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Did Science Kill God? | John Lennox

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The Veritas Forum

In this episode we hear from mathematician, philosopher, and theologian, Dr. John Lennox. In a discussion titled “Did Science Kill God?” Lennox thoughtfully probes the idea that God and science is an either or decision. Recorded in 2015 from the stage at UCLA.
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Transcript

[MUSIC] 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 world view to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with? How do we know whether the lives that were living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are a mystery, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this involved. In today's episode, we hear from mathematician, philosopher, and theologian, Dr. John Lennox. In a discussion titled, "Did Science Kill God?" Lennox thoughtfully probes the idea that God and science isn't either or decision.

Recorded in 2015 from the stage at UCLA.

[MUSIC] Just to tell you a little bit about myself, because I am equally interested in the arts and the sciences, because I started off wanting to be a linguist. I wanted to be an expert on Greek and Latin.

And then I got more interested in French. And then I decided that physics and mathematics were the thing. And so I moved across to physics and mathematics.

I had a very good languages teacher at school. That when I was 15 or 16, I could speak French pretty fluently. And I thought, do I need to go to university to pursue this? Or perhaps I could do languages for fun and do the sciences as well.

And that is at the end what I decided to do. And I ended up doing pure mathematics at

Cambridge in the early 1960s, not 1860s, please. And have enjoyed ever since the value of having the cultural interests that proceed from language interests to mathematics.

Now, they're connected because of course, natural languages and pure mathematics have something uncommon. Both of them are a language. And pure mathematics is, in one sense, the most refined language we know, except I imagine that the computer experts among you might argue that computer languages are even more pure and more exact.

But I've always been interested in this notion that we can express ideas in language, that we can read and write and communicate. And so studying mathematics, I was always interested in the bigger question. The word is mathematics fit in the bigger world of culture and history.

What is it significance? For instance, I don't know whether you realize that you had a near miss today without lump of rock about a third of a mile across. Did you hear it was in past? It missed earth by about three times the distance from earth to the moon. That's about 750,000 kilometers.

So you can breathe a sigh of relief because it's not going to come round for quite a long time. And because of your wonderful skies over California, which I envy, I wish I had my telescope with me because at the moment you can see a marvelous comet lovejoy and it's fairly rapidly disappearing. It won't be round for another 8,000 years.

Now we cite these figures as if it's dead easy to calculate this kind of thing. And if you were set to calculate when comet lovejoy would come round again, you might have considerable difficulty if you had to do it from first principles. The fascinating thing is that mathematics allows us to get a grip on the universe out there.

Even as a child I found that staggering. When I learned Newton's law of gravitation, it's got eight symbols in it. And when I first discovered that you could derive the elliptical orbits of the planets around the sun from those eight symbols, I thought that was absolutely spectacular.

Just without single bit of information, you can land a person on the moon. You don't even need Einstein's corrections. Now, brilliant people have asked questions about that.

Einstein famously said the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it's comprehensible. How is it that we can understand the universe mathematically? In 1961, the Nobel Prize winner, Oighein Wigner, he wrote a very famous paper, "A Much Loved of Mathematicians, called the Unreasonable Effectiveness of Matmatics." How can it be reasonable that here's a mathematician she's thinking in here. She comes up with a set of equations and lo and behold, they enable her to describe a phenomenon out there, like the return of comet lovejoy in the next 8,000 years.

How does that work? How is it that large parts of the universe are describable in terms of mathematics? Now, that leads to all kinds of very interesting questions. And the question before us this evening is the famous, very old, but very important question of the relationship of science to faith in God. Because there's quite a considerable body of opinion at the moment, very vocal, led by people like Richard Dawkins with whom I've debated publicly.

You can see that on the internet, if you like, who feel that science has abolished God effectively. And indeed Stephen Hawking, who's arguably the world's most famous living scientist, he simply says, "Look, you've got to choose between science and God." And as a result, many young people, undergraduates, graduate students, have said, "Okay, I've got to choose between science and God, so I choose science." Now I want to investigate that a little bit, because there's something odd going on here. Why I say that is because I've just been talking to you about one of the most famous scientists of all time, Sir Isaac Newton, who discovered the law of gravitation.

He and Stephen Hawking have in common that they both occupied the same professorship at Cambridge. And the interesting thing is that Isaac Newton was not an atheist. According to Stephen Hawking, Isaac Newton should have chosen between science and God, but he didn't.

He was very famously a believer in God. And what I want to investigate with you tonight, I want to focus it on those two individuals, to make the discussion easier to follow, and I hope to provoke you to questions. I want to take you on a journey that I've been on myself, because I've been puzzled for a very long time.

How it is that the pioneers of science, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Clark Maxwell, Charles Babbage, how it is that they were all believers in God, and yet today people like Stephen Hawking say you've got to either believe in God or be a scientist. So let's have a look at that. Please note down your questions so that we can come to them at a suitable time.

I'm not going to cover all of this topic. It's a huge topic, and it's a fascinating topic. But what I want to do is to try to clear up some fog, because it seems to me that there's a lot of intellectual confusion around this whole debate, and we can only navigate our way around it if we see what causes some of the confusion.

The first thing is that often people think that there's a conflict between God and science. Now that cannot be the case. Think of the Nobel Prize for Physics.

It was one last year by Peter Heggs, the Scotsman, the Heggs Boson, and Peter Heggs is an atheist. Just a few years before that, the same Nobel Prize was won by an American, Bill Phillips, and he's a Christian. Now there are no different scientists.

They both won the Nobel Prize, and you can get no better than that. So it can't be

science versus God, obviously, because they're both brilliant scientists. What that tells us is this, that there's a real conflict, but it's not between science and God.

It's between their two worldviews. Heggs is an atheist. That's his worldview.

He takes a naturalistic perspective on the universe. That's his worldview. It conflicts with the worldview of Bill Phillips.

He's a Christian. So let me say first of all that we need to reorientate ourselves in the debate of wherever we're going to understand it. The real conflict is between two worldviews which are obviously opposed, atheism and theism.

