

An Evangelical Natural Theology

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The Universe: Physical Reality

- More complex than we expect
- More interesting than we have been told!
- Insight into the Creator
- Must be observed to be understood
- Must be modeled to be discussed
- All models (theories) are provisional
- Knowledgeable about the past; engaged in the present; open to the future

Christian Cosmology

- Knowledgeable about the current consensus
- 90% dark matter and energy!
- Humble about level of understanding
- Open to future developments
- Engaged in the current discussion
- Knowledgeable about the history of the discussion

Natural History of the Universe

- “Big Bang”
- Actual “beginning” but subtle issues
- Expanding universe: Inflation
- Observations in the present lead to inferences about the past
- Spectroscopy of cosmic light: 13.7 billion years
- Gingerich: “God’s Universe”

Evangelical Stance Towards Thermodynamics

- Conservation of Energy (1st Law)
- Relevance of Entropy (2nd Law)
- No known exceptions
- Theological travesties: Entropy as Sin
- Dynamic nature of physical reality
- Importance of fluctuations
- Complex world in constant change

Evangelical Stance Towards Quantum Mechanics

- Paradigm for small and light particles
- Accurate theory
- Uncertainty Principle
- Theological travesties: QM leads to moral relativism
- Complementarity
- Polkinghorne

Evangelical Stance Towards Chemistry

- Matter is created and good
- Started with quark soup
- Early universe dominated by H and He
- Chemistry in the stars
- Heavy atoms and supernovae
- Theological travesties: Attack on Nuclear Chemistry

Natural History of the Solar System

- Second generation star
- Complex history: Nebular evolution
- Formation of planetary rings
- Coalescence of planets
- Complex history: Planetary evolution
- Natural history of the Earth inferred from observations in the present
- Theological travesties: “Creation Science”

Natural History of Life

- Rapid appearance of life on Earth
- Complex history: Cellular evolution
- Processing of the Earth by living organisms
- Complex history: Proliferation of life forms
- History of life inferred from observations in the present
- Theological travesties: Recent creation
- Francis Collins “The Language of God”

Physical Reality on Earth

- Highly nonequilibrium system
- Faithful but flexible (Polkinghorne)
- Theological travesties: Static world of perfect “order”
- Evangelical stance: Grateful for a world that allows Freedom and Faith; Hopeful about the future; Reaching out in Love to a world in need

Philosophy of Matter

- Actual world is complex and interesting
- Theological travesties: “Perfect” structure
- Actual world is dynamic and changing
- Theological travesties: Stasis as the highest good
- Evangelical stance: Active in understanding and tending the Earth as God’s stewards

Natural Theology

- Murphy, McGrath, Padgett
- God is both powerful and subtle
- God is both “simple” and complex
- God as decisive and discontinuous as well as patient and continuous
- Multiplicity of complementary pictures needed to model actual God

Natural Theodicy

- Murphy and Ellis “On the Moral Nature of the Universe”
- Reality of Evil and Suffering
- Active involvement of God (Blocher)
- Jesus: Knows our sorrows
- Defeat of Death in Resurrection of Jesus
- Ultimate restoration and New Creation

Conclusions

- Evangelical science is knowledgeable of the past and present, engaged in the present, and eager to embrace the future
- Evangelical science is open to new ideas, but not in a hurry to embrace the “latest” thing
- Evangelical science is not trapped in the bad science of the past, nor enslaved by the bad theology of the past and present