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GOD VS DESIGN IN *THE GRAND DESIGN*

By Henry Middleton

In *The Grand Design*, Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow present religion and science as rivals and give the impression that they are irreconcilable. The following quotes present such an opposition, and they reveal an antagonism toward religion in the authors:

Ignorance of nature's ways led people in ancient times to invent gods to lord it over every aspect of human life.¹

Since the connection of cause and effect in nature was invisible to their eyes, these gods appeared inscrutable, and people at their mercy.¹

In this book I have described how regularities in the motion of astronomical bodies such as the sun, the moon, and the planets suggested that they were governed by fixed laws rather than being subject to the arbitrary whims and caprices of gods and demons.²

The Greeks' Christian successors rejected the idea that the universe is governed by indifferent natural law. They also rejected the idea that humans do not hold a privileged place within that universe. . . . A common theme was that the universe is God's dollhouse, and religion is a far worthier study than the phenomena of nature.³

The straw men and loaded language in these statements are plentiful. How does the sovereign rule of God conflict with laws of nature? Why does belief in God lead to degradation of science as a worthy discipline? One would get such an impression from these statements. It also fits how Hawking and Mlodinow define laws of nature. They present a no-exceptions view of laws of nature. Consider the following statements:

In modern science, laws of nature are usually phrased in mathematics. They can be either exact or approximate, but they must have been observed to hold without exception—if not universally, then at least under a stipulated set of conditions.⁴

Scientific determinism: Given the state of our universe at one time, a complete set of laws fully determines both the

future and the past. This would exclude the possibility of miracles or an active role for God.⁵

It is, in fact, the basis of all modern science, and a principle that is important throughout this book. A scientific law is not a scientific law if it holds only when some supernatural being does not intervene.⁵

This book is rooted in the concept of scientific determinism, which implies that the answer to question two is that there are no miracles, or exceptions to the laws of nature.⁶

Scientific determinism: There must be a complete set of laws that, given the state of the universe at a specific time, would specify how the universe would develop from that time forward. These laws should hold everywhere and at all times; otherwise they wouldn't be laws. There could be no exceptions or miracles. Gods or demons couldn't intervene in the running of the universe.⁷

We claim, however, that it is possible to answer these questions purely within the realm of science, and without invoking any divine beings.⁸

These statements incorporate undefended assumptions. Why must there be laws? Why must these laws have no exceptions? Hawking and Mlodinow say:

Today most scientists would say a law of nature is a rule that is based upon an observed regularity and provides predictions that go beyond the immediate situations upon which it is based... This is a generalization that goes beyond our limited observations.⁹

The last sentence in this quote is significant. Greg Bahnsen explains that "scientific investigation is only possible in an orderly, rational, coherent, unified system."¹⁰ Scientific laws cannot exist without uniformity. If there is a rational God who designed the universe, then there is a firm basis for this uniformity. For an atheist it is very problematic due to what

⁵ Ibid., 30

⁶ Ibid., 34

⁷ Ibid., 171

⁸ Ibid., 172

⁹ Ibid., 27-28

¹⁰ Bahnsen GL (2007) *Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen*. American Vision, Powder Springs, GA, 187

¹ Hawking SH, Mlodinow L (2010) *The Grand Design*. Bantam Books, New York, NY, 17

² Ibid., 171

³ Ibid., 24

⁴ Ibid., 28

Bertrand Russell called the principle of induction.¹¹ We can make predictions of how the universe will behave in the future based on past observations, but as Russell explained, these observations only tell us about the past. The assumption that the future will be like the past is just that—an assumption. True, our observations continue to demonstrate uniformity, but why does this uniformity exist, and what guarantee do we have that it will continue to exist? For the Christian this is not a problem because a reasonable and sovereign God both created and continually governs the universe, but a purely atheistic/materialist worldview ultimately provides no basis for the assumption of uniformity beyond particular, finite observations of past events. Scientific investigation, however, is impossible without assuming such uniformity. Bahnsen concludes:

