

Separating Observational & Philosophical Science

(appropriate for High Schoolers and older)

Michael R. Daily, February 2016

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What is science? When we say, “science says the universe is 15 billion years old, science says man evolved in the following way”, what does that mean, “science”? That type of science is really made up of two things:

- 1) **Observational Science** – Observational science is the study of physical processes that we can observe and measure while they are happening and includes things like experimental data and the ability to repeat an experiment and get the same result someone else did. We Christians love observational science and we have no problem with it – we like it. But there is another part of science:
- 2) **Philosophical Science** – This includes dogma or ideology (strongly held beliefs) and in science it usually is presented in the form of assertions. What is an assertion? The word “assertion” is a scientific word which means “to strongly insist” that something is true. When a scientist makes an assertion he is saying, “I have no data, I have no observational evidence, there are no experimental results that support what I am about to say, nevertheless I strongly insist that the following must be true”. This is philosophy. We Christians reject philosophy in all its forms.

Colossians 2:8-9

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

Dictionary Definitions

Philosophy - *Investigation of the nature, causes, or principles of reality, knowledge, or values, based on speculative, logical reasoning rather than observational or empirical methods.*

Empirical Methods - *Based on observation or experience, capable of being verified or disproved by observation or experiment.*

Ideology - *A systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture, a manner or the content of a thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture; the integrated assertions, theories and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program*

Science - *a system of knowledge covering general truths or the operation of general laws as obtained and tested using the scientific method. Note: the scientific method uses principles and procedures for the systematic pursuit of knowledge using the recognition and formulation of a problem, the collection of data through observation and experiment, and the formulation and testing of hypotheses.*

Its critical that you be able to tell the difference between real science – observation and experimental results – and philosophy in the form of assertions. Accept the real science but reject assertions.

Philosophical science includes speculative ideas about things which may have happened in the past and cannot be observed happening in the present such as the beginning of the universe or ideas such as evolution. Unfortunately, the scientific community intermixes observational science and philosophical science together and tries to present all of it together as “real science”. For example, Darwin’s discovery of natural selection is part of observational science, but Darwinian evolution is not. However, they both are referred to today as evolution (one is microevolution, the other macroevolution). So, an evolutionist might point to the observational evidence supporting natural selection and, in the same breath, assert that this is evidence supporting Darwinian evolution without missing a beat. The Christian then has to help people understand what natural selection really is and show why the evidence for natural selection demonstrates that natural selection is true but that the same evidence does not prove that Darwinian evolution is true. The Bible says nothing that conflicts with natural selection but it says a lot that conflicts with Darwinian evolution!

As a result, a critical skill that we must all develop is the ability to listen to what a scientist presents and separate out the observational pieces from the philosophical pieces. We then accept the observational pieces, reject the philosophical pieces, and fill in the blanks with what the Bible has to say. Nevertheless, remember that the Bible has final authority over all things, including observational science. When the two conflict, the Bible is right and the science is in error and, over time, as science learns more, that is revealed (**John 3:12**).

Tonight we are going to do an exercise to see how good you are at separating out observational science from philosophical science. We are going to watch a five minute video of an atheist talking about science and philosophy. This particular person describes himself as a philosopher who likes to talk about science and I appreciate him for not minding being called a philosopher. However, most of the scientists who will be presenting mixtures of observational science and philosophy to you will strongly object being called a philosopher. Watch and listen to the video very carefully. Afterward we will analyze what is being said and see if we can separate out the observational and philosophical science.

Watch 5 min. Brain Games video. The video can be constructed by downloading the files below from Vimeo and editing them together so that they match the transcript in Appendix A.

CBS news video: <https://vimeo.com/60490785>
Jason Silva: <https://vimeo.com/64078417>
Color and light: <https://vimeo.com/84207602>
Fake news reporter: <https://vimeo.com/75081861>

If you don't have the tools to create the video clip you can just use the transcript in Appendix A either as a handout or as a projection on a screen as a PowerPoint or Word document.

