God wants to create a really good world, and if, among, if incarnation and atonement, we could just sort a shorten the Christian story to that incarnation and atonement, if that's a characteristic of all of many of these very, very good worlds, well, then he may very well pick one of them.

But any world in which there is incarnation and atonement will be a world in which there is suffering, in which there is sin and consequent suffering, and not just a little bit of it, not just insignificant Picadillo on the part of an otherwise admirably disposed angel, it'll have to be a whole lot more than that, how much more it's hard to say. But I mean, the main point then would be that the good worlds contain incarnation and atonement, and worlds that contain incarnation and atonement are bound to contain pain, suffering, and evil. So that would be, that would be a suggestion anyway.

You might call that the Ophilex Copa, Ophilex Copa theodicy from the, on Easter Saturday night in the Catholic Liturgy, there are the words Ophilex Copa, O happy sin that occasions such a marvelous response on the part of God and so on, so it goes. I just want quick follow up to that. How does that, does it account for suffering that occurs after the incarnation and atonement have, well, after there's been incarnation, after,

say, Christ has been crucified and has suffered for our sins.

I'm not quite sure I understand how that account explains why there need to be lots of suffering and bad things that happen even after that whole story is, is well, not entirely finished, but why those parts of it are finished. I guess I'm not quite clear. I'm quite sure that I see the problem.

I mean, why should it, why should, I mean, the idea would be, well, we should just stop once incarnation and atonement has occurred then from then on. Sure, yeah. No more.

Well, I mean, it's not, it's not as if that is, the story is that there are creatures who rebel against God who have turned against God and then they get, they can be redeemed by virtue of God, of incarnation and atonement and to put it kind of crudely, the more the better, you know, why stop was just the first, you know, the first 15, 20 million or something like that. Okay, so the next question that a number of NYU students asked, again, in different varieties, it's a question concerning relativism. So roughly, you know, there's lots of disagreement concerning religious matters, the relationship between religious and science, or religion and science.

Do you, no, you don't, but do you think that some form of relativism is, is a good way to respond to that and then the more important part, if not, why not? Well, basically, I don't think relativism makes any sense. I mean, that's basically why not. I prefer to hold views that make sense.

Relativism doesn't make sense. Therefore, I prefer not to hold it. But relativism, as I understand, well, I mean, of course, there are many varieties of it and there are sophisticated ways of putting it in unsophisticated ways and so on.

But to put it at a basic and unsophisticated way of thinking about it, it's the idea that there really isn't any truth. There is no particular way the world is. There is basically how it looks to me or how it is relative to me and how it is looks to you, how it looks to George over here.

But there's no truth just as such about how the world is or about anything else. But when the relative says this, he doesn't take that to be just true relative to him. He thinks it's really true, just plain true.

And it seems to me it's really impossible to get away from the notion that there is such a thing as truth and that for any proposition or belief you come up with, either that belief or proposition is true or else it isn't true. It's true relative to George, but not true relative to Sam. In a way, that doesn't even make sense, unless you mean by that something like that.

Well, George believes it and Sam doesn't. That's okay. But to say that it's true relative to this guy and not true relative to that guy, as far as I can make out, that doesn't make

sense.

Truth isn't the sort of thing that holds relative to one person and not relative to another. And I think anybody that states relativism, at least ordinarily, doesn't take a statement of it to be relative just to him. He takes it to be the way things are.

Some background, relativism is often a favorite whipping boy among philosophers. I'm going to try and stick up for at least some form or I don't know about stick up for, but at least ask you what you think about maybe a weaker form of relativism. So you can be a relativist about truth and say, yeah, it's true relative to you that God exists.

It's false relative to somebody else that God exists. Say we're not talking about that sort of relativism, but just a sort of relativism about reasonableness. So maybe it's reasonable relative to you and your epistemic standards.

That's a phrase people sometimes use in this context, but it just means your sort of standards of reasoning or what you regard as sensible good reasoning. Maybe it's reasonable relative to those standards to believe in God. It's unreasonable relative to some other standards.

And maybe there's not much to be said about which set of standards is the right set of standards or the best set of standards. All we can say is that, well, yeah, relative to your standard, it's reasonable to believe these religious claims, relative to some other standards, it's not. Well, I mean, in the first place, what's reasonable to believe does depend on one circumstances.