So the question that we can ask now is the sensible one, which way does science point? Does it point towards atheism? Or does it point towards God or does it point nowhere? And so I want to amass the evidence for you tonight. I'm not going to give you proof of the mathematical sense, for the obvious reason that you can only give proofs in the mathematical sense for things in mathematics. What I'm going to do is to do what we do in every other area of natural science and supply evidence.

So what evidence is there? That there should be a positive connection between faith in God and science. Well the first thing is to go back to Newton himself and the pioneers of science. It has been noticed many times that modern science as we know it grew up in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Its pioneers were all believers in God to such an extent that the most common view of this is in the words of C.S. Lewis, "Men became scientific, why? Because they expected law and nature, why? Because they believed in a law giver." That is a fascinating claim. It's saying that far from faith in God hindering science, it was faith in God the drove science. That was the motor that drove it.

And the connection is obvious because let's go back to Vigner's unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics. But it's not unreasonable if you take the theistic view. And these early pioneers like Kepler, they looked at the universe and they said what we're doing is studying the universe and the language God gave us.

Mathematics were thinking God's thoughts after him. And because they believed in a rational God, an intelligent God, it was that that motivated them to say science must be able to be done. And it's worth doing if we human beings are made in the image of God, then perhaps we can follow some of God's thoughts.

And so the enormous excitement when Newton discovered his law of gravitation. And now here's the interesting thing. The law of gravitation plays a very important role in the contemporary debate because it's Newton's reason for believing in God and his Hawking's reason for not believing in God.

The very same law of gravity. Stephen Hawking says because there is a law of gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing and therefore God is totally unnecessary. And yet Isaac Newton, who discovered the law of gravity, when he discovered it, he didn't say what Hawking said.

He wrote a book called the Principia Mathematica, the most famous book in the history of science, expressing in it the desire that a thinking person might come through reading it to believe in God. So when Newton discovers the law of gravity, he says, wow, what a fascinating God that did it that way. And of course it's true, isn't it, that the more you understand about mechanical engineering, the more you can admire the engine of a Cadillac or a Lincoln, the more you understand about art, the more you can understand the genius of a Rubens, not the less.

And so the more Isaac Newton understood about the universe, the more he believed about God. And yet the more Stephen Hawking studies about the universe, the more he seems to be increased in his atheism. And I want to investigate why that difference.

The first reason I think, and I struggle with this for quite a while because I find it so strange that Stephen Hawking, who is just a bit ahead of me in Cambridge, and a long way ahead of me in his mathematical ability, I remember him walking around Cambridge very well. I just wonder what it is that really convinces these people. Well the first thing is that it's very common these days, and many people pick it up from Richard Dawkins simply to make an assertion.

God is a delusion. You've heard the title of the book, the God Delusion. And Stephen Hawking does something like that in an interview with one of our British newspapers.

He said, "Religion, well that's a fairy story for people afraid of the dark." Now of course that's the Freudian argument. And often it's used, some scientist says that religion is a wish fulfillment, there's psychological science brought in, and that's the end of the story. It isn't the end of the story.

If we're going to be scientific, then we need to take these arguments a little bit more seriously than that. For instance, the first thing to notice is that not every statement by a scientist is a statement of science. I'm making a whole lot of statements tonight that aren't statements of science.

But the difficulty is that once a person is a scientist and says something, people tend to think that what they've said is scientifically verifiable, therefore it must be true, and therefore it is great authority. When Carl Sagan started his series, "Cosmos," the universe is all that his walls are ever shall be. Well that's a marvelous statement, but it's not a statement of science, it's a statement of his metaphysical belief.

That's all. So when I was asked what I thought of Hawking's statement, religion is a fairy

story for people afraid of the dark, I was very tempted to reply and I gave in to the temptation and said atheism is a fairy story for people afraid of the light. Now it's very kind of you to laugh, but it proves nothing.

But what it does is illustrate what happens when you really look at the Freudian argument, because one of Germany's most brilliant psychiatrists has weighed into this about this delusion question and he points out, look, if there is no God, then Freud's argument is wonderful showing that religion is a delusion and the idea of God is a wish fulfillment and so on, a father figure in the sky is brilliant, if there is no God. But of course he goes on to say if there is a God, the very same argument shows you that atheism is a delusion, the desire not to have to meet God ever, not to have to give a count for the wrong things we thought and the way we've messed up and so on. If there is a God and then he says the bottom line is this, that the real question, whether there's a God or not, Freud can't help you neither can young, neither can frankly, you have to look somewhere else.

And the problem is before the discussion even gets started, people think that God's question has been solved by Freudian psychology, it has not. It's actually equally balanced in both directions and doesn't address this substantive problem at all. And the next thing I would want to come to is that to my great surprise, I discover that many of my scientific colleagues, their problem is not so much for science but it's with God, they're confused about God and that's why they say you've got to choose between science and God.

Now this was quite a revelation to me and it's relatively recent because when I was younger and I talked about God, I could assume that an audience knew what I was talking about, I was talking about the triune God of the Bible who created the universe and upholds it and has left his fingerprints all over the cosmos, the heavens declare the glory of God. But now of course I can't understand that because many, many people now think, look back over history, there have been thousands of gods and when I was in this area last time I debated the editor of Skeptic magazine, Michael Sherber and he, I think it was said to me or Dawkins or somebody but they all do it with me anyway, said, you know, you're an atheist, me with respect to Zeus and yes I am, I'm an Azusaist. You're an atheist with respect to Wotan, yes I am and I wotan us and so they went through a long boring list of gods and then they said, and we just go one God more and we are artheists, we don't believe the God of the Bible.

So what they're doing you see is thinking that the God of the Bible is just like the Greek God of thunder or lightning. That's a profound mistake. That's read anything about the ancient gods of Greeks, Babylonians, Romans and so on will know that the key difference between them and the God of the Bible is a very simple but profound one.

The gods of the ancient religions are all I quote, descended from the heaven and the

earth. That is their products of the primeval chaos, primeval soup, mass energy, call it what you like, their material gods. They come from the universe, the God of the Bible created the universe.

That's a vast difference but the difference is more profound than that. You see the Greek God of lightning disappears when you do your first lecture in atmospheric physics at UCLA physics department because you discover how lightning works, atmospheric discharges, static electricity, all that kind of thing, pressure gradients. Oh, I don't need the God of lightning anymore, exit that God.

