



science & God

Scott Petty

• Little Black Books •
books that get to the point

science & God

As Christians, do we have to choose between believing science and believing God? And aren't we just a little bit foolish to believe in God these days?

In his usual snappy style, Scott Petty faces these difficult questions head-on, covering important topics like the Big Bang, Genesis and the beginnings of human life, evolution, design versus cosmic accident, and—most importantly—the evidence for God.

Like all the Little Black Books, this short book is a fun read and gets straight to the point.



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Little Black Books: Science and God

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Introduction

I did my very last high-school science project the night before it was due. I'm pretty sure that was obvious to everyone who saw it, especially my science teacher. I had fumbled through my textbook and worked out that if I wrapped a piece of copper wire around a metal bolt then I would have something that at least looked like an electromagnet. And then, with a flash of great inspiration, I decided to thread some string through a couple of pulleys to create a kind of crane for the electromagnet to swing off. How could you not be happy with that? Electromagnet and pulley system—two little science projects in one! Neither bit worked and my science teacher was not impressed. But I didn't care. I had finished my last science project and I would never have to return to the world of science again. And that made me smile.

So I imagine God is having a bit of a laugh at the fact that I have voluntarily decided to write this Little Black Book on science and God. Some 20 years after I thought I'd never have to think about science again, I have decided to undertake the biggest science

project of my life. It's not that I have a newfound love of science, but the rise of the celebrity scientists (or 'New Atheists' as they have been called) has left me little choice. If those guys had stuck to the world of science I would have been safe from ever having to work on a science project again—but they were not happy to stick to the world of science. Instead, scientists and authors like Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and others have assaulted the realm of faith and religion. And it's not just that they want to make snide comments from the sidelines every now and again. They are openly and intentionally trying to replace religion with science and something they label 'reason', and they claim to expose God and faith as figments of our imagination. Richard Dawkins, who in many ways is the premier celebrity atheist, said in his introduction to *The God Delusion*:

If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down.¹

They are brazen in their attacks upon religion and God, and they want science to be the only explanation for every part of life. And maybe I would have even been ok with that, had people I know not been swayed and undermined by the aggression of the New

Atheists' argument that science even explains away God.

After picking up a copy of Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, a friend of mine who had professed Christ for years was persuaded that God was a figment of our delusional imagination. He told me point blank that biological evolution explained everything in life so there was no need or room for God in his life. I don't think my friend is the only one affected like this (though I suspect he may have been using New Atheism as a convenient excuse to resist Jesus' inconvenient call upon his life, because he is now 'evolving' the human species by spending a ridiculous amount of time bulking up at the gym and a silly amount of money on alcohol).

Truth be told, I find it annoying that anyone should argue, or for that matter believe, that science should be pitted as an alternative to religion, as an enemy of God, or as a substitute for belief. There is plenty of room for both, and both are necessary for balanced human existence. That's what this Little Black Book is all about. Surprisingly, I have to say, it is by far the most enjoyable science project I have ever done. I hope you find it enjoyable and interesting too.

CHAPTER I

Why you don't need to pick a team

If you were to read any popular discussion of the relationship between science and religion these days, you would think that they were locked in a tenacious battle to the death: the 'forces of faith' versus the 'forces of fact'. Picture it as a boxing match. In the red corner, looking a little pasty and weighing in at, well, not very much at all (because all they do is look under microscopes or through telescopes), are the science guys. In the blue corner, also looking pasty and scrawny (because they spend most of their time obsessed with not sinning and singing schmaltzy songs around the campfire), are the religion guys. And if you believe all you read, they are always opponents, adversaries, archenemies.

