

Theology and Metaphysics as Scientific Endeavors

An Invited Position Paper By

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Editor's Note: The “Invited Position Paper” segment is a unique feature to SHERM journal where hand-selected scholars are invited to write their particular standpoint or attitude on a specific issue. While the position paper is intended to engender support for the paper's line of reasoning and overall conclusion, the paper is not intended to be a simple op-ed piece. Rather, each essay must be academic in nature by deriving its position from verifiable data and/or the author's training and experience as a scholar in a particular field of study.

In this particular case, the author was asked to answer the following question:

“Can the study of theology and/or metaphysics be classified currently or ever qualify in the future as a scientific endeavor? Why or why not? If yes, what criteria or methods would need to be in place and practiced to make them scientific? If no, what is it about ‘science’ that prevents theology and/or metaphysics from qualifying?”

Abstract: This article contends that theology is a scientific endeavor if it 1) makes correlations between humanity's deepest existential questions and the answers provided by any given religious tradition and/or 2) it describes the beliefs and practices of various religious traditions as accurately as possible. The correlations in methodology are made by psychology, sociology, anthropology, and/or neurobiology. The descriptions in method are also collectively furnished by archaeology, history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and other cognate disciplines. The article further maintains that metaphysics is a scientific endeavor if it explains 3) the constituent elements of reality as a whole, as well as 4) explains the presuppositions used to detect these elements. I take a scientific endeavor as one that requires empirical and/or logical verification of its claims. Since my conceptions of theology and metaphysics demand such verification, they should be considered scientific.

Keywords: Science, Metaphysics, Theology, Physical Sciences, Social Comparison

Introduction

THIS ARTICLE ARGUES THAT theology and metaphysics are scientific endeavors if undertaken in the ways I describe below. I believe “theology” should be practiced in two ways: first, by making correlations between

humanity's deepest existential questions and the answers provided by any given religious tradition.¹ The second way is through an interdisciplinary attempt to describe the beliefs and practices of various religious traditions as accurately as possible, using the tools of archaeology, history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and other cognate disciplines.² I think "metaphysics" should endeavor to explain the constituent elements of "reality as a whole" and the presuppositions used to detect these elements.³ I understand a "scientific" endeavor as one whose claims can be verified by either empirical evidence or logical reasoning, whether deductive, inductive, or abductive.⁴

Scientific Theology: The First Way

According to the first way theology should be practiced, the science of psychology may be used to determine, through past and present observation, the deepest existential questions of humanity. Any remaining existential questions may be observed by surveying the major loci in the history of philosophy. Such questions include (but are not limited to) whether or not God exists, what (if any) is the meaning of life, whether or not objective moral values exist, whether humans are embodied souls, and how to thwart the anxiety of an ambiguous human existence.⁵ The historical study of any major world religion will disclose its proposed answers to these questions. For example, the historical study of Christianity (particularly in the tradition of the Westminster Confession of Faith) proposes that God exists (Heb. 11:6), the meaning of life is to love and blissfully experience the presence of God and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Mark 12:29–31), objective moral values exist by virtue of being grounded in God's nature or character, humans are embodied souls (Matt. 10:28), and that anxiety may be thwarted on earth by

¹ This definition is inspired by Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. in 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 1:59–66.

² This definition is inspired by Christopher Partridge, "Phenomenology and the Study of Religion," in *Introduction to World Religions*, 3rd ed., ed. Tim Dowley and Christopher Partridge (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 5–10, doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1w6tb27.12.

³ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:20.

⁴ This definition is inspired by John Ziman, *Reliable Knowledge: An Explanation of the Grounds for Belief in Science* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 42–76 and Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1959; repr., New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 3–56, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203994627>.

⁵ Louis P. Pojman and Lewis Vaughn, *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth*, 9th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 52–113, 287–375, 457–75, 625–69.

surrendering it to God (1 Pet. 5:7) and on the afterlife by committing one's life to following Jesus and so gain eternal life (Mark 8:34–35; John 3:16).⁶ But how can the correlations between these questions and answers be scientific?

