

May 21, 2012

Gary,

Before I get busy on the debate responses, I wanted to take a few moments out to response to your pamphlet. I got a bit carried away. I hope you won't be put off by my bluntness. Instead I hope this opens a new line of dialog for us.

Talk to you soon.

Jim

Attached:

Gary,

The night of the debate you gave me a copy of a pamphlet you wrote and I took the time to read it. You didn't ask for comments, but given our relationship, I hope you won't mind if I take the opportunity to share some thoughts on your essay.

In section 10 you use the phrase "intellectual integrity," and I have to say that, even though I would never question your personal integrity, it seems clear to me throughout this piece that your intellectual integrity is compromised. You fall prey consistently to what I refer to as "Selective Science Syndrome" (SSS hereafter). That is, where you think that science can be of assistance, you cite it, where it gets in your way you dismiss it. You must choose one way or the other.

Response: Jim, you appear completely oblivious to your own tendencies in this matter throughout your entire critique. I challenge you to specifically name the scientific facts that I choose to ignore.

Almost all theists do this and they must, and here is the reason: Ever since the onslaught of science, starting with Galileo, picking up incredible steam with Darwin and creating what I mentioned the other night is an ever-shrinking place for religion in the areas unknown to science (Neil DeGrasse Tyson), religion has realized that it must play by the rules of science. Science works on facts, experiment, observation, analysis and verification by predictions. We use the phrase, "and that's a scientific fact," to make a point. It's realm is certainty. Religion does not operate in that sphere.

Answer: I do not deny that science and religion operate in two different spheres. SJ Gould makes this point in his text, "Rocks of Ages." He goes too far when he designates the distinction between these two as "non-overlapping majesteria," as though factual statements are limited to scientific discovery alone. Philosophy (in addition to theology) is not subjected to scientific analysis. If non-scientific pronouncements cannot be regarded as effectively certain, then virtually every pronouncement you make in your critique of me is disqualified as well. It is actually an urgent matter that the distinction between science and philosophical propositions are separate realms (your "definition" above is helpful in this matter. This definition, however, does not disqualify philosophy, but what it does do is clarify the line where certain scientists confusedly wander into making philosophical pronouncements that have no scientific foundation.

You tend to make philosophical pronouncements which I find to be philosophically flimsy. I will not repeat what I stated in the last e-mail. Instead, I will add the following questionable propositions. You seem to believe from the history of errors over the god-of-the-gaps (a critique I do not challenge), that it follows that one can never appeal to God as a viable answer to any challenge whatsoever. Yet that argument is a straw man. Appeals to God as the Creator of the universe and an Intelligent Designer as the source of information within the DNA code are not arguments from ignorance, but rather from "inference to the best explanation" among a host of viable options. As to the first, since the facts of science point to an absolute material and spacial beginning to the universe, there is no remotely scientific or materialistic option to appeal to as superior to the theistic explanation. This situation certainly persuaded Antony Flew to belief in God as the solution to these concerns.

But in order to maintain any credibility, religion has had to find a way to fit the round peg of faith into the square hole of scientific fact. It can't be done because they are two different worlds. As Karen Armstrong points out, their roots are different, one in logos, the other in mythos.

It used to be so much easier for religion. Religion can no longer use the age-old tactic it used from the beginning of time – killing those who disagreed. From time immemorial, if someone dared to disagree with the religious teachings of their society, they were ostracized, stoned, burned at the stake and subjected to myriad tortures to confess their sins of disagreeing.

How can you ignore the reign of terror as the banner of the French Revolution, or the 100 million plus deaths of the 20th century at the hands of atheistic regimes, some of which still continue today? Christians do not have to deny that our record in history is far from pure. We may add, however, that the Catholic Church did not promote the clarity of the Bible, but to the contrary suppressed its translation into the languages of the people.

The year 2000 marked the fourth centenary of the death of Giordano Bruno, burnt at the stake in Rome. His sin? He stated that he believed that: "In space there are countless constellations, suns and planets; we see only the suns because they give light; the planets remain invisible, for they are small and dark. There are also numberless earths circling around their suns, no worse and no less than this globe of ours. For no reasonable mind can assume that heavenly bodies that may be far more magnificent than ours would not bear upon them creatures similar or even superior to those upon our human earth."

Of course, we now know he was right. But now religion has to play nice in the sandbox and it is finding that it's hard to do.

I said the other day at Starbucks that the major difference between religion and science is that science looks at the facts and tries to draw objective conclusions, where religion starts with its conclusion (God exists) and works hard to try to make whatever facts come up fit the conclusion it has long ago drawn.

