



# Hasn't science disproved God?

## Assumptions

Whenever we encounter a question - even if it's a question we have ourselves - we need to ask ourselves: what are the assumptions behind this? What is driving it? What are the key questions behind the question?

What are the assumptions behind the question?

## Science has not found evidence for God

Science is all about proof. Modern science hasn't found scientific evidence for God, so surely science has disproved God.

"You can't put an omnipotent deity in a test tube."

Eugenie Scott, of the American National Centre for Science Education

What would you say to this?

There is no scientific or mathematical formula that proves God exists, and I don't expect there to be. That's because science and faith operate in very different ways.

Science is not a belief system but rather a way of looking at the world - the scientific method. The scientific method is all about *repeatability*.

I notice something about the world, I think it over and come up with a theory. I devise an experiment to test that theory, whether it makes sense or not. Then I run the experiment again to check that I get the same results. Then I publish the results in a journal and other people run the same experiment to check that *they* get the same results too.

That is the way science works, but it's not the way that faith and belief in God works. A miracle, for example, can't be repeated in laboratory conditions. There's a mismatch between the way science operates and the way faith operates. That doesn't mean we can't question faith or look for evidence – far from it – we just do it in a different way than science. It's the same with history. We can't reproduce history so we can't use the scientific method to consider it, we need to use other means.

The problem comes when we equate the scientific method with *certainty*. When we run experiments and so on, we often talk about a theory being *proven*. As if we can be absolutely certain about it. But science doesn't actually prove things, instead it works in probabilities. The most likely explanation we have is this, and this experiment adds some more evidence to that.

So science doesn't disprove God because it uses a different method which doesn't exactly prove or disprove things completely.

## **We don't need God, science explains everything**

Consider this quote from Peter Atkins:

"Science, the system of belief founded securely on publicly shared reproducible knowledge, emerged from religion. As science discarded its chrysalis to become its present butterfly, it took over the heath."

Peter Atkins, who was Professor of Physical Chemistry at Oxford

That is probably a view shared by many people these days. Okay, religion was fine for a while. But we have now emerged from religion and faith into the scientific age. We needed God to make sense of the world before, but now science makes sense of the world, so we don't need God.

"There is no reason to suppose that science cannot deal with every aspect of existence. Only the religious – among whom I include not only the prejudiced, but the uninformed – hope there is a dark corner of the physical universe or of the universe of experience that science can never hope to illuminate."

Peter Atkins

What Peter Atkins is talking about here isn't just science. As I said before, science isn't a philosophy or a belief system, it is a set of tools and method of examining the world. Once you start talking about explaining everything, you have moved beyond science into a worldview, or a belief system.

In this case, the belief system is called scientific naturalism. Scientific naturalism claims that science is the only true source of knowledge. It uses science but it is more than science. It is a claim about truth and how we gain truth.

Okay. So we ought to ask: if science is the only source of knowledge, can science justify the belief in scientific rationalism? The problem is, it can't.

Saying 'science is all you need' is not a scientific fact. It cannot be proved by science. It's a belief, it's a matter of faith.

Every person has faith. They believe *something* - about themselves, about the world, about meaning and purpose. That belief is not something that science can deal with.

One of the most staunch scientific naturalists is Richard Dawkins who has said that he would only believe that which could be scientifically and rationally proved. He has been asked on a number of occasions what he believes but cannot prove. Eventually he answered the question:

"I believe, but I cannot prove, that all life, all intelligence, all creativity and all design anywhere in the universe is the direct or indirect product of Darwinian natural selection."

Richard Dawkins

That is Richard Dawkin's faith. It shapes his worldview and ideology, but he cannot prove it scientifically.

Science and faith work in very different ways to answer very different questions. We need both to make sense of ourselves and of our world.

What do you make of that argument?

Science answers the questions about our world that it is equipped to answer. But science cannot answer them all. Faith answers the questions that science cannot answer: meaning, purpose, love, beauty, significance.

Cause is something that can be discovered by observation and reason. Purpose is not available for inspection because until the purpose has been realized, it is hidden in the mind of the one whose purpose it is.

Lesslie Newbigin

"The laws of motion do not set billiard balls moving; they analyse the motion after something else ... has provided it."

C. S. Lewis

"Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." Albert Einstein

## Science and faith are incompatible

This idea is that you can't be a 'serious' scientist and believe in God. The assumption here is that only silly, uneducated people would believe in something like Christianity (and some people do put it in those terms!)

If that's the case, why do some people think science and faith clash?

There are some significant things that we need to grapple with when it comes to science and faith. Two key areas are usually miracles and evolution. These are not trivial things and deserve some proper treatment (we don't have time to do them justice tonight probably but perhaps another time!)

But working through these issues doesn't mean that science and faith are incompatible. We may need to wrestle with our understanding but that's true in many different areas.

"Sometimes people ask if religion and science are opposed to one another. They are, in the sense that the thumb and fingers of my hand are opposed to one another. It is an opposition by means of which anything can be grasped."

One of the key pieces of evidence for science and faith not being opposed are the vast array of scientists who also believe in God. Not just as Christians, but also Muslim, Jewish and other faiths as well. From a Christian perspective you can roll off a list of names through the ages who believed in Jesus such as Issac Newton, Robert Boyle, Michael Faraday, Copernicus and Galileo.

"Those who argue for the incompatibility of science and religion will draw little comfort from history ... the myth of a perennial conflict between science and religion is one to which no historian of science would subscribe."

Peter Harrison 'Christianity and the rise of Western Science'

The list of Christians who are also eminent scientists is not just in the past. There are many scientists today who believe in Jesus.