After the video put the transcript on the screen or give a hardcopy to everyone. As a group take one line of dialog at a time and have the group analyze it. If a line is clearly philosophical science, have the class mark out that line of dialog. If the line is observational science, have the class highlight it with yellow or something. If the lines are personal opinion or have no obvious meaning just leave them unmarked. Work through the whole transcript with them and see what result you get. Your result should look something like what follows.

Brain Games Video Transcript With Comments

1 - CBS: *Jason Silva's been called (how's this for a description) a "Timothy Leary for the viral video age". Wow. He's a filmmaker who uses new technology to get people excited about philosophy and science. Take a look at this video from this year's TED global conference – a festival of new ideas.*

Comments on 1-CBS

First we need to research the terms used.

Timothy Leary: (1920 – 1996) Psychologist known for advocating psychedelic drugs. Leary believed that LSD showed potential for therapeutic use in psychiatry. Leary's LSD experiments, and the controversy surrounding them, resulted in his being fired from Harvard University. He popularized catchphrases that promoted his philosophy, such as "turn on, tune in, drop out" and "question authority". He also wrote and spoke frequently about transhumanist concepts involving space migration, intelligence increase, and life extension. During the 1960s and 1970s, he was arrested often enough to see the inside of 29 different prisons worldwide.

Viral Video: A video that becomes popular through a viral process of Internet sharing, typically through video sharing websites, social media and email.

Philosophy: Investigation of the nature, causes, or principles of reality, knowledge, or values, based on speculative, logical reasoning rather than observational or empirical methods. **Empirical Methods** - based on observation or experience, capable of being verified or disproved by observation or experiment.

Science: system of knowledge covering general truths or general laws as obtained and tested using the scientific method. Note: scientific method uses principles and procedures for the systematic pursuit of knowledge using the recognition and formulation of a problem, the collection of data through observation and experiment, and the testing of hypotheses.

TED: Started in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, TED today shares ideas from science to business to global issues.

2 - Silva: ~~Radical openness its huge. It's a universe of possibility. Its grey infused by color. It's the invisible revealed. It's the mundane blown away by awe. We, need to cultivate radical openness as a way of participating and accelerating evolution. Wow.~~

Comments on 2-Silva

Radical Openness: The idea that we are entering a new social era that is best served with extreme levels of openness and sharing of information in order to take advantage of the increasing interconnectedness of our world and relationships. This is in contrast to historical approaches where individuals, organizations, and companies intentionally protected information about themselves. Examples of information kept secret included trade secrets, intellectual property, proprietary information, closed-door meetings, and details of our personal comings and goings.

The Bible recommends Discretion rather than radical openness.

Discretion: Showing discernment or good judgment, the quality of not being noticed by many people, cautious reserve in speech.

Proverbs 2:11-17

Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, ¹² **To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things;** ¹³ **From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness;** ¹⁴ **Who delight in doing evil And rejoice in the perversity of evil;** ¹⁵ **Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways;** ¹⁶ **To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words;** ¹⁷ **That leaves the companion of her youth And forgets the covenant of her God**

Proverbs 3:21-24

My son, let them not vanish from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion, ²² **So they will be life to your soul And adornment to your neck.** ²³ **Then you will walk in your way securely And your foot will not stumble.** ²⁴ **When you lie down, you will not be afraid; When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.**

Proverbs 5:1-4

My son, give attention to my wisdom, Incline your ear to my understanding; ² **That you may observe discretion And your lips may reserve knowledge.** ³ **For the lips of an adulteress drip honey And smoother than oil is her speech;** ⁴ **But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword.**

Proverbs 11:22

As a ring of gold in a swine's snout So is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion.

Proverbs 19:11

A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.

