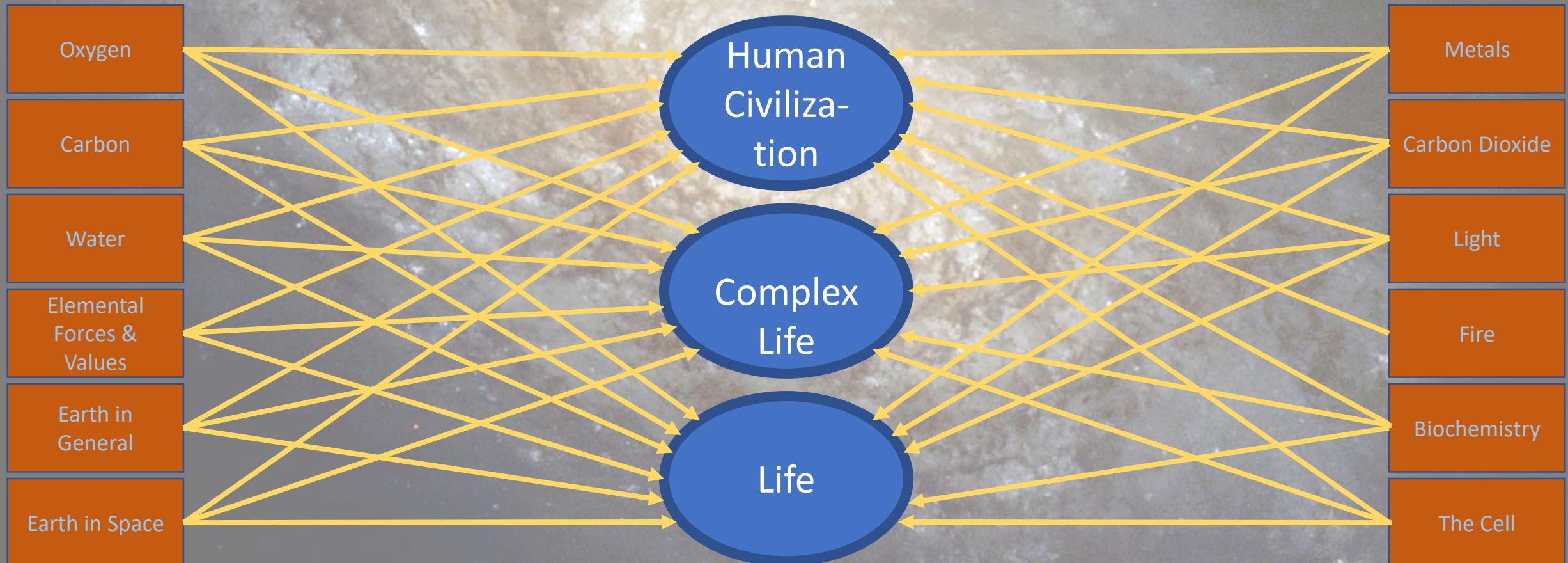




Apologetics 3  
Teleology  
The Materialist Response

# A situation that invites an explanation

A large number of *independent* contributing factors with small or vanishingly small contributing values:





# A situation that invites an explanation

- When we see all these factors, and perceive that life, advanced life and human civilization would not have happened unless they were all exactly the way they are, why do we conclude that there is a designing intelligence behind what we see?
- Is this an ***argument from ignorance***: “Because we do not have a ready explanation for life, advanced life and human civilization, there must be a divine cause”?
- Is this an argument for a ***“god of the gaps”***: are we searching for something, anything, that we can attribute to divine agency?
- **No**, we are pointing out that the phenomena we observe in the universe around us are very comparable to circumstances we observe every day, that prompt us to make rational and common-sense judgments about which situations are likely the result of chance and which required advance planning, design and directed energy

# A situation that invites an explanation

- As Christians, we find it reasonable to attribute the extremely unlikely circumstances that we see around us to planning and design by an intelligence “outside” nature
- But how can many other intelligent people not see what we see?
- If the evidence is so compelling, why is not almost everybody “compelled” by it?
- Some explanations ...



# An explanation: A materialist bias

- The “scientific method” ...
  - Data collection
  - Formulation of a hypothesis
  - Testing of the hypothesis by experimentation and focused data collection
  - Publishing of findings
  - Attempts by peers to confirm or refute the hypothesis
  - If the hypothesis appears to be confirmed, elevation of the hypothesis to the status of a theory
  - Use of the theory to drive further research and exploitation
- ... works best when material causality is the subject and the means of experimentation
- And there is some support for that bias even in scripture: **Deuteronomy 6:16**—“You shall not put Yahweh your God to the test ...”
- A commitment of faith, which is what God has asked, is inconsistent with a demand that God prove himself



# An explanation: A materialist bias

“We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism.

