

Why Just Saying “No” is So Intellectually Foolish

Scientific Methodology¹ and its Bearing on a Dismissive² Attitude Against Christianity

The late *former*³ atheist Antony Flew had at one time sought by his essay, “The Presumption of Atheism,”⁴ to put the burden of proof on theists⁵ to demonstrate God’s existence *decisively*. Although his preference of beginning point was more procedural than prejudicial, he nevertheless failed to highlight that very investigational strategy which this paper will advocate. Yet prior to Flew, the late atheist Bertrand Russell even **more glaringly** changed the world intellectually...for the **worse!** It is said that a lady once confronted him with the question, “*If God were to ask you, ‘Why did you not believe in me?’ What would you say?*” He replied, “*Not enough evidence God, not enough evidence.*”⁶ By this response, his impact⁷ on the “thinking” of his disciples actually stifles vibrant inquiry as opposed to encourages it.

It is extremely common for skeptics of every stripe to dismiss, out-of-hand, consideration of historical and scientific claims that Christians offer which favor both the existence of the God of the Bible⁷ and the doctrine that Jesus Christ is God’s Son (John 1:1-3.14). Although the reasons for skeptical denial may be manifold,⁸ in every case this ploy actually violates scientific methodology as understood in its broadest sense. The concept, “rationality” (or logic), while vital to scientific investigation, is distinct from science. The concept, “empirical,” while also vital to scientific knowledge, is likewise distinct from it. The goal of scientific methodology is to study any physical phenomenon (cloud formation, human anatomy, geological processes, the nature of stars, etc.) in order to fully understand it in all of its aspects. My point is that **scientific methodology is NEVER CONTENT to disprove theories others hold**. It instead seeks to attain positive *truthful* apprehension of whatever matter is under consideration.

A truly *scientific* conclusion can never be proved. On the one hand, strictly-*mathematical* formulas and calculations and also logical deductions can each be proven for the reason that they are not science. But *phenomenal*⁹ things, which are the object of *scientific* study, cannot finally be proven. This does **not** mean that science **cannot** ever approach the truth. But scientific truth is often reached only by hard-fought steps. Consider, for example, the search to achieve science’s present understanding of DNA, to name just one single example among many.¹⁰ So I repeat the point of my previous paragraph, that instead of settling for rejecting the points of view of others, scientists seek to reach a conclusion

¹ The common term is *scientific method*. Yet I prefer to add the suffix, *ology*, because every branch of thinking, including theology, demands the same level of care even as each one both employs its own unique data and requires its own specific tools.

² By my employment of the word “dismissive” I am not suggesting every *ism* deserves an equal level of consideration, but instead that the very objections posed against Christianity apply equally to the worldview of the skeptic.

³ Although Flew had previously been regarded as the leading intellectual proponent of atheism, in 2004 he renounced that position on the grounds of scientific discoveries of both the Big Bang beginning of the universe out of nothing, and advancing insights from Intelligent Design. For a documentation of that turn of events, see Antony Flew with Roy Abraham Varghese. [There is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed his Mind](#). (Harper One, 2007). ** Although this book is heavily criticized by the atheistic community, charges against it have been roundly answered. See the section, “Book with Varghese and Authorship Controversy” at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antony_Flew

⁴ Antony Flew. [The Presumption of Atheism & Other Essays](#). (Barnes and Noble, 1976). ** Also an internet text: <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~ekremer/resources/Flew%20The%20Presumption%20of%20Atheism.pdf>

⁵ “Theism” is the belief that God is “transcendent and immanent, omniscient, sovereign, and good.” Robert McTeigue S.J. [Real Philosophy for Real People](#). (Ignatius, 2020), p. 81.

⁶ [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). “Religious Epistemology: 2. The Evidentialist Objection to Belief in God.” <https://iep.utm.edu/relig-ep/#:~:text=Bertrand%20Russell%20was%20once%20asked,objectio%20to%20belief%20in%20God>.

⁷ Such claims include firstly that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth, secondly, that He consequently transcends (stands outside of) the reality of nature (the created order) (Genesis 1:1), third, that God is a personal being who is both loving and holy, to name just a few.

⁸ These factors include firstly a world-view known as philosophical materialism which almost entirely pervades academia. This position trickles down to the average citizen. It suggests for example that belief in a personal God amounts to superstition. Secondly public institutions of education either discourage or downright forbid intellectual dialogue over the question of God’s existence. Thirdly, the chronic presumption that since the biblical God is holy, that view instills fear that His goals are pleasure-stifling. This list is only partial.

