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# Where is the Warfare? The Impact of Sola Scriptura on Science and Religion Dialogue

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Where is the Warfare?  
The Impact of Sola Scriptura on Science and Religion Dialogue

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
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## Introduction

I came of age at the dawn of the New Atheism. Richard Dawkins published *The God Delusion* in 2006 when I was in seventh grade. His provocative best-seller sparked mass media interest and gave rise to the recent public fervor that dominates contemporary science and religion dialogue. Timely publications by Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens—*The End of Faith* (2004), *Breaking the Spell* (2006), and *God is Not Great* (2007), respectively—fanned the flames of the burgeoning New Atheist movement.<sup>1</sup> Their aggressively anti-religious rhetoric was fodder ready for consumption by a mass media that preys upon polarizing ideologies.

Nearly a decade later, nothing seems to have changed. In response to the recent horrifying attacks by Daesh terrorists on the citizens of Paris, Richard Dawkins quickly took to social media in an attempt to blame “religion” for the violence of the offenders.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the fact that “religion” is an utterly meaningless term in the sense that Dawkins chooses to employ it, he is a powerful rhetorician with a wide following. Regardless of whether or not Richard Dawkins is warranted in his sweeping criticism of religion, what he says, matters.

Dawkins and the New Atheists command one side of the popular science and religion polemic. While religious adherents responded to the criticisms levied by New Atheists in a wide variety of ways, one perspective gained more public

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<sup>1</sup> Hooper, Simon. “The rise of the ‘New Atheists.’” CNN. 9 November 2006. Web. 17 November 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/11/08/atheism.feature/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> Herman, Peter. “It’s Never as Simple as ‘Religion is Bad.’” Huffington Post. 16 November 2015. Web. 17 November 2015. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-herman/its-never-as-simple-as-religion-is-bad\\_b\\_8566104.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-herman/its-never-as-simple-as-religion-is-bad_b_8566104.html)

attention than all of the rest, that of young earth creationism. The person most often associated with young earth creationism is its most fervent supporter, the progenitor of 'answersingenesis.org' and the Creation Museum, Ken Ham.<sup>3</sup> Ham's debate with Bill Nye early last year—which has been watched nearly five million times on YouTube—sparked many conversations across the country in which the questions posed inevitably were framed in a manner that pitted science against religion.<sup>4</sup> Do we trust Bill Nye's paradigm of science from which we moderns in developed countries live with abundant food and advanced medical treatments, or do we place our faith in the religion espoused by science skeptics like Ken Ham? More plainly, are science and religion at war?

I remember the exact moment that I became aware of the potential conflict between science and religion. I was sitting in my eighth grade Earth Science class, and we were discussing the tectonic plates that constitute the Earth's crust. One of my favorite childhood teachers told us that the tectonic plates have been moving for millions of years. Scientists have observed the rates at which they move apart today and have used abductive reasoning to render a picture of an ancient super-continent, Pangea.<sup>5</sup> Even today's continents act as puzzle pieces. The eastern coasts of the Americas fit, more-or-less, nicely snug with the western coasts of Europe and Africa. As a visual learner, it seemed so intuitively *right* to me.

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<sup>3</sup> Answers in Genesis. 17 November 2015. Web. 17 November 2015.  
<https://answersingenesis.org/>

<sup>4</sup> "Bill Nye Debates Ken Ham – HD (Official)." YouTube. 4 February 2014. Web. 17 February 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6kgvhG3AkI>

<sup>5</sup> "Plate Tectonics – Pangea Continent Maps." Geology.com. 2015. Web. 17 November 2015.  
<http://geology.com/pangea.htm>

At that moment I remembered the story of Adam and Eve. Having grown up a Christian, I was intimately familiar with the creation narrative of Genesis 1. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, God’s creative actions took place in a period of six days. First He separated light from darkness, day one. Then God created the land that existed between the waters above and the waters below, day two. God proceeded to create plants, stars, and creatures of the sea and air on days three through five, respectively. Day six, of course, was the most momentous. God created the land-dwelling creatures, the last of which were humans, Adam and Eve. I knew Adam and Eve to be the common ancestors of all mankind. Their descendants are easily traceable through an explicitly demonstrable lineage in the Biblical text that arrives at the incarnated Logos Himself, Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> We are even told the ages at which each man along the lineage beget his son, causing many biblical scholars to date the world as having started in 4004 BCE.<sup>8</sup> I found myself at a crossroads. Do I believe in the Bible, or do I believe in science?

This thesis is the result of years spent investigating that question. I have learned that my dilemma results from my participation in Western society’s collective investment in the warfare model of science and religion. The Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at the University of Oxford, Dr. Alister McGrath, is convinced—along with the vast majority of historians of science—

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1:1 (King James Version)

<sup>7</sup> Dolphin, Lambert. “The Genealogy from Adam to Jesus Christ.” December 1998. Web. 17 November 2015. <http://ldolphin.org/2adams.html>

<sup>8</sup> Simanek, Donald. “Bishop Ussher Dates the World: 4004 BC.” Web. 17 December 2015. <http://www.lhup.edu/~dsimanek/usshe.htm>

that the warfare model is not a defensible framework from which to work when assessing the interaction of science and religion. He says of it,

The study of history allows us both to account for the origins of this deeply problematic understanding of the relation of science and religion, and to assess its reliability. Above all, it allows us to move beyond it, and construct more informed and positive approaches to the interaction of these two distinct domains of thought.<sup>9</sup>

While McGrath and others who espouse historically informed perspectives on the science and religion dialogue are correct in their assessments, my approach will not be strictly historical.<sup>10</sup>

Rather, I have two aims with the publication of this thesis. The first is to contribute to the recent scholarly work that seeks to discredit the popular, yet fallacious, warfare model of science and religion. A nuanced investigation shows that the warfare evident in popular discourse cannot easily be attributed to a conflict between the essence of science and religion. Rather “science” and “religion” are interpreted as something else entirely. The New Atheists equate science with scientism, and religion is often associated with the Biblical inerrantism of many Protestant Christians. Both ideologies are grounded in an empiricist epistemological framework founded by Luther’s declaration of *sola scriptura*. The resulting fundamentalist feedback loop is the heart of the true warfare, a conflict between scientism and inerrantism.