It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is an absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.”

Richard Lewontin, “Billions and Billions of Demons,” *The New York Review*, 9 January 1997, page 31.

- In other words, “It is better to be wrong than to allow a non-material explanation.”



# An explanation: A materialist bias

- It is not that this materialist bias is totally without justification
- For much of the history of humanity, people have imagined that supernatural forces or deities were responsible for phenomena that they could not understand
- This superstition led to the invention and worship of pagan deities
- Progressively, over the course of millennia, natural causes for these supposed divine effects have been found and, to a satisfactory extent, proven
- Most Christians believe that God answers prayer through natural material means
- In the mid-1800s, Darwin and his fellow naturalists proposed a hypothesis that the variation of forms of life had a materialistic explanation, and over the next half-century this hypothesis, for most naturalists, replaced the idea of “special creation”



# An explanation: A materialist bias

- For many aspects of our lives, we accept the boons that materialist science offers
- We live in houses, work in buildings, get from place to place in comfort that results from the research and application of materialist science
- To put it another way, the heater and air conditioner in our home, our office and our car are not there because God answered a prayer by producing a (direct) miracle
- We do (maybe not entirely!) what doctors tell us for the sake of our health because of the findings of medical science
- We decide what to eat and what to avoid eating (probably not entirely!) because of what nutritional science tells us about calorie counts and health benefits
- Most of the tools, appliances, practices, routines and techniques that we take for granted for our health and safety have been derived from materialist science
- Why, then, should anyone deny that materialist science works?



# An explanation: A materialist bias

- Many religious people avoid the teleological argument because it is always possible that materialist science will find a material explanation for the phenomena that we have seen in this study
- After all, it is undeniable that ***science changes***
- But, almost since Darwin published his books in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the trend in science has been in the ***opposite direction***: more and more complexity, more and more specificity, longer and longer odds against that material explanation
- There are some findings of science that are not going to be reversed: gravity will continue to be found to work the way we have always supposed that it works
- If there were a simpler material explanation lurking somewhere “out there,” we would almost certainly have seen some sign of it ... but ***the odds just keep getting longer***



# An explanation:

“I won’t let a God who cares tell me what to do”

- “The reason we accepted Darwinism without proof is that we didn’t want God to interfere with our sexual mores.” —Julian Huxley in an interview with Merv Griffin
- “I was more than happy to latch onto Darwinism as an excuse to jettison the idea of God so I could unabashedly pursue my own agenda in life without moral constraints.” — Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Harper Collins, 2000), page 91
- Would there be such a resistance to acknowledging design by an external Creator if the most quoted verse in the Bible were:  
“For God so loves the world that he wants you to do whatever you feel like doing, and—don’t worry—he will come along later and clean up all the messes you make”?
- It is the fact that the Jewish, Christian and other “monotheistic” religions teach that there is an infinitely powerful God who cares what people do to each other that makes divine intervention and design in the world unacceptable to many people



An explanation:

“I won’t let a God who cares tell me what to do”

- “What would really satisfy us would be a God who said of anything we happened to like doing, ‘What does it matter so long as they are contented?’ We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven — a senile benevolence who, as they say, ‘liked to see young people enjoying themselves,’ and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, ‘a good time was had by all.’” —C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*
- Being a Christian should not be mostly a matter of “thou shalt not”
- But there is no denying that there are some “no-nos”, and putting long-term good over short-term desire is something that many people are just not willing to do



# An explanation: “Professional courtesy”

- I haven't taken a poll, but ...
- Probably, most people who adopt a strictly materialist view of the world do not start their careers intending to prove that there is no God
- In an environment where only material causes are considered valid findings, any normal person will naturally start to think of all causes as being material
- If all the people whose knowledge and skill you respect show that they are determined not to acknowledge any non-material causes, what course are you likely to follow?
- “Methodological naturalism”—the approach to investigation that assumes that only material causes may be considered—may be perfectly valid for what can be known ahead of time to be a purely material inquiry ...
- ... but it will naturally become a way of thinking about all inquiries and all questions that ignores reason and common sense and stifles the search for actual explanations



# An explanation: Going along to get along

- I haven't taken a poll, but ...
- Probably, most of the people who help popularize materialistic ideas ...
  - News reporters
  - "Influencers"
  - Creators of popular entertainment
  - Internet "authorities"
  - People like ...
    - Zane Grey (writer of western novels)
    - Theodore Roosevelt (American President)
    - Ernest Thompson Seton (founder of the Boy Scouts of America)
    - Jack London (American author)
    - Theodore Dreiser (American author)
    - Edgar Rice Burroughs (Author of "Tarzan" novels)

