

poses a problem for defining “natural.” However, all scientific theories, current or future, are incomplete and contain error. It is the very strength of scientific explanation that theories are open to correction by future observation. The scientific enterprise keeps expanding the list of known natural agents and discovering new properties and interactions.

What then is the distinction between natural and supernatural agents? Natural causal agents have known (and knowable) limited capabilities and properties that can be used to explain observed phenomena. These phenomena and their proposed natural causal agents can be tested and confirmed by the larger scientific community. Investigators of any religious faith or none can examine available evidence, and come to a consensus on the current best scientific explanation for a given set of observations. Supernatural agents, by contrast, do not have recognized limited and detectable capacities. A supernatural agent that can accomplish any conceivable end provides no insight into understanding the mechanisms by which a particular event occurred. It is no different as a scientific statement than “I don’t know.”²

The other argument that Harris presents is that “truth-seeking” is a problem for RMN (pp. 30–31). He states that limiting science to natural explanatory posits “(a) fails to ward off pseudoscientific or otherwise unscientific explanatory posits, or (b) closes off consideration of promising explanatory posits.” There will always be proposals and research put forward by members of the scientific community that are based on erroneous data or false argumentation. That is why peer review and scientific consensus are so critical.³ The scientific community pursues truth within its domain. Furthermore, scientific theories will always be simply the best understanding at any particular time and in that state of the art.⁴

Harris presents cosmic fine tuning as an example where an area of scientific inquiry includes “supernatural” explanations. Firstly, cosmic fine tuning is argued in the absence of any theological argument or appeal to a supernatural agent. Secondly, a scientific theory can also have a theological response or understanding. Different intellectual domains can and do interact with each other. Ideas and theories do cross-pollinate between domains. They are not non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA) as argued by Steven Gould. As a Christian, I am completely free to integrate my science and faith, but that integration is not itself a scientific conclusion. Harris seems to be saying that science must include all true statements. This removes any demarcation between science and other ways of knowing that becomes the scientism which Paul deVries sought to avoid.

Notes

¹Paul deVries, “Naturalism in the Natural Sciences: A Christian Perspective,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 15, no. 4 (1986): 388–89.

²For an extended discussion, see Keith B. Miller, “The Misguided Attack on Methodological Naturalism,” in *For the Rock*

Record: Geologists on Intelligent Design, ed. Jill S. Schneiderman and Warren D. Allman (University of California Press, 2009), 117–40.

³See Keith B. Miller, “Contemporary Challenges to the Pursuit of Truth,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 76, no. 2 (2024): 77–85, <https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2024/PSCF9-24Miller.pdf>.

⁴Nicholas Rescher, *The Limits of Science*, rev. ed. (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 37.

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Harris Replies to Keith Miller

I’m grateful to Keith B. Miller for his letter concerning my recent *PSCF* article, “Against Restricted Methodological Naturalism.” As I read him, Prof. Miller makes two principal points:

1. That my article implies an unseemly scientism, i.e., the view that all “good and true explanations” are scientific ones; and
2. That at least some versions of methodological naturalism (e.g., the one proposed by philosopher Paul deVries) do not suffer from the maladies I dub the “intelligibility” and “truth-seeking” problems, respectively.

I will take these two important points in turn, with aspirations to brevity.

First, perhaps I should say as straightforwardly as possible that I am no scientism advocate, and I know of no reason to think that such a view is implied by the above-mentioned article. My argument is that even a methodological naturalism that is restricted to the domain of scientific explanation does not deliver the heuristic benefits that would justify it. That’s all. Nothing about the *scope* of scientific explanation (relative to other forms of explanation) follows from this—not as a matter of logic, at least. Without further argument, then, I can only signal my agreement with Prof. Miller: no to scientism!

Second, consider the following from the quoted account of methodological naturalism from Paul deVries:

The natural sciences are limited by method to naturalistic foci. By method they must seek answers to their questions within nature, within the non-personal and contingent created order, and not anywhere else.¹

Now it is notable that deVries limits his consideration to the *natural* sciences, which right away occasions the question of whether personal aspects of the contingent created order can show up in other kinds of scientific explanations. It seems obvious to me that they can and do (think of human preferences/intentions as they appear in an economic model, for example), which conclusion already shows that this version of methodological naturalism is not a stipulation that is meant to govern *all* of science *qua* science. It seems to me that the Scylla and Charybdis problem of intelligibility and truth-seeking arises yet

again here. If deVries's sense of "natural" is only meant to govern special sciences whose subject matter is (usually) naturalistically "well-behaved" (e.g., law-accommodating disciplines such as physics and chemistry), then it is not what my argument targets; if it really is meant as a stipulation for *all* of science, then it is going to get in the way of good theorizing in at least some other sciences.