Psychology, sociology, anthropology, and/or neurobiology may be marshaled to test, for any religious tradition, how well its answers work in satisfactorily answering its adherents' existential questions. Continuing with my previous example, psychologists can empirically assess whether the Christian answer that God exists is entirely believable to persons in the Christian tradition either universally (which is *prima facie* doubtful) or for a large majority (which is *prima facie* probable). Sociologists and anthropologists can, through personal interviews and observation, cross-check the psychologists' results. If the answer works for a large majority, theology can correlate the existential question to the Christian answer. Likewise, psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists can join forces to observe whether the notion of loving and blissfully experiencing God and loving one's neighbor leaves the large majority of Christians feeling as though life has meaning. If so, then theology can again correlate the question and answer. The neurobiologist Sam Harris—one of the so-called Four Horsemen of the New Atheism—has argued that objective moral values exist, which may be discovered scientifically by determining the practice of which morals leads humans to objectively thrive and flourish.⁷ If Harris' case succeeds, then the existence of objective moral values is empirically verified. Now, the question becomes whether the Christian interpretation of objective moral values is grounded in the nature of God or whether Harris' interpretation that objective moral values need no divine grounding is plausible to most Christians. If the Christian interpretation convinces most of the traditions' adherents, then theology may carry out its task of correlation.

Interestingly, psychology has the potential to empirically answer the question of whether humans are embodied souls or bodies. Neurobiologists have convincingly established the ubiquitous correlation between mental states and brain states.⁸ But this does not answer the question of whether there

⁶ *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education & Publications, 2007), 355; William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 182.

⁷ Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Moral Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 1–112.

⁸ J. P. Moreland, *The Soul: How We Know It's Real and Why It Matters* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2014), 36–37.

is an immaterial mind or soul, nor does it satisfactorily answer the mind-brain problem as detailed in philosophical positions such as dualism-interactionism and materialism).⁹ Recent studies of anxiety disorders—particularly obsessive-compulsive disorder—by psychiatrist Jeffrey Schwartz and psychologist Stephen Phillipson have revealed that sufferers possess the mental power to change their brain chemistry and even rewire their brain to alleviate their disorders.¹⁰ This has been demonstrated by positron emission tomography (PET) scans.¹¹ However, the phenomenon seems impossible on the materialist view, since mental states, as excrescences of the brain, possess no causal power over the brain any more than smoke possesses any causal power over the fire that generates it.¹² Unless materialism may somehow be revised to accommodate these scientific finds, it seems that mental states are not generated by the brain but must be generated by an immaterial mind, or soul. Accordingly, both Schwartz and Phillipson have explicitly drawn the conclusion that their studies scientifically demonstrate the existence of an immaterial mind.¹³ If Schwartz and Phillipson are correct, then correlation between the existential question and the Christian answer may be made.¹⁴

The question of how to thwart ordinary anxieties similarly belongs to the domain of psychology. Many psychologists have shown that spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation significantly reduce normal anxieties.¹⁵ The issue becomes whether surrendering such anxieties to God is,

⁹ J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 78–79.

¹⁰ Jeffrey M. Schwartz and Sharon Begley, *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force* (New York: ReganBooks, 2002); Steven Phillipson, “Choice,” OCD Online, accessed August 3, 2019, <https://www.ocdonline.com/choice-old>.

¹¹ Schwartz and Begley, *The Mind and the Brain*, 88–94.

¹² Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, 80.

¹³ Schwartz and Begley, *The Mind and the Brain*, 94–95, 374–75; Phillipson, “Choice,” <https://www.ocdonline.com/choice-old>.

¹⁴ For a brief refutation of the existence of an immaterial mind or soul, see David Kyle Johnson, “The Relevance (and Irrelevance) of Questions of Personhood (and Mindedness) to the Abortion Debate,” *Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 128–32, <https://doi.org/10.33929/sherm.2019.voll.no2.02>.