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<sup>9</sup> McGrath, Alister. *Science and Religion: A New Introduction*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell. 2010. Print.

<sup>10</sup> Some highly recommended historical evaluations of the relationship of science and religion are Ian Barbour’s *Religion and Science* (1990), John Hedley Brooke’s *Science and Religion* (1991), and Ronald Numbers’ *Galileo Goes to Jail* (2009).

My second aim naturally follows from the first. As I dispense with the warfare model, I will need to define “science.” I find it fascinating that what science is, does, and can do is so poorly understood in a society that so heavily appeals to it for authority. I will then expound upon an understanding of God that is both underrepresented in contemporary science and religion dialogue, and firmly rooted in the classical theism of the Christian tradition. But is this not a thesis on science and religion, rather than merely one that analyzes science and Christianity? All projects like this are limited in scope, and I am not yet confident with my grasp of other religions to risk misrepresenting them. Religion is a notoriously difficult term to define, but it seems to me rather obvious that Christianity is a religion. And if at least one religion is not at war with science, then science and religion *per se* cannot be at war.

#### I.

*“I think that there are no forces on this planet more dangerous to us all than the fanaticisms of fundamentalism, of all the species: Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as well as countless smaller infections. Is there a conflict between science and religion here? There most certainly is.”<sup>11</sup>*

Neil deGrasse Tyson recently wrote a piece for the Huffington Post called “What Science Is -- and How and Why It Works.” He uses the article to convey the importance of making informed decisions through an appeal to science. “Science discovers objective truths. These are not established by any seated authority, nor by any single research paper. [...] Once an objective truth is

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<sup>11</sup> Dennet, Daniel. *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. 1996. Print.

established by these methods, it is not later found to be false.”<sup>12</sup> While this statement reflects the generally accepted public understanding of science, Tyson takes the notion that science discovers objective truths for granted. He quietly assumes it without expending any effort to defend it. What reasoning might Tyson have for suggesting that science *establishes* objective truths? It is left unclear what he means by “objective” and “truth,” so one must ask whether or not the way that he uses those terms is correct. Questions like these are the catalysts for our investigation into the explanatory domain of science.

We should not want science to say things that it cannot possibly say. Such a practice reeks of dishonesty, and it would be unfair to ask scientists to answer questions outside of the domain of their trade. Rather, we should seek to understand what science can, and does, explain. In that spirit, let us ask questions about the relation of scientific theories to truth claims. *How do we know that scientific theories are true?* Theories are proved true via experimental observation. *How does experimental observation prove the theories true?* When experiments work, the theory is verified. *Ah, so why do the experiments work?* The experiments work because the theories are true.

One will notice a peculiar circularity in the responses above. The historian of science Peter Dear says of this phenomenon, “Such is the belief, amounting to an ideology, by which science is understood in modern culture. It is circular, but invisibly so.”<sup>13</sup> With Dear’s assertion in mind, let us reconsider Tyson’s contention

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<sup>12</sup> Tyson, Neil deGrasse. “What Science Is -- and How and Why It Works.” 21 November 2015. Web. 26 November 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Dear, Peter. *The Intelligibility of Nature: How Science Makes Sense of the World*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2006. Print.

that science establishes objective truths. Science deals exclusively in the study of material reality through the construction of theories that explain empirical phenomena. This practice occurs through abductive reasoning, an “inference to the best explanation” based upon a finite number of empirical observations. As the observational data changes and is reinterpreted, the “inference to the best explanation” often shifts to a different explanation.

The history of science is littered with examples of scientific discoveries that make very particular knowledge claims, only later to be refuted by other discoveries. One such example concerns James Clerk Maxwell’s discovery of a mechanical “aether.” Did Maxwell establish the objective truth of a mechanical aether when he outlined electromagnetic field theory after many experiments on electromagnetism?<sup>14</sup> We now know that he did not. He gathered many influential experimental results, but it took only a few decades for the aether explanation to dissipate. There is no doubt that Maxwell stringently abided by the scientific method, but his discovery proved to be of instrumental value rather than explanatory value after subsequent analysis.

Science is progressive in the sense that some theories better explain the available data than other theories. While it may be said that one theory is better than another theory, the mere fact that the new theory is *better* does not make that new theory objectively true. Science actually deals in relative truths, humble knowledge claims that assert that what we know now has yet to be disproven. Our current understanding is better than what we thought we knew before. Experiments since James Clerk Maxwell have provided us with much new

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

information about electromagnetism, but the abductive reasoning used by scientists to arrive at our theories about electromagnetism does not have the power to establish “objective truths” in the sense that Tyson intends.

Intellectual humility and incessant curiosity are the hallmarks of good scientists, and scientists recognize that it is the business of science to change. Science is about *doing* things; it is chiefly instrumental. As Dear says, “[M]any theories are still employed for the purposes of practical engineering that are no longer believed to be true in their natural-philosophical content—a simple example being the use of earth-centered astronomy for purposes of navigation.”<sup>15</sup> In no way should this analysis be viewed as science skepticism or as an attempt to weaken the influence of science. Rather, it is the recognition of the power of science through an appreciation of what science does and what it can do. The instrumentality of science should be valued. Without it we would not have the abundant food, modern medicine, or high-speed transportation that characterizes the developed world.