But there is a more fundamental point here. As I try to show in the article, the history of modern science is full of examples of instructive disagreements about whether certain scientific posits are credibly "naturalistic."² How were these cases adjudicated? Surely not by winning consensus on a definition of the term "natural" – a consensus that has not been forthcoming to this day. They were adjudicated by the *relative depth and power of the particular explanations at issue*. In the case of Newtonian gravitation, which seemed to Leibniz et al. as dangerously supernaturalist, $F=ma$ did the talking – not the philosophers reflecting on its naturalistic pedigree. Indeed, even for a paradigmatically "naturalist" theory such as Darwinian evolution, surely it is the unifying power of natural selection as a mechanism that covers such an impressively large range of data that is interesting here (especially relative to rival explanations), not its naturalistic bona fides. The lesson? I think it is something like "*Give me the good explanation – who cares about the naturalism!*"

Note here that it does not follow from my view that we ought to begin developing "supernaturalist" scientific theories, whatever that might mean. Indeed, that is decidedly not a good idea, in my estimation. On the contrary, I think we should unfetter scientific theorizing from *the very distinction* between natural and supernatural. In fact, more generally, we should just get out of the business of deciding in advance of actual science which explanatory posits will get to count as scientific. This is what methodological naturalism tries to do, and I think these cases from the history of science testify against its success.

Notes

¹Paul deVries, "Naturalism in the Natural Sciences: A Christian Perspective," *Christian Scholar's Review* 15, no. 4 (1986): 388–89.

²Joshua Lee Harris, "Against Restricted Methodological Naturalism," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 78, no. 1 (2026): 31–33, <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF3-26Harris>.

Joshua Lee Harris

A Reaction to the Framing of the Article by Deborah Haarsma

Deborah Haarsma ("Staying in Conversation: Review of Research on the Science Views of Evangelicals and Effective Ways to Respond," *PSCF* 78, no. 2 [2026]: 67–80) brings genuine expertise and pastoral concern to the science-faith conversation, and her communication recommendations deserve wide attention. Her concern for genuine dialogue across a polarized divide reflects exactly the Christian virtues she commends.

Yet the article's framing invites scrutiny on its own epistemological terms. Haarsma draws on Haidt's research showing that moral intuitions precede reasoning across the entire human population – then applies this insight exclusively to evangelical skeptics, as though the scientists and communicators in her audience were exempt from the same dynamic. That implication goes unexplored. A more representative picture might have included sociological data on science skepticism across the political and religious spectrum – work that might have complicated the article's assertion that distrust of science is particularly an evangelical problem.¹

Vaccine safety is well supported; legitimate questions about specific mandates and policies should not be confused with the safety evidence itself. Climate science is more complex – the physical mechanisms are established, but long-term projections carry genuine uncertainty, mitigation policies are legitimately contested, and survey instruments that conflate scientific with policy disagreement may overstate evangelical rejection of the science itself.²

More significantly, the article overlooks cases in which orthodox Christians resisted scientific and cultural consensus yet were subsequently vindicated. Kinsey's foundational sexology – built on non-representative samples heavily weighted toward prisoners and sex offenders, with undisclosed conflicts of interest shaping his conclusions – informed decades of policy before its corrupt foundations were documented.³ Freudian repression, traced directly to Freud by Loftus and colleagues, failed systematic empirical scrutiny – a failure acknowledged from within the psychoanalytic tradition itself.⁴ The self-esteem movement, which directly contradicted the Christian anthropology of pride as social pathology, collapsed when research demonstrated that violence and aggression correlate with threatened egotism – high self-esteem under threat – not low self-esteem.⁵ Resistance to these revisions has come disproportionately from religiously progressive quarters – a pattern that complicates any account of science skepticism that focuses exclusively on evangelicals.

The cases above suggest a more uncomfortable conclusion: the scientific establishment has sometimes deserved skepticism, and orthodox Christians have occasionally been its most prescient critics. The irony is that their progressive counterparts seem most resistant to correction. A paper calling for epistemic humility is strengthened, not weakened, by applying that standard to everyone in the conversation – including the scientists doing the calling.

Notes

¹See, e.g., Elaine Howard Ecklund and Christopher P. Scheitle, *Religion vs. Science: What Religious People Really Think* (Oxford University Press (2018)); and John H. Evans, *Morals Not Knowledge: Recasting the Contemporary U.S. Conflict Between Religion and Science* (University of California Press, 2018).

²Elaine H. Ecklund et al., "Examining Links Between Religion,