

Amateur Philosophers¹

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God made clear in Isaiah 55:8-9, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Information from the special revelation by God in the Bible not only is far superior to any thoughts of men but also is fully dependable. Any knowledge which originates in the minds of men is not of the same dependability.

Human assertions about a supposed evolution of species have spread throughout the world since the days of Darwin over a century ago. Our pastor, Dr. Timothy Jordan, when he came back from teaching in Romania observed that the questions by pastors there are very much the same as the questions of students in the classroom here. Atheistic explanations and attitudes permeate every mission field.

In recent decades few refer to a "theory" of evolution; it is now asserted as a firm scientific fact. Evolution is represented as fact by every form of expression in our day, not as a possible explanation, but as of supposed unquestioned certainty. Academic circles are as vocal and dogmatic as the media. Ideas of creationism are treated as myth, as more ridiculous than the cures of pagan medicine men.

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Amateur Philosophers

The intent of this presentation is to distinguish three fields of study so as to show that many who are trained, capable scientists are only amateur philosophers and often are unqualified theologians. To illustrate: all are familiar with the job descriptions of a carpenter, a plumber, and an electrician. They engage in distinct areas of work and engage in specialized types of work, in the tasks of building a house for instance. There are some things another can do, but each is expected to recognize certain principles and procedures. A plumber who does any electrical work must so function as to avoid a short circuit. One thus may be a professional plumber and an amateur electrician. To make application, one may be a professional scientist and an amateur philosopher, but in the realm of philosophy he ought to adhere to customary principles of philosophical study.

Fields of Knowledge

There are three distinct fields of endeavor which ought to be recognized, kept distinct, and appropriately evaluated. They are science, philosophy, and theology.

Science

Science identifies the activities of those who are engaged in systematic study of the phenomena of nature, employing controlled patterns of observation, verification, classification, and systematization.

The *realm* of science is to investigate the physical world and the way it operates, often to study what can be put in a test tube or on a microscope slide. Such observations can be checked and rechecked. Extensive careful study results in a more accurate comprehension of the world.

The *procedure* of science is to observe, classify, clarify, test conclusions, etc. As a simple illustration, a dandelion expert, to have thorough knowledge, must measure, draw, describe every

known variety of dandelion. He should endeavor to survey all dandelions all around the world and to consider all dandelions of all centuries past. However, such thorough research has limitations. The physical limitation is obvious; one man or any group of men cannot locate and investigate all present and past dandelions. The geographical and chronological expanses are just too great. There might be one more variety or even several not yet discovered.

In this work of observation, description, classification, and analysis, a scientist uses what is called the inductive method. He reasons from what he learns about specific plants, blossoms, and seeds to arrive at certain generalizations that seem to apply to all dandelions everywhere. These inductive examinations can reach likely generalizations but can never arrive at final absolutes. His generalizations are checked, repeated, and improved by others. This scientific endeavor is commendable activity for understanding the material world.

The *results* of scientific investigations are usually first expressed as an hypothesis (a guess); some gain the status of a theory (a guess that has some consistent support); a few observed regularities are recognized as laws (patterns that seem not to permit exceptions). Science claims to deal solely with what can be physically observed. It cannot investigate basic non-physical realities, such as life, consciousness, laws of logic, moral standards, love/hate, duty, etc. Science thus tends to ignore or deny the reality of these non-material aspects of life.

The explanation of the origin of species known as evolution is but a guess; it is a hypothesis, not yet a theory. So far, there are no evidences to substantiate the pattern of development proposed. The "missing link" is still missing. The chasm in DNA factors between the nearest ape and the human race is impossibly great.

Observing that there are certain aspects of the structure and function of a horse which resemble those of a dog and a snake is in the field of scientific endeavor. Guessing that some common ancestor accounts for the seeming similarities is beyond the

scientific endeavor. It is a work of philosophic endeavor, an activity for which most scientists are untrained and unqualified. The simple explanation that a supremely wise God formed variations of body structure for humans, horses, dogs, and snakes ought surely to be considered, even preferred.

Philosophy

Philosophy is a recognized intellectual endeavor which seeks to discover the core truths of life and reality. Every person and every culture have a philosophical outlook, just as everyone has a concept of the physical world, but there is a formal field of study known as philosophy.

The *realm* of philosophy has been to explain the purpose and importance of life, endeavoring to propose answers to such questions as Whence? Why? and Whither? That aspect of philosophical development known as ontology deals with the question, What is real? That aspect known as epistemology inquires into, How do we know?