¹⁵ See for example, N. Boscaglia et al., “The Contribution of Spirituality and Spiritual Coping to Anxiety and Depression in Women with a Recent Diagnosis of Gynecological Cancer,” *International Journal of Gynecologic Cancer* 15 (2005): 755–61, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1525-1438.2005.00248.x>; Mario F. P. Peres et al., “Mechanisms Behind Religiosity and Spirituality’s Effect on Mental Health, Quality of Life and Well-Being,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 5 (2018): 1842–55, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10943-017-0400-6>; Michelle J. Pearce et al., “A Novel Training Program for Mental Health Providers

for most Christians, an essential part of prayer and meditation. The question of whether or not the fear of death is alleviated for most Christians by committing themselves to Jesus may be empirically answered by psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists. Theology may correlate the question and answer if the aforementioned issue is answered in the affirmative. The procedure I have suggested for the Christian tradition may, *mutatis mutandis*, be employed for every other religious tradition. Hence, theology, on my first definition, becomes a scientific endeavor in virtue of verification by empirical evidence. It is also comparative and phenomenological, cataloging the answers in each religious tradition that satisfy the basic questions of humanity.¹⁶

Scientific Theology: The Second Way

According to the second way, the attempt to accurately describe the beliefs and practices of various world religions proceeds along etic and emic lines. An etic description supplies a third-person, neutral observation of beliefs and practices, which one may consider to be an outsider's perspective. Among other things, the etic description furnishes things that insiders to a given religion may miss. An emic description supplies the interpretation of beliefs and practices given by most practitioners of a religion, which furnishes an insider's perspective. Among other things, the emic description furnishes what outsiders to a given religion may miss.¹⁷ Therefore, these perspectives complement each other and are both indispensable. Providing these descriptions is an interdisciplinary effort on the part of the social sciences.

Archaeology can aid in furnishing both perspectives. Through its discovery of material artifacts, it can (in the etic mode) establish the probable occurrence of religious rituals that were once practiced at various sites, as well as a range of possible meanings for those rituals. Through its discovery of manuscripts written by religious practitioners, it can perform the emic task of explaining beliefs and practices from the perspective of insiders. History can also aid in both the etic and emic tasks. By studying past and present texts composed by outsiders and insiders, it shows how religious beliefs and practices were (and are) understood by both groups. Psychologists can etically

in Religious and Spiritual Competencies," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 6, no. 2 (2019): 73–82, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/scp0000195>.

¹⁶ Partridge, "Phenomenology and the Study of Religion," 24.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

furnish their own scientifically informed interpretation of religious beliefs and practices. To illustrate, a psychologist may interpret a Christian patient's belief in Jesus' substitutionary atonement for the sins of the world or practice of undergoing baptism as the patient's attempt to cope with their own wrongdoings and feelings of unworthiness, thereby gaining a fresh start in life.¹⁸ Or a psychologist may interpret a Christian patient's belief in the afterlife as a mechanism for giving the earthly life meaning or overcoming what Paul Tillich called "the threat of nonbeing."¹⁹ Or a psychologist may interpret a Christian patient's receiving of the Eucharist as the patient's attempt to experience a numinous reality greater than themselves or to gain a sense of belonging to a larger, like-minded community.²⁰ However, psychologists can emically use their professional tools to discern their Christian patients' own interpretations of beliefs and rituals.

Sociology can furnish an etic account of how religious beliefs and practices affect local and global communities, as well as the social needs that religious beliefs and practices meet in these groups around the world. This helps supply what Clifford Geertz termed a "thick description" of religion.²¹ Let me give some historical and contemporary examples. Max Weber famously uncovered the cause-and-effect relationship between Protestant beliefs and practices and Western capitalism. In particular, the Calvinist belief in predestination led Calvinist Protestants to doubt whether or not they fell among God's elect. The Protestant virtues of thrift (Prov. 6:6–8; 10:5), self-discipline (Eph. 4:28; 2 Tim. 1:7), and the performance of labor (1 Thess. 4:11) led many Calvinists to identify success in business as proof of divine election. This situation triggered these Calvinists to "be all the more eager to confirm your call and election" (2 Pet. 1:10, NRSV) by working very hard in business, thereby giving rise to capitalism.²² Peter Berger detected the linear relationship between the Protestant Reformation and the successive emergence of atheism among many cultural elites. The Protestant Reformation significantly "disenchanted" the world by eliminating almost all the Roman Catholic links between the supernatural and natural realms. Such links

¹⁸ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 52–57.

¹⁹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:64.

²⁰ For the concept of the numinous, see Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 8–11.

²¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3–30.

²² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002), 1–202.

included miracles allegedly performed at pilgrimage sites or relics, the magic of the host being transubstantiated into the physical body of Jesus, the sacrament of holy orders (which places an indelible mark on the ordinand's soul that enables him to consecrate the Eucharist and to grant or refuse a parishioner's admission into the kingdom of God), and the mystery surrounding the communication of divine grace in such sacraments as confirmation, marriage, and extreme unction. The only link Protestantism retained was the Bible. But with the advent of biblical criticism and its calling into question the traditional authorship and historical reliability of various biblical books, many cultural elites regarded the last link between heaven and earth severed, thus sparking either their actual or practical atheism. Such forms of atheism were abundantly witnessed during the Enlightenment.²³

Contemporary examples of how religious beliefs and practices affect society include two phenomena in American evangelicalism. One is how the belief that America is a Christian nation—the modern equivalent of biblical Israel—leads to most evangelicals' unquestioning support of American militarism, even when most other Americans oppose such militarism.²⁴ When President George W. Bush ordered military action against Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, most evangelicals blindly supported these wars, even when learning later that the reasons for invading these countries were either misinformed or falsified entirely.²⁵ Another is the fact that 81% of white evangelicals voted in 2016 for Donald Trump despite his apparent moral disqualifications, thus securing Trump the American presidency.²⁶ This phenomenon has been explained by sociologists as the result of most white evangelicals' fear that they are losing the culture war against abortion (which they truly believe is a new Holocaust), same-sex marriage, evolutionary theory, the so-called lack of God in public schools, and other perceived ills.

²³ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 111–13.

²⁴ Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 67–126.

²⁵ Reza Aslan, *Beyond Fundamentalism: Confronting Religious Extremism in the Age of Globalization* (New York: Random House, 2010), 32–33, 95–99.

²⁶ Gerardo Martí, "The Unexpected Orthodoxy of Donald J. Trump: White Evangelical Support for the 45th President of the United States," *Sociology of Religion* 8, no. 1 (2019): 1–8, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sry056>. Cf. Kevin S. Seybold, "A Cultural Cognition Perspective on Religion Singularity: How Political Identity Influences Religious Affiliation," *Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 21–28, <https://doi.org/10.33929/sherm.2019.vol1.no1.03>.

Such topics, especially abortion, are viewed as so severe that the aforementioned white evangelicals judged that successfully battling them warranted the ends justifying the means.²⁷ Trump's presidency impacts—in my judgment, negatively—both American and global society.²⁸

Anthropology can be used to verify or falsify Émile Durkheim's famous verdict that religion is "society worshipping itself."²⁹ Through fieldwork, each belief and practice of a society may be tested for its contribution (or lack thereof) to societal worship. Anthropologists can, therefore, differentiate between those beliefs and practices that are purely about contact with the numinous sans any social contribution and those that, though cast in theological language, play a pivotal role in maintaining one or more facets of society. I suspect that anthropologists would classify a Christian going on a spiritual retreat to meditate and pray as a simple attempt to connect with the numinous. By contrast, I would suspect that anthropologists would classify a teenage Native American going on a vision quest as the theological attempt to integrate the Native American into the adult population of the tribe by assigning him a traditional vocation and ascribing to him the responsibility to marry and have children.

The joint effort of the aforementioned disciplines and their cognate fields will supply a full and multifaceted understanding of beliefs and practices of various religious traditions that is verifiable by empirical evidence. Hence, the second way of practicing theology becomes scientific. It is important to note that the second way is methodologically agnostic rather than methodologically theistic or atheistic. That is to say, while scholars in various fields may be either personally theistic, agnostic, or atheistic, the method these scholars employ does not ascribe to any particular religious belief. The method makes no judgment as to the truth or falsity of religious

²⁷ See Stephen Mansfield, *Choosing Donald Trump: God, Anger, Hope, and Why Christian Conservatives Supported Him* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017); John Fea, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018).

²⁸ See also, Brian D. McLaren, "Conditions for the Great Religion Singularity," *Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 40–49, <https://doi.org/10.33929/sherm.2019.vol1.no1.05> and Darren M. Slade and Kenneth W. Howard, "Responses to the Religion Singularity: A Rejoinder," *Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 61, 65–67, <https://doi.org/10.33929/sherm.2019.vol1.no1.06>.