Tyson’s project is not the elevation of science; it is the promotion of scientism, a term synonymous with the materialistic philosophy employed by the New Atheists. But are there merits to a materialistic worldview? When parsing through branches of philosophy, it is important to define terms and to provide a clear delineation of the thought behind them. “The materialistic assumption is this: The universe is a closed, material system, and that all there ever is or was can be reduced to matter and material processes. The materialist flatly denies

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

the possibility of the spiritual.”<sup>16</sup> Abductive reasoning cannot be used to argue that there are *only* empirical phenomena, for that would be begging the question. If one wanted to argue that material reality is the only reality, then one could attempt to do so. Materialists do that all of the time. But that argument would be metaphysical, not empirical.

Materialism is empiricist epistemology—the branch of philosophy concerning the theory of knowledge acquisition and scope—taken to a logical extreme such that it serves as an all-encompassing, thoroughly pervasive worldview. Empiricism *works* as the foundation for the scientific method. The only evidence capable of being experimented upon with any hope of achieving replicative confirmation is that evidence available to the five senses. No credible journal will publish a paper lacking analysis that has been empirically determined. Science, more so than any other communal project of knowledge acquisition, does a fantastic job of describing material reality. As mentioned before, the rigors of the scientific method allow us to do many things, but this does not necessarily mean that scientific discoveries are the *only* acceptable knowledge claims. I call such a perspective “imperialistic empiricism.” I say that somewhat jovially, but of course the implications are rather serious.

Imperialistic empiricism is not only undesirable, it is self-refuting. When people ask for “the facts,” they tend to be asking for some sort of scientific verification of a statement. This is exactly what Richard Dawkins expects when

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<sup>16</sup> Barnes, Marc. “Creationism is Materialism’s Creation.” 5 February 2014. Web. 25 November 2015. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/badcatholic/2014/02/creationism-is-materialisms-creation.html>

he says, “Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.”<sup>17</sup> But is it fair to expect a scientific answer for every kind of question? The answer to that inquiry is a resounding *no*. This can be demonstrated quite easily. I will quote again from Dawkins.

We come to know what is real, then, in one of three ways. We can detect it directly, using our five senses; or indirectly, using our senses aided by special instruments such as telescopes and microscopes; or even more indirectly, by creating models of what might be real and then testing those models to see whether they successfully predict things that we can see (or hear, etc.), with or without the aid of instruments. Ultimately, it always comes back to our senses, one way or another.<sup>18</sup>

This perspective may seem acceptable to a modern reader unacquainted with philosophy—one such as Dawkins perhaps—, but it is inherently self-refuting. Theologian David Bentley Hart says it best, “The very notion of nature as a closed system entirely sufficient to itself is plainly one that cannot be verified, deductively or empirically, from within the system of nature.”<sup>19</sup> Materialists want to have their cake and eat it too. The scientism espoused by Tyson, Dawkins, and the rest of the New Atheists is an infantile and “sophomoric” attempt at

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<sup>17</sup> Dawkins, Richard. “Lecture at the Edinburgh Science Festival, 1992.” From “Positive Atheism’s Big List of Richard Dawkins Quotations.” 2008. Web. 10 December 2015. <http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/quotes/dawkins.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Dawkins, Richard. *The Magic of Reality: How We Know What’s Really True*. New York: Free Press. 2011. Print. From Aaron Brake. “Richard Dawkins: The Untutored Philosopher.” 2013. Web. 26 November 2015. <http://pleaseconvinceme.com/2013/richard-dawkins-the-untutored-philosopher/>

<sup>19</sup> Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God*. New Haven: Yale. 2013. Print.

establishing a coherent worldview.<sup>20</sup> It is *scientism*—not science—that is at war with religion. The limitation of science to the explanatory domain that is material reality provides science with an abundance of power within that domain; however, we must not forget that science is not scientism. Having established this understanding of science, we will be better equipped to assess the warfare model of science and religion going forward.

## II.

*“We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.”<sup>21</sup>*

I made the claim in Section One that it is not science and religion that are at war; rather it is scientism and religion that conflict. Although scientism is an incredulous philosophical stance, it is more often than not the worldview of atheists in the Christian West.<sup>22</sup> This is not to say that Christians articulate their disagreements with materialistic atheists in a monolithic fashion. Disputes among Christians over what constitutes orthodoxy, a word meaning “right belief,” have occurred since the formation of the early church soon after the death of Jesus Christ. Since the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, there has been

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<sup>20</sup> Craig, William Lane. “Why is Richard Dawkins So Popular? Dr. William Lane Craig.” 20 May 2009. Web. 26 November 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gpJutzOH4>

<sup>21</sup> Armstrong, John et al. “The Cambridge Declaration of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals.” 20 April 1996. Web. 10 December 2015. <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/cambridgedeclaration.html>

<sup>22</sup> Thankfully, there are some exceptions to this generalization. Examples are Thomas Nagel, David Chalmers, Martin Heidegger, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

a tendency for these debates to reduce to arguments over the proper interpretation of Holy Scripture.

