

Science and the Limits of Knowledge

SCIENCE AND THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE

An Excerpt from “Dialogue with a Nonbeliever
(About Science and the Limits of Knowledge,
the Big Bang and Evolution,
Ancient Christianity and Modern Heterodoxy),”
second edition

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Foreword

Is there a God? People come to know the fact that there is a God in multiple ways.

Some, during wartime, clearly hear a voice telling them to move away from the place where they had found shelter and, a few moments after they leave, a bomb destroys that shelter. Such a story we hear from a person known for his efforts to find Noah's Ark.

Others first come to believe that there is a devil, and only after that do they understand that there must also be a God. There were cases of people who got involved in the paranormal, trying to communicate with the "dead" and with other "well meaning" spirits. Later, some of these people realized they were actually talking with the devil.

Others say that the best proof that there is a God is that He hears us when we cry out to Him. A Romanian Orthodox Christian believer gave this answer to a fellow countryman who was asking what proof we have that there is a God.

Others notice that every time they say or do something bad—something that their conscience tells them is bad—something bad immediately happens to them, too. After many such "coincidences," they come to admit the fact that there is "Someone" up there Who is watching every step of their lives.

But the most common and most obvious way to know that there is a God is to look around us, at everything surrounding us, and realize that there has to be a Creator who created us, the animals, the plants, this planet and the entire universe.

To counter this obvious reasoning, modern science has come up with the theories of the Big Bang and evolution. The Big Bang theory claims that the universe began to exist about 14 billion years ago, following a big explosion that led to the formation of stars and planets, all with no divine intervention. Then, the evolution theory claims that inanimate matter, somehow, again with no divine intervention, organized itself into the first living organism. This organism, the evolutionists say, started to reproduce and to evolve, and, during billions of years, and also without any divine intervention, eventually turned into the living organisms we see today: people, animals and plants.

We read in the Bible that Thomas did not believe that Christ had risen from the dead until he saw Him with his own eyes. And then Christ told him:

«Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.»¹

I understand that these words could also mean *blessed are those who believed in God without seeing many arguments*, or *blessed are those who obey all the rules of the Church without trying to find out their purpose*, or *blessed are those who are fully confident that God had very good reasons for all the rules He has left for us in His Church, even though we don't know those reasons*.

Dear reader, if you want to be one of those blessed ones, then you can put this book aside and forget it was ever written. I was not one of those blessed ones; my faith was weak and it needed arguments, it needed answers. And God helped me find those arguments and answers. I am neither a theologian nor a priest, so I have no authority to teach other people. Therefore, in this book I try not to be a teacher for anyone, but only to offer other people, too, the arguments and the answers that God helped me find, with the hope that they will also be useful to them as they were useful to me.

This book is the result of more than ten years of researching the arguments for and against the theories of the Big Bang and

¹John 20:29.

evolution, a study that also implied the search for the right religion and the true Church of Christ. And because that research required countless contradictory discussions with evolutionists, this book is structured as a dialogue, too. The characters Daniel, Michael and John are fictitious. None of them are meant to be an exact replica of the author or of one of the evolutionists mentioned before. Most stories related in the book are based on true events, but the true identities of those involved remain hidden.

This edition is not a real translation. I wrote the original in both Romanian and English, so this edition is actually an original, too. To express this in other words, it was translated by the author himself.

The reader is warned that some of the footnotes refer to articles and books written by evolutionist or atheist scientists. Those references are only listed for those who want to know in detail science's account of the origin of life and the universe. Most of the footnotes with creationist references refer to articles and books written by Protestant scientists, and some of those works contain, in addition to the scientific arguments, theological opinions, too. The reader is warned that many of those theological opinions are considered to be wrong, heretical, by the Eastern Orthodox Church. Therefore, those works can only be useful for their scientific contribution to the refuting of the theories of evolution and the Big Bang, and in no way for the theological opinions that can be found in some of them.

The author
February 18th, 2016

1. The Fools and the Wise Ones

On Sunday morning, Daniel woke up late, like he used to do every Sunday. He got out of bed, washed himself, skipped breakfast and, just before noon, he left home to meet his friend, John.

