Science, Peace, and Leadership

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Session 1: What is science?

What is science? How do our definitions of science guide how we think and talk about it? In this first session, Dr. Swamidass offers multiple definitions of science, and how the differences between those definitions affect our ability to communicate and navigate scientific conflict.

If we can recognize that there might be legitimacy in science, but it's only giving us a limited view of the world, we'd be in a much better spot.

Key Terms

Science: While there are many definitions, some of which are explored here, we generally mean the modern scientific enterprise, beginning about 500 years ago, maturing and developing into what we see today.

The Demarcation Problem: There is no consensus on a precise definition of what is and is not "science."

Main Points

- Though we have a general understanding of what "science" is, there is not an established and agreed upon precise definition of "science." This is often called the "demarcation problem."
- One helpful definition of science is that it (1) a specific way of studying nature, (2) to find limited and provisional explanations, (3) of how the world works, (4) without invoking God, and (5) in an ongoing community.
- Another helpful definition of science is that it (1) is not the only legitimate/logical way of studying the world, (2) cannot give us a complete view of the world, and (3) is not an anti-God conspiracy.
- A few centuries ago, most scientists were Christians, but Christians are now a minority in many disciplines. In this sense, science is like a house we once lived in, but no longer exclusively inhabit.

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Session 1: What is science? (cont.)

Content Questions

- What definition(s) of science are you bringing with you into this course? How does that affect the way you engage with scientific issues?
- Dr. Swamidass suggests that many Christians view science as an "anti-God conspiracy." Have you experienced this view? If so, what effect has that had on scientific discussions both within and outside the church?
- In what ways does science stop short of giving us a complete view of the world? Dr. Swamidass gives the example of the myriad approaches to studying a sunset. How have you experienced the limitations of science's ability to explain our world?

Application Questions

- Consider the conflicts or discussions around science that you've witnessed or been a part of in faith settings. What was the nature of those conflicts?
- How if at all does your Christian community talk about or deal with science? In going through this course, what do you hope could be achieved through a better understanding and approach to scientific issues?

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Session 2: The Pastoral Challenge of Science

What is the effect of the Church's approach to science? In this session, Dr. Swamidass explores the pastoral challenge of science with an eye towards seekers and students.

We can't ignore conflict if we care about the needs of students and seekers

Key Terms

Epistemological Challenge: How do you know that what you believe is true?

The Scopes Monkey Trial: A 1925 legal case in Dayton, Tennessee in which a public school teacher was found guilty of violating a state prohibition against teaching evolution.

Main Points

- There is a long history of conflict between Christians and scientists.
- Among the top reasons young Christians give for leaving the faith is a perceived conflict between mainstream science and their faith.
- We live in a scientific world, and science matters. Science presents a real pastoral challenge that we can't ignore, and we need to engage.
- Rather than avoiding scientific conflict or opposing science altogether, Christians can directly engage with students and seekers who are asking questions about faith and science with intellectual humility and confidence in Christ.

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Session 2: The Pastoral Challenge of Science (cont.)

Content Questions

- Have you experienced what Dr. Swamidass refers to as an epistemological challenge? In what ways have you reckoned or wrestled with how you know what you believe is true?
- What issues other than human origins have you observed leading to perceived conflicts between Christianity and science?
- Dr. Swamidass outlines two ways many churches approach scientific issues: avoidance and opposition. How have you seen these two approaches used in your Christian communities?

Application Questions

- Think about the students and seekers in your community. How could your church/school/family/etc. engage with the perceived conflicts between Christianity and science and make them feel welcome and loved?
- The "further resources" document available for this course (at carverclassrooms.org) includes multiple resources that are helpful for students and seekers navigating scientific conflict. Consider whether you know anyone other than yourself or the people in your group who might benefit from exploring some of these resources.

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Session 3: Science in Light of Jesus

How does the gospel change our view of science and the scientific community? In this session, Dr. Swamidass seeks to answer how Christians can think about and engage in science faithfully and effectively.

As Christians, we think the gospel matters. We think it changes how we see everything, and it certainly should change how we see science.

Key Terms

General Revelation: As we encounter nature, we encounter who God is.

Special Revelation: God wants to be known beyond science through the person of Jesus.

Main Points

- When asked by skeptics for a sign, Jesus points to the Resurrection. This is how he answers the skepticism of science.
- While we often look to science for confidence, God chose to reveal himself in history through the person of Jesus, who is our true confidence.
- In light of the gospel, science, even when it is legitimate and correct, is not the whole story.
- One way Jesus might define "science:" as a community of people that he loves. The scientific community is made up of image-bearers of God, and we are called to love them as Jesus does.

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Session 3: Science in Light of Jesus (cont.)

Content Questions

- How does God reveal himself through his creation? In what ways have you encountered his character in the world?
- How is this general revelation different from the revelation of God's character and love through the person of Jesus? How
- If science is a community of people whom Jesus loves, how might that definition inform our approach to scientific conflict? What would look different?

Application Questions

- How would focusing on the person of Jesus and the reality of the resurrection rather than scientific conflicts change the way the church relates to the scientific community?
- Who do you know in the scientific community? Are you connected with any scientists, professors, teachers, or students? How could you show them that they are loved by Christ along with the rest of the scientific community?

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Session 4: Promoting Peace in Science & Faith

When our differences seem impossible to overcome, what can we as Christians do to engage without falling into avoidance or opposition? In this final session, Dr. Swamidass details an effective approach that Christians can take to faithfully and peacefully deal with issues of scientific conflict.

Jesus is greater than our disagreements.

Key Terms

Knowledge-deficit approach: A common model of public engagement that assumes that a lack of knowledge is the main problem in most societal conflicts

Modeling: A strategy of leadership and pedagogy that guides others by displaying and living out the behavior we want them to replicate

Main Points

- A "knowledge-deficit" approach to scientific controversy and conflict places ourselves in the impossible position as experts to provide knowledge. This approach undermines trust, and our main barrier to relationship is a deficit in trust.
- The most effective approach in times of conflict is to model seeking understanding without trying to convince. This subverts the "fight or flight" response, enabling real thought to take place, and ultimately leads to change.
- As leaders, we have to be willing to enter conversations to really learn and to be changed ourselves, expecting others are going to be more willing to change as they see us modeling a willingness to consider new ideas and/or change ourselves.

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Session 4: Promoting Peace in Science & Faith (cont.)

Content Questions

- Do you find yourself operating with a knowledge-deficit approach, assuming that a lack of knowledge is the main issue in societal conflicts? In what ways have you seen this?
- Have you experienced the "fight or flight" in issues of scientific conflict? What does that tend to look like?
- How have you seen intellectual humility modeled well in the church and/or the scientific community?

Application Questions

- What could your Christian community take away from this course? Come up with some practical applications, however small, that model listening, seeking understanding, and loving the scientific community like Jesus does.
- In what ways are you willing to change as you deal with issues of scientific conflict? Think about what it might look like to engage in conflict with both intellectual humility and confidence in Christ as you engage others.