The distinctive mode of scriptural interpretation characteristic of Protestantism can be traced to the teachings of the father of the Reformation, Martin Luther. “The rule is: The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel.”<sup>23</sup> With these words, Luther established the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*, meaning “by Scripture alone.” Luther ensured through *sola scriptura* that the Bible would be the final adjudicating factor on all practical and theoretical issues in the reformed churches.<sup>24</sup> *Sola scriptura* is tacitly assumed by many Protestants (it certainly was by me), so is its introduction into Protestant doctrine a phenomenon worth examining? It should be noted that *sola scriptura* is not a doctrine representative of Christianity’s two largest denominations, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. By matter of historical fact, it is also the case that the Christian church operated for fifteen hundred years without it. So why was there a sudden change?

Luther was an academic theologian by trade who found the cloistered life dreadful. He engaged in the Roman Catholic Church’s practice of penance for many years but was deeply unsatisfied with the practice. Already skeptical of Catholic doctrine on penance, he was infuriated by the Church’s sale of indulgences.<sup>25</sup> At that time, parishioners could purchase pardons from the

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<sup>23</sup> Luther, Martin. *The Book of Concord: The Smalcald Articles*. September 2008. Web. 27 November 2015. <http://bookofconcord.org/smalcald.php>

<sup>24</sup> MacArthur, John. “What Does Sola Scriptura Mean?” 7 August 2015. Web. 28 November 2015. <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-sola-scriptura-mean/>

<sup>25</sup> Jones, Jim “Background to ‘Against the Sale of Indulgences’ by Martin Luther.” 2012. Web. 28 November 2015. <http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his101/web/37luther.htm>

Church, and in return priests promised the forgiveness of some of the parishioners' sins. Luther saw the corruption inherent in this practice and became skeptical of the ecclesial leadership.

As a theologian, Luther was intimately familiar with the Biblical text. His disillusionment with Church authority led him to seek authority elsewhere, and he found that authority in Scripture. For Luther, the tradition of the Church could no longer be trusted as the interpretative framework for Holy Scripture. Instead Luther believed that it was Scripture which interprets Scripture, and any rational person could discern the "plain meaning" of Scripture.<sup>26</sup> Luther's novel determination directly rejected the dogma of a millennia and a half of Church history, and it has profoundly impacted modernity.

Luther is famous for composing his "Ninety-Five Theses," a series of statements that reflected on many aspects of the Church he thought needed reform. My awareness of Luther's pervasive impact on the history of Christianity has caused me to write some "theses" of my own in response to *sola scriptura*. The next two sections will be devoted to parsing through the following controversial claims.

1. The incompatibility of *sola scriptura* with traditional modes of scriptural interpretation opened the door to two new modes of interpretation, inerrantism and modernism, which have primarily detracted from the faith.
2. *Sola scriptura* is indirectly responsible for the intense fragmentation of the Christian Church.

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<sup>26</sup> Kimel, Aidan. "Trinity, Eucharist, Tradition and the Challenge of Sola Scriptura." 12 November 2013. Web. 28 November 2015. <https://afkimel.wordpress.com/2013/11/12/trinity-eucharist-tradition-and-the-challenge-of-sola-scriptura/>

3. *Sola scriptura* is a doctrine that undermines itself.
4. *Sola scriptura* should be discarded in favor of a perspective representative of the coherent and long-standing Christian tradition.

### III.

*“Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.”<sup>27</sup>*

Section Two chronicled the emergence of *sola scriptura* as dogma of biblical interpretation for the Protestant Reformers. The five centuries since this revolutionary idea was penned have seen the rise of modern science, and the historian of science Peter Harrison believes that this correlation is no coincidence.<sup>28</sup> Harrison argues that the impetus for obtaining a plain meaning of scripture led to the development of objective theorizing, a process wherein observers pose as an entity that “stands back” from the object with the hope of attaining a meaning plainly evident to any rational person. When it became acceptable to create methods for objectively theorizing about the Bible, the precedent was set for the application of those same methods to “God’s other book”: Nature.<sup>29</sup>

Harrison rejects the naïve warfare model adopted by the New Atheist dilettantes in favor of the historically informed perspective that this new way of

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<sup>27</sup> “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.” 1978. Web. 29 November 2015.  
<http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>

<sup>28</sup> Harrison, Peter. *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001. Print.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

viewing scripture actually served to advance modern science. I mentioned in Section One that taking a “science-only” approach to the process of knowledge acquisition is self-refuting and, therefore, unhelpful. If *sola scriptura* gave rise to a method that is unhelpful when making claims beyond its particular explanatory domain, then one must wonder about its efficacy as a dogma meant to ascertain religious truths.

Jesus says in the Book of Matthew, “Ye shall know them by their fruits.”<sup>30</sup> The fruits of *sola scriptura* matured during a period of history that witnessed many of the successes of science. Those successes translated into the misperception that science was capable of explaining dimensions of reality beyond its epistemic domain. Over the centuries, taking an objectivist, empiricist approach to truth became natural, and many aspects of Christian faith were challenged under the label of “science says otherwise.” Rising skepticism about the possibility of miracles is one example. For good reason, miracles are impossible within the framework of modern science. If scientists were to allow for the occurrence of miracles, the brute explanation of “God did it” would apply to every phenomenon under investigation. Scientific experimentation is not concerned with that class of answers. The explanations occur on two different levels, but they are not mutually exclusive; to say otherwise is to make a category error. It is certainly possible that both “God did it” and “There happens to be a good scientific explanation for the phenomenon” could both be true.

In the case of miracles, there tends not to be good scientific explanations for the phenomena in question. How could scientists hope to replicate the many

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<sup>30</sup> Matthew 7:16a (King James Version)

instances in which it is recorded that Jesus instantly healed people of various ailments? Could scientists replicate a process wherein a few loaves of bread and a few fish were turned into food for thousands? Certainly, scientists could not replicate the resurrection of Jesus, and it can provide no explanation for the other miracles as well. The mere fact that science cannot explain miracles does not mean that miracles could not have occurred; recall that the domain of science is limited. Science does not have the power to explain *all* of reality. This concept is something that many in the “Enlightened West” simply do not understand. Misunderstandings of this sort are prevalent, and faulty perceptions of both science and religion have resulted.