²⁹ Quoted in Alan Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World: A Sociological Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 69.

beliefs and practices. Rather, the method simply describes as accurately as possible, from the complementary perspectives of outsiders and insiders, each religious belief and practice under investigation.³⁰ Such neutrality further commends the second way of practicing a scientific theology.

Scientific Metaphysics

As I have defined the term, metaphysics can partner with cosmology and astrophysics to understand the nature of the universe as a whole. Part of this understanding is answering the question, posed by almost every religion, as to whether the universe—all time, space, matter, and energy—began to exist or is beginningless. Philosopher of religion, William Lane Craig, has revived the so-called *kalām* cosmological argument originally proposed by the Islamic philosopher, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (1058–1111). The argument’s first premise, “Whatever begins to exist has a cause,” is defended by Craig on both empirical and logical grounds.³¹ Empirically, this principle is “constantly verified and never falsified” in the scientific disciplines.³² Even though physicist and cosmologist Lawrence Krauss has claimed that the universe came from nothing (and that virtual particles come from nothing), his definition of “nothing” is different from the lexical understanding of the term as “the absence of anything” or “nonbeing.”³³ By “nothing,” Krauss means the quantum vacuum, which is “a sea of fluctuating energy governed by physical laws and having a physical structure.”³⁴ Therefore, neither the universe nor virtual particles seem to be exceptions to the argument’s first premise.³⁵ Logically, the causal principle follows inductively from human experience and deductively via *reductio ad absurdum*. Craig makes the inductive case as follows: “Does anyone in his right mind really believe that, say, a raging tiger

³⁰ Malcolm Hamilton, “The Sociology of Religion,” in *Introduction to World Religions*, 3rd ed., ed. Tim Dowley and Christopher Partridge (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 16–20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1w6tb27.14>.

³¹ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 96–97, 111.

³² William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 78.

³³ Lawrence M. Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing: Why There is Something Rather than Nothing* (New York: Free Press, 2012); William Lane Craig and Lawrence Krauss, “Is There Evidence for God? The Craig-Krauss Debate” (lecture, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, March 30, 2011), <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/debates/the-craig-krauss-debate-at-north-carolina-state-university/>.

³⁴ Craig, *On Guard*, 76.

³⁵ Craig and Krauss, “Is There Evidence for God?”

could suddenly come into existence uncaused, out of nothing, in this room right now? The same applies to the universe: if prior to the existence of the universe there was absolutely nothing—no God, no space, no time—how could the universe have possibly come to exist?”³⁶ The *reductio* begins by assuming, for the sake of contradiction, that things can really come into being from nothing. But if so, why is it just the universe that does this? Why do dogs or trees not come into being from nothing?³⁷ As Craig asks, “What makes nothingness so discriminatory? There can’t be anything about nothingness that favors universes, for nothingness doesn’t have any properties. Nor can anything constrain nothingness, for there isn’t anything to be constrained!”³⁸ Hence, the causal principle seems to be confirmed.

The argument’s second premise, “the universe began to exist,” is defended by Craig by appealing to the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin Theorem, proven by scientists Arvind Borde, Alan Guth, and Alexander Vilenkin.³⁹ The theorem shows that “any universe that has, on average, been expanding throughout its history cannot be infinite in the past but must have a past space-time boundary.”⁴⁰ Since all currently proposed models of the universe, including the multiverse, fits this description, it follows that the universe (which by my definition covers the multiverse) must have a beginning.⁴¹ As Vilenkin explains, “It is said that an argument is what convinces reasonable men and a proof is what it takes to convince even an unreasonable man. With the proof now in place, cosmologists can no longer hide behind the possibility of a past-eternal universe. There is no escape; they have to face the problem of a cosmic beginning.”⁴² From these two premises, the conclusion follows: “The universe has a cause.”⁴³ Notice that this conclusion does not establish the existence of God, *brahman*, the Dao, or any other entity. But showing that there is a cause of the universe is a major advance and illustrates the possibility of a scientific metaphysic.

³⁶ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 113.

³⁷ Craig, *On Guard*, 77.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 92; Arvind Borde, Alan H. Guth, and Alexander Vilenkin, “Inflationary Spacetimes are Incomplete in Past Directions,” *Physical Review Letters* 90, no. 15 (2003), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1103/physrevlett.90.151301>.