And we are all encouraged to pick a team. The popular discussion sets it up like this: if you are a bit primitive in your thinking, a

bit conservative in your upbringing, a bit rigid in your morality, and above all pretty stupid, you choose religion. You choose God. Despite evidence to the contrary, despite the fact that there is no reason for God, you choose faith. Alternatively, if you are a bit more modern in your thinking, progressive in your upbringing, progressive in your morality, and above all (you guessed it) smart, you choose science. And if you accept the popular slogans, you have chosen fact over fantasy, reason over religion, evidence over make-believe. Well done, you. Give yourself a pat on the back!

In 2010, I read an article in a Sydney newspaper about the release of a new book called *The Grand Design* by the world-famous physicist Stephen Hawking.² In this book, Hawking argues that we don't need the idea of a divine force to explain the creation of the universe, because gravity created the universe. (But who created gravity?) There were 277 responses on the newspaper's website about this book. Some of them were from Christians, some were from atheists and some were from agnostics (who think you can't really know anything about God). And as I read all 277 comments, I came across many people who are very certain that nothing happens when you die. Here are three of my favourites:

- Someone with the unfortunate but amusing name ‘Anas’ from London said, “Do you really believe in heaven, for God’s sake it’s 2010... Once we die we disintegrate into the atoms that made us, no more no less...”
- Another person with the relatively normal name of ‘Andrew’ said, “There is no GOD either way you look at it... You live, you die, end of story.”
- Thirdly, someone who arrogantly calls himself ‘The Truth’ said, “Ok idiots. Here is a dose of reality. THERE IS NO GOD! There is nothing, we live, we die.” (Thank you, Mr The Truth; all of us idiots have now been overwhelmed by your convincing argument.)

I was struck not only by the lack of a decent argument or reasoning in these comments, but also by the sheer certainty of the responses. In these people’s minds, there is no possibility that God exists. Scientists like Stephen Hawking have proved that we don’t need God (for that matter, we don’t *want* him). ‘For God’s sake, it’s 2010: science and God are enemies, and science has defeated God. In the light of modern scientific discoveries, belief in God is idiocy. If you picked religion, you picked the wrong team. You picked faith and fantasy over reason and evidence, so we are allowed to

mock you.’ This seems to be the way the discussion of science and religion plays itself out these days.

But have you ever stopped to wonder what God thinks of the disappointing way this issue is ‘debated’? Do you think God is afraid of science? Do you wonder what he thinks of evolutionary biologists like Dawkins who claim that science explains everything—not just the development of species, but *everything*? Do you think God is saying to himself, “I really hope that scientists don’t discover X, Y or Z because that means they will have finally uncovered that I’m not real. Hang on, if I’m thinking these thoughts, doesn’t that mean I *am* real? Have to think about that some more; also have to think about why I’m talking to myself. That’s a bit weird.”

In this chapter, which in many ways is the most important chapter in the book, I want to explain why God is not afraid of science, why Christians have no need to be afraid of science, and above all why we do not need to pick a team. It’s not an either/or thing, where you have to choose *either* evidence *or* faith. It is a both/and thing, and Christians can and should pick *both* God *and* science.

Since this is a Little Black Book, I cannot say everything about the subject of science and God. But I can give you three sturdy

and solid reasons why Christians don't need to choose between God and science, and then show you a way forward with this issue.

The long friendship of science and Christianity

One reason why Christians shouldn't feel forced to choose between science and God is that science and Christianity have had a long-lasting and fruitful friendship. We could say that they have been good mates for centuries.³

An underlying belief in an ordered universe, governed by a good and rational God, is very fruitful soil for science to grow in. If science, at its most basic level, is about making observations of the physical, natural universe over a period of time in order to draw conclusions about how it operates, then for science to be at all useful, there needs to be some order in the way that the physical, natural universe operates. So belief in an ordered universe, which is where the Bible starts, is a fundamental building block for the whole idea of science. I'm not saying you have to be Christian to be a scientist, or that other civilizations (such as the ancient Greeks or Egyptians) never did any science. I am just saying that you have to believe in an ordered universe to be involved in scientific pursuit, and this is exactly what we find on page 1 of the Bible.