Are you truly meaning to suggest that your investigation is not biased in favor of naturalism? I totally reject the notion that you are an objective investigator of the question "Does God exist?". I am astonished that you believe this about yourself. Please understand, I am not faulting you for your bias...Just as I have mine. But don't ask me to swallow the notion of your objectivity.

The loyalty that you have to Jesus and squaring everything with that philosophy is admirable to a degree – right up to the point that it starts to cost the intellectual integrity.

So, to the article.

You start right in the first paragraph by setting up the premise I just stated. You start with the conclusion: if God is the Creator... who in Jesus entered the world... we should see his prints across nature and within history, which is what we do find!"

Of course if you set out to find the prints then you will observe every shred of evidence with the filter that says, "Aha! Here is another piece of evidence of his prints." This is exactly what leads theists to conclude that the fine-tuning argument makes sense. Theists are predisposed to start with the conclusions and work back to the facts, interpreting every fact along the way as "evidence."

Section 1.

The actuality of the physical universe does NOT, without a vast amount of further knowledge demand the existence of a Capital "B" Being who brought it in from the outside. What it DOES demand, being a very complex nut to crack is the time, knowledge and depth of understanding to fully comprehend the possible answers. However, if you are starting with the conclusion and trying to support that conclusion, then the last thing you want is more information that will only paint you further into the corner that Neil DeGrasse Tyson mentioned. That is why, no matter what the misunderstood, or incompletely understood natural phenomenon, the theist is instantaneous in his conclusion that it must be God.

Please refer to my earlier comment.

Whether that phenomenon is a volcano, an earthquake, thunder or an eclipse, gods are attributed. When we discover DNA, theists jump in with, "See how god works in mysterious ways."

Regarding "inference to the best explanation" as opposed to the "god-of-the-gaps" see previous comment.

Your dismissal of quantum physics and Higgs boson particles is very premature and is emblematic of the problem that religion creates. You close your mind to any possibility that those things could lead to further answers or understanding and it leads one to believe that you would rather forego that knowledge in order to avoid a threat to your deeply held conviction.

All I said, and it is important, is that such particles cannot be appealed to as the cause of the universe since they themselves are material particles that exist and move within space and time that arose out of nothing. As I already said, since there was nothing at all before, then the concept of existing is meaningless. They arose from the Big Bang.

William Lane Craig is interviewed on YouTube saying that (and I am closely paraphrasing here), "It does not matter what amount or quality of evidence is laid before me to prove that God does not exist; the

reason I will still believe, not matter what evidence is presented is because of the ‘witness of the Holy Spirit.’”

He condemns himself with his own words that he is not a serious scientific proponent. He puts himself in the category of a poser. He wants to adopt that language of science and the form of science (because he has to in order to even pretend to have any intellectual credibility, as noted above, the world belongs to science), but he is not sincere in the least.

I highly respect Dr. Craig. I would not say what he appears to say here (assuming your memory is correct...I have my own to worry about). Your argument, however, is finally with him, not with the facts of the case.

You say that, “Since the Cosmos can’t account for its own existence, God (Capital G) stands as the only serious source of its cause.” But in reality, we know so little about the universe that it is simply too early to draw that conclusion. Ah, but I forgot, you drew that conclusion before we began to look at the evidence.

Must I remind you of your own assumptions?

Section 2.

Nothing controversial at the beginning, but at the end of the first long paragraph you say since Hawking states that energy, space, time began out of a zero volume singularity, therefore the universe is a miracle in its fullest sense. Nonsense!

If added knowledge brings the understanding that, as Hawking says, “Because there is a law such as gravity, the Universe can and will create itself from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the Universe exists, why we exist,” then this will be seen NOT as a miracle in the sense that you mean, but simply a unique natural phenomenon. Remarkable, but NOT a miracle.

Your criticism of me is not successful. Hawking rejected philosophy in favor of science (case in point) and then went on to commit a philosophically fallacious argument. The suggestion of “nothing[ness]” and the existence of gravity is a contradiction in terms. A “zero volume singularity” has no place either for an allegedly existent “gravity” or for matter that gravity can actually work on. Furthermore, gravity is a law, not an actual existent causal agent.

As for your claim that, based on the ideas of one converted Atheist, that the burden now lies on Atheists to bear the burden of proof of God’s non-existence, that is not true at all. If I say I have a unicorn in my garage and you say, “I don’t believe in unicorns,” it is my burden to prove I either have a unicorn, or I don’t. If you later say, “Well, okay, now I DO believe in unicorns,” then the proof does not shift to you to prove that I don’t have a unicorn. That’s just silly.

