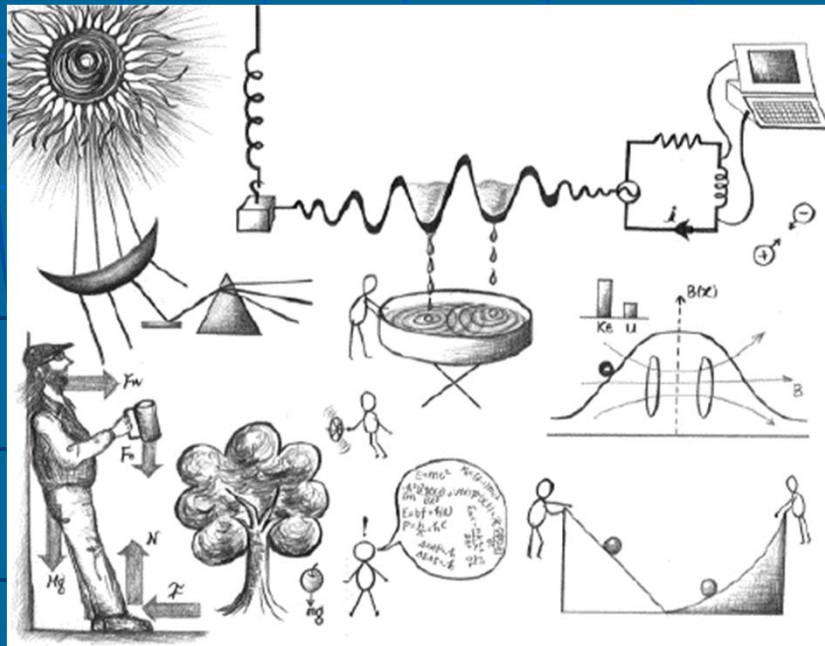


Methodological Naturalism and the Threat of Science?

Robert C. Bishop
Physics Department
Wheaton College



The Sciences: Friend or Foe?

- Practices of scientists
- "Scientific metaphysics"
 - Materialist naturalism
 - Antagonistic towards Christianity
 - Displaces God from the world



Two Forms of Naturalism

- Methodological Naturalism
 - Commitment to methods of inquiry for particular limited purposes
- Ontological/Metaphysical Naturalism
 - Substantive commitment to picture of what really exists



Theological Motivations for Modern Scientific Practices

- *Ex nihilo* creation
 - E.g. John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16
- Divine freedom
- Ontological homogeneity
 - “The creation is homogeneous in the sense that everything has the same ontological status before God, as the object of his creating will and love. All is ‘very good’ because he created it, mind and matter alike” (Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 72).

Theological Motivations for Modern Scientific Practices

- Implies Creation has contingent rationality
 - Creation utterly depends upon God sustaining it's existence moment by moment
 - God was free create a wide variety of creations

Implications for Scientific Practices

- We have to look at creation to see what God has made
 - Investigation must be empirical
- Take creation on its own terms to understand it
 - Entities, processes, laws...

17th—Century Practices



- Empirical
- Modeling phenomena
- Understand secondary causes through which God works



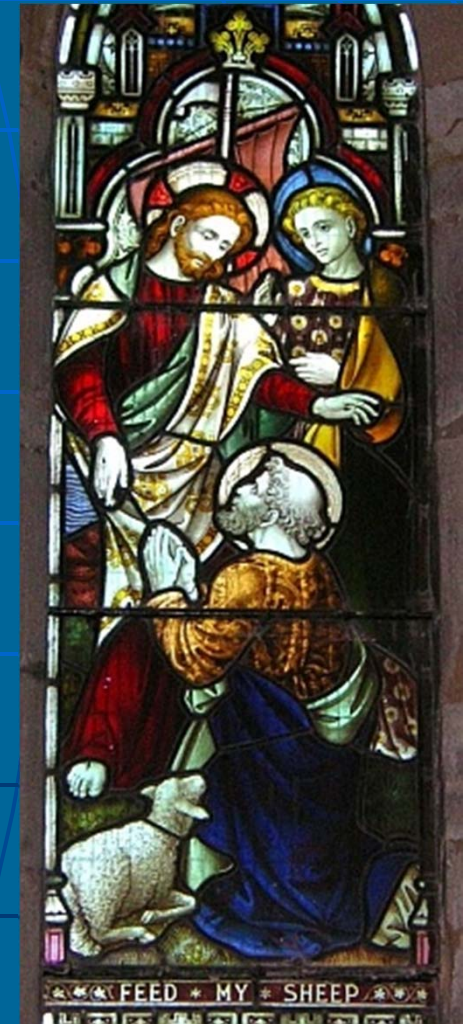
6/28/2013

Goal of Modern Science Practices

- Understand creation on its own terms
- Understand how creation works
- Understand God's work in creation

Methodological Naturalism

- Methodological Naturalism
 - Commitment to methods of inquiry for particular limited purposes
- Purpose:
 - Understand how creation works on its own terms



Methodological Naturalism

- Albert Magnus 13th century

- “[Albert] acknowledged (with every other medieval thinker) that God is ultimately the cause of everything, but he argued that God customarily works through natural causes and that the natural philosopher’s obligation was to take the latter to their limit...Albert pointed out that God employs natural causes to accomplish his purposes; and the philosopher’s task is not to investigate the causes of God’s will, but to inquire into the natural causes by which God’s will produces its effect. To introduce divine causality into a philosophical discussion...would be a violation of the proper boundaries between philosophy and theology” (Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science*, (U. Chicago 2007), pp. 240-241).

Methodological Naturalism

- Kepler as exegete of nature
 - “as we astronomers are priests of the highest God in regard to the book of nature, we are bound to think of the praise of God and not of the glory of our own capacities...Those laws are within the grasp of the human mind; God wanted us to recognize them by creating us after his own image so that we could share in his own thoughts” (letter to J.G. Herwart von Hohenburg, March 26, 1598).

Methodological Naturalism

■ Boyle

- “For [natural philosophers] consult experience both frequently and heedfully; and...they are careful to *conform their opinions to it; or if there be just causes, reform their opinions by it*” (*The Works of the Honorable Robert Boyle*, ed. T. Birch (Hildersheim: Georg Olms, 1965 [1772]), vol 5, 513-14, emphasis added).
- “The book of nature is a fine and large piece of tapestry rolled up, which we are not able to see all at once, but must be content to wait for the discovery of its beauty, and symmetry, little by little, as it gradually comes to be more and more unfolded, or displayed” (*Boyle Works*, Vol. 6: 796)

Methodological Naturalism: 21st Century Confusions

- “the methodological postulate of metaphysical naturalism, which entails that for science to be science, by definition it can pursue, identify, and entertain only natural causes as plausible explanations of natural phenomena, with the universe as a whole regarded as if it were a closed system of natural causes”
- “maintains that for the purposes of science one cannot appeal to transcendent causes, and therefore scientific research must be pursued as if metaphysical naturalism were true”
- “acting as if God does not exist”
- “a rule of science that requires that scientific explanations use only material (matter, energy, and their interactions) cause”

Implications of Properly Understanding Methodological Naturalism

- Contemporary scientific practices follow 17th-century Christian practices for investigating creation

Implications of Properly Understanding Methodological Naturalism

- Contemporary scientific practices follow 17th-century Christian practices for investigating creation
- Theories such as big-bang cosmology & evolution are results of systematic application of scientific practices

The Sciences: Friend or Foe?

- Practices of scientists
- "Scientific metaphysics"
 - Materialist naturalism
 - Antagonistic towards Christianity
 - Displaces God from the world