3 - Silva: ~~Today, if you don't have ADD you're not paying attention. You know, we're overwhelmed. There's so much content, and attention is the now limited resource. And so, I don't feel entitled to people's time if I want to tell them about something fascinating. And so, I figure by creating content that's really dense, idea dense, I call my videos shots of philosophical expresso.~~

Comments on 3-Silva

ADD: Attention Deficit Disorder: Medical condition characterized by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity

The Bible indicates that we are not overwhelmed.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

The Bible indicates that attention has always been a non-infinite resource – this isn't new.

Proverbs 4:20

My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.

4 - Silva: ~~I think the ongoing evolution of human consciousness is the ongoing ability of the brain to process greater amounts of information. The evolution of human is to transcend our boundaries. Human beings didn't stay in the caves, they didn't stay on the planet, they didn't stay within the limits of their biology. I think that human beings do not tail their minds to their tools. And when these tools start dovetailing back, then the line between user and tool becomes flimsy indeed.~~

Comments on 4-Silva

The Bible indicates that humans and their consciousness were created, not evolved, so the idea of a continuation of evolution leading to humans being able to process greater amounts of information is not true. The Bible teaches that knowledge will increase (**Daniel 12:4**) but this does not mean any one human can process all of it. Instead we choose to specialize in more and more narrow areas as knowledge increases. People didn't evolve from living in caves to non-caves. Some people lived in caves if it made the best shelter but others never lived in caves. In general humans do stay within the limits of their biology because it is too expensive to do otherwise. For example, in all of human history only 12 people have walked on the Moon. What do the "dovetailing" sentences mean? Its not clear they mean anything.

5 - Silva: ~~I think the brain is an energy saving system – sort of decides what's the useful information and then everything else you can delete. The brain has a mental map, an internal model of the world that it has to interface with. The brain is primed to notice the new, the different – and biologically selected to notice the new. But if we know that, we know that our brain is awakened by the new, then if we want to play with what we focus on and what we don't focus on, and what gets edited out, we can take active steps to perform a metacognitive hack on our own brains. And force ourselves to notice what we never noticed before.~~

Comments on 5-Silva

God designed the brain to be time and energy efficient but that is not the same as it being an energy saving system. It can be demonstrated that the brain does make quick decisions about what to pay attention to and what to give lower priority (not sure it deletes it right away). The brain is designed to notice the new but it was designed by God, not biologically selected to do so. It is possible to understand what the brain is doing and develop exercises that make us more conscious of these processes.

metacognition: awareness or analysis of one's own learning or thinking processes.

hack: to gain access to a capability by cheating or illegal means.

6 - Yale PhD: ~~Color is light and light consists of electromagnetic waves. But we can only see these waves when they're of the right length. Little bit too long and we call them microwaves. Useful for heating up your hot pocket but not so much for seeing. A little bit too short and we call them X-rays. But right in the middle, the part of the spectrum we call visible light, that's the most useful.~~

Comments on 6-Yale PhD

Except for the last line this is all observational science. The last line is not quite accurate. All spectrums of electromagnetic waves are useful. Visible light is most useful for human sight.

7 - Silva: *If you could see beyond the tiny slice of light that's visible to you, you'd realize there are hidden messages in objects all around you. Don't believe it? Take a look at this flower. Can you see its hidden message? Probably not. To you it just looks like a yellow bloom. Now let's see the very same flower under ultraviolet light. The way a bee would see it. Looks pretty different, huh? Ultraviolet light reveals the bullseye nature has provided animals looking for pollen. Let's see another one. That's what we see, and what a bee sees. Its pretty crazy that nature can hide something so colorful right in front of your eyes, isn't it? What's so interesting about this flower is that it reveals how different species evolved to see only the colors they need to, ~~in order to survive~~. For humans it's the part of the spectrum we call visible light.*

Comments on 7-Silva

The first few lines are observational science. Except for the last two lines, the whole paragraph becomes accurate if you change the word "nature" to "God".

Matthew 6:26

Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

The last line of the paragraph becomes accurate if the word "evolved" is replaced with "were designed by God" and the words "in order to survive" are removed. God's designs are often about efficiency, not necessarily survival, but evolution assumes all characteristics today exist because they provide a survival advantage.