Daniel and John were both the same age: 27. They had been to college together, had graduated in the same year and had both found well-paying jobs, though in different companies. Neither of them was married, but John was planning to get married in a few months. Daniel had broken up with his girlfriend a few weeks ago, so for now, marriage was, for him, an event way too distant in time. Sometimes the two men saw each other on Sundays, to have lunch together.

On his way to the restaurant, Daniel took a shortcut because he was a little bit late. He passed by a church and slowed down for a second. The service had just finished and the people were going home. Most of them seemed to be in their 50s, but among them Daniel also saw a few young ones, here and there.

'Losers,' he said to himself. 'I can't understand why they are wasting their time like this... It's Sunday, you can sleep longer or do a lot of other useful things. Why would you waste your time in church?'

John had arrived and was waiting for Daniel near the entrance of the restaurant. They sat down at a table and started to browse through the menu. They had seen each other last week, so they didn't have too many new issues to discuss. After enumerating the latest movies and songs recently released, there followed a short debate about the newest computer technologies.

Then a short silence set in, during which the waiter brought their food.

After thinking for a few seconds, Daniel mentioned the people he had seen at the church:

“On my way here, I passed by a church, and I saw some people who had stayed there a few hours. When I passed by, I think the service had just finished and they were going home.”

“OK, so?”

“And I don’t understand why those people are wasting their time there... Some of them, very few, were young, about our age.”

“I think I understand what you want to say. To you, it seems foolish to spend two or three hours in church on Sunday mornings. To you, those people seem to be idiots.”

“Exactly.”

“It’s obvious,” John said, “that if indeed there is no God, those people are the greatest losers on the face of the earth, because they’re wasting their lives for nothing. You know, besides two or three hours Sunday morning, there are a lot of other things that their religion is asking of them, and which affect their lives profoundly.”

“Yes, that’s true.”

“But it is equally obvious that, however, if there is a God, then maybe the greatest losers are us and the other people like us, who never go to church.”

“Maybe... But how do you know that there is a God?” asked Daniel.

“I don’t know.”

“Then why go to church? Besides, there is more than one religion. And every one of them claims to be the true one...”

“Because you just mentioned that there are multiple religions, here’s an extreme example. Do you remember the attacks of September 11, 2001?”

“Of course, everybody remembers.”

“Well,” John said, “I don’t know whether there is a God or not, but even two nonbelievers like me and like you have to admit, although it may be very hard for them, that if the religious

beliefs of those terrorists are true, in the afterlife they will be in heaven accompanied by 70 virgins each, and we are going to be in hell.”

“You’re joking.”

“Not at all, I’m very serious. But there are three *ifs*. *If* there is a God. *If* Islam is the true religion. And *if* their interpretation of the Quran is the correct one. You have to admit that *if* these three conditions are met, the 19 terrorists were some of the wisest men in the world, while the atheists and all those of other religions are just some losers.”

“I really, really hope that it isn’t so,” Daniel said.

“I hope that, too.”

“So we both hope. But for me, hope is not enough. I would like to know for sure. So how do we *know* whether it is or it isn’t so?”

John didn’t say anything. Daniel went on:

“You say you’re a nonbeliever, but sometimes you seem to be on religion’s side.”

“I’m not a believer,” answered John. “But I’m not a complete nonbeliever, either. I simply don’t want to think about religion now; I have more important things to do. I’ll think about God and religion when I’m old. So let’s say I’m a temporary nonbeliever.”

Daniel pondered for a few seconds, then said, smiling:

“You’re not going to like this, but I have to tell it to you: Even a temporary nonbeliever like you has to admit, although it may be very hard for him, that if he dies before getting old, he won’t have time to think about God and religion anymore and, if there is an afterlife, he will be counted with the nonbelievers.”

“Yes, I have to think about this possibility, too, but not right now,” John said, also smiling.

“And now let’s get back to my problem. You want to wait till old age to figure out whether there is a God or not. But I don’t want to wait that long. Maybe there is no God, but I want to know for sure, so I can live my life without worrying that after death I’ll be asked why I didn’t go to church, to the mosque or to the synagogue. Or to the Buddhist temple.”

John laughed.

“And how exactly did you think to proceed in order to find out for sure?”

“I thought,” Daniel said, “about going to see a priest and ask him what exactly makes him think there is a God. Maybe this way I’ll see that there are no serious arguments.”