The God of lightning is a God of the gaps. The Greeks couldn't explain lightning therefore God did it. Now what I have discovered relatively recently is that many of my colleagues think that that's my idea of God.

There's something in biology I can't explain. Oh, that's where God works. God did that, you see.

And a little bit more science, that gap is closed and God gets squeezed out and disappears. You understand the argument, don't you? Now try and follow the logic of this. If you define God to be a God of the gaps like that, then you have to choose between God and science because that's the way you've defined God.

Full stop. And that explains to me a long way what's happening with many of my friendly atheist colleagues. They think that I believe in a God of the gaps and they rightly say, look, you have to choose between that God and science.

Of course you do because that's the definition of that God, but that's not the God I believe in at all. I don't believe in the God of the gaps. The Bible does not start with the words in the beginning God created the bits of the universe we don't understand.

That would be a very curious start, wouldn't it? In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. That is he created the whole show. And of course that's what Newton believed.

And so when he discovered his law of gravity, the more he understood, the more he admired the genius of the God that did it that way because it's not a God of the gaps. If you've got that, now that's crucially important because you're a long way of getting out of the fog if you understand that. Now when Newton discovered gravity, he was getting towards a scientific explanation.

Now this is one of the words I'm interested in most from the humanity side and from the science side. What do we mean by an explanation? I wonder do we discuss these in university classes but I hope to provoke you to think about things that perhaps you don't often think about in your classes. What do we mean by explanation? What do we mean by scientific explanation? So I go to school very long time ago and the teacher comes in

and writes down the law of gravity and says that's an explanation of what? Do you know what I thought? I thought it was an explanation of gravity.

It isn't you know. Do you realize that no one knows what gravity is? Still today. And if you don't believe that, you better read Richard Feynman and he worked in the University of California so you better check before you disagree with him.

You see, we make the mistake and it's a profound mistake of thinking that the laws of nature are explanations in every sense. Let me just explain a little bit more of what I mean by that. The law of gravitation is brilliant.

Eight symbols, it enables us to do brilliant calculations, make predictions, send men to the moon and so on, but even Newton realized it didn't tell him what gravity was. Didn't explain gravity. And in fact, it's the famous philosopher Wittgenstein that put his finger on it brilliantly and he said this, he said the chief deception of modernism is that the laws of nature are explanations of the phenomena of nature.

They're not. They're descriptions with predictive power. So even within science itself, when somebody says, oh, we've got a scientific explanation, you've got to be very careful.

It would be very, very limited even within science. That's point number one. Point number two is explanation comes at different levels and kinds.

Why is the water boiling? Well it's boiling because heat from a Bunsen burner is being transduced through the base of a copper kettle and it's upsetting the molecules of water. They're getting very agitated and they're moving faster and faster and faster and faster and that's why the water is boiling. No, it isn't.

The water is boiling because I want a cup of coffee. Now your laughter shows me that you understand the difference between two kinds of explanation intuitively. My statement was foolish, which statement? The statement, no it's not.

It's boiling because I want a cup of coffee. Oh yes it is. Both explanations are perfectly valid, aren't they? There's a scientific explanation of what's happening and then there's the explanation in terms of agency and intention and desire.

Now would you ever dream of saying that the scientific explanation conflicts with the human explanation or the agency explanation? Of course not. Well let me put it to you like this very bluntly, suggesting that God is in conflict with science as an explanation of the universe is like saying that Henry Ford is in conflict with the law of internal combustion as an explanation for the motor car. Let me say that again.

Saying that God is in conflict with science as an explanation of the universe is exactly like saying that Henry Ford is in conflict with the law of internal combustion as an

explanation for the motor car. But we need to get clear ladies gentlemen. To get out of this fog is God and science are not the same kind of explanation.

They don't conflict, they don't compete, they compliment. Science tends to deal mainly with the how questions. The God answer deals with the why questions, the bigger questions and so there's zero conflict and that was seen very early on.

But because people have become confused about the nature of God and simultaneously confused about the nature of explanation they have got into a terrific tangle and therefore are now suggesting that God and science are alternative explanations. That's exactly what Richard Dawkins believes. So what I'm suggesting to you is this watch out for false alternatives.

God or science, mechanism or agency. These are false alternatives and they lead us away from very rapidly from the central questions. And you see for instance think of Stephen Hawking's dismissal of God by using gravity because there is a law of gravity the universe can and will create itself from nothing.

That is the heart of his book the grand design and when I read it I was staggered. Because there is a law of gravity because there is something the universe will create itself from nothing. That's a contradiction, a flat contradiction.

Secondly because there is a law of gravity doesn't say because gravity exists but what would a law of gravity mean if there was no gravity? If there is no gravity a law of gravity is totally beaming us and what that exposes is a very strange idea that laws are creative but they're not are they? Laws do not create anything. The law of gravity never created any gravity it describes gravity when you've got it. I'd be illustrate this another colleague in Oxford a very famous atheist is Professor Peter Atkins and I once asked him after a lecture Peter what created the universe and he said mathematics and I'm afraid I was so taken aback I started laughing rather uncontrollably and with much embarrassment and he said he was very angry he said why are you laughing well I said Peter I'd be honest that's the most absurd thing I've ever heard in my life.

He said why? Well I said I am a mathematician and let me keep it simple for you one plus one equals two did that ever put two dollars in your pocket? In fact it's interesting just how pro of that do you all remember the financial crisis? Yes I think we do. You know why that happened precisely because people thought that by doing mathematics you can create money we call it creative accounting. It's a very odd belief that by manipulating ideas and symbols you can create a reality.

Newton's laws of motion not only never created the universe they've never moved a billiard ball in this universe they can describe its motion but its people accuse move it. There's a great deal of confusion in the status of the laws and I was very amused having read this in Hawking's book to read his first example of a law the sun rises in the east

and sets in the west. Well that's a very sensible law but it doesn't create the sun or the east or the west it's simply a description and descriptions do not create realities objective realities.

