An Evangelical Natural Theology

Gary Patterson
Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA
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