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

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

[1]See, 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).
[2]Elaine H. Ecklund et al., "Examining Links Between Religion,

Evolution Views, and Climate Change Skepticism," *Environment and Behavior* 49, no. 9 (2016): 985–1006, https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916516674246.

[3]James H. Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life* (Norton, 1997).

[4]Elizabeth F. Loftus, "The Reality of Repressed Memories," *American Psychologist* 48, no. 5 (1993): 518–37, https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0003-066X.48.5.518; and Michael E. Shulman, "What Use Is Freud?" *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 69, no. 6 (2021): 1093–113, https://doi.org/10.1177/00030651211059546.

[5]Roy F. Baumeister et al., "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression: The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem," *Psychological Review* 103, no. 1 (1996): 5–33, https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.103.1.5.

Steven Willing, MD
ASA Member

Deborah Haarsma Responds to Letter from Steven Willing

I am grateful to Dr. Willing for engaging my recent article and for the insights he brings to these issues.

We agree on vaccines; he echoes points I made in the article. Regarding climate change, current survey instruments actually do ask separately about views on science and views on policy. My article reported 2025 results on both.

Regarding the larger framing of my article, the nationwide data I report clearly show that distrust in science is more common among evangelicals (variously defined) than in any other demographic, justifying the focus of my article. I agree with Willing that scientists and progressives are also subject to Haidt's findings that moral intuitions precede reasoning, and my paper acknowledged this in one example (the sudden rise in democratic confidence in science during Covid). I have written elsewhere in more depth about the influences of scientists' worldviews on their interpretations of science.

I was unfamiliar with the historical incidents Dr. Willing cites, and I appreciate his sharing them with *PSCF* readers. My article used a similar example from the Scopes Trial: it was theological liberals and leading biologists who pushed social Darwinism and eugenics in the early 1900s, contributing to the concerns of conservative Protestants about evolution; social Darwinism and eugenics were later shown to be scientifically flawed. I also named the Tuskegee experiments and other bioethical issues in science, and recommended that communicators acknowledge that science has not always been good. I could have framed more positively the ethical concerns that evangelicals have about gene-editing. AI and gene-editing are critical moral issues that Christians need to speak to today.

Deborah Haarsma
ASA Fellow

A Clarification That Would Strengthen Haarsma's Argument

I read Deborah Haarsma's recent article with appreciation. Her synthesis of the sociological research on evangelical distrust of science is valuable, and her practical guidance for Christian scientists is the kind of work this journal exists to publish. I write only to offer a clarification on one point that I think would strengthen her argument considerably—and that her readers deserve to have right.

In treating the historical background, the article rightly notes that historians have discredited the "warfare" thesis associated with John William Draper and Andrew Dickson White. But the more important and frequently missed point concerns where that narrative came from. The conflict thesis did not arise from an actual collision between science and religion. It was forged within nineteenth-century Protestantism itself, by liberal Protestants who were seeking to reform and redefine the faith and who deployed "science" as a polemical instrument against traditional, creedal, and dogmatic theology. What was presented to the public as "science versus religion" was, at bottom, one theological vision contending against another.

This matters for Haarsma's project more than it might first appear. If the historic quarrel was really intra-Protestant—a dispute over biblical authority, the person of Christ, and who would define orthodoxy in a modern age—then evangelical wariness toward "science" is not simply anti-intellectual reflex. It is the residue of a genuine theological contest, one in which conservatives correctly sensed that more than empirical findings was being asked of them. Recovering that history reframes the distrust she describes and, I would suggest, points toward more durable ways of rebuilding trust than treating the problem as primarily one of communication.

Haarsma cites *Of Popes and Unicorns* (Oxford University Press, 2021), which I co-authored with David Hutchings and which offers an accessible introduction to these themes. For readers who wish to follow the argument to its sources—the actual documentary record of how and why the conflict narrative was constructed—I would point them to the fuller scholarly treatment in *Science, Religion, and the Protestant Tradition: Retracing the Origins of Conflict* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019). My hope is simply that those persuaded by Haarsma's call to "stay in conversation" will also have the most accurate possible account of how the conversation went wrong in the first place.

With gratitude for the journal and for Haarsma's contribution,

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