

The Bible, he says, remains interested in the “who” and “why” of agency. So, the biblical text addresses a question of “order,” an observation as old as rabbinic recognition of the priestly concerns of Genesis 1. This perspective emerges by recognizing the biblical text as literature produced for the people and cultures of its own time and thus answering their questions rather than ours.

Since this argument remains predominantly an evangelical discussion, Walton appropriately writes in language and terminology for the people and cultures of his own time. He is devoted to preserving the evangelical commitment to the authority of Scripture, and to encouraging the readers to embrace other ways to think about creation. This commitment provides the center of the debate. Walton appears to still be answering the same questions about Genesis because of the continuing prevalence among ordinary believers of the view that the inspiration of Scripture consists in the very words verbally dictated directly by God. So, Scripture remains authoritative even in matters of science and history. Walton walks a fine line between his affirmation of biblical authority as “God’s authority vested in the human instruments he used to produce Scripture” (p. 17) and of inspiration as both “each word (verbal) comes from God (inspired)” and “the whole message throughout (plenary) comes from God (inspired)” (p. 27). He qualifies this definition with the language of “affirmation”: that is, the inerrancy of Scripture in “all Scripture affirms.” There is also the language of “reference”: all that which is not affirmed is in reference to the perspectives of the culture (pp. 22–25). The line appears very fine between the role of the divine and the human in the production of Scripture, which role will no doubt remain disputed.

There are small faults with this book. Familiarity with Walton’s previous work is expected, as indicated by references to a prior publication without explication for the sake of the present reader. There are also frequent mentions of “my viewpoint,” as though his work appears original and unique where it is within the scope of scholarly conversations elsewhere. Finally, footnote references are almost wholly to authors within evangelical publishers (e.g., Zondervan, Baker, IVP). These practices might be understood as signs of the internal evangelical focus of this project, and the care with which Walton chooses his language.

Apart from these quibbles, *New Explorations in the Lost World of Genesis* provides a valuable contribution to the origins debate. It serves as a tribute to Walton’s patience and long-suffering over the past 20 years with this project. Scholars can find it wearisome to repeatedly face the same questions and criticisms. I admire and respect Walton for the grace and patience he exhibits in our current polarized and contentious cultural and spiritual environment. There is so much more to Genesis 1–3 than clues as to how and when creation came to be. Walton attempts to open horizons of understanding through the

culture and peoples for whom the Bible was written. This offering should free readers to ask better questions.

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Letters

A Response to Joshua Harris’s View of “Restricted Methodological Naturalism”

In his article, “Against Restricted Methodological Naturalism” (*PSCF* 78, no. 1 (2026): 27–37), Joshua Harris defines Restricted Methodological Naturalism (RMN) as follows: within the domain of science for X to be a valid explanation of Y, X must be natural. In his critique and ultimate rejection of RMN he implies that science must include explanations that include supernatural agents to avoid dead-end explanatory paradigms, or creating obstacles to promising novel explanations. However, he ignores that other domains also have claims to truth. There are good and true explanations that lie outside of science. All truth is not scientific!

A return to the original definition of methodological naturalism by Christian philosopher Paul deVries is helpful. He described the limitations of scientific inquiry as follows:

The goal of inquiry in the natural sciences is to establish explanations of contingent natural phenomena strictly in terms of other contingent natural things—laws, fields, probabilities. Any explanations that make reference to supernatural beings or powers are certainly excluded from natural science ... 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. Thus, the natural sciences are guided by what I call methodological naturalism.¹

He explicitly argued that this definition serves to give proper intellectual space for theological inquiry; it rejects science as the only arbiter of truth. To remove this limitation on what science can investigate is yielding to a culture of scientism.

Harris pursues two extended arguments against RMN—the “Intelligibility Problem” and the “Truth-Seeking Problem.” I will briefly respond to both of these arguments.

Harris sees the intelligibility problem as the inability to define “natural” and “supernatural.” He argues that the incompleteness or potential falsity of current theories

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