Assertions that discounted the possibility of miracles on scientific grounds spurred the response of Christians, and two new modes of biblical interpretation emerged: modernism and inerrantism. Modernism is characterized by an embrace of what Rudolf Bultmann has termed “demythologization.”<sup>31</sup> Modernists, like Bultmann, believe that Scripture is the product of social, psychological, political, and cultural forces. Christian modernists want the authority of Scripture protected from further advancements in science by interpreting the Bible in a liberal, historicist fashion.<sup>32</sup> They tend not to believe in the literal occurrence of miracles because science cannot assess the reality of miracles. Modernists believe that the miracles served moral purposes, rather than having actually

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<sup>31</sup> Perrin, Norman. “Rudolf Bultmann.” 22 May 2013. Web. 29 November 2015.  
<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Rudolf-Bultmann/article-history>

<sup>32</sup> Cutsinger, James. *That Man Might Become God: Lectures on Christian Theology*. University of South Carolina. 2014. Print.

occurred.<sup>33</sup> Modernists are rationalists; for them reason is equated with empirical facts, and miracles have no empirical basis.

One can easily see why some Christians have responded negatively to modernism. Many believe that demythologization hollows the faith and makes *sola scriptura* significantly less meaningful. If the Bible is the authoritative ground of theology that *sola scriptura* demands of it, then where does one draw the line with the constant skepticism? The response to the rationalization of Scripture was fideism. Like the modernists, fideists also equate reason with empirical facts; although, they do so with one caveat. If empirical facts contradict faith, then the empirical claims must be rejected; faith comes before reason. Thus, *sola scriptura* was responsible for the development of a “reason versus faith” dichotomy.

Fideists are characterized by conservative fundamentalist hermeneutics, and their response to modernism is known as inerrantism.<sup>34</sup> Inerrantist beliefs were codified, beginning in 1910, with the publication of *The Fundamentals*, a series of essays outlining what many inerrantists believed to be the fundamentals of the faith.<sup>35</sup> The term “fundamentalism” in American religious and political discourse is due to the impact that these essays had on codifying the beliefs of inerrantists. They emphasized five doctrinal issues as fundamental to the faith: the verbal inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, the substitutionary theory of atonement, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the second coming of

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Eskridge, Larry. “Fundamentalism.” 2012. Web. 29 November 2015.  
<http://www.wheaton.edu/ISAE/Defining-Evangelicalism/Fundamentalism>

Christ.<sup>36</sup> These stances are tinged with the miraculous and serve to directly combat modernism.

Inerrantism has most impacted science and religion dialogue through its association with creationism. Creationism is a seriously loaded term in modern discourse. When it is mentioned without further qualification in the context of this thesis, it refers to both young earth and old earth creationism. How does one distinguish young earth creationism from the old earth varieties? The strictly literalist approach adopted by Ken Ham and Answers in Genesis is the gold standard of young earth creationism. As mentioned in the Introduction, young earth creationists believe that God created the entire world much like it is today in a period of six twenty-four hour days. Many young earth creationists think that by rejecting the literalist six day model, one immediately rejects the inerrancy of Scripture.<sup>37</sup>

Ken Ham wrote the Foreword to a book called *Refuting Evolution* by Jonathan Sarfati.<sup>38</sup> In *Refuting Evolution* Sarfati makes a series of outlandish claims that are either poorly researched or purposefully misleading. He claims that the diversity of species, all 1.7 million of them, can be accounted for by migration and “micro-evolution” in a timespan of a few thousand years after Noah’s worldwide flood. He claims that evolutionary theory is suspect because paleontologists have not uncovered all of the missing links. Sarfati also does not believe that evolution can account for bird, whale, and human evolution, and he

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<sup>36</sup> Cutsinger, James. *That Man Might Become God: Lectures on Christian Theology*. University of South Carolina. 2014. Print.

<sup>37</sup> “Is the Bible True?” 2015. Web. 29 November 2015. <https://answersingenesis.org/is-the-bible-true/>

<sup>38</sup> Sarfati, Jonathan. *Refuting Evolution*. Green Forest, Arkansas: Master Books. 1999. Print.

believes radiometric dating to be bunk.<sup>39</sup> It is not a stretch to say that vast majority of working scientists would disagree with almost every single claim about science made in *Refuting Evolution*. It would take another thesis to defend that statement, but the interested reader might find *biologos.org* a good place to start.

In spite of all the bad science in *Refuting Evolution*, Sarfati makes one interesting, irrefutable point. He observes that science assumes uniformitarianism. Uniformitarianism is a principle inspired by the geologist Charles Lyell which states that the processes that we observe today have been occurring in much the same fashion throughout all of time.<sup>40</sup> It is an assumption in the truest sense. No empirical study can possibly prove it, and it is indispensable for conducting science. One must take it or reject it on faith. If one accepts it, the compendium of modern science makes sense. Without it, the discoveries of modern science are a perverse illusion. How else might one interpret the evidence for an old universe gathered from glacial ice cores, radiometric dating, the age of galaxies as measured from the speed of light, and time measurements of the universe's expansion?<sup>41</sup>

Old earth creationists want to accept the long history of the universe while preserving the special creation of humans and the historicity of Adam and Eve. They are characterized by their redefinition of what a "literal" interpretation means. The Hebrew word *yom* usually means "day" in the typical twenty-four