So there's immense confusion lurking underneath and one of the reasons I believe is people aren't taught the philosophy of science. They're taught narrow ways of calculating and so on and understanding and taught a great deal of facts but they're not ever taught how to stand back from those facts. Now I want to give you plenty of time for questions but I want to come to something else that's right at the heart of everything at the moment and it's absolutely fascinating to my mind and it goes back again to what I was saying about history.

These early scientists believed in God and so they looked at the universe they said why don't we have a look and study it. They believed science could be done. Now sometimes I have fun with my colleagues and I ask them questions.

I love asking questions and playing Socrates. So I say to them tell me colleague what do you do science with? They say well I've got a wonderful million dollar machine. No no I don't mean that.

I mean oh you mean my and they almost say mind and then they remember their current philosophy and they say brain because they're not quite sure that there is a mind that's distinct from the brain. Well okay let's leave that stand. I do it with my brain.

So I say okay tell me about the brain you do science with. They say do you want the long story? No I want the short story. Okay tell me right down to absolute minimum the short story of the brain.

Well they say something like this. Ultimately they say the brain is the end product of an unguided process that didn't have it in mind. And I said you trust it.

Say that again to me. If your computer you knew it was the end product of an unguided process that didn't have it in mind would you trust it for a moment? No. Why do you trust your mind to do science? The early pioneers knew why because they believed that the mind was a creation of God that was made in his image but now let's come to the current set of atheists of which many of my colleagues are.

That's exactly what they believe. The brain is the end product of a mindless unguided process and yet they trust it. And you say well that's the kind of argument a Christian would come up with.

No it isn't. It's the kind of argument that Charles Darwin would come up with. This might surprise you now.

But listen to Charles Darwin. With me the heart of doubt always arises whether the

convictions of man's mind which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals or of any value or are at all trustworthy. Would anyone trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind if there are any convictions in such a mind? It bothered Darwin on the basis of his theory which I'm not going to discuss tonight because these are the implications of that theory.

How can you possibly trust anything that is produced by an organ which does not seem to have a solid base? Now this story is shifting into center stage of the debate today. John Gray who's an atheist, professor of the history of European thought at London says "Modern humanism is the faith that through science humankind can know the truth and so be free." Now this is an atheist speaking. It's not me.

If Darwin's theory of natural selection is true this is impossible. The human mind serves evolutionally success, not truth. In other words you cannot expect anything like truth to come out of the human mind.

Now one of the top philosophers in the world is Alvin Plantinger of Notre Dame, just retired. Here's his view of this. Dawkins is right that we are the product of mindless unguided natural processes then he has given us strong reason to doubt the reliability of human cognitive faculties.

And therefore inevitably to doubt the validity of any belief that they produce including Dawkins' own science and his atheism. His biology and his belief in naturalism would therefore appear to be at war with each other. In a conflict that is nothing at all to do with God.

But now there was an explosion in cyberspace a year or so ago when Thomas Nagel a leading American philosopher New York wrote a book with the most provocative title I've ever seen. It starts off very innocently mind and cosmos and then it says this. Why the neo-Darwinian view of the universe is almost certainly false.

Now this is an atheist philosopher who is at the top of philosophy in the USA today. Here's what he writes and it's all to do with this doubt about the validity of human rationality. Here's what he says.

If the mental is not itself merely physical it cannot be fully explained by physical science. Evolutionary naturalism implies that we shouldn't take any of our convictions seriously including the scientific world picture on which evolutionary naturalism itself depends. That is a fascinating statement.

In other words what these people are saying is that if you follow the atheist logic and apply it to the very reasoning you need to develop any science, any philosophy, anything you discover that it collapses into chaos. C.S. Lewis put it years ago he got it clearly. He says if all that exists in nature the great mindless interlocking event, if all that exists is

nature rather, the great mindless interlocking event, if our own deepest convictions are merely the byproducts of an irrational process then clearly there's not the slightest ground for supposing that our sense of fitness and our consequent faith in uniformity tell us anything about a reality external to ourselves.

Our convictions are simply a fact about us like the color of our hair. If naturalism is true we have no reason to trust our conviction that nature is uniform. It can be trusted only if quite a different metaphysic is true.

If the deepest thing in reality the fact which is the source of all other factude is a thing in some degree like ourselves. If it is a rational spirit and we derive our rational spirituality from it then indeed our conviction can be trusted. Our repugnance to disorder is derived from nature's creator and ours.

To put that much more succinctly, shooting yourself in the foot is pretty painful, shooting yourself in the brain is fatal. And what is happening here I believe is that people are just beginning to see that if you follow the extreme reductionist route which insists as a paradigm of how science must be done that everything is reduced to physics and chemistry you end up destroying science. In other words what I'm suggesting to you is a very provocative thesis.

It's not that science is buried God the exact opposite. It's that science is burying atheism that you can't logically have both science and atheism. In other words science itself is indicating to us that there must be some transcendence within human rationality.

Now you notice what Nagel said if the mental isn't purely physical but we all know that. If you go down in the beach in California you've got some beautiful beaches and you see your name written in the beach may or be only four letters, JOHN like mine, you immediately recognize intelligent input don't you? Immediately you know there's been intelligence there even though you didn't see it done. You infer upwards because it's a linguistic phenomenon.

The fascinating thing is we've lived to say the discovery of the longest word in any language the DNA code. Three and a half billion letters long. What about that then? And I find it very strange that many of my colleagues I run them through the illustration of the beach and they say yes of course you recognize mind if there's language and I say well look here's another language the DNA code the human genome.

We use code language all the time and I say to them what's the origin of that? Oh they say chance and necessity. I say what? Chance and the laws of nature but even your own name seen written you won't do it that way. There's something odd going on here and of course it's the paradigm pressure in the west of insisting that you are not allowed to even consider that there might be some transinsons.

What I want to argue ladies and gentlemen it's beginning to appear totally unavoidable and my final point is I began with two worldviews. On the one hand there is the worldview of naturalism that starts off with mass energy or the multiverse or something like that and then everything is derivative. It comes bottom up emergently until you get mind and language and so on and the idea of God because there isn't a God.

The biblical worldview is the exact opposite. It says in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. All things came to be through him.