Jim, You are silly here. As for Dr. Flew, he was an extremely influential leader in the advancement of atheism until his conversion. He is not talking about unicorns! He is talking about the absolute beginning of the universe out of nothing. That discovery has overthrown the previously held scientific consensus that the cosmos had always existed. I am astonished that you treat this major cosmological

upheaval as a triviality. The burden is indeed upon the atheist to account for the existence of the universe apart from a transcendent creator.

A for your last paragraph, the Bible constantly rejects the principles of science.

I deny that the Bible constantly rejects the principles of science.

But when we question those rejections of science the response is always the same, "Well, we cannot question the mind of God."

You are confusing apples and oranges. Granting my belief that God created the heavens and the earth it follows logically that God's mind is superior to mine.

The Noah Flood story
Tower of Babel story
The order of creation
Talking snakes
900 year old people

The list is really too long to catalogue in its entirety.

Section 3.

Here is an area where you get pretty jiggy with the scientific facts. We will stipulate to the facts as you cite them (amount of mass, etc.).

But then you go on to assert that the multiverse proposal is made to circumvent the fine tuning argument.

It is a recent proposal that indeed has been intended to circumvent the pointing of the fine-tuning to an intelligent designer of the cosmos.

But you have completely misunderstood that line of inquiry; it is not designed to refute that argument. That is just another hypothesis that someone put forward. I think you have projected that as a counter-argument to fine tuning.

You criticize the argument as pure speculation. That is exactly what it is: Pure speculation with no empirical evidence. But that is how scientists work.

You have just contradicted your earlier statements on the distinction between science and religion.

Scientists come up with speculations and go about the business of trying to DISPROVE IT! Religion comes up with a theory and spends the rest of its life trying to PROVE IT.

Your relevance to the above?

So you have interpreted it as a god of the gaps argument from the secular side, but you have misunderstood the whole principle of science. Of course you would, though, you work from the side of the table where they do the opposite.

Section 4.

The flaw in Section 4 is that you believe that evolution needs an “infinite” amount of time in which to operate. You cite Arthur Eddington, whom, you say was an Atheist (and you do like to quote atheists when you think it serves your purpose), but he was an Astrophysicist who died in 1944. That was at a time when our knowledge was in a rather infantile state of development, wouldn't you say? I'll bet that if he were alive today, given the state of our existing knowledge he might be very inclined to adopt a more modern view consistent with someone like Richard Dawkins.

And Richard Dawkins says? He actually states that we have no idea about two things. First, the cause of the beginning of all things. And second, the appearance of the first life.

I don't think the concept of the building blocks of life coming together in the far reaches of space and being shipped here by cosmic explosions is farfetched, but then again, I don't have an agenda to protect. So that leaves my mind free to wander to all kinds of interesting things that you must limit for fear of upending your neatly packaged, pre-existing conclusions.

What am I protecting?

You point out that the complexity of the cell is far beyond what Darwin could have imagined in his time, and you make it sound as though that was a weakness of Darwin's. On the contrary, it underscores his genius! To come to the realizations that he did with no knowledge of DNA, nor of the complexity of the molecule was extraordinary – it is something to be admired, not diminished.

That statement was not a put down of Darwin. It is to say that it is well nigh impossible how Darwin would have advanced his theory in light of what we now know.

But it doesn't matter. The complexity argument is addressed quite nicely by your oft-quoted friend Francis Collins who goes out of his way to excoriate the Intelligent Design argument and the people behind it. But when Selective Science Syndrome hits, it hits hard. You are willing to look at science when it seems to support the fine tuning argument (which it does not), but not when it eviscerates the Intelligent Design argument.

Why you anger about this? I am quite certain that you have appealed to Collins more than I have. Why do you assume that because I may disagree with him that I regard him as an enemy? By the way, Collins, though rejecting Intelligent Design, was not a Darwinist. Darwin argued that blind natural processes resulted in the array of life we now see. Collins choice of terminology over “Theistic-Evolution” was “Bio-logos.” But what am I refusing to acknowledge scientifically.

As far as the specious claim that the transitional fossil record is lacking, I can only say a few things:

Anyone with a curious mind and access to the Internet can easily address this issue;

Francis Collins specifically says that if you are a critic of the fossil record, then stop your beefing, the DNA record is a far more specific and comprehensive record of the fact that all life on earth came from a single source.