That certainly seems right. So the thought, so, so what's the thought? I mean, the thought is the thought that in general, all we could say is, well, it's sensible from Sam's point of view to believe this, but not sensible from somebody else's point of view. And then what I mean, there's what does one infer from that? I mean, what I want to say is, what I have to do is look at the questions that I'm interested in as carefully as I can and investigate them in as much detail as I can and learn as much as I can about them.

And then I'll wind up believing something one way or the other. And that's what the right thing for me to believe is. And I can't say that it's going to turn out the same way for everybody else, maybe not.

But what else can I do then, then believe what seems to me to be right? I mean, maybe I can't convince other people, but that doesn't mean I should sort of stop believing what I do believe or think it doesn't make any difference or that there's no real issue here none of that seems to me to follow. You certainly find the same thing in philosophy. You find some people are materialists and some aren't and some people believe in abstract objects like propositions and states of affairs and properties, Plato's, Holmanagerie, and others don't.

And typically philosophers don't typically convince each other. They don't wind up in agreement. But what follows from that? I mean, maybe that's too bad, but nothing follows from it with respect to what you ought to do.

So if I think I can't convince materialist philosophers that dualism is true, maybe I can't do that, but that doesn't mean I should stop believing it or that I should just throw up my arms and say, "Oh, a pocks on both your houses or anything like that." What I have to do is I have to just follow the argument or the evidence or whatever we've got, whatever impulses we have here, follow them as carefully as I can and stick with what I come up with. Okay, now we're going to move on to the audience Q&A section. So I've got some audience questions.

There's the first one. What about the argument stating that conflict isn't manifested in mere religion, which limits its tenets to the belief in a creator God? The conflict arises when you look at the specific tenets in religion, like the world was created in six days or the whole earth has been flooded in the past, etc. These things have been proven wrong by science.

I guess I'm inclined to think that a version of Christian belief, according to which the earth is only, the world is only 4,000, I'll say 6,000 or maybe even 10,000 years old. I guess I do think that would be extremely problematic and that we've got some really good reason to think that that's not the way it is. But that's not part of Christian belief as such.

You won't find that in any crease. There are some Christians who believe it, but I would say it's not part of Christian belief just as such. I would go on to say that when you look at the Bible, there are very many different kinds of discourse that it contains.

There is praise and there is history and there are say Jesus' parables, parables, he tells in order to make a certain kind of point. Well, if you look at the first couple of chapters of Genesis, they look like a sort of poetic parable, you might say. They don't have the same feel as what you find when you get a little further along, say, where there is an account of what Abraham did.

He went here and then he went there and he had sons, Isaac and Jacob and the like of that. He got married. The first couple of chapters don't have that kind of feel.

They have much more poetic, much more of a kind of parable like parabolic, whatever the right word is there, feel to him. So I would say what one has to do there is to try to decide just how much of those chapters are supposed to be God intends for us to take literally. I don't think the answer to that is just obvious.

I guess I'm inclined to think that it's important to think there was an original human pair, Adam and Eve, who fell into sin because the New Testament makes reference. Paul

makes reference in various places to Adam and Eve. But as for the rest, some of the other elements of the story, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the snake and so on, maybe these things aren't intended to be taken literally.

Quick follow up on that. So you've said you think evolutionary theory in general is compatible with Christian belief. That can seem to put some pressure on the idea that there was an original pair of humans.

If you think that humans evolved gradually from Australopithecines or Homo erectus or... That sort of picture suggests that if you look backwards, you're not going to find a clear first pair of humans. You'll find things that get more and more human-like without there being some natural pair to point to and say, "Yeah, those are the first two humans." Yeah. Well, people talk about bottlenecks in the whole lineage leading to current humanity.

Maybe a bottleneck when there was say 10,000 individuals, something like that. It's entirely compatible with evolutionary theory that God should pick a certain pair of these individuals. I mean, they're... And we can imagine them as having descended from earlier forms of life.

Pick a certain pair and treat them in a special way or give them a special property or characteristic by virtue of which they could then be said to be created in God's image. And furthermore, it's perfectly possible that these two original... That these original pair should have done something wrong, sinned against God, turned back, turned their backs on God. And if both of these characteristics are heritable and dominant so that if two individuals mate and one of them's got these characteristics and the other one doesn't, then their offspring will have them, then it could be that all present human beings are in fact the sentence of that pair of others as well, but they are the sentence of that pair.