# An explanation: Going along to get along

- I haven't taken a poll, but ...
- Probably, most of the people who help popularize materialistic ideas ...
  - News reporters
  - "Influencers"
  - Creators of popular entertainment
  - Internet "authorities"
- ... though not truly "converted" to materialism, say what materialistic scientists tell them to say, because they want to remain in good standing with their sources
- We do not have to believe that there is a "grand conspiracy" to break down our wills and infect our minds with materialistic poison to see that it sometimes makes sense to regard what we are told not with paranoia but with a healthy skepticism
- We can still give consideration to what "authorities" tell us, yet "sniff" it before we swallow it



# An explanation: Summary

- The explanations we have suggested ...
  - Materialist bias
  - “I won’t let a God who cares tell me what to do”
  - Professional courtesy
  - Going along to get along
- ... are the true motivations for the attempt to explain the phenomena that we observe by materialist causes
- But they are not the reasons that are given
- What are those supposed reasons; what claims do materialists make?

# Reasons not to believe: The infinite universe

- **The claim:** the universe has been here forever, and with an infinite amount of time anything can happen, even things that are almost impossible
- Problems with the claim
  - All the evidence—and I do mean **all** the evidence—says that the universe did have a beginning at a definite point in time
    - Einstein’s theory of general relativity
    - Background radiation from the beginning
    - Measured and confirmed expansion of the universe (“red shift”)
    - Second law of thermodynamics (in an infinitely old universe, everything would have “run down” by now)
    - Cosmic background radiation observed by COBE
  - None of the attempted “explanations” for these phenomena explains anything
    - “Imaginary time”—Stephen Hawking: “In real time, the universe has a beginning”
    - Oscillating universe—must conform to the second law of thermodynamics
    - Quantum fluctuation—there has to be something—even if it is called a vacuum—that has characteristics, and nothing with characteristics can be exempt from the second law of thermodynamics



# Reasons not to believe: The multiverse

- **The claim:** there are an infinite number of universes, and we just happen to be in the one where the spectacularly unlikely event of the development of life, advanced life and civilization happened
- Problems with the claim
  - Even though there are mathematical models that allow for multiple universes ...
  - ... there is no evidence for other universes, and there could not be, because if we could collect evidence it would have to come from this universe
  - There is no reason that even if there were an infinite number of universes all of them would have different characteristics; they might all be the same, in which case the odds remain insurmountable
  - If the multiverse theory can explain why life, advanced life and civilization arose against fantastic odds, it can explain anything; for example ...
  - ... Hitler was not responsible for starting a world war and killing millions of Jews because he was hateful and evil, we just happen to live in the universe where Hitler appeared to be hateful and evil, but the deaths of tens of millions of people were strictly by chance!



# Reasons not to believe: Our unique point of view

- **The claim:** the question—“how did life, advanced life and civilization get here against tremendous odds”—is an illegitimate question, because if the universe had not produced those phenomena, we would not be here to wonder about it
- Problems with the claim
  - This might be a valid response if we knew, independent of the evidence we have seen, that no designing intelligence were possible, but in the face of the kind of effects that we know are always the results of planning and design, and considering the odds against blind chance producing those effects, that is exactly the thing we cannot know
  - Suppose you had been selected to play an “action hero” in a movie
    - You just finished a scene in which hundreds of people were shooting at you (the hero) at close range
    - You ask the director, “How did you produce those special effects; I heard bullets whizzing past me, and saw holes appearing in the walls, and other damage that the shooting seemed to be causing?”
    - The director answers, “Those were real bullets, and all those people were trying to kill you.”
    - If you replied, “Then how did I escape getting killed?” would you be satisfied if he responded, “That’s not a valid question, because if you had not survived, you would not be here to ask me”?



# Reasons not to believe:

## Nobody can prove that it didn't happen this way

- **The claim:** whatever the effect we are considering—life, advanced life, civilization—it will always be possible to imagine some material cause that cannot be disproven
- Problems with the claim
  - ***This claim is true:*** it will always be possible to imagine a non-disprovable material cause
  - Such imagined possibilities are called “just-so stories”
  - This claim is like a prosecuting attorney going into a courtroom and arguing that the defendant is guilty because, even though there is no evidence against him, it will always be possible to imagine some way that he might have committed the crime
- When combined with any of the supposed explanations, this reason is usually sufficient to set the materialist mind at ease



# Reasons not to believe: The modern, materialist “fairy godmother”

- In our materially oriented age, there cannot be anything like “magic,” or a “genie in a lamp,” or a “fairy godmother”
- Therefore, when we need a “super hero,” we must have a material cause
- Such as, an average teen, bitten by a radioactive spider!
- ***How is materialist science as a faith any different?***
- Its “explanations” are no more likely than a radioactive spider producing a “Spider Man”!