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> "Uniformitarianism: Charles Lyell." Web. 29 November 2015. [http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/history\\_12](http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/history_12)

<sup>41</sup> "How are the ages of the Earth and universe calculated?" 27 June 2012. Web. 29 November 2015. <http://biologos.org/common-questions/scientific-evidence/ages-of-the-earth-and-universe>

hour sense, but it is on rare occasions used to mean “an age or epoch.”<sup>42</sup> Old earth creationists argue that the history of the universe could have unfolded like much of modern science describes such that “the ages” fit into the Genesis narrative. Maybe “Let there be light” refers to the Big Bang. The foundation of the land refers to an earth that had cooled. And the creation of animals refers to the evolution of animate beings relatively late in a universal time scale. Even cursory examination of the narrative compared with the caricature provided by modern science disproves this notion.<sup>43</sup>

It is not only scientists who would make this claim; theologians have been concerned with the logic of the Genesis narrative taken literally. Probably the most prolific early church father, Origen (185 CE – 253 CE), thought one would have to be a simpleton to take the Genesis creation narrative literally. He says in *On First Principles*,

For who that has understanding will suppose that the first, and second, and third day, and the evening and the morning, existed without a sun, and moon, and stars? and that the first day was, as it were, also without a sky? And who is so foolish as to suppose that God, after the manner of a husbandman, planted a paradise in Eden, towards the east, and placed in it a tree of life, visible and palpable, so that one tasting of the fruit by the bodily teeth obtained life? and again, that one was a partaker of good and evil by masticating what was taken from the tree? And if God is said to walk in the paradise in the evening, and Adam to hide himself under a

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<sup>42</sup> Lennox, John. *Seven Days That Divide the World*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. 2011. Print.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

tree, I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, and not literally.<sup>44</sup>

The Genesis creation narrative, read literally, cannot hope to align with the incongruous situation documented by Origen.<sup>45</sup> Rather than trying to read into the Bible a “plain meaning,” Christians, on the authority of church fathers, should be skeptical of strictly inerrantist approaches. Origen represents one of many early church fathers who, like all orthodox Christian scholars before the Reformation, interpret the Bible in a traditionalist fashion.<sup>46</sup> The next section will explore traditionalism as a legitimate framework of biblical interpretation.

#### IV.

*“Using the analogy of DNA and the telomeres, Protestantism’s inability to consistently reproduce itself — its tendency to fragmentation and theological innovations — seems to mirror some kind of unraveling of its genetic code.”<sup>47</sup>*

Section Three featured descriptions of modernism and inerrantism, the offspring of *sola scriptura*. While modernism and inerrantism certainly conflict, their conflict is not, strictly speaking, a dichotomy. Rather than disagreeing at every point, they work from the same view of reason: the notion that “reason” and

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<sup>44</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. 1885. Web. 26 November 2015. [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04/Page\\_365.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04/Page_365.html)

<sup>45</sup> Lennox, John. *Seven Days That Divide the World*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. 2011. Print.

<sup>46</sup> Bouteneff, Peter. *Beginning: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic. 2008. Print.

<sup>47</sup> Arakaki, Robert. “Contra Sola Scriptura.” 3 January 2012. Web. 10 December 2015. <http://blogs.ancientfaith.com/orthodoxbridge/contra-sola-scriptura-part-4-of-4/>

“empirical facts” are the same.<sup>48</sup> As long as reason and empirical facts are equated, a reason versus faith dichotomy will continue to be perceived. If empirical reasoning really is the only way to grasp reality, then reason and faith may actually be in conflict. This potential issue was resolved in Section One. A full-blown empiricism—or materialism—is unsustainable as an all-encompassing method of knowledge acquisition.

When the precedent for scriptural interpretation became “Scripture interprets Scripture,” a need for a hermeneutically objective interpretation of Scripture was invented. Even if scripture is divinely inspired, written by men of God by the very words of God, as many fundamentalists assert, people will always disagree about God’s intended interpretation. There can be no doubt that the rampant individualism sanctioned by *sola scriptura* is the foundational, yet indirect, cause for the intense fragmentation of the Church. This is the fundamental problem of Luther’s *sola scriptura*; “by scripture alone” is a meaningless imperative. People are always the ones interpreting scripture. There is no “manifest meaning” of scripture that is evident to all who read it. *Sola scriptura* is ultimately unhelpful as a means of interpreting scripture. Rather than rejecting the notion of scriptural authority, the proper authority must simply be indicated.

The dogma for the previous millennia and a half of Church history was such that the Scriptures could only be interpreted in the context of Tradition. Tradition corrects for the error in assuming that there is one decisive plain

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<sup>48</sup> Cutsinger, James. *That Man Might Become God: Lectures on Christian Theology*. University of South Carolina. 2014. Print.

meaning of Scripture that any rational person can ascertain. Saint Thomas Aquinas, following the lead of theologians before him, wrote of the four levels of scriptural meaning in the *Summa Theologica*.<sup>49</sup> The first is the literal or historical, a meaning closely related to what we moderns call “literal.” Aquinas also considers the allegorical, moral, and anagogical levels, levels which, along with the literal, allow one to plunge into the deeper truths of Scripture. These levels fall under the spiritual interpretative category, a category that is ignored by *sola scriptura* from the outset.<sup>50</sup> Scripture was being analyzed on more than one level for the first fifteen hundred years of Church history. Was Luther’s declaration of *sola scriptura* warranted given the vast historical precedent against it?