The usual *procedure* of a philosopher is to assert a unifying principle to explain all phases of life and then to develop the outworking of this principle so as to show how each phase of life fits into the whole that he proposed. In doing so, he customarily uses the deductive method, making logical deductions from his posited assertion. His idea of reality is developed so as to show the completeness and consistency of his system. Other philosophers accept or reject his thesis or evaluate the logic and applicability of his full explanation.

Those who have had survey courses in philosophy recall that much of the presentation of any one philosopher has been to show the inadequacy of other explanations of reality. He endeavors to show that he is right and all others are wrong. Each philosopher has full faith confidence in his own proposed presuppositions and in his development of the implications of those presuppositions.

A proper philosophic outworking of evolutionism is yet to be produced. Thus far the position has been asserted by amateurs. A qualified philosopher ought to endeavor to enumerate the presuppositions upon which it is built, to work out the logical implications of these basic assumptions, to develop a consistent worldview, and to build logical defenses against opposing views. In our judgment, attempting such a development would clearly reveal the weaknesses of evolution.

The *result* of any philosophic development is to set forth a human concept of the world and of life. The aim of all philosophies is to arrive at a correct characterization of reality. All men have a world-view, not just philosophers. Various aspects of culture influence the outlook of each person. The philosophers among mankind strive for a completeness and correctness superior to other men. Two philosophic developments have permeated twentieth century thought, naturalism and humanism.

Naturalism is a philosophic development which asserts that reality consists only of matter and force, not of mind or spirit. What is real is that which can be known by the five senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Thus some naturalists have asserted that thought is only a product of the brain as bile is of the liver, that God is no more than the inner aspirations of humans, mere wishful thinking. The presuppositions and assertions of naturalism must be blindly accepted by faith; they cannot be proved.

Humanism is a philosophical development which asserts that man is the measure of all things, that man is the only intelligence in the universe, that man is himself independent and self-sufficient. This basic premise of humanism is applied to every phase of life. Man must overcome the antagonistic forces of nature. Man is the captain of his fate. Consequently, man does not need God.

Evolutionism illogically combines naturalism and humanism. Its adherents present a hypothesis to explain the origin and development of the universe. The position is built on

philosophical assumptions, not on evidence discovered as a result of scientific endeavor. For instance, no man can observe creation; he can only guess concerning the past processes which produced what we see today. There has been no evolutionary change in the lifetime of any scientist. Many species are becoming extinct; no new species are evolving.

Note that naturalism and evolutionism fit hand in glove. Both deny anything supernatural. They judge that everything in the world can be explained as a part of the process of nature. Events in nature occur by chance as well as by regularity. This chance is totally impersonal; there is no superior intelligence guiding and governing the world.

In evaluating human philosophic developments, consider what God has said, "It is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (I Cor. 1:19-20). "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8). "Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Tim. 3:7). "And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water" (II Pet. 3:4).

Theology

Theology is simply the study of who God is and what He has done. It is neither a study of physical science nor an attempted human philosophical explanation of the world and life. All men have a theology in the sense of having some conception of deity and the supernatural. Theologians do not have special mystical insights; they vocationally concentrate on available information.

All men can know the Creator God and the truths of His self-revelation. Every believer ought to seek to know God better. Having a correct theology should be the goal of every believer.

Scientists and philosophers expend energy to discover truth. Theology is not so much a human search for truth as acceptance of truths directly divinely communicated. Theology is a scientific activity in that it investigates and organizes information from God concerning Himself and His creation. Included in the truths of theology is information about the world and life. This divine world-view explanation of reality is more complete and more consistent than any of the philosophic explanations developed by men.

The *realm* of study by theologians is thus primarily and almost exclusively investigation of God's special revelation, the Bible. Full theological study does include, secondarily, study of God's general revelation, His handiwork. Present-day students greatly benefit from previous theological studies by believers, and so study of the history of doctrine is beneficial. God the Holy Spirit has guided and continues to guide unto greater comprehension of truth.

The *procedure* employed for theological studies of God's self-revelation is that of exegesis. This means careful, correct comprehension of the truths which God chose to make known to men. The work also involves the logical process of deduction. Conclusions reached are based on the authority of Scripture, thinking God's thoughts after Him; they are not invented or proposed by men. Theological studies manifest an overall consistency, for they represent the comprehension of one Divine Mind. The result of expressing interrelated truths is customarily referred to as systematic theology. Different doctrines are arranged in an orderly, related fashion (this systematic phase of the endeavor is sometimes mislabeled inductive).