If you are really interested in the transitional fossil record take some time and visit the American or Smithsonian Museums of natural History. Instead, the people who cite this bogus claim are far too often found at the Creation Museum where they are lying to the foolish public to make easy money and perpetuate their own silly passions.

Your case is at least bolstered by your inclusion of the words, "far too often." But in fact the observation that the fossil record is not as you say. Such scientists as Colin Patterson, Stephen Jay Gould, and others who are curators of the many of the mainstream natural history museums concede the same observation. So I do not deny the statement. You already know that I am not a young-earth creationists.

Section 6.

This is one of the most interesting areas of new scientific development. But it is not an area where I think you will find much to celebrate. The mind is clearly a function of the brain. It is not the home of the soul or a separate entity from the brain that directs our subconscious or our conscience. It is directed by chemical actions and reactions, just like the rest of the brain.

The implications for that as it pertains to free will and everything else are yet to be determined. But rather than fight off the coming of this new revolution in brain/mind science, you should wrap your brain/mind around the fact that it is another area where we thought we knew one thing, but new information (which, as I mentioned will be coming at you at a much faster pace) is going to completely change our understanding of how the brain/mind works. And it is probably NOT going to say, "Oh, yes, and C.S. Lewis was exactly right."

I mean no slight here. But are you asking me to think of you as a "who" or a "what?" If what you say is true, then I am merely talking to an electro-chemical machine. Propagators of such notions involve themselves in deep philosophical absurdity. If you have no free will then what am I supposed to make of the sounds you utter when you speak? Antony Flew decried his post conversion critics who demanded that he read more science by responding to them, "You don't understand that your challenges lie outside of the scientific realm...they are philosophical." I have no interest in challenging the notion that our brain involves electro-chemical processes. I just state that our personhood is more than that reside in physical bodies.

Section 7.

See Section 6.

Section 8.

Our Secular culture tends to denigrate the concept of "revealed" knowledge from God, for good reasons. First off, I have to seriously question the use of the term 'revealed knowledge.' This is revealed subjective information. Gary, you must realize that every different culture gets different

revealed knowledge and each thinks it is directly from a different god. How, exactly does that work? Doesn't that make you even the slightest bit skeptical about the nature of revelation?

No. Your conclusion does not follow logically from your premise.

I know you're skeptical of the revelations that come to others, but in fairness you must at least wonder a little bit about, 'Well, if their revelation is incorrect, then isn't my revelation at least subject to the same scrutiny?'

Of course it is. Just as your own philosophical assumptions and commitments call for further scrutiny.

Here's a great example from Exodus. A guy is brought before Moses for picking up sticks on the Sabbath. The crowd is demanding retribution. Moses goes off and prays to God and God reveals to him that this man must be stoned to death by the crowd.

Really?! This is the God that is all-loving, all-forgiving, all-knowing, etc. Yet, there is no other way to solve this problem?

What is more likely: that Moses wanted to ease the riled-up crowd, or that God really demanded, after telling his chosen people "Thou shalt not kill," a few chapters earlier, that this individual person be stoned to death by the angry mob because he picked up sticks?

On the face of it, the religious use this to show the level to which we must follow God's law. But scratch the surface and they say, We cannot know the mind of God.

Here is what probably happened: this guy was picking up sticks on the Sabbath because, though he was Jewish, he probably did not really believe in all that crap. So the others got angry (threatened) and decided that this was a good way to get rid of him. And Moses thought, "Frankly, this guy is a putz, maybe God will whisper in my ear the words I want to hear." And later that day the guy is gone.

That is revelation.

Of course, in defense of God, theists will say, "We cannot know the mind of God." But it's not the mind of God that needs knowing, it's the mind of Moses that needs knowing.

Section 9.

Gary, this is an area that is beyond comprehension to me. When you re-read this section that you wrote, does it not just scream out that you have no sense of the irony?

Of course "the Holy Bible never even suggests that faith is irrational."

The problem is many do define faith as irrational, both within Christianity and outside. I have heard you express this confusion.

They are preaching to the home team. They can say whatever they want and no one is ever going to question it – if they do, they get stoned for blasphemy.

Rarely in the past. Not today in Christianity. What you describe, however, is not a religious problem, but the pervasive human problem that has been most aggressively expressed in recent times under atheistic regimes.

As I said earlier, once you have sipped the cool aid of the home team you see everything through that filter. You should go back and read this again and try to do so with even a modicum of objectivism, forget skepticism.

First off, faith and trust are very different. Trust is built on the experience of someone doing what they say they will do. It is based on experience, observation, to some degree experimentation and observable traits. Faith is built on no evidence whatsoever, and in fact, often despite evidence to the contrary.