In other words word, logic, information, language is primary and mass energy is derivative. And you see here's the fascinating thing. If the mental is not purely physical says Thomas Nagel, exactly information is not visible, information is often visible but it's not material.

We live in the information age where physicists have discovered that information is a fundamental quantity and it's not reducible to physics and chemistry. That's the end of materialism I'm afraid. So I believe we're at the start of a fascinating new era.

We're very slowly but very gradually we're going to have to reorientate ourselves. The key to it all that I've been trying to say this evening is this. Science is wonderful and I'm passionate about it.

Science comes about by thinking about the universe but the bigger issues start to fall into place. When we begin to do what C.S. Lewis suggested in the 1940s we need to do and that is we need to begin thinking about thinking. We need to begin thinking about the status of our thinking and to ask ourselves why it is we believe that thinking gives us valid answers and it is my provocative suggestion to you tonight that ultimately the only answer to that question is God.

So science has not buried God but science and thinking about thinking is in process of burying atheism. Thank you very much. Is there any remaining scientific domain for which the existence of God is relevant to us? Well I'm absolutely delighted that we have the skeptic society on board.

So if they're listening thank you very much for joining us. So good. There he is up there.

That's very nice to have you with us. Well the question is very interesting because it reminds me immediately that we have a very important question. The question is very interesting because it reminds me immediately of something Lawrence Christ wrote to which I replied.

He said now that we've got the Higgs boson we don't need God. The Higgs boson is arguably more relevant than God. To which I replied more relevant for what? If I'm giving a lecture on atomic physics I won't mention God at all.

God isn't relevant. But if I was giving a lecture and why there's a universe at all in which atomic physics can be done then of course I'd have to mention God. And the point is it's not that are the remaining scientific areas for which God is relevant.

God is relevant to the whole lot just as if you might say are there any remaining elements of the science of motor cars that need Henry Ford? Well they all do. But you never find Henry Ford in a motor car. Of course not.

But his genius is stamped all over it. And the point I'm making tonight is cuts in under what you're saying because it's saying that the whole of science, the very fact that we can do science, the rationality we need to discuss all these topics ultimately requires God to underpin it. When I'm teaching algebra in Oxford I don't mention God at all.

In that sense he's not relevant to the teaching of that discipline. God becomes relevant at the higher level up. So thank you for that question.

But I don't think it does anything in getting rid of God. Let me say one more thing about it though because very often because I'm a mathematician people come to me and they tell me the story of Napoleon and Laplace. You know the story of Napoleon and Laplace don't you? You don't? Goodness me.

What do they teach these days? Napoleon came to Laplace who was a famous mathematician and Laplace had written this fantastic book on projectiles which was relevant to ballistics in the army. What elevation do you have to have the gun to hit the enemy at this distance and so on? So Napoleon looked at all these equations and said, "And where is God in your equations?" And Laplace's famous answer was, "June pabazuander set uputés." I don't need that hypothesis. And how many people say, "There you are." That's what I think about God.

I don't need that hypothesis. But Laplace was completely right. I just said exactly the same thing because it was a book about calculating ballistics.

You don't need God for that. We got to realize, ladies and gentlemen, that 99.9% of all science is being done in this university at the moment, this moment, doesn't raise the question of God. Of course not.

You're finding out where this bit fits, how this bit works, what this drug does and so on and so forth. The God question comes higher up when people start saying, as we argued from the beginning, that if you've got science, you don't need God. That begins to be where the problem lies.

We mustn't think, and some of the questions do imply, that we're thinking of God as a bit of science. He isn't. Another question.

Most of the scientists you have referenced as believers in God live a long time ago. Has a

modern science give us fresh evidence that contradicts believe in God? Most of them, they lived a long time ago, yes, and probably I'm a dinosaur too. But the reason I used those scientists was not because they lived a long time ago, but because they are connected with the rise of modern science.

That's why I referenced them. What we're establishing is the thesis that's known as white heads, thesis, or murtance, thesis, and so on, that there's an intimate connection between the rise of science and belief in God. Now, of course, there are many scientists today who believe in God.

Of average scientists in America's who's who, average working scientists in universities, about 40% believe in God. Now what was the last twist to your question? Because my mind didn't retain it. Have you now got it in writing? Yes.

And the last question was... You tell me again. Has it modern science given us fresh evidence that contradicts belief in God? That was just the second one. Oh, I don't think so.

I think that contemporary science is increasing the evidence to believe in God. Now, unfortunately, because of our limitation in time, you'll have noticed that I've concentrated on the philosophy and history of science more than on the results of science. One of the very interesting results of science in recent times, and people are fascinated about it, and so am I, is the whole idea that space time at the beginning.

Now, I'm old enough to remember when that first came in, because believe it or not, if you go back before the early '60s, most scientists did not believe that there was a beginning to space time. And when the evidence say of the hot big bang, Arnold Penzius, the microwave background, Hubble expansion, and so on, began to come in, there was fierce resistance in the British Academy against this development. And it went right up to the top level, the editor of Nature wrote in his newspaper, Nature, and said, "We must not go down this route of believing that there was a beginning." Why? Because it'll give too much leverage to people who believe the Bible.

Isn't it astonishing that the biggest advance in astrophysics in the 20th century was resisted because it appeared to converge with the Bible, that it, of course, had been saying for centuries in the beginning God created the heavens of the earth. And indeed, in the most famous laboratory in the world, which I mustn't name because it was the secret meeting I was at, which I mustn't tell you about. I said to people, I said, "You know, they said to me, 'Look, the Bible's totally irrelevant to science.' And I said, 'Have a minute.' I said, 'You guys, for centuries, believe that there wasn't a beginning to space time because you listened to Aristotle when, in fact, the Bible for centuries had been saying in the beginning God created the heavens of the earth.

And perhaps if you'd taken it more seriously, you'd looked for the evidence earlier." Now,

where are you going from that is to more contemporary science is that since there was a beginning, that raises the question beginning from what? And the current answer is nothing. And so I give a lot of lectures about nothing. Nothing turns out to be absolutely fascinating.