The *results* of theological study give us authoritative, dependable information in three areas: (1) a true concept of the world and of life; (2) divine guidance concerning life, values of

life, and purposes of life, especially the way to be right with God (making clear God's one and only way of salvation); and (3) much correct information concerning the future.

Whereas studies of biology and of history produce results that are descriptive of what is or was, theological studies are normative, that is, descriptive of what is and what ought to be. There is no one book of theology that is authoritative. No creed or confession can boast absolute truth. All doctrinal expressions must be judged as to how correctly they convey the eternal truths of Scripture.

Underlying Assumptions

Underlying assumptions undergird the endeavors of these three fields. Although some indications of presuppositions have already been given, a further enlargement on the extent of presuppositions being employed should be helpful.

Science

Science must assume and cannot prove seven basic things which cannot be observed, tested, or established by scientific endeavor. (1) The observer assumes his own existence. (2) He assumes the existence and reality of things in the world outside himself. (3) He assumes that his senses and measurements give dependable representations of phenomena of the world outside himself. (4) He assumes that his mind can function in an orderly and dependable fashion. (5) He assumes that his mind can construct and convey generalizations regarding reality. (6) He assumes that speech can convey meaning to others. Finally, (7) he assumes that his generalizations may be universally true.

Obviously, scientists would accomplish nothing if they attempted to apply their "scientific method" to their presuppositions. They confidently act according to these seven principles on the basis of blind faith; not one can be established

using the five senses or a test tube. At the same time, even though we point out the philosophical deficiencies and inconsistencies of such a procedure, we acknowledge that what they discover when they employ the scientific method is usually valid. We accept that it is proper for them to function in such a fashion because that is the way God made man, man's mind, and the world which they study. We have a firm basis in the revelation of God.

Philosophy

Philosophy is built on similar assumptions. (1) A philosopher assumes, but cannot prove that he exists (Descartes, "I think, therefore I am"). (2) He assumes and asserts his basic premise for his philosophical system without any proof or evidence. (3) He assumes the dependability of his logic. (4) He asserts the finality of his position without any real proof other than the philosophical preferences which have appealed to him.

Theology

Theology is admittedly built on a faith procedure just as the others are. (1) We acknowledge that the Bible is God's one and only revelation of His truth to the human race. (2) We accept what the Bible teaches about human capability, that we are made to think God's thoughts after Him. (3) We accept that words and thoughts are able to convey meaning; speech is intended to inform, not to deceive. (4) We have experienced an enlivening, enlightening new birth. (5) We enjoy a daily walk with the eternal Creator.

Note that a Christian can be a good scientist, investigating God's universe, but cannot be a naturalist, accepting an opposing, conflicting, contradicting philosophy. Objections by evolutionists must pertain to our refusal to accept their philosophy, not that a Christian cannot read the test tube correctly.

Christians are directed to understand the world and to “subdue” the world. God has commanded, “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8). “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise” (Prov. 6:6).

Confidence in Each Field of Knowledge

Now let's develop a few comments about the confidence we can have concerning the product of each of these fields of study.

Science

Science and proper scientific endeavor have discovered much of value and importance. We can have reasonable confidence in discoveries about vitamins, radiation, principles of inertia, fingerprint patterns, etc. Where investigations have been true to the scientific method, we can and should benefit from the results.

Specialists can figure out and predict the time of sunrise here in Lansdale for November 15, in A.D. 2016. Most of us cannot check their computations and probably need not do so. There is one important difference. They by blind faith assume that elements and relationships will continue uninterrupted. We have the confidence that regularity will continue, based on the sure promise of God that “while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest and cold and heat and summer and winter and day and night shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22).

Almost every time I go to a doctor or dentist I think of the days of George Washington two centuries ago. Knowledge of diseases and proper treatment have improved so much that all of us can thank God we live in the latter part of the twentieth century. Things like telephones, electric lights, radio, television,

and computers are marvels of modern science. Christians are not opposing science in opposing evolution.

Philosophy

Philosophy has not and cannot contribute anything of real value (evolutionism included). All philosophical assertions as products of human minds need to be weighed in light of teaching of the Word of God. We should be familiar with the field of philosophy and with the various philosophic systems in order to comprehend the world in which we live and serve. Although we can quite easily see the errors of false religions, the influences of naturalism and humanism are not so easy for us to detect. In addition, commercials promote the desirability of every product (materialism). The proposed pleasures of the world are repeatedly recommended (hedonism). But we as believers are warned not to be conformed to this world; we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds that we may know the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2).

