

FEATURE: What Nobel Scientists Think about God

PROF.: “Some days I believe in God; others, not.” The words are from a physicist who won a Nobel Prize in Physics – Dr. Leon Lederman.

VOICE: Is it unusual for a scientist to think God might exist?

PROF.: I wondered that same thing when I read Dr. Lederman's comment. So I researched what a number of Nobel Prize-winning scientists said about God. I'll be glad to discuss what I discovered.

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

FORMAT: Tell me more about the statement you quoted a few minutes ago. Did the physicist who said, “Some days I believe in God; others, not,” elaborate on what he meant?

PROF.: Yes. Shortly after winning the 1988 Nobel Prize for Physics, Dr. Leon Lederman told the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper, “There will always be room for God. If we discover all the laws of physics, the question remains, ‘Who made the laws?’ ”

VOICE: I've been told for years that all scientists are atheists. Is Dr. Lederman the only scientist of Nobel caliber who thinks God may exist?

PROF.: Oh, far from it! German physicist Max Born won the 1954 Nobel Prize in Physics for his work on quantum mechanics. Born once commented, “Those who say that the study of science makes a man an atheist, must be rather silly people.”

VOICE: Why did he say that?

PROF.: He didn't elaborate. But other Nobel laureates have explained why belief in God makes sense to them.

For example, German-British researcher Dr. Ernst Boris Chain was awarded a Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for research work involving the ability of penicillin to cure diseases. Chain commented, “The principle of...**purpose**...stares the biologist in the face wherever he looks. ...The probability for such an event as the origin of DNA molecules to have occurred by sheer chance is just too small to be seriously considered...”

He said there needed to be “directive forces” to originate life and to develop it into the various forms in which life now exists.

VOICE: In other words, a brain had to be controlling creation.

PROF.: Yes. Erwin Schrodinger [ER-win SHROH-ding-er], an Austrian scientist who earned the 1933 Nobel Prize in Physics for his pioneering work in quantum physics, expressed a similar idea.

Schrodinger went beyond purpose in the **universe**, to purpose **in people's lives**. In his words, "I am very astonished that the **scientific** picture of the real world around me is **very deficient**. It gives a lot of factual information and puts all our experience in a magnificently consistent order, but it is ghastly silent about all...that really matters to us. It cannot tell us a word about red and blue, bitter and sweet, physical pain and physical delight. It knows nothing of beautiful and ugly, good or bad, God and eternity. Science sometimes **pretends** to answer questions in these domains, but the answers are often so silly that we are not inclined to take them seriously."

VOICE: That's an interesting point. The natural sciences are so objective that they can't tell us what is beautiful or ugly, or good or bad.

PROF.: Yes. And deciding whether or not **God** exists, is **far** beyond the ability of science!

VOICE: There's no litmus paper that can detect God.

PROF.: Right. Some of the most thought-provoking statements about God came from scientists who lived too early to get Nobel laurels. Nobel Prizes didn't originate until the 20th century. If they had existed earlier, seventeenth-century French mathematician and physicist Blaise Pascal certainly would have deserved one.

Pascal believed God reveals himself through what he called "two books." First, God shows his wisdom and power in the things he created – the book of nature. And secondly, God gives additional information about himself in his written word, the Bible.

I quote Pascal, "Let no man...think...that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God's word, or in the book of God's works."

VOICE: That's a new thought to me – the idea that nature is a book written by God, and that we can learn something about God by studying the world he created. Tell me more!

PROF.: You can tell a lot about an engineer or an artist without ever meeting him. Look at a painting or test-drive a car, and you can tell how much talent the person had, and how carefully he did his work.

Similarly, the Bible says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge." (Psalm 19:1).

VOICE: In other words, the order of the astronomical heavens shows the wisdom and order of the God who made them.

- PROF.: Yes. The Bible adds that the book of nature is so clear that the only way people can miss its message is by deliberately closing their minds. The Bible book of Romans says, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has *made* it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” (Romans 1:18-20).
- VOICE: As we examine the galaxies or the DNA, we see God’s wisdom and power implied.
- PROF.: Yes. Pascal added, “God has given enough evidence of his existence, to make belief **possible**. But he has not given enough evidence, to make that belief **compelling**.”
- VOICE: Is he saying that God shows enough of himself so that we **can** believe in Him – but God doesn’t show Himself so convincingly that He **forces** us to believe?
- PROF.: Right. God respects our intelligence by encouraging us to think in the process of discovering him. And he respects our freedom, by not compelling us to believe against our will. Pascal thought this was because, instead of making us robots, God wants us to choose him, to love him. Pascal said that if God showed us all his power and wisdom, that would not produce love, but terror.
- VOICE: So there were a number of outstanding scientists have believed in God.
- PROF.: Yes. Many scientists find that the more they learn about nature, the easier it is to believe in God.
- VOICE: That reminds me of a statement someone made: “Nature is an effect, whose cause is God.”
- PROF.: That’s a good summary of what Pascal and others have discovered.
Before our time runs out, I want to share a quotation from twentieth-century American physicist Dr. Arthur Holly Compton. For discovering what we now call the Compton Effect relating to x-rays, Compton was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics.
Dr. Compton wrote, “For me, faith begins with the realization that a supreme intelligence brought the universe into being and created man. It is not difficult for me to have this faith, for an orderly, intelligent universe testifies to the greatest statement ever uttered: ‘In the beginning, God...’ ”
- VOICE: Well, we’ve covered quite a bit of information today. How would you summarize what Nobel Prize-winning scientists think about God?

PROF.: Dr. Leon Lederman said, “Some days I believe in God; others, not. ...There'll always be room for God. If we discover all the laws of physics, the question remains, ‘Who made the laws?’ ”

Dr. Ernst Chain sees purpose and intelligence in natural structures such as DNA. He concludes, “The assumption of **directive forces**...becomes a necessity in any kind of interpretation.”

Dr. Compton calls God the “supreme intelligence” and says, “...an orderly, intelligent universe testifies to the greatest statement ever uttered: ‘In the beginning, God...’ ”

VOICE: In other words, scientists who are Nobel winners are certainly not all atheists.

PROF.: Right. Dr. Richard H. Bube of Stanford University in California observes, “There are [proportionately] as many atheistic truck drivers as atheistic scientists.”

And here’s one closing quotation from a winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics. Dr. William Phillips said he can’t walk across his church without meeting a dozen scientists.

Brains are not a hindrance to belief in God. God invites us to love him with our minds!

VOICE: Brains are not a hindrance to belief in God. God invites us to love him **with our minds!**

FORMAT: THEME AND CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENT

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