

Worldviews, Christian Faith and Science – How do they relate?

Apologetic discussions often suffer from a lack of clarity concerning the definition of terms such as worldview, science, and Christian faith as well as their interrelation. The talk first discusses the concepts underlying these terms focusing on the relation between Christian faith and atheism and the role of natural science. In order to understand the scope especially physics can cover, I discuss the nature of theories in physics, the concepts of evidence and proof, and the role of falsifiability and paradigms, especially related to reductionism. The results of this discussion will allow to reject frequent misleading accusations against the reasonability of Christian faith. Finally, I will give examples of answers atheists and Christians give concerning several fundamental questions and conclude that believing in God is reasonable and explains the existence and the properties of the world better than atheism does.

Ralf B. Bergmann, born 1962, is married and has three adult children. He received his degree in physics and a doctorate from German universities. He was active at several research institutions in Germany and Australia and has also worked in industrial research. Since 2008 he has been a professor at a German university and head of a research institute working on optical technologies and optoelectronics. Beyond his research, he is interested in defending the reasonability of Christian faith, especially all around the border zones of physics, philosophy, and theology as well as the relevance of Christian faith for modern western society. In 2019, he authored the book *Gott und die Erklärung der Welt – Christlicher Glaube oder atheistische Weltanschauung: Was ist vernünftiger?* (God and the explanation of the world – Christian faith or atheistic world view: What is more reasonable?).

- I. The relation between natural science and world views
Richard Dawkins has, amongst others, reinforced the view, that the world can be understood purely in physical terms up to the level of “mind, beauty, emotions, moral values” [1, p. 34] This view still appears to be a solid paradigm in the scientific arena. Does it? John Lennox^{2, 3} and many others,^{4, 5} have given answers for non-experts to counter such views. I have recently published a short comprehensive book⁶, that discusses a number of arguments in the area of natural science, philosophy and theology covering a lot of the literature quoted here and have also given an argument against the apparent non-compatibility of miracles and laws of nature.⁷ Christian philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga,⁸ Richard Swinburne,⁹ William Lane Craig¹⁰ and James Porter Moreland¹¹ have given more extensive in-depth treatments. For a fruitful discussion, we must define natural science and world views and clarify their interrelation. The talk concentrates on the world views of atheism and Christian faith. As one important result of this discussion, it turns out that an alternative between natural science and faith is misleading, instead we have to talk about the conflict between atheism and Christian faith.
- II. The physicist’s fishnet: What can natural science describe and how?
We will discuss the establishment and limitations of laws of physics, which describe the mechanisms observable in nature.
- III. Proof or evidence: What convinces you?
The concept of proof has very limited practical applicability and we normally must rely on evidence and seek for the best explanation for a phenomenon.

- IV. Questions Atheism and Christian faith should answer
 Atheism cannot answer the fundamental question, why a universe exists at all. It also has trouble explaining why the universe allows for life at all. While the first question appears to be fundamental and not just due to a gap of knowledge, this may be debatable for the second question. Here again, we must look for the best, or more convincing, explanation. Further, the question of what man is and if a God can intervene in the world at all has to be evaluated based on the observations we can make in world.
- V. A case study: A universe from nothing
 In order to elucidate the first question of the last paragraph I will discuss the question, whether a universe can arise from nothing and demonstrate that we here have a fundamental limit of the explanatory power of physics.
- VI. Another bunch of questions
 Finally, there are existential questions atheism cannot answer such as those touching hope beyond death, guilt, suffering and meaning. Here Christians have a strong base to give answers that resonate with human nature and experience atheism cannot supply.
- VII. Conclusions: A response to the claim of atheism
 Christian faith has solid ground in answering apologetic and existential questions and there is good reason to be confident about the foundation of one's own beliefs.

Suggested Readings:

- ¹ R. Dawkins: The God Delusion. Bantam (2006)
- ² J. C. Lennox: Gunning for God - Why the new atheists are missing the target. Lion Hudson (2011)
- ³ J. C. Lennox: Can Science explain everything? The good book Company (2019)
- ⁴ W. L. Craig: On guard – Defending your faith with reason and precision. David C. Cook (2010)
- ⁵ Timothy Keller: The Reason for God: Belief in an age of skepticism. Hodder (2008)
- ⁶ R. B. Bergmann: Gott und die Erklärung der Welt – Christlicher Glaube oder atheistische Weltanschauung: Was ist vernünftiger? Brunnen, 2nd Ed. (2020)
- ⁷ R. B. Bergmann: Does Divine Intervention Violate Laws of Nature? Organon F 26 (1) 86-103 (2019). Open access <https://www.organonf.com/journal/orgf-2019-26106/>
- ⁸ A. Plantinga: Where the conflict really lies – Science, religion and naturalism. Oxford University Press, Oxford (2011)
- ⁹ R. Swinburne: Is there a God? Oxford (2010). German translation: Gibt es einen Gott? Ontos (2006)
- ¹⁰ W. L. Craig (ed.): Philosophy of religion – a reader and guide” Edinburgh University Press (2002)
- ¹¹ J. P. Moreland and W.L. Craig: Philosophical foundations for a Christian World view. Inter Varsity Press (2003)

Further resources in English and German can be found in <https://erklaerung-der-welt.de/>