The problems with *sola scriptura* considered thus far are by no means exhaustive. In paradoxical fashion, it is Scripture itself which is the most convincing evidence against *sola scriptura*. The Apostle Paul states in his Second Letter to the Thessalonians, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”<sup>51</sup> Paul acknowledges the dual importance of both epistles, *i.e.* Scriptures, and word, *i.e.* oral and liturgical tradition. In addition to this, it is actually impossible that *sola scriptura* could have been an acceptable dogma to the first few generations of Christians. The first New Testament writings were not penned until twenty years after the Resurrection, and there was not a full New Testament canon until the

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<sup>49</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. From James Cutsinger. *A Reader in Christian Theology*. University of South Carolina. 2014. Print.

<sup>50</sup> Cutsinger, James. *That Man Might Become God: Lectures on Christian Theology*. University of South Carolina. 2014. Print.

<sup>51</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:15 (King James Version)

fourth century.<sup>52</sup> It was only after Emperor Constantine declared Christianity legal in the Roman Empire via the Edict of Milan in 313 CE that Christians gained the opportunity to organize Councils.<sup>53</sup> Holy Scripture was canonized during those Councils of the early church, and the Councils were commissioned by ecclesiological bodies that were in keeping with Holy Tradition.

By rejecting Tradition and appealing to *sola scriptura*, Luther ultimately undermined the authority of Scripture. Scripture does not exist without a Tradition that established an ecclesial hierarchy by means of apostolic succession wherein the Holy Spirit guided the Tradition of the Church to orthodox interpretations of Scripture.<sup>54</sup> One would have to reject several of Christianity's most important doctrines if *sola scriptura* were true. Many church Creeds were crafted from deliberations at several Councils.<sup>55</sup> The Councils also established Christ's existence as one person in two natures, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. These notions are not explicitly listed in the Bible; they are known as "inspired deductions." How does one continue to identify as a Christian if these doctrines, along with Tradition, are discarded? Contrary to the precedent Luther set by declaring *sola scriptura*, traditionalism is not a dispensable interpretive framework.

The many pages devoted to displacing the modern paradigm of *sola scriptura* in favor of traditionalism would be all for naught in the context of this

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<sup>52</sup> Cutsinger, James. *That Man Might Become God: Lectures on Christian Theology*. University of South Carolina. 2014. Print.

<sup>53</sup> "313 The Edict of Milan." 2015. Web. 30 November 2015.  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1990/issue28/2809.html>

<sup>54</sup> Cutsinger, James. *That Man Might Become God: Lectures on Christian Theology*. University of South Carolina. 2014. Print.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

thesis if the traditionalist perspective could not dispense with the warfare model of science and religion. The traditionalist perspective brings to the discussion a very specific definition of God, a definition the New Atheists and creationists both ignore. The final section will be devoted to investigating why the traditionalist conception of God is, not only correct, but the appropriate counterweight to a discussion that has been dominated by creationists and materialists.

## V.

*“We are all atheists about most of the gods that societies have ever believed in. Some of us just go one god further.”<sup>56</sup>*

Materialists assert that material reality is the only reality, and the change that we observe is explained by scientific laws which operate in a mechanistic fashion. This mechanistic philosophy is exactly what Richard Dawkins brings to the table in the many books, articles, and videos in which he criticizes religion. Theologian David Bentley Hart describes how New Atheists conceive of God in the context of the mechanistic philosophy.<sup>57</sup>

As it happens, the god with whom most popular atheism usually concerns itself is one we might call a “demiurge” (*demiourgos*): a Greek term that originally meant a kind of public technician or artisan but that came to mean a particular kind of divine “world-maker” or cosmic craftsman.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Dawkins, Richard. “The Root of All Evil.” From “Positive Atheism’s Big List of Richard Dawkins Quotations. 2008. Web. 10 December 2015.

<http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/quotes/dawkins.htm>

<sup>57</sup> Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God*. New Haven: Yale. 2013. Print.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

Dawkins' success in criticizing creationists lies at this juncture. Creationists also assume that material reality works mechanistically, but they posit another sort of reality as well, an immaterial reality. The immaterial God intervenes in material reality from time-to-time in prayer, miraculous healings, or the creation of the entire world. In fact it is this sort of creator God that is a demiurge. The demiurge is not material reality; it fashions the material into a world.

The demiurge is an easy target for Dawkins. The world plays by his rules 99.9% of the time. When a creationist says that God created man as a fully formed species in a garden six thousand years ago, Dawkins takes the creationist to task. He asks the creationist to explain why the compendium of scientific evidence suggests that the universe has evolved. Why also do the mechanisms that we have identified, such as natural selection by common descent, explain this evolutionary process? If you cannot accept these biological mechanisms, are you also willing to discard the biological mechanisms that allow for successful heart transplants, insulin dosages, and pain killers? The creationist response ultimately retreats to scriptural authority; the same scriptural authority that we have already seen is fallaciously ascribed to literalist biblical interpretations.

To their credit, there have been a plethora of Christians who eschew a literalist approach to the Bible in favor of a more modernistic approach in discussions about creation. Intelligent Design theorists like Michael Behe and theistic evolutionists like Francis Collins tend to accept the vast majority of the science, including an evolutionary picture. Intelligent Design theorists tend to

point to remote and exceedingly rare instances of ‘irreducible complexity,’ concluding that ‘an intelligence,’ God, must have interfered to create the irreducibly complex entity in question.<sup>59</sup> To the chagrin of many Intelligent Design theorists, mechanistic explanations have developed that explain away several supposed examples of irreducible complexity.<sup>60</sup>