The issue boils down to this: Since man cannot know everything he must assume or presuppose uniformity and then think and act on this very basic assumption. Consequently the principle of uniformity is not a scientific law but an act of faith which undergirds scientific law. Thus, adherence to the principle of uniformity—though absolutely essential to science and the scientific method—is an intrinsically religious commitment.¹²

What makes this even worse is that Hawking and Mlodinow also leave themselves with no basis for reliable observations *on which to base* their generalizations. They apply model-dependent realism to scientific theories. They say that a scientist can apply any model which matches his observations, and if there is more than one option, then he can choose whichever is more convenient in a given situation. Whether or not the model is actually real is, for them, a pointless question.¹³ Shortly after explaining this, however, they cut the feet off of their own argument. They argue that model-dependent realism applies to everyday life as well. They say that “there is no way to remove the observer—us—from our perceptions.” Perception is shaped by “the interpretive structures of our human brains.”¹⁴ It is true that people’s interpretations are shaped by their worldviews, which would include interpretive structures, but Hawking and Mlodinow go further than this. “What one means when one says ‘I see a chair’ is merely that one has used the light scattered by the chair to build a mental image or model of the chair.”¹⁴ This is reminiscent of Morpheus’ words to Neo in *The Matrix*: “What is real? How do you define real? If you’re talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain”¹⁵. If this was true, then it would be impossible to decide which model best matches one’s observations means when one says ‘I see a chair’ is merely that one has used the light scattered by the chair to build a mental image or model of the chair.¹⁶ This is reminiscent of Morpheus’ words to Neo in *The Matrix*: “What is real? How do you define real? If you’re talking about what you can feel, what

you can smell, what you can taste and see, then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain”¹⁷. If this was true, then it would be impossible to decide which model best matches one’s observations because even the observations are questionable. It also makes no sense to trust one’s observations if free will, as Hawking and Mlodinow argue, is ultimately an illusion.¹⁸

It is quite different if God created the universe:

The uniformity of nature is perfectly compatible, however, with the Christian worldview. The absolute, all-creating, sovereignly-governing God reveals to us in Scripture that we can count on regularities in the natural world. ...Because of this God-governed regularity in nature, the scientific enterprise is possible and even fruitful.¹⁹

For the Christian, scientific investigation has a firm foundation in the eternal, rational, and self-existent God who created the universe and set its physical laws. Scientific investigation also reveals the glory and intelligence of God.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge (Psalm 19:1-2).

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you (Psalm 139:13-18).

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:19-20).

It makes sense for a Christian to believe in consistent laws of nature and empirical observation because he believes a reasonable God created a universe which He designed to demonstrate His eternal nature (Romans 1:18-23) and therefore a universe which can, and should, be investigated. To examine the laws of nature is to more fully understand the creation of God. Scientific investigation can be motivated by an attitude of devotion to God because to investigate the universe is to investigate the universe which God made. Francis Schaeffer

¹¹ Russel B. (2008) *The Problems With Philosophy*. Wilder Publications, Radford, VA, 41-48

¹² Bahnsen GL (2007) 192

¹³ Hawking SH, Mlodinow L (2010) 46

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47

¹⁵ Wachowski A, Wachowski L (1999) *The Matrix*, Warner Bros. Pictures, DVD, 0:40:16

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47

¹⁷ Wachowski A, Wachowski L (1999) *The Matrix*, Warner Bros. Pictures, DVD, 0:40:16

¹⁸ Middleton, H (2010) *The Grand Design and Free Will* <<http://tasc-creationscience.org/content/grand-design-and-free-will>> Accessed 2013 Mar 25

¹⁹ Bahnsen GL (2007) 194-195

explains in *How Should We Then Live?* that the founders of modern science (such as Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton) operated on the assumption that a reasonable God had created the universe, and so it was natural to assume that people could make true discoveries about the universe through the use of observation and reason. They also believed that the universe was a real, objective reality and not merely an illusion. It was therefore possible to investigate the universe, and because God had created it, it was worth investigating. Not all of the scientists of this time were Christians in the biblical sense, but they nonetheless operated within a generally Christian framework.²⁰ A Christian also has reason to believe in miracles and other forms of divine intervention because the God who created the universe is continually sovereign over it.