⁴⁰ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 140.

⁴¹ Craig, *On Guard*, 92.

⁴² Alexander Vilenkin, *Many Worlds in One: The Search for Other Universes* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 176; quoted in Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 140.

⁴³ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 111.

Metaphysics can also team with physics to study subatomic particles. The specific role metaphysics can play is to employ logic in determining whether such particles, once in existence, can or cannot fail to exist. It could also determine whether some combination of such particles, too small to be anatomically detected, make up the human soul. Metaphysics can also team with biochemistry and neurobiology to determine what chemicals and portions of the brain generate religious experiences. Metaphysics can partner with logicians and mathematicians to determine whether certain abstract objects, like the laws of logic and numbers possess mind-independent reality or are simply human constructs.⁴⁴ Metaphysicians can then use abductive reasoning to figure out the best explanation of these abstractions. Do they exist by “a necessity of their own nature” or as thoughts in the mind of a supreme being?⁴⁵ Moreover, using revealing the presuppositions used by scientists to uncover the constituent elements of the world is one task of the philosophy of science, which forms part of my definition of metaphysics.⁴⁶ On this definition, metaphysics becomes scientific because its claims are empirically or logically verifiable.⁴⁷

Conclusion

This article has delineated the criteria and methods that would need to be in place for theology and metaphysics to be scientific endeavors. The criteria encompass empirical and logical verification. On my first description of theology, psychology and philosophy observe humanity’s deepest

⁴⁴ Paul M. Gould, “Introduction to the Problem of God and Abstract Objects,” in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul M. Gould (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1–20. In my judgment, the so-called indispensability argument guarantees the mind-independent reality of such objects (ibid., 16).

⁴⁵ Greg Welty, “Theistic Conceptual Realism,” in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views On the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul Gould (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 81–96; Craig, *On Guard*, 56.

⁴⁶ Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 16–53, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198745587.001.0001>.

⁴⁷ For the opposite view that metaphysics (and theology) can be scientific, see Jack David Eller, “The Science of Unknowable and Imaginary Things,” *Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 178–201, <https://doi.org/10.33929/sherm.2019.vol1.no2.04> and Thomas Burke, “Is Metaphysics a Science?,” *Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 252–73, <https://doi.org/10.33929/sherm.2019.vol1.no2.08>.

existential questions. Psychology, sociology, anthropology, and neurobiology test how well each religious tradition's answers serve to answer these questions for its adherents. On my second description of theology, archaeology, history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and other cognate disciplines can join forces to furnish an etically and emically informed description of the beliefs and practices of various world religions. On my conception of metaphysics, cosmology, physics, astrophysics, neurobiology, logic, and mathematics explain the constituent elements of reality as a whole. Philosophy of science discloses the presuppositions scientists employ to discover these constituent elements. Insofar as these methods are used, theology and metaphysics can and should be deemed scientific.

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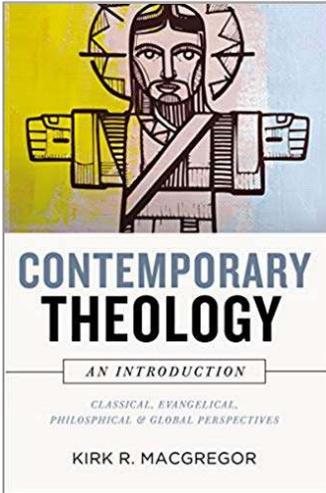
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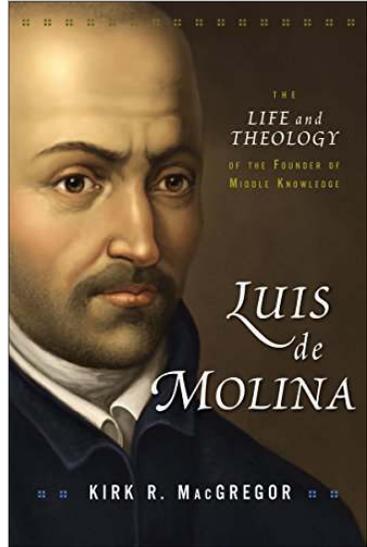
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