That'd be one way to think of it. So next question. Do you think that it's truly possible to persuade slash defend slash reason slash prove the veracity of Christianity short of the work of the Holy Spirit and a person's heart? Excuse me.

Well, I think you can certainly argue about Christianity, but I guess fundamentally, I agree with John Calvin here. What leads someone in the last analysis to see the truth, the beauty and the truth of the whole Christian story is the work of the Holy Spirit and that person's heart. So John Calvin spoke both of what he called a "sensist of Anaitus" by virtue of which people will come to believe in God, come to think there is such a person as God, see God's hand in the world and so on on the one hand, and then when it came to specifically Christian belief which goes well beyond belief in God, incarnation in atonement and so on, his idea was that in the last analysis, what the cognitive mechanism that brings it about, if somebody has this belief, accepts it, is the work of the Holy Spirit.

And I guess I'm inclined to believe, I'm inclined to go along with Calvin. Given that I'm a Calvinist and that I teach at Calvin College, what else can I do? But of course, that's not the only thing that's involved. I mean, the kinds of responding to objections to Christian belief is also important.

And carrying on some of the other things that questioner asks about, these things are also important. But crucial and perhaps most important, I would say is though, work of the Holy Spirit. Okay, so next question on, could you explain your idea that reason is not necessary for a formulation of the belief in God? Well, I didn't really say reason isn't necessary.

What I said was that having propositional evidence isn't necessary, or at least it's a question as to whether it's necessary. There are lots of beliefs we have, as I said a little while ago, that we accept on the basis of other beliefs, for example, if I believe that 31 times 9,471 is X, I will believe that on the basis of a bunch of other beliefs, like, I don't know, nine times five is 45, etc. On the basis of all these others, I will come to this concluding belief.

But probably most of my beliefs aren't like that. Perceptual beliefs, for example, I believe that there are a lot of people in front of me and I'm sitting on a stage and there's a glass of a bottle of water here and I don't believe that on those on the basis of arguments or evidence from other propositions at all. I believe them on the basis of evidence on the basis of, say, the evidence of sense.

But I don't believe them on the basis of propositional evidence. I don't believe them because I've got an argument for them. And I guess I think the same is true for belief in God.

Most of us who believe in God don't believe because of some argument. It's rather that it just seems right. It just seems right to me to think there are a lot of that there are other people.

It just seems right to me to think that there are many people in the audience here in the light, not on the basis of some kind of argument. It just seems right. That's the way I think belief in God is for most people.

So from the inside, it just seems right. From the outside you might say, well, you know, what's the explanation then? Why does it just seem right? There would be something like Calvin's idea of a sense of divinity, a sense of given atollus. Is a good retort to the atheist that even given evolution, nothing has said about what was before or caused the Big Bang.

In other words, science can only speak to origins of different laws, whereas religion looks at actual creation. Why don't you read that again? Is a good retort to the atheist that

even given evolution, nothing has said about what was before or caused the Big Bang? Oh, sorry, that should've been. Is a good retort to the atheist? Yeah, okay.

Didn't really like questions, sorry. In other words, science can only speak to origins of different laws, whereas religion looks at actual creation. Why don't you enter that one? No.

I'm trying to think of what the questioner has in mind there. I mean, what exactly is the question? So science doesn't tell us what happened before the Big Bang. Fair enough, I guess, on many views.

There isn't any before the Big Bang, so that science couldn't tell us about that, whereas religions tell us about what the world is actually like. I guess I would have to say that science tries to tell us about what the world is actually like too. I mean, you can think here of, there's this old contrast between faith and reason.

Nowadays, we speak of science and religion, but in the Middle Ages, people talked about faith and reason, so that each of faith and reason was each of them is a source of belief or a source of knowledge. Again, to quote John Calvin, he didn't think that faith is believing something, as Mark Twain said, that you know ain't true, no, he thought that you know something by faith. Faith is a sure and certain knowledge, so on, so on, so on, so on, such and such of God's benevolence towards us and the like.

But it doesn't come from reason. It's not reason isn't its source. It's source.

Calvin thinks it is the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. So there are these two different sources, and they both tell us, and they both tell us things about the world. It's not that religion tells us about what the world is actually like and science tells us something else.

Both faith and reason, both science and religion tell us about the world we actually live in. One strategy people will sometimes offer in response to questions like this. So grant that science can trace things back to the Big Bang, but can't give some further explanation of say why the Big Bang occurred, in particular maybe not why it occurred with the initial conditions that it did.