I absolutely reject your definition.

Second paragraph:

The important decisions that you list are not subject to faith. They are subject to trust and to knowledge and hope and other things, but please explain to me how “purpose” is subject to faith. Love can fall into so many categories that it is really hard to characterize.

Belief in the God and Father of my Lord Jesus Christ logically leads to all sorts of ramifications about how I live my life and for what purpose. Atheism and its assumptions that morality is illusory logically leads to other purposes and ends which we have observed in the last century.

You say within the scientific realm practitioners accept as true certain mysteries that are measured but not fully understood (light, relativity, etc.) but even in quantum mechanics, there is enough understanding to test and use our knowledge for predictions which turn out to be accurate.

The difference between a scientific mystery and a religious mystery is this: a scientific mystery is something to be studied, a religious mystery is something to be worshipped.

I agree.

The systematic study of nature was started by people 10,000 years ago when they realized they could plant seeds and control how they grew and modify animals based on breeding. The Greeks, Romans and later the Arabs advanced science in many ways before anyone had the notion about an orderly universe being part of the equation.

I do not deny their contributions. But they were largely in the area of philosophy and mathematics. The Greek view of physical reality in terms of shapes and inherent purposes actually stood in the way of a thoroughgoing analysis of the very structure of nature.

It is frustrating when people who rely so heavily on faith (believing with no evidence) attribute that same character flaw to everyone else so they can feel better about the flimsy path they have tread

themselves. This is why theists want to say atheists have to have faith in order to believe in evolution or that the world just came together. But that is a complete misunderstanding of what faith is.

I often run into people who say it takes as much faith to get on an airplane as it does to believe in God. Nonsense.

I don't have "faith" that the world was created out of nothing. I look at the evidence and I see that there is a trend in that area of scientific knowledge moving in this direction and I say, "I will reserve my judgment until we know more, but for now, it looks like that may be the case." However, when I look at the alternative, i.e., the Abrahamic religions, I can clearly say, "This cannot be true. It is too filled with error, misunderstandings, folklore and just plain nonsense for me to believe that any of it is true." So I move on and say let's wait and see what happens in this other area.

I disagree.

It is more important for me to find the truth than it is to just jump onto a popular solution just because it feels good or may make unsubstantiated promises of behavior modification rewards in another life.

My intellectual integrity is far too important to me to just give it away for a story about pie in the sky.

Chapter 10.

Lee Stroble is not a serious thinker on this topic, or any other topic. He is a phony who has made a cottage industry out of ripping off CS Lewis and doing a bad job of it. He makes gobs of money by telling foolish people what they already believe and his brilliant move was to tell them he was an atheist first then converted.

Are you getting hungry? Or tired? The above paragraph is not worthy of you. You may may disagree with him. But seriously, why the diatribe?

If you read his book closely you will see two things. One, he was never really a serious thinking atheist. He describes himself as merely an asshole. He was angry, bitter, blah blah blah. Then he met a woman who was converting to Christianity and through his association with her, he converted and he's made millions ever since. The irony of course is that his motivation was that he met a woman, whom he married and the rest is history. But there is nothing more Darwinian than that.

He sets himself up as if he is this great reporter who is trying to probe the depths of these confounding religious mysteries. He will use his legal background and his skills as a top notch reporter to get to the bottom of these challenging questions.

Then he chooses people who are noted Christians in these specialized areas and he tosses them huge juicy softballs and stands and celebrates when they hit measly little singles. He's a complete phony and no one sees through it. Why? Easy. Because they don't want to see through it. Stroble is providing them the answers they want, they are never challenged and they never have to question their own assumptions or beliefs. What could be easier than that?

Your final entreaty to your readers is another indication that you are starting from your conclusions. You say, "In the name of intellectual integrity, allow a thorough and honest inquiry about Jesus of Nazareth to direct you to scholarship that is supportive of the Christian claims."

Intellectual integrity demands that your readers start with information from a wide variety of sources, some from Lee Stroble, some from sources that completely contradict him and are critical of him. See both sides. Then when you have studied deeply from both sides, make a decision about which is more likely to be valid. Otherwise, intellectual integrity is just a hollow phrase.

I don't have a problem with this statement. Isn't that just what I advocated?

Sorry if this seems a bit harsh. I don't want to be rude, but I thought directness would be better than being wimpy. There is a lot for us to talk about here – if you still want to talk to me.

I hope you don't mind this approach. But I welcome your response with the same directness.

Thanks,

Jim