

A critique of scientism spoiled

Can Science Explain Everything?

John C. Lennox

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Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at University of Oxford, John Lennox, is a renowned Christian apologist with numerous publications under his belt. He has debated prominent atheists like Richard Dawkins, the late Christopher Hitchens, and Peter Singer. Many will be familiar with his intellectual prowess and his explanatory abilities. His easy-going writing style is helpful in reaching the lay-skeptic whom this book is targeting. It is unfortunate, however, that Lennox promotes ‘old-earth’ compromise among evangelicals.

This latest book (a slim 127 pages) is by no means a unique work. It is reminiscent of the much larger volume, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*.¹ What *does* make it different is the use of personal testimonies and anecdotes, plus witty comments.

The first anecdote sets the tone for the opening pages and the general view of theists held by ‘the world’: Lennox was challenged by university academics to “give up this childish faith in God” (p. 15). The polarization of science and religion (as if they are contradictory) is rife in society and needs tackling. Lennox explains that this is more an atheist versus theist (worldview) question, pointing out that in the 20th century “over 60% of Nobel Laureates were Christians” (p. 17). One Russian audience that he addressed was angered because

they had never before been told that the likes of Kepler, Boyle, Newton, Faraday, and many others were devout believers in God.

Western academics on the other hand seem glibly to overlook this. Of course creationists are all too familiar with being ignored. Stephen Hawking “read little philosophy and less theology” (p. 27), yet asserted: “There is no heaven or afterlife ... that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.” Lennox countered with: “Atheism is a fairy story for people afraid of the light” (p. 30). The point is, scientists often venture out of their realm of expertise. This poses risks—as we shall see—as their followers are likely to lap up everything they proclaim, without due consideration and critical thinking.

Big bang ‘science’ trumps biblical authority

Ten pages in the middle of the book contain most of its ‘controversial’ elements. Anticipating the skeptics, Lennox asks pointed questions. One such hypothetical criticism is worth quoting in full:

“Worse still, if you take what the Bible says about creation literally, don’t you end up believing that the earth is less than 10,000 years old, and so contradict everything we know from science about the age of the earth? There is therefore no point in bringing the Bible into the discussion if you want us to listen to you” (p. 65).

Note that even the biblically illiterate person understands the text to teach a creation *thousands* of years ago. Most Christians also understand this to be the plain meaning, but many then

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try to explain that we need to interpret the plain text differently. And certain Christian academics assure us that *they* are just the right (qualified) persons to do so. These people pay lip service to the authority of Scripture, but are really putting science above Scripture.

Recently, well-known apologist William Lane Craig has said farewell to inerrancy as an important doctrine, and has admitted he is only “reasonably confident” in the virgin birth of Jesus.² While he knows the traditional view of Genesis 1–3 is a literal understanding, he goes along with the ‘mytho-history’ explanation,³ and Lennox is no different. When he says, “Here is how I resolve this particular issue” (p. 72), it implies that something is, in his mind, a problem. Yet, this issue only arises if uniformitarian ‘science’ is placed above Scripture, and Lennox has done just that when it comes to the age of the earth.

Lennox puts “information we get from studying nature” first and “that which we get from studying the Bible” second (p. 66). No surprise, then, that he is happy to admit that, when “the universe blinked into existence at a single point in time and space”, this “was a Big Bang caused by God” (p. 71).

Lennox does understand the sound arguments for a creation day being a 24-hour period.^{4,5} However, in order to accommodate 13.8 billion years that supposedly lapsed since the Big Bang, he separates the first two verses in Genesis 1 from the six days of creation (Genesis 1:3–2:1),⁶ which in turn are also separated from day 7 (Genesis 2:2–3). Quoting C. John Collins, he says that Genesis 1:1–2 describe “an event that took place before the storyline got going” (p. 73).^{7,8}

He claims to pay close attention to language and grammar, but fails to address the fact that the millions of years he accepts are filled with death, disease, and suffering—all prior to Adam, and thus before the original sin! Lennox says this sin “infected the human race from its very start” and “changed the attitude of the creature to their [sic] Creator, to other humans and to the creation around us” (p. 108).

But what about Romans 8:20–22? This passage speaks of the *whole* of creation, not just mankind.

When the Lord will make a new heaven and a new earth, it will be a restoration to the way things were originally (very good) and it will be done swiftly, not over billions of years. Theological integrity is paramount, if Christians are not to scupper the foundations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the danger of deep-time compromise.

Naturalism

In the final third of the book, Lennox seeks to warn the reader to the supernatural, and Christianity in particular. Perhaps the greatest objection to the Christian faith—the problem of evil and suffering—is only addressed in just over a page! Maybe deep down, Lennox realises how unsolvable is the dilemma that, according to his understanding, there was already death, strife, and disease

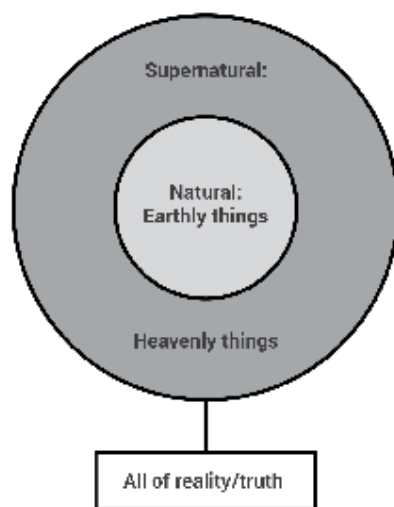


Figure 1. All of reality includes the supernatural. Repeatable science resides in the natural, miracles (historical—e.g. creation, or future—e.g. a new heaven and a new earth) are supernatural (e.g. by the Creator).

(such as cancer) of both humans and animals *long* before the Fall.

A problem with this book is that, more than once, Lennox appeals to scientists to give justification or merit to Christianity and the Holy Scriptures (pp. 26, 76, 83). Fortunately, he does highlight the difference between the two types of science, which he refers to as *induction* (operational, empirical science; which includes natural science) and *abduction* (historical, forensic science; which is greatly enhanced by an eyewitness account) (figure 1).

If that eyewitness is none other than the Creator, one wonders why so many people “are not prepared to trust him” (p. 118) about creation in six days but prefer their interpretation of the book of Genesis. The biblical imperative is: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

Conclusion

There is much meat in this compact book, certainly enough to challenge the thinking atheist or agnostic, at whom this little volume is mainly targeted.

Christians may also refresh their memories on important matters such as the death of Jesus, His burial, the empty tomb and eyewitness accounts of the risen Christ, among other things. Despite Lennox’s efforts to minimize talking about origins, there are a few bones for the biblical creationist to spit out.

References

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8. See also DeRemer, F., Good approach misapplied to get ‘analogical days’ [Review of Collins, ref. 7], *J. Creation* 21(2):35–39, 2007.