Maybe that's just some unexplained part of the theory. The retort that's often offered then is that there's no way to avoid having some unexplained explainers in your theory. So even if we say it's because of God that the Big Bang occurred, there's a further question of well, why is it that God exists? Now maybe we can answer that, maybe some version of your ontological argument would give an answer to that, but I take it a natural way for an atheist to respond here is to think there's no way to avoid positing some unexplained explainers.

And so then the question is which are the sort of more parsimonious or less implausible

unexplained explainers to have in a theory. Okay, next question. If God is real and did create the world, why does he allow such strong evidence and so much of it support in the idea that the world is not his work, i.e. Darwin DNA evolution? Well, I mean part of what I was arguing earlier on is that Darwinism doesn't give us any evidence against Christian belief, against belief in God or specifically Christian belief.

So the question is well, why is it that there is that sort of evidence? I guess I don't think it is. Evidence against the existence of God. I don't see any incompatibility between God's having created the world and the living world's having to come to be by virtue of some form of evolution.

They seem to be to fit together okay perfectly well. To what degree can one infer ethical imperatives or public policy from science? Well, that's a hard question too. You guys are asking all these hard questions.

Haven't you got some easy ones? Look through that, please. Well, I guess I don't think science can tell us what's right or what's wrong. But once we know what's right or what's wrong, however we learn it, then science can help us implement policies that promote the right, let's say, and minimize the wrong.

So I don't think so science could be intimately involved in the production of the right kind of public policies, but it can't be the whole shooting match. You also have to know what's really worth shooting at in order to then to decide how to achieve that. Okay.

How does the particular example of the relationship between evolution and creationism help us understand the relationship between science as such and faith as such? Science is such and faith is such. Some particular example, would you read that again? Sure. How does the particular example of the relationship between evolution and creationism help us understand the relationship between science as such and faith as such? Okay, now I get it.

Right. Yeah. Well, I think it helps in this way.

Some people think that there is some kind of conflict between science on the one hand and faith, say, Christian faith or the Christian religion on the other. And as I said at the very beginning of my talk, people point to several different loci where this where they were it looks as if there is some kind of clash or where it's alleged that there is some kind of clash. And this particular one, evolution and Christian belief, that's just one of these loci, but it helps one understand the relation between science and Christian and Christian belief more generally.

If you take a look at any one of these loci and see whether there really is conflict or not, if it seems, if as it seems to me there isn't any conflict, then that's a step on the way to a kind of foreunderstanding of the relation between religion and science. In order to do a

complete job, we'd have to look at some of the other loci as well. For example, the idea that excuse me, the idea that there is conflict between science on the one hand and miracles on the other, right? Jesus rising from the dead, Jesus changing water into wine and the like.

And while there's no time now to go into this in any detail, just as another example seems to me you can think about it like this. If you look into physics textbooks at the statement of say conservation of energy or conservation of momentum, other conservation laws, these laws together with what they're deduced from, they're stated for closed systems. Systems such that there is no causal input from outside the system, right? So it'll be sort of the conservation, while I will say energy is conserved in a closed system.

If there's input from the outside, then all bets are off and energy won't necessarily be conserved at all. Well, if the laws of science more generally are stated for a closed system or for closed systems, then anytime God does something special, anytime there is a miracle that's a, the systems in which that miracle takes place are not closed systems. They're not closed to causal input from the outside because there's causal input from God's activity into that system.

So that the laws of science, laws of nature more generally, aren't then violated by God's doing something special by raising somebody from the dead or something like that or changing water into wine. There's no violation of any laws of nature on such an occasion because the laws are stated just for closed systems and any system in which something like that happens, God acts in it and that way is not a closed system. So more generally, the idea here would be to take a look at another, one after another of the places, the loci, where people think there is kind of conflict and see whether there really is or isn't and that will certainly help us understand the relation between faith and science.

Okay, this next one is a bit complicated but I think I get it from the diagram and I think it looks like a good, good, no, it looks like a good question too. So I have to ask it. So the first question with, with a follow up for what is the probability that our senses are reliable given that there's an objective reality, not given naturalism and evolution, just given this weaker thing, there's an objective reality.

Now here's the follow up. If we understand this relative to no background beliefs at all, presumably pretty low. So then the belief that there's an objective reality undermines my evidence for believing it too.

