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# *Hasn't Science Proven That Belief in God Is an Outdated Superstition?*

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**S**cientific endeavor is held in high esteem today. The work of scientists, doctors, and engineers has sent people into space, developed the internet, sequenced every gene in the human body, and increased the length and quality of human life. The impact of scientific discovery is immense.

However, many today also believe that the sciences have displaced any need for God. Science is seen as offering us facts and proofs about the natural world, whereas belief in God is irrational, outdated, and irrelevant. In the past, spiritual explanations for natural phenomena used to be invoked when no other alternatives were available. Take hurricanes, for example. Centuries ago, these were believed to be caused by the anger of the Mayan god Huracan. Today, however, meteorologists reassure us with explanations of weather systems, pressure changes, and temperature differentials. Natural explanations have replaced spiritual ones. In many cases, this is good and right, but does it mean that all spiritual perspectives are to be discarded?

## **God or Science?**

Many assume that scientific practice and belief in God are incompatible, and we therefore need to choose between them. I arrived at university as an agnostic with precisely this view. In week 1, I was invited to an event advertised as “Grill a Christian.” Intrigued, I went along and eventually asked my burning question. I discovered that choosing between God and science is like choosing between Jeff Bezos and Amazon’s internal processes as the reason that Amazon exists today. A multinational company’s infrastructure and its CEO are not competing reasons for its existence and success. In fact, both are needed. Similarly, there is no contradiction between the study of nature’s mechanisms and belief in God. It is not the case that scientific explanations displace God; rather, there are different kinds of explanation that together give a more complete understanding of the world.

## **Conclusive Proof?**

The evidence-based nature of scientific research can give the impression that science offers facts and certainties about the world. But, in practice, the results published in journals are rarely presented as conclusive proof. Scientific understanding progresses incrementally. The best explanations that make sense of the data are suggested, but conclusive proof isn’t really what’s on offer. In fact, there’s very little in life, let alone the sciences, that we can conclusively prove. Can you

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conclusively prove that your family loves you? Or that the Houston Astros won the World Series in 2022? Not in a scientific sense. We can point to other kinds of evidence but not the kind of scientific certainty that is so highly esteemed but impossible to attain.

### **Successful Science?**

A helpful question to be asking is this: *What is it that makes science possible?* What is needed for it to succeed? Every laboratory study proceeds on the basis of two assumptions. First, that the laws of nature have a degree of order and stability. If college students run an experiment at NYU and ask colleagues to carefully repeat it at UCLA, they should, in general, generate the same results. There is an underlying order to the natural world such that hypotheses can be tested and studies repeated. The second assumption is that our minds are sound and capable of making sense of the natural world. We are able to reason, to think, to ask questions, and to grow in understanding of nature's mechanisms.

What is the most persuasive explanation for the existence of both of these facets? In atheism, God does not exist and we live in a purely material universe. The natural world and the human mind have both arisen by means of accidental and unguided processes. This is not impossible, but does it provide the best account of the deep sense of order we see? What about theism? If one supreme God exists, then order in nature and mind are qualities that flow naturally from the starting conditions of the universe. In other words, there is order in nature and in the human mind because there is an Orderer and a Mind behind it, known as God. On this basis, we can make a case that, not only is God still compatible with the practice of science, He is the best explanation for why it is possible at all.

C.S. Lewis argued that this expectation of divine order in nature stemming from belief in God inspired scientific inquiry in the modern era. "Men became scientific because they expected Law in Nature, and they expected Law in Nature because they believed in a Legislator." (*Miracles* by C.S. Lewis).

James Clerk Maxwell, the first Professor of Experimental Physics at Cambridge University's Cavendish laboratory had words from Psalm 111 inscribed above the laboratory's entrance, "Great are the works of the Lord: they are pondered by all who delight in them." For Maxwell, physics was not proof of God's nonexistence; it was a means of pondering the world that God had made.

### **Answers to All of Life's Questions?**

If science has displaced God, then surely it ought to be able to bear the weight of all of our questions about life in general. But, in fact, we ask many questions that lie beyond the realm of science. Cosmologists describe events surrounding the beginnings of our universe, but cosmology can't answer the question of why our universe exists in the first place. Neuroscientists give us elegant descriptions of the brain networks recruited in all manner of cognitive tasks. But neuroscience can't answer the question of why we are even conscious *at all*. Psychologists and sociologists may observe and document human behavior, but their disciplines can't answer questions of ultimate meaning and purpose.

Most important, the sciences can't answer the questions of whether God exists and whether this life is all that there is. Modern medicine may help some of us to delay death, but it provides no answer to whether or not Jesus rose from the dead. These are all vital questions. I continued to ask them and ended up changing my mind about God, concluding that He made best sense of my life and my love of science.

Questions of God's existence have not been displaced by science. They remain as relevant as ever.