Just think about it. You see, if you believe there's a beginning to space time and everything started from nothing, you've now got to be able to solve the biggest problem in philosophy. Why is there something rather than nothing? Now as a Christian, I've got a straight and simple answer to that at one level.

The universe didn't come from nothing. It came from God, but God is non-physical. But now, dismiss that and put yourself in the position of modern cosmologists.

They've got to get the universe from nothing because that's all there was or wasn't. "Hey, so how do you do it?" "Well, now listen, here's Laurence Christ, a universe from nothing." And on about page three, he says this. Now, just think about this.

If you were given this, whatever subject you're studying, suppose you were given this sentence and asked to comment on it. I wonder what you'd say. Here it goes.

Because something is physical. Nothing must be physical, especially if you define it as the absence of something. What? Because something is physical.

Nothing must be physical, especially if you define it as the absence of something. What would you call that? Autor anonsons. But this is a world famous astrophysicist.

He's desperate to get something from nothing. So what does he do? Redefine nothing. That's what they all do.

Hawking does. The universe cannot well create itself from nothing. But when you investigate it, you discover that nothing is a quantum vacuum.

It's not nothing at all. And if you want a really amusing send up of the whole thing, read David Albert, who's a philosopher in New York. It's hilarious in his comment about nothing.

Now, this is serious stuff to my mind because it's scientific advance, but it's bringing people to a full stop. Now, I'm a very fortunate person because I get invited to your wonderful country many times and I get to meet fascinating people. And I was at Harvard and MIT simultaneously and invited to the faculty club.

And to my amazement, I was invited to have a public debate with Alan Gooth, who's the most brilliant cosmologist in the world. He's the father of the theory of inflation and he's a very nice man. And he and I debated the God question and he gave us a brilliant lesson in physics.

And then he said, if you want to add God to that, well, I don't mind, but I don't. So his atheism was pretty mild. So we added a discussion and I couldn't resist because I would never be in this position again.

I said, Alan, listen, you're the expert on nothing. And there's great confusion out there about nothing. In fact, there's much to do about nothing.

I said, tell us, when you as an astrophysicist use the word nothing. You don't mean what we mean by nothing. I went down into the middle of UCLA and I met nobody.

It doesn't mean I met somebody called nobody. It means I didn't meet anybody. Yes? You don't mean philosophical nothing, the ordinary sense of nothing.

He said absolutely not. So what we're faced with, ladies and gentlemen, is this just for your information? There are many books on the shelves in your book shops here claiming to prove that the universe has come from nothing. They've all failed.

Now that to my mind is a very fascinating indicator that they're failing and entering into very foolish statements because the one obvious answer that's staring at them in the face, they reject our priori. That is that the universe comes not from something physical but from an intelligent God. And I find again and again the more that science reveals the information base for so many of our sciences, the more that speaks to me of a word-based universe, it makes sense.

It makes much more sense than it's opposite. I could say a lot more about that but I'm not going to because there's another question. The second question is the Bible says that the first man is Adam and from him came the genealogy of David to Jesus.

However, this contradicts conventional understanding of evolution which says that the earth is millions of years old. What are your thoughts on that? Oh, I have a great deal of thoughts on that. That's almost another full lecture you know.

And the last bit of it, you see, there are several elements in that. In fact, there are three completely separate vast questions in there. There's the question of the age of the earth.

There's the question of the descent of all human beings from Adam and so on and so forth. And there's the question of the age of humanity. So let me put it to you, which of those would you like me to talk about? The age of the earth, the question of Adam, which of those two? I'll give you the choice.

The age of the earth? Okay, I'll go for that one. And it's not that I don't want to deal with the other one because this is a huge and very interesting subject and I'll let you enter a secret afterwards. But let me just tell you this.

When it comes to the Bible and the age of the earth, the very interesting thing is the

Bible says zero on that topic. Now, there's a shock for some of you. You see, but what about the seven days at the beginning of the Bible? I'm very well aware of those seven days.

Indeed, I've written a book on those seven days called Seven Days That Divide the World. And if you want to follow what I think about them, but let's think logically. Suppose we pick up a Bible, we've never seen it before.

It's very easy to make assumptions and then dismiss the old thing. Let me give you an example of that. What does the Bible say in the beginning God created the heavens of the earth? That's what it says in the beginning.

When was the beginning? Well, there is now a sequence of days, day one, two, three, four, five, six, and God rests. And people say, "There you are." It's a short time ago because we got all these genealogies that you mentioned. You got six days and then the beginning.

But they make a mistake. They don't look carefully enough at the literary form of Genesis 1 because you see the beginning is not part of the sequence of days. That's obvious to scholars of Hebrew.

It's obvious too when they look at the grammar because the first statements in the Bible in the beginning God created the heavens of the earth is in a different past tense from the sequence of days. Now, there are all kinds of controversies about these days. I've written about them.

But what I'm about to tell you has got nothing to do with what you believe about the days. It's simply this that the statement in the beginning God created the heavens of the earth is not part of the sequence of days. It's referring to events before the sequence of days.

How long before the Bible doesn't say so neither do I. So I have the slightest difficulty with the current age given by the standard model, 13 point, whatever it is, three, seven or four, eight billion years. I don't think the Bible makes any comment on it whatsoever. That's an example of over reading what the Bible says.

The days are fascinating. But as I say, it would take up far too much time and I've written a book about it and you can look that up and Amazon and so on. So we'll go to the next question.

Okay. So the next question is just to clarify, please ask, well, that's not the one. Okay.

So question three, how would you respond to Sam Harris and those scientists who believe that solely, solely, neuroscience can explain morality? Well, I'm very interested in what Sam Harris and Co. Wright have responded to him in my book, Gunning For God

Actually. I delayed publishing it when I came across his book, The Moral Landscape.

And of course, the problem lies in your formulation of the question that neuroscience can explain morality. Here we go again. What do we mean by explain? I want to amplify what you're saying to make the claim more precise.

The contention is this and it's a very important one. For many years, centuries in fact, in Europe and in the West, morality has been dominated by the God concept. The Ten Commandments have been the basis of many legislations and so on, civil rights, everything else.