I take it the thought is that you said the probability that our senses are reliable given evolution and naturalism, that's low. So there's an under minor that they think, well, the probability that our senses are reliable given just that there's an objective reality or there's an external world, that doesn't seem too high either. So there should be an under minor too but that doesn't seem right the person is suggesting.

So then the next part more plausibly we understand this question, this question, what's the probability that our senses are reliable given that there's an objective reality, relative to background beliefs on which it can come out high. But then why can't we understand the question of what the probability that our senses are reliable given naturalism in the same way? Think you got it? There's a lot. Sorry.

Well, I mean all these hard questions. I mean that's another hard one. Right, so I think one way to think about that is as follow up, well first of all, I have no idea what the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable given just that there is such a thing as true truth and falsehood is I wouldn't be able to, I don't know, is that low? I've got the faintest idea.

It's somewhere between zero and one. That's about inclusive at that. That's about as best you can do.

But I think there is another way to put this question which really makes sense. So I didn't mean to disparage that way of putting it, that's not making sense. So I was talking about the probability of our faculties being reliable given naturalism and evolution.

Right? Well now presumably you can add other things there given naturalism and evolution and x . Right? Now the question is what can you put in for x ? What would be an admissible substitution there for x ? Presumably you couldn't put in r itself, you couldn't put in just anything you believe, you do believe r . That's one of our background beliefs this person is talking about. r is one of our background beliefs that are, I'm sorry, I shouldn't just say r , that our faculties are reliable which I've been calling r . That is one of our background beliefs but you can't sense we put that in there because if you could, then you could defeat any probabilistic argument against anything. So you can't do that.

Well what can you put in there? That might be a little tricky but you can't put in anything that directly implies r . Nor I would say can you put in anything there that you believe just because you do believe r . Just because you do believe that your cognitive faculties are in fact reliable. So I mean so the way in which this discussion would have to proceed is we'd have to see what background beliefs the person who the questioner, what background beliefs he has in mind and maybe we'd find something really interesting and maybe not. Last two questions, kind of big picture ones.

First one, why do you personally find Christianity so compelling or convincing? Or what? Or convincing there's a slash. Right. That's a, well I mean I guess I can't say a lot more than that when I think about this whole Christian story I was saying how I thought that the best possible worlds contain incarnation and atonement the best worlds God could create.

When I think about the whole Christian story I just find it overwhelmingly attractive. It just seems right to me. I can't think of much by way of serious argument for it.

There are arguments for Christian belief. Richard Swinburne gives some and various other people have given them and while I think those arguments have at least some probative value I don't think they're strong enough to support genuine Christian commitment or genuine Christian belief. So sometimes when I'm at prayer it seems to me that I feel God's presence and I just find myself thankful for this whole gift of atonement so that sinners like I and like the rest of us can in fact once more be in the right relationship with God.

From the inside as I said a different connection earlier on the most I can really say here is it just seems right which is also the most I can say about you know my idea that there's been a past I can't really give an argument much of an argument for that. Burch S. Bertrand Russell said it's compatible with all our evidence that the world popped into existence 10 seconds ago with all these rusty automobiles and crumbling mountains and apparent memories and the like of that. I can't give much of an argument in either of these cases but I just I just find it convincing.

That's about the best I can say that's from the inside. Now in the case of perception you just find yourself believing these things and then there you've got this kind of outside explanation while we've got this cognitive faculty perception we're so created that under certain conditions we form true beliefs about the world and response to various kinds of experience in the light. You can give the same kind of thing here too I mean you can you can say as Calvin does well there's the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit under certain conditions God helps you see that this story is true.

That too is a kind of cognitive faculty it's not a natural inborn one and created as perception is but it's still a cognitive faculty. That may not be a good answer but that's best I could do. And last question what advice would you give to those in the audience seeking truth? Veritas.

Well I don't know if there's any sort of recipe one could give for seeking truth or winding up with true beliefs or winding up with with rational beliefs, justified beliefs. I don't think there's any kind of general recipe. All you can all you can all you can do is just think about these things talk about these things learn as much as you can about these things if you're sort of inclined towards Christian belief you can temporarily at least try it out you can go to church you can read the Bible you can talk to Christians and the like of that but beyond that there's not there there's no particular there's no particular method the basic the basic idea here I guess I would say is just you have to be serious you have to you have to for these serious questions you have to make a really serious determined effort to wind up with the with the right belief.

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