

Making Elbow Room for Faith

Christian Theism in the Science Classroom

Society for Classical Learning 2014 Conference

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Intro

- * Does legitimate science instruction require leaving God out? (*No.*)
- * Eventually, every line of questioning leads to teleology and to the intersection of science and faith.
- * The point at which God comes in depends on the type of question being asked.

Class 1 questions have scientific answers

- * What causes thunder?
- * Why does cotton absorb moisture?
- * Does the Higgs boson exist?
- * How are methane molecules shaped?

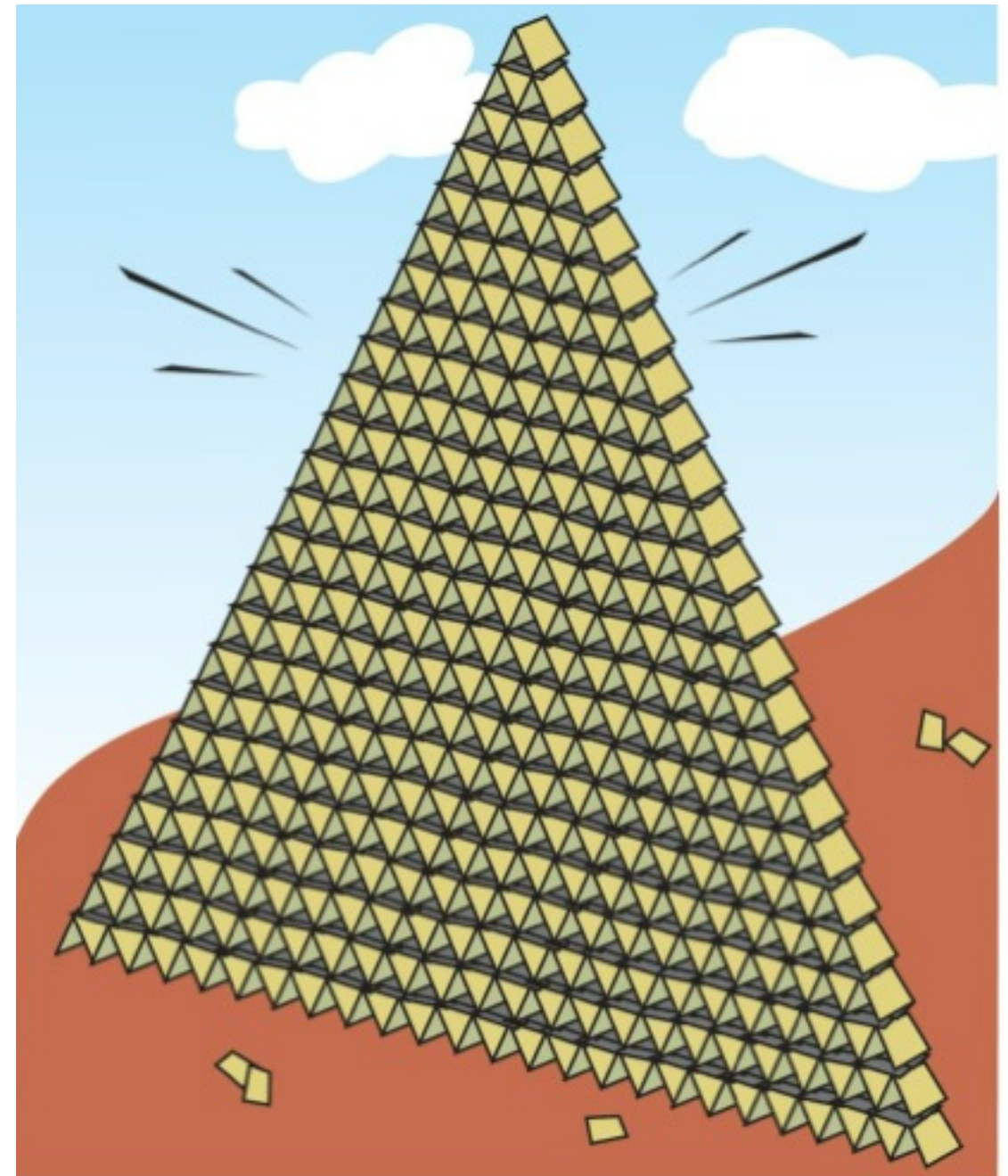
Class II questions do not presently have scientific answers, but we reasonably expect that they will

- * What causes Alzheimer's disease?
- * How are the theories of quantum mechanics and general relativity to be reconciled?
- * Is there life on other planets?
- * Why is the expansion rate of the universe increasing?