Theology

Theology as an exact science can and should contribute truths that are crucial for this life and valid for the next life. As normative rather than descriptive, teachings of theology correspond to reality and are authoritative. Some so-called theological statements do not correspond to Scripture and should not be accepted. God's truths are dependable and unchanging. The way those truths are presented by speakers and writers must be judged by the Bible.

Truths of revelation are unchanging: Man is a creature of God. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no not one. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. These truths remain the same generation after generation.

Amateur Philosophers

Scoffers of our day like to assert that theologians once thought that the earth was the center of the universe and opposed notions that the earth is round and revolves around the sun. Unfortunately the ancients were just following the “scientific” teaching of the day. Such is not the view of Scripture.

Science is changing every day. The dictates of past science are the errors opposed today. If Jesus does not return for two centuries, it is safe to say that “scholars” of the twenty-third century will laugh vigorously in relating that people once believed in a chance evolutionary development of all life on the earth.

The Need for Discernment

Using these distinctions, we need to *discern*, to evaluate, and to weigh what we see, hear, and read each day. As examples, I conclude with brief excerpts from three recent news items and comments to illustrate my exhortation. The first is from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of November 11, 1996; it is an article concerning physicist Alan Sokal.

Scientists acknowledge that they don't yet have a claim on absolute truth, he says. “Obviously science is approaching truth, discovering something objective about the world,” says Sokal. “We also know we don't have it yet.”

He is fully persuaded of the scientific method; he is committed to naturalistic humanistic philosophy. He is confident (blind faith) it will lead to truth, but recognizes that it has not done so yet.

The second is from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 28, 1996. The title of the article is, “Race lacks ‘a biological reality,’ researchers find; it's really just skin deep,” by Robert S. Boyd.

Contrary to widespread public opinion, researchers no longer believe that races are distinct biological categories created by differences in the genes that people inherit from their parents. Genes vary, they say, but not in ways that correspond to the popular notion of black, white, yellow, red or brown races.

"Race has no basic biological reality," said Jonathan Marks, a Yale University biologist. "The human species simply doesn't come packaged that way."

"In the social sense, race is a reality; in the scientific sense, it is not," said Michael Omi, a specialist in ethnic studies at the University of California in Berkeley.

John Moore, chairman of anthropology at the University of Florida: "Skin color genes are turned off and on very quickly in evolution," Moore explained. "People can go from black to white, or white to black, in 10,000 years."

The clear teaching of the Bible: all humans are descendants of Adam and Eve. There is only one race, not many races. God has made of one blood all nations of men (Acts 17:26). "All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds" (I Cor. 15:39).

The third article is from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of October 29, 1996, a column by David Boldt, "The evolution of a new theory."

Mike Behe had been mildly disappointed. "I had expected to be hanged in effigy," said the short, bespectacled professor of biological sciences at Lehigh University. "I thought big scientific

organizations would put out warnings that reading my book could be dangerous to your health.” After all, in his book *Darwin's Black Box*, Behe does nothing less than attack the theory of evolution.

He is not discarding Darwinism, which he thinks accounts for lots of little things, like why horses have hooves. However, he believes Darwinism doesn't have a prayer of explaining what he and other biochemists are finding about the intricate chemical reactions taking place within cells that allow the immune system to work or cause blood to clot.

He contends that these and other systems couldn't have been created through evolutionary improvement because all the parts of the system need to be present and arranged in order or the system won't work at all. He calls this principle “irreducible complexity,” and contends that it argues for another theory of development: “intelligent design.”

Only a few [responses] have gotten into deeper discussions over the question of who or what might be doing the intelligent designing. (Behe offers various possibilities, only one of which is God.)

It's not as if Behe's book has been ignored. It has been widely reviewed, and while the tone of the reviewers has occasionally bordered on snotty, none dispute his science, or his assertion that evolutionary theorists cannot answer the questions he poses.

What has amazed him most, though, is how gossamer the research offering evolutionary explanation for microbiological phenomena actually is, and yet how willing many scientists are to accept Darwinism *on faith alone*.

This seems like the old pattern, accept facts, but explain the facts according to your presuppositions; do not change just

because facts point a different direction. How much better to rest in an unchanging reality. “Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar, as it is written” (Rom 3:4).

Personal Exhortation

My exhortation is that the believer read with discernment. Distinguish sources; determine whether information is from the eternal Mind or from finite minds. Sort out fact from philosophical guesswork or unfounded conclusions. Read your Bible. Refer to it during a sermon to judge the truthfulness of what the preacher is saying. Walk day after day by God's grace, not according to the vain wisdom of this world. Deliberately follow in the path which God Himself has directed.