



Science and Faith in the Second City Study Series

Session 1: Can science explain everything? – an interview with Prof John Lennox

There is a widely held view that science can explain everything, that science holds all the answers and there is no place for faith in God. This is the materialist world-view – that all that there is is matter and all that matters is matter. The physical world is what you see or can observe scientifically and that there is nothing more. People who hold this view might be termed materialists or physicalists. However, whereas there may be only a small number of people who hold this view as a thought-out philosophical position, there are many more of us who live in this way and so in reality are functional materialists. The materialist worldview is gently but powerfully challenged in this study by John Lennox. In this study we gain a ‘big-picture’ overview of the relationship between science and the Christian faith. In a series of short videos, taken from a longer lecture, we hear John’s responses to questions that have been posed to him on the theme ‘Can science explain everything?’.

Professor John Lennox is a retired Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford and a well-known apologist for the Christian faith. One of his recent books is entitled ‘Can Science explain everything?’ and is available from the Good Book Company ([Can Science Explain Everything? - John Lennox | The Good Book Company](#)).

The main themes covered in this study are: the limitations of science, the conflict between science and faith, the Big Bang theory of cosmology and Genesis, the nature of truth, miracles and a Christian view of suffering. These notes are intended for private or small group study. Please watch each video clip and then consider the associated study questions. There are 27 minutes of video and so in order to give enough time for discussion it is intended that the session lasts between 60-75 minutes. The video material for this study can be found on our website at <https://www.scienceandfaith.co.uk>

Study Questions

Interviewer: In your view do you think that the idea that ‘science can explain everything’ is widely held, and is it a view that you have ever held?

Watch the video

In his answer John Lennox speaks about both the power of science and its limitations.

- Share together ideas about the power of science – its success stories.
- What about the limitations of science? Discuss the examples John Lennox gives to demonstrate the limitations of science.

Interviewer: There is a common perception that faith and science are in conflict and that religion has to give way to scientific findings.

Watch the next video

John Lennox speaks about the role that ‘faith’ or trust plays in the workings of science.

- What do you make of the assertion that ‘all scientists have faith – (in the methods of science)’?
- In his discussion about Galileo John goes on to suggest that there have been many prominent scientists over the centuries who have also been Christians. Are you familiar with this idea and what do you make of it?

- What do you make of his statement that the fundamental debate is not between science and God, but between atheism (the view that there is no God) and theism (belief in God)?

Interviewer: An example of a specific area of conflict between Christians and science.

What is so wrong with the Big Bang theory that leads some Christians towards the view of (young earth) creationism?

Watch the next video

The Big Bang is an assertion that the Universe had a beginning. Scientifically this is a relatively new idea – previously cosmologists thought that the Universe had always existed. So the idea of a beginning to the Universe is common to both modern science and Christian thought. However, the idea of a Big Bang is in conflict with some readings of the first chapter of Genesis in the Bible.

- Don't provoke a conflict (between Genesis and modern cosmology) when it's not necessarily there in the text. Can you agree with this statement?

Interviewer: How do we know what is true and not true?

Can we take the Bible seriously as a source of truth, especially when it talks about miracles?

Watch the next video

A materialist will argue that what you see in the world is what you get, there is nothing more. In other words, our Universe is a closed system – there is nothing else. Christians will argue that our Universe, and our world as part of it, are not closed systems because there is a God who is over and above them.

- To what extent do you resonate with the idea that there is 'something/someone' beyond our world, which/who can interact with it and thereby be an explanation for miracles?

Interviewer: Some people see a contrast between religion and science when thinking about suffering. For example, religious sectarianism in northern Ireland (where John grew up) has given rise to unimaginable suffering, whereas science has been our saviour with vaccines and medicines alleviating suffering.

Watch the next video

John Lennox comments that science has the capacity for both good and evil and expresses his shame at the religiously motivated violence in Northern Ireland. He points out that Jesus repudiated violence.

- Do you agree (a) that Jesus was against violence and so (b) any violence in the name of Christianity is actually 'pseudo-Christianity'?
- You may wish to reflect on the proposition that extreme suffering almost always arises out of atheistic philosophies and within atheistic regimes. For example, Russian, Chinese, and Cambodian atheistic states perpetrated mass murder on an unimaginable scale.

The talk 'Can science explain everything?' was given in Birmingham in April 2022 as part of the Christian apologetics series 'Science and faith in the Second City'. You can watch the talk in its entirety on our website. The project was funded by a Scientists in Congregations grant from ECLAS, in Durham, and organised by ChaplaincyPlus. This written material is free to copy.