Class III questions don't have scientific answers; many experts believe that they never will

- * Why does purposefulness, specifically human purposefulness, exist?
- * Why do people weep when they listen to Handel's Messiah?
- * How did life arise (biogenesis)?
- * What is the source of the intelligence that pervades the coding in DNA?
- * How did human nature arise, including self-awareness, use of language, rationality, the ability to produce art, humor, and self-denying love?

- * Secularists claim God-of-the-gaps argument—materialists categorically deny divine intervention.
- * Atheists must reduce everything to brain biochemistry; Christians believe in the soul.
- * Scripture implies that biogenesis is in this class, but our understanding may be incomplete on this.
 - * Scripture affirms God's direct creation of life
 - * 60 years of research have produced nothing
 - * The improbability speaks for itself



- * Emergence of human nature: how can purpose and consciousness arise from purposelessness and inanimate matter?
- * British Philosopher Antony Flew: It can't



Class IV questions are definitely not accessible to scientific inquiry

- * Why does the universe exist?
- * What caused the Big Bang?
- * Why are there laws of nature?
- * Why are the laws of nature orderly, even highly mathematical?

Here the faithful teacher says:

Science and faith in the Creator converge right here. Scripture declares that God created the heavens and the earth. Science establishes that, yes, the universe had a beginning but cannot explain the beginning. Faith comes right back and says that's the part we can answer. There is One, revealed to us in the Bible, who made everything. In the beauty of his holiness and in his great wisdom God fashioned his creation with exquisite grace and beauty, for his own glory and as a precious gift to us, his image bearers. This gift should evoke from us thanksgiving, praise, and worship: 'it is he that has made us and not we ourselves.' Further, God is the one who superintends all things at all times, constantly holding the creation together (Col. 1:17) and lovingly acting within creation to direct it according to his own inscrutable purposes (Ps. 104). And amazingly—astonishingly—as we learn more about his creation, we learn more about him. Think about that when you are reading your chemistry assignment tonight!

Who gets to define science?

- * Methodological naturalism? Even some Christians insist on it.
- * A more expansive—and legitimate—view, expressed by Alvin Plantinga:



Alvin Plantinga
Professor of Philosophy Emeritus
University of Notre Dame

Quoted from the journal
Faith and Philosophy, July 1996

Consider, for example, the question of how life originated: theists know that God created it in one way or another, and now the question is: how did he do it? Did he do it by way of the ordinary regularities or laws of physics and chemistry (the ordinary behavior of matter, so far as we understand it) or did he do something special? If, after considerable study, we can't see how it could possibly have happened by way of those regularities—if, as is in fact the case, after many decades of study the enormous complexity and functional connectedness and integrity of even the simplest forms of life make it look increasingly unlikely that they could have originated in that way—the natural thing to think, from the perspective of Christian theism, is that probably God did something different and special here. (Such a conclusion, of course, would not be written in stone. All we can say is that is it likely with respect to our present evidence; perhaps things will change; the inquiry is never closed.) And why couldn't one draw this conclusion precisely as a scientist? Where is it written that such a conclusion can't be part of science? Why should we accept methodological naturalism?



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So to return to the current question: should the Christian scientific community observe the constraints of methodological naturalism? So far as this argument is concerned, the answer seems to be: yes, of course, in those areas where Duhemian science is possible and valuable. But nothing here suggests that the Christian scientific community should not also pursue non-Duhemian Augustinian science where that is relevant. There is nothing here to suggest that if it ain't Duhemian, it ain't science.

Think on the centrality of Christ in all things

- * We must not leave Christ out of anything:
He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
- * We *need* not leave Christ out to be engaging in legitimate science instruction.

Serious about science.
Serious about faith.

Come visit our booth!