Intelligent Design theory claims to be scientific, but even surface-level examination shows that it is dreadfully bad science. Science requires mechanistic explanation, but Intelligent Design presupposes ‘an intelligence’ without providing any sort of mechanism to explain its existence. The theory may very well be true, but it is impossible to judge it empirically. This, of course, means that Intelligent Design is decidedly not scientific. Intelligent Design theorists, like other creationists, invoke ‘God-of-the-gaps’ arguments when there is not yet a good mechanistic explanation for some aspect of material reality.<sup>61</sup> ‘God-of-the-gaps’ arguments are notoriously weak and are dangerous to one’s theology. If ‘God’ may be ascribed to some yet unexplained material phenomenon, then it is left available that ‘God’ could be explained away when a mechanism is discovered for that phenomenon.<sup>62</sup>

This precarious situation is avoidable. The demiurge may be an easy target for Dawkins, but it is ultimately a straw man. Dawkins is a rhetorician who delights in the burning of straw men, but he never addresses the true question of

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<sup>59</sup> Behe, Michael. *The Edge of Evolution*. New York: Free Press. 2007. Print.

<sup>60</sup> Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. 2006. Print.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God*. New Haven: Yale. 2013. Print.

God, God as understood from the perspective of traditionalism. Turning again to the words of David Bentley Hart,

The true philosophical question of God has always been posed at a far simpler but far more primordial and comprehensive level; it concerns existence as such: the logical possibility of the universe, not its mere physical probability. God properly conceived, is not a force or cause within nature, and certainly not a kind of supreme natural explanation.<sup>63</sup>

Hart proclaims that the question of God cannot be asked in the realm of things bound by nature; the question of God “concerns existence as such.” God answers the question “Why does anything exist at all?”<sup>64</sup>

Dawkins and another New Atheist, Jerry Coyne, do not accept this understanding of God. “If someone credits something to God, generally what it means is they haven’t a clue, so they’re attributing it to an unreachable, unknowable sky-fairy.”<sup>65</sup> This quotation makes evident the fact that Dawkins and Coyne do not understand that the question of God is decidedly *not mechanistic*; it abhors any explanation of the sort that they expect. They demand a mechanistic explanation because they believe that the *only* true explanations are mechanistic. Fortunately, that is not a consistent position to hold; the assertion “the only true explanations are mechanistic explanations” cannot itself be mechanistically explained. The theme of self-refutation is prevalent throughout scientism.

Dawkins and Coyne mentioned that God was a sort of “sky-fairy.” New Atheists often imagine God as a fairy, a flying spaghetti monster, or one of the

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. 2006. Print.

'gods.' These associations are further instantiations of the demiurge and are representative of the failure of New Atheists to really address the question of God. Hart says of this confusion,

Fairies and gods, if they exist, occupy something of the same conceptual space as organic cells, photons, and the force of gravity, and so the sciences might perhaps have something to say about them, if a proper medium for investigating them could be found. [...] God, by contrast, is the infinite actuality that makes possible for either photons or (possibly) fairies to exist, and so can be "investigated" only, on the one hand, by acts of logical deduction and induction and conjecture or, on the other, by contemplative or sacramental or spiritual experiences.<sup>66</sup>

The creationists and materialists both seem to think that God is subject to scientific investigation and that "evidence" may or may not be found, whereas traditional Christians have not understood God as being subject to a scientific explanation. In the terminology of medieval theologian Meister Eckhart, God is the "ground" of being itself.<sup>67</sup> Reflecting on Hart's work, Marc Barnes says,

How could evolution possibly pose a threat to God, properly understood as the Absolute Giver of Being, who at every moment provides the absolute ground for the existence [of] every contingent thing, every thing

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<sup>66</sup> Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2013. Print.

<sup>67</sup> Harmless, William. *Mystics*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2008. Print.

which does not contain the source of its own present-moment  
existence[?]<sup>68</sup>

Barnes' stance reflects a common trend among traditionalist Christians, the advancement of a very particular kind of theistic evolution that emphasizes God as the reason for existence as such. This is not to say that all instances of theistic evolution avoid falling for the same categorical confusion mentioned above. As long as scientism remains associated with the practical success of science, people will continue to confuse categories.

Scientism may be able to bully creationism or Intelligent Design, but a theistic evolutionary framework conceived with a nuance that heeds a traditional understanding of God is not in conflict with science. Science cannot investigate God because 'existence as such' comes before empirical investigation. It is possible to free ourselves from the bondage of the scientism and inerrantism conflict, but it is a process that must start with the destruction of the fount from which both spring. Once *sola scriptura* is discarded, a return to God as traditionally conceived may be possible.

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<sup>68</sup> Barnes, Marc. "Creationism is Materialism's Creation." 5 February 2014. Print. 2 December 2015. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/badcatholic/2014/02/creationism-is-materialisms-creation.html>

## Appendix

## A Contribution to the Materialist Mythos: A Materialist “Creation” Narrative

*“The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.” – Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden* (1995)*

*Bright 1:1-10*

- 1 In the beginning were the brute laws of physics.
- 2 The universe was without form, and void; and nothingness pervaded all. The laws of physics remained resolute.
- 3 And then a series of quantum fluctuations generated light!
- 4 This light was good, for it was the first of its kind in existence.
- 5 Thus light could be distinguished from darkness.
- 6 Sentient beings would one day recognize the light as day and the darkness as night.
- 7 After the first minutiae of the Big Bang, the universe generated many stars and many galaxies.
- 8 By purely random circumstances in a most obscure section of the universe, there existed a rock hurtling through space. It was the third planet from its sun.
- 9 Its tectonic continental crust ever so slowly moved such that a craggy surface appeared.
- 10 Millions of years ago, a contingent of super-intelligent extraterrestrials visited the lonely rock and decided to bestow upon it life. The spawned life forms were well suited for the hostile primordial earthen environment. ...