Hawking and Mlodinow also appear to argue against a “god of the gaps”:

Many people through the ages have attributed to God the beauty and complexity of nature that in their time seemed to have no scientific explanation. But just as Darwin and Wallace explained how the apparently miraculous design of living forms could appear without intervention by a supreme being, the multiverse concept can explain the fine-tuning of physical law without the need for a benevolent creator who made the universe for our benefit.²¹

This sounds like the argument that, as science advances, the “god of the gaps” is continually pushed out of the picture. This argument is flawed on a fundamental level. Explaining the processes of the natural world does nothing to eliminate the creator. In his response to *The Grand Design*, John Lennox explains a crucial distinction:

Contrary to what Hawking claims, physical laws can never provide a complete explanation of the universe. Laws themselves do not create anything, they are merely a description of what happens under certain conditions.

What Hawking appears to have done is to confuse law with agency. His call on us to choose between God and physics is a bit like someone demanding that we choose between aeronautical engineer Sir Frank Whittle and the laws of physics to explain the jet engine.²²

Lennox argues in *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* that the existence of God makes science possible:

The point to grasp here is that, because *God is not an alternative to science as an explanation*, he is not to be understood merely as a God of the gaps. On the contrary, he is the ground of all explanation: it is his existence which

gives rise to the very possibility of explanation, scientific or otherwise.²³

Lennox also explains that it is not the science which he does not understand which motivates him to believe in God. Instead, it is the science which he does understand, because he sees the amazing and brilliant design inherent in it.²⁴ Christians need not, and *should not*, take a “god of the gaps” route in defending their faith. They can instead hit opposing arguments at their core. As Albert Mohler explains, “the ‘God of the gaps’ as a false idol of theological surrender.”²⁵

Hawking and Mlodinow argue that complex systems can arise without God. One could possibly respond that this does not prove that such systems actually *did* arise without God, but there is a much more fundamental problem here. Without a basis for the existence of natural law, Hawking and Mlodinow have no basis on which to even *begin* their argument. A Christian has a basis on which to account for a reasonable universe which operates according to natural laws, and a basis on which he can use his senses to observe it, because the universe was created by a reasonable God who designed it in such a way as to reveal Himself (Psalm 19; Romans 1). And yet, because God created the universe, and because He is completely sovereign over it, there is no contradiction in His divine intervention in the universe.

Christians, you do not need to feel threatened by the arguments of unbelievers, regardless of how sophisticated they may sound. Some of them will be widely read, educated, and intelligent, but ultimately they not have a leg to stand on.

Unless God is back of everything, you cannot find meaning in anything.²⁶

“I hold that belief in God is not merely as reasonable as other belief; it is not a little more probably, or infinitely more probable, than unbelief. I hold rather that unless you believe in God you can logically believe in nothing else.”²⁶

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, April 11, 7:00 pm, Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 631

TASC will present the documentary *Darwin: The Voyage that Shook the World* followed by a brief discussion. Dan Reynolds will moderate.

²³ Lennox JC (2009) *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* Lion Hudson, Oxford, 47

²⁴ Lennox JC (2010) God of the Gaps <http://johnlennox.org/index.php/en/resource/god_of_the_gaps/> Accessed 2013 Mar 27

²⁵ Mohler A (2010) No Need for God? Stephen Hawking Defies Divine Creation <<http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/09/07/no-need-for-god-stephen-hawking-defies-divine-creation/>> Accessed 2013 Mar 25

²⁶ Van Til C (1948) *Why I Believe in God*. Committee on Christian Education, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia (PA)

²⁰ Schaeffer F (1976) *How Then Should We Live?* Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, in Schaeffer F (1985) *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*. Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 155-164

²¹ Hawking SH, Mlodinow L (2010) 165

²² Lennox JC (2010) As a scientist I'm certain Stephen Hawking is wrong. You can't explain the universe without God <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1308599/Stephen-Hawking-wrong-You-explain-universe-God.html#ixzz2ObYoUHLg>> Accessed 2013 Mar 25