

Scientific Apologetics and Natural Versus Supernatural Causes

The scientific enterprise studies the web of natural cause and effect, which is machine-like, predictable, and controllable. Many Christians believe the Biblical world view also requires real-world causes that are supernatural in origin. Supernatural causes are singular, personal, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and often produce effects that cannot happen naturally. Many Christians working in science experience tension between doing science and depending on supernatural causes, which are often required in living out their faith. For them this tension has both a professional and a “living the Christian life” side, and the two sides do interact.

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I. Scientific apologetics and the natural/supernatural cause problem

- A. Scripture is God’s Self-revelation, written by the Holy Spirit through human minds.

- B. Science is a gift of God for us to understand and control His world with His guidance.

- C. Our task is to persuade people of the truth of the Biblical world view in light of modern science.

II. A reasonable definition of science with high epistemological reliability.

- A. Science is the attempt to explain as much of reality as possible using logic, mathematics, and carefully controlled experimental observations.

- B. Different fields of science achieve this ideal to varying degrees.

C. Historical sciences are inherently different and less reliable than laboratory sciences.

III. Natural causes

A. Regular, repeatable, controllable (usually,) machine-like

B. Never fully verified in any scientific experiment; some things go unchecked.

C. Can be understood using mathematical laws, empirical facts, and experiments.

IV. Supernatural causes

A. Singular, personal, unpredictable, uncontrollable.

B. Often produce effects that cannot happen naturally.

C. Can be verified empirically, but not studied by the methods of science.

V. An expanded modern view of science returning to its roots

A. *Alvin Plantinga* (Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Notre Dame):

“If you exclude the supernatural from science, then if the world or some phenomenon within it are [sic] supernaturally caused—as most of the world’s people believe—you won’t be able to reach that truth scientifically.”

B. Historical situation.

C. Categories for supernatural causes can fit into science.

D. Science can help identify possible supernatural events.

VI. Robust dependence on supernatural causes is essential to Christian living

A. The resurrection of Christ is absolutely essential to our faith (I Cor. 15:12-19)

B. Prayer changes the natural course of events (James 4:2, “You do not have because you do not ask God.” NIV) by initiating a supernatural cause.

C. Any form of personal guidance, God speaking to us or “quickenning Scripture” to us represents a non-natural cause for an effect in the biochemical machine in our skull.

D. “Give and it shall be given to you...”, “Bring in the full tithes and test me, says the Lord, and see if I will not pour out...”

E. Powerful personal inner change: the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ working within us.

VII. Discussion of specific Biblical miracles

A. Crossing of Reed Sea, Jordan River – Natural causes and maybe supernatural ones.

B. Feeding of the 5000 – A clear violation of physical law: conservation of mass/energy.

C. Woman at the well – Detailed knowledge was supernaturally given to Jesus Christ.

D. Resurrection of Jesus Christ – A clear violation of natural law. (cf. 2 Cor. 15)

E. Post-Resurrection appearances of Christ – What is “a spiritual body?” (cf. 2 Cor. 15)

VIII. The concepts of Non-Overlapping Magisteriates (often abbreviated NOMA) and Methodological Naturalism are not helpful solutions, but we can agree that natural causes are to be sought and understood in doing science.

IX. Participatory group discussion of all of these points.