“I want to know what the priest will answer, too.”

2. Is There a God? I Want to Know!

Daniel postponed seeing the priest for a few weeks. He didn't know any priests, and he also had no religious friends. Besides, it seemed to him that his question was a little bit weird and he won't be taken seriously. Eventually, one Sunday around noon, he stopped in front of the church he had noticed before. This time it was a little bit later in the day and almost everyone was gone. He got closer to the door, trying to see whether anyone was still inside. He noticed a young man, maybe a few years older than him, who was also getting ready to leave.

"Hi," Daniel said.

"Hi," the young man replied.

"I'm looking for the priest."

"He just left, actually everybody has left. I'm locking the church and I'm leaving, too. Can I help you with anything? I have the priest's phone number if you want to talk to him."

"No, no, I wanted to ask him something face to face."

"Then, if you have a personal question for him, you'll have to wait till next Sunday. But if it's a question related to the church or to the religious services schedule, you can ask me. I'm Michael and I take care of the church when the priest is not here. Do you want to schedule a religious service, a marriage or a baptism?"

"My name is Daniel. I have a problem and I was wondering if he could help me. I wanted to ask him... I wanted to ask him a rather unusual question... I wanted to ask him how does he know that there is a God?"

A short silence followed.

“It’s a really important problem for me,” Daniel added quickly, thinking that he was not being taken seriously.

Michael looked at him for a few seconds. Daniel was silent.

“How does the priest *know* that there is a God?” Michael asked eventually.

“Yes, or how do you know? Or how does any believer know that there is a God?”

“What makes you guys dedicate so much of your lives to this God, how can you be so sure that He exists?” Daniel added to himself.

“Or how do I *know*... I’m afraid you’re asking the wrong question. What kind of *know* do you have in mind? You want to know whether God exists the same way you know, for example, what your height is, what the speed of light is or what the distance to the moon is?”

“Exactly, how can you prove scientifically that God exists, what tangible, observable proof is there?” Daniel asked, already thinking that Michael had no solid arguments.

“Some time ago I asked myself a similar question,” Michael said.

“And what answer did you find?”

“Look, I am neither a priest, nor a scientist. However, if you want to find out my opinion, if you want to know how it is possible to argue scientifically for the existence of God and if you have time to listen to me, let’s sit down on this bench in front of the church and set some things straight. Like every modern man, you seem to put great trust in science.”

“Of course, science has advanced so much during the past few decades. Science has offered us electronic devices, space travel, modern medicine, laser surgery and so many other things.”

“Yes,” Michael said, “science has advanced greatly during the past hundred years. And this advancement gives the modern man the illusion that he can do anything, that he can measure anything, that he can investigate anything and that he can find all the answers through science... Well, I have to disappoint you a little. If you have the time and the patience to listen to me, I’ll try to prove to you that, despite all this scientific progress, our power

of investigating the reality we live in is, however, very limited. I mean we're not, even by far, capable of determining, or measuring all the things we'd like to know. Actually, the most important things are completely beyond our capabilities of knowing and investigating scientifically. And I'll explain it to you step by step."

"I'm listening," Daniel said.

3. Limits of Knowledge

“Some basic things first,” Michael said. “To each one of us, it seems that he or she knows very many things, from very many areas. About our day to day life; about the apartment or house we live in; about our friends and acquaintances; about the city we live in; about our country; about the history of our country; about the history of the world; about the human body; about animals and plants; about the planet we live on; about our solar system; about our galaxy; about the universe; about religion. We add new knowledge almost every day. However, only a very small part of this knowledge we have was acquired by direct observation and experiment, that is, empirically¹. The vast majority of our knowledge was acquired from other sources, mainly from other persons, from books and from TV.”

“So far, I agree,” Daniel said.

Michael went on:

¹ Empirical: capable of being verified or disproved by observation or experiment. (Merriam-Webster)

From a scientific point of view, empirical knowledge is knowledge acquired only through the senses and by experiments performed in a laboratory.

The principle of empirical verifiability is the principle that claims that only statements that are empirically verifiable or logically necessary are cognitively meaningful. Obviously, this is an error. The principle of empirical verifiability is not logically necessary, nor can it be empirically verified, therefore it is declared null by its own rules.

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