And in 1906, just up the valley here somewhere in La Jolla at the Salk Institute, there was a major discussion on atheism. And the first question was, should we get rid of religion? And the answer was yes. And we should use science to do it and hence our question tonight flowing out of that conference.

But they had a third question. What are we going to do about morality? Because morality, generally speaking, is based on religion. If we get rid of religion, we're going to have no base for morality.

Can science give us morality? Now, that's where Sam Harris comes in. Because for many years it had been believed and still is by many of us, that you cannot go from an "is" to an "ought." That's what David Hume said. You can't just describe a situation and "is" what it is and then suddenly say, therefore you ought.

Morality needs something transcendent. Einstein realized that science couldn't produce morality. And of course we realized that, too, science can tell you if you put, if you put strictening in your granny's tea, it will give her more than a painful day.

But science can tell you whether you ought to do it to get your hands on her money. Science doesn't tell us about ethics. Richard Feynman here said exactly the same thing.

That nature doesn't come with a prescription, how you ought to use it. And David Hume said you can't go from "is" to "ought." Sam Harris says you can. In other words, he's saying you can get a base for morality within science.

I disagree because I think that when you investigate and other people have done the same, Sam Harris's arguments, they appear very plausible. But how he gets his "ought" from "is" is to put the "ought" into the beginning. And of course he then gets an "ought" from "an is" because his "is" contains "ought." Now that's a big story in its own right.

And I think that we need to be very careful because this is a hugely important topic. I see two topics that concern me. One that's stages of the universe, created or not.

We've been talking about that tonight. The second is the status of human life made in

the image of God or not. That's one of the most contentious discussions in our age.

And Harris is making a contribution. And the attempts are being made to bypass God and to try to get ethics and morality from either social evolution, genetics and so on. There's a long history of the failure of that scheme.

And some of it is of course as you know horrific. But it's very important that we realize just what is going ahead. But I think neuroscience is one of the most interesting topics.

And I encourage Christians to get involved in it. Understanding consciousness is a very, very important thing. But I don't think neuroscience is going to explain morality.

Next. So here's the next one. How would you explain fossil evidence that contradicts the idea that humans are made in the image of God? For example, the Australopithecus fossil woman named Lucy or any other hominid fossils that have been found? That's the question I said I wasn't going to say anymore about it.

You stinked it in. You stinked it back in again. Well, from where I sit.

And again, it's a huge other topic. Telling what is human or not from fossils is extremely difficult. Because the image of God is not measured by fossils.

I mean, if you look at us in this room, if you fossilize the whole lot of us, it is amazing what vast differences there would be. It would be fascinating to see to what branches we were all assigned. The image of God is God as a rational spirit.

And just within the human race, without even involving hominids and all this kind of thing, the fact is that we all bear something that is a rational spirit. You can't tell that from bones. So I'm not sure whether it's worth pursuing that any further.

So let's go to something else. With so many contradicting religious claim, what makes me believe religion as an answer to the why question and change my lifestyle according to a religious claim rather than believing Stephen Hawking, who says that there is no God and live my life the way I want it. Well, I wouldn't believe Stephen Hawking because of the vast and ludicrous claims that he makes and logically contradictory statements.

So let's come to the serious part of your question. Which is the first part. Now you're asking a question.

Let's put it in context. You brought the science in quite cleverly at the end or by mentioning Hawking. But actually your question has nothing to do with what we were talking about tonight.

Your question about different religious claims and so on. But it's a different question, but since you look so nice, I'm going to have a good answering it. All right? Because I think it's an important question, but do realize, ladies and gentlemen, it wasn't the question on

our topic because addressing the question of other religions is a major question in its own right and we need to take it seriously.

But would you like me to say something about it? Okay. Let me have a go, at least briefly, in honoring your question. The first thing to say is this.

Before we start investigating this question, we need to realize something about other religions or all religions. I'm a Christian. I have friends and virtually every religious group and none.

And you know what? I discover that roughly speaking, all of them have the same kind of morality. Have you noticed that? And in fact, research has been done around the world in all faiths, non-Roman pagan religion, Confucianism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, everything. And they've all got the golden rule.

Have you ever noticed that? Every single one explicitly has got it. A version of it, do unto others as you would be done by. Now when I learned that and I learned it from C.S. Lewis, that there's a little chapter at the end of his book, The Abolition of Man, which is well worth reading on this.

I thought that's very interesting. And second day, I thought that's exactly what I would expect as a Christian. But since everybody's made it the image of God, we've all got similar moral concepts.

But what does that mean practically? It means, and I pick it up from the previous question, but in a very different way, that as I look at you, I'm looking at someone made in the image of God who's got infinite value. I need to be very careful what I say to you and how it treats you, didn't I? Now it's so important before we enter the debate on various religions that we establish that base of mutual respect. Because otherwise it just degenerates.

Now once we've got that, my atheist friends could sometimes put me to shame, you know, because they're moral beings and sometimes their standards are better than mine. Shame on me. If you've got what I'm saying, it was very important to me.

And you'll understand then what comes next. Once you've got that, you then realize there are many other religions that disagree with each other. Leave Christianity out.

Islam is never going to agree with Hinduism about the number of gods, is it? Obviously not. And what I discover is that with people of other religions, and I have friends and all around Oxford, it's mostly the atheists that are worried about raising the question about different religions, not the religions themselves because they recognize their differences and are very happy when other people recognize them and don't blur them all together. Now it raises a very big question.

Why then would I be a Christian? Because that's really what you're asking. Why not go with Stephen Hawking just blow the lot? And why would I be a Christian? Now, this is a different kind of question. What I mean by that is this.

Christianity makes very specific claims within history. Studying the universe, which I feel is very important, gives me certain pointers towards God. And part of my reason for believing in God is what I see in the universe.

But it's not my full reason for believing in God, not by any talk. Because I can't get to know God personally through studying Andromeda through a telescope. And I mean that sincerely.

The central Christian claim is that God has actually revealed himself. God has become human. The word has become flesh so that we can get to know God at close quarters.

And that's the claim. And we must take these claims, listen to what they say, and decide whether they're true or not. Now I have to cut a very long story short here because otherwise we'll be here all night and I have the energy to stay all night, even if you have.