⁹ The term means an observable “fact, occurrence, or circumstance.” [Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary](#). (Barnes & Noble, 1989).

¹⁰ James Watson and Francis Crick received significant criticism both by the scientific community as a whole, and by their scientific competitors prior to arriving at their ultimate discovery. Bill Bryson. [A Short History of Nearly Everything](#). (Broadway, 2003), Ch. 26.

which makes the most sense of the known facts known. This methodology is called *abduction*, also known as the *theory of multiple-competing hypotheses*. This means that instead of seeking proof, scientists independently frame the same knowable yet incomplete data in an endeavor to provide a superior view which harmonizes the same, most comprehensibly, similar to the group effort of putting a complex puzzle together. Again, the goal is to construct a coherent picture that includes every puzzle piece. Interestingly, Dr. Stephen Meyer¹¹ argues that it was this very method that Charles Darwin employed in his investigational work leading to his book, *On the Origin of Species*.¹² So, if you want to be on the side of science, deeming atheism to be a *default* position is wrong-headed for the reason that it commits, *scientifically speaking*, a categorical error. Furthermore, it contradicts the scientific *spirit*.

The bottom line is, every time Christian claims are dismissed on the allegation that they conflict with scientific knowledge, the critic has invariably established a standard which s/he judges must be met in order for Christianity to qualify as truth. Further, the critics also imply that Christians are obligated to provide reasons for their beliefs in the first place. Yet the hard fact is that these realities consequently also obligate the critic as well, in light of the previous paragraph, to in turn account for their own belief system, which they imply is superior to that of the Christian. Russell's decial of the insufficiency of the evidence (above) is manifestly unimpressive because of his neglect to account for either our existence or the biblical claims about Jesus of Nazareth. For example, his book, *Why I am Not a Christian*,¹³ is a complete disappointment due to its failure to address either the contemporaneous cosmological discoveries (e.g. the Big Bang, which persuaded Einstein to acknowledge a Creator of the universe¹⁴) as of the time of its first publication in 1967, or the historical evidence concerning Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.¹⁵

To make matters worse for the critic, identifying the phenomena that *Christians* must reconcile with our faith, at the same time highlights a body of facts that the critic must also explain on the basis of an atheistic world view too: whether that be strong atheism or weak atheism. For starters, atheists for example are obligated to explain the following:

- The universe came into existence out of **zero-volume singularity** (absolutely nothing).¹⁶
- Our universe is habitable by humans only because at its inception aspects within the atom, the electro-magnetic force, and the force of gravity were precisely set.¹⁷
- Virtually every life-form, including the most primitive, contains DNA whose information-laden genetic code specifies the formation and construction of every single body part.¹⁸
- No other hypothesis than that Jesus rose from the dead, fully reconciles with the entire body of twelve historical facts that even skeptical historians acknowledge are trustworthy.¹⁹

Critics evade their responsibility to account for the above realities for the reason that they have no case.

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¹¹ S. Meyer. *Signature in the Cell*. (Harper One, 2009), p. 153. ** J. Ladyman. *Understanding Philosophy of Science*. (Routledge, 2002), p. 209f.

¹² Harvard University Press, 2003, facsimile of his 1859 edition.

¹³ academia.edu/11791682/Bertrand_Russell_Why_I_Am_Not_a_Christian_and_Other_Essays_on_Religion_and_Related_Subjects

¹⁴ Walter Isaacson. *Einstein: His Life and Universe*. (Simon & Schuster, 2008), p. 355, 389. ** Antony Flew, Op.cit. (3).

¹⁵ Gary Habermas and Antony Flew. *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead: The Great Debate*. (Harper and Row, 1987). Much of this material was also knowable during Russell's time too. See Dr. Simon Greenleaf. *The Testimony of the Evangelists* (1846). (Kregel Classics, 1995).

¹⁶ W.L. Craig. *Reasonable Faith*. Third edition (Crossway, 2008), pp. 125-140. ** my paper, "God's Prints are Everywhere," at my website.

¹⁷ Hugh Ross. *The Creator and the Cosmos*. Fourth edition. (RTB, 2018), chs. 4-6. Dr. Ross founded Reasons to Believe at www.reasons.org

¹⁸ Stephen Meyer. *The Signature in the Cell DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design*. (Harper One, 2009).

¹⁹ See my two papers, "Twelve Historical Facts Surrounding Jesus' Resurrection" ** "Hoax? Myth? Or Literally True?" at my website.