So it comes down to this, why would I believe that Christianity was true with all respect to other people? Well now, let me make it very practical and blunt. I have Muslim friends. They believe that Jesus did not die.

I have Jewish friends. They believe he died and he didn't rise. I'm a Christian.

I believe that Jesus both died and rose. Those three things are mutually exclusive historically. You see that? They're claims about history.

And therefore I know no other way about going about this than to investigate the history. What does it tell me? And I can only tell you so I don't expect you to accept it because of me. That would be very silly.

On investigating the evidence of this central claim of Christianity that Jesus rose from the dead, thus demonstrating that he is God incarnate, which is utterly crucial, and is a central message that's been preached for two thousand years. I am convinced by two things. One by the historical evidence, I've just written two chapters on it in a book called "Gumming for God," looking at it very critically through the eyes of David Hume, who set up criteria for witnesses.

Why I believe that the resurrection actually occurred. But then secondly in my own personal experience. It's a very personal question, but let me tell you straight.

Christianity is falsifiable. Jesus claims that if I trust him with my life and I have done, things will happen to me. He'll give me forgiveness.

He'll give me peace with God. He'll give me new power to live. I've experienced that now

for 60 years.

I've seen it happen in many other people. In other words, there's evidence that actually works. Now, myself, people can show me if they like that coming to believe what Hawking does transforms their lives.

I mean that seriously. I would challenge someone. Stephen Hawking's right.

Let's meet again in the years' time. Bring 50 people here that whose lives have been utterly transformed from the good through coming to be atheists. I'll bring you 50 or 500 or 5000 whose lives have been completely transformed through becoming Christians.

In the end, for me, the evidence that it works is very important. I've seen so many marriages say, so many people rescued from drug abuse and all kinds of substance abuse. When you see that again and again, you begin to add one-on-one and say, "Look, there's something in this business." You may not have got that far, which is why you've got this great opportunity in a very tough group to speak to many of your contemporaries who are here and ask them, "Does this really work? Why does it make sense for you?" But you see, the bottom line for me in answer to your question is that I don't feel Christ competes with any other religion for the very simple reason that He offers me something that they don't.

Forgiveness and certainty right now. This with God right now. It's not a religion of merit that I have to wait until the day of judgment, until I know I've accepted.

I can no acceptance right now. I find that nowhere else. So in that sense, I would submit to you that Christ is competing with no one else.

Okay. How much more time have we got? So actually, we are heading into our last question of the night. So this will be our last question.

The next question is, as a scientist, what do you think motivated atheist scientists to be atheists and what made you choose to be a Christian? Well, I guess. No, right. That's a very interesting question.

What motivated atheist scientists to be atheists? What motivated me to be a Christian? Well, it's not usually science that motivates people to be atheists. I find talking to them. One of the, some are more honest than others, as is true of Christians as well.

Richard Lewington is a very interesting case in point. He's a professor at Princeton, I think, of genetics, a world-favest geneticist. And he says, "Look," he said, "let me be honest with you." It's not our science that commits us to devise experiments that give only natural and naturalistic answers.

It's not at all. It's our prior commitment to naturalism, to atheism, that leads us to devise

an apparatus, however counterintuitive and so on, that simply delivers naturalistic answers because, he says, we must not allow a divine foot in the door. That is his atheism comes at the start.

Now, let me be completely open with you. I find some people say that science has led them to atheism. Richard Dawkins does.

I'm not sure that that's the case, but it isn't fair of me to second-guess him. I think he must have had a very negative experience of some aspect of Christianity earlier on. He seems to indicate that sometimes.

But for me, I didn't start with science at all. I started with what I saw at home, which is where most people start. My parents were Christian.

So you say, "Oh, there you are." You say, "You come from Ireland. Your parents are Christian." I bet your grandparents were Christian. Yes, they were.

I bet your great-grandparents were Christian. Yes, they were. Well, it's Irish genetics, the end of story.

Now, I grew up in that environment. And you say, "Well, look, honestly, you tell us this at the end of all this evening." And really, that's why you're a Christian. Well, to start with, yes.

But let me explain to you that I grew up in a very unusual family, precisely because it was a very sectarian country. There was a lot of narrow-minded bigotry and religious violence. My parents had nothing to do with that.

They so believed in what I told you earlier that every human being is made in the image of God, that they employed equally across the religious divide, and were bombed for it. They really put their faith in God out in public and lived according to it. That's point number one.

Not number two, they encouraged me to think. They didn't just feed me with Christian books. In fact, my father fed me with all kinds of literature.

So I grew up in a Christian home, which was so open for intellectual discussion about everything. I never met anything like it. I thought every home was like that.

You see. Hi, when I got to Cambridge, in my first week a student said to me, "Do you believe in God?" And then he said, "Oh, sorry, you're Irish." I should never have asked you that. All you Irish believe in God and you fight about it.

I'd heard that before. Now, let me explain to you that my whole life since then has been based on this. I want to know whether my faith in God is the truth or not.

Not is it helpful, but is Christianity the truth? So what have I done? I spent my entire life exposing my faith in God to its opposite. I learned German. I spent a lot of time in East Germany.

And I was able to study the effects of atheism systematically exposed on the society. I learned Russian. I spent a lot of time in Russia talking about these things at the level of the Academy of Sciences.

All of it, interested in answering that question, "Is it just a matter of my background? The atheist will stay an atheist, the Christian will stay a Christian kind of thing." And what has been very important to me has been through life to see that it is possible to change your worldview. People don't have to end up where they start. And the university like this one is a marvelous opportunity to explore your worldview.

Of course, we're all prejudiced. We all start somewhere. But one of the most marvelous things of a group like this is, as I suspect, there are people from many different worldviews here, get to know each other.

I sit alongside people and I have a little rule. I will keep asking them questions until they ask me one. That's a pretty difficult thing to do.

You try it and see, but you learn a great deal about the other person. And I have spent my time really answering, trying to answer that question for myself, "Is this delusion? Is it deception? Is it simply a matter of heredity and environment? Or is it true?" And my conclusion has been increasing as I've gone around the world and exposed my faith to questioning as tonight. My faith in God gets stronger and stronger because I see the evidence growing.

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