8 - Silva: *When it comes to trust, your brain takes a surprising amount of short cuts sometimes based only on what someone's wearing. Its called the expert fallacy and we all fall victim to it every day. Don't think you get manipulated that way? We're about to put the expert fallacy to the test. Comedian Jay Painter is posing as a reporter. Complete with suit, microphone, and camera. We want to see if those cues are powerful enough to make folks believe some absurd news stories that he's made up. Think you wouldn't fall for it? Let's watch.*

Comments on 8-Silva

This is all observational science (i.e. "Let's watch").

9 - Painter: *(to the man) Excuse me, sir (man: yes) Hi, I'm Jay Painter, National Geographic news network. I was just wondering if I could ask you a quick question. (absolutely) Sir, as I'm sure you heard this morning, Texas has announced that they're seceding from the United States. (Is that correct?) Yes. Can I just get your reaction on this? (I'm very disappointed).*

Comments on 9-Painter

This is part of the experiment.

10 - Painter: *(to the woman) Well, how about the bill that is saying that people have to limit the amount of children that they can have based on their income? (woman: I mean if they have a smaller income but they want to have more children I feel like they should be allowed to).*

Comments on 10-Painter

This is part of the experiment.

11 - Silva: *Sure, its funny but what's going on here? ~~You go along with what everyone else is doing because that's the way evolution has conditioned us for generations. Going along with the tribe often upped your odds of survival.~~ And so your brain takes yet another short cut – deciding to trust someone with very little evidence about who they really are or what they actually do.*

Comments on 11-Silva

The reason we go along with everyone else, according to the Bible, is because we love the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

John 12:42-43

Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

Hebrews 11:1-2

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the men of old gained approval.

Going along with the tribe, according to the Bible, often results in the loss of good morals.

I Corinthians 15:33

Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."

It has been experimentally demonstrated that the brain does take shortcuts, using a pattern recognition approach, but the level of trust given from taking a shortcut is also related to the potential consequences of trusting the person. Less trust will be given for the same visual cues if the consequences for us are high.

12 - Painter: *(to the man) Well sir, one more thing. I'm not actually a real news reporter. (to the woman) Did you believe me? (woman: little bit actually, kind of did).*

13 - Man: *I had my doubts but then again because he wore a suit and a tie and the cameras and so forth I did believe him.*

14 - Woman: *I think if he would have come up dressed up in a T-shirt I don't think I would have believed him as much. Someone in a suit seems like they'd be more persuasive.*

Comments on 12, 13, and 14

These are just personal opinions and not science.

So, how did you do? Were you able to separate out the observational science and the philosophical science? Did you also notice that sometimes the words people say don't actually mean anything or are just personal opinions? What's interesting about observational science is that it always points us to God. Philosophical science always pushes us away from God.

Romans 1:20

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Let's watch another short video. This one is packed with nothing but observational science. It has no philosophy in it and it also has no meaningless words or personal opinions.

I want you to watch the video closely and notice the difference in how it feels compared to the first video.

Watch the 3 minute Apollo video. You can download it from: <https://vimeo.com/146677336>

The Bible tells us that pure observational science reveals God's attributes, eternal power, and His divine nature (Romans 1:20).

As Christians we love and accept observational science but we completely reject philosophical science.

Appendix A - Brain Games Video Transcript

- 1 - CBS: Jason Silva's been called (how's this for a description) a "Timothy Leary for the viral video age". Wow. He's a filmmaker who uses new technology to get people excited about philosophy and science. Take a look at this video from this year's TED global conference – a festival of new ideas.
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Definitions

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- Viral Video:** A video that becomes popular through a viral process of Internet sharing, typically through video sharing websites, social media and email.
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- TED:** Started in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, TED today shares ideas from a broad spectrum — from science to business to global issues — in more than 100 languages.
- Radical Openness:** The idea that we are entering a new social era that is best served with extreme levels of openness and sharing of information in order to take advantage of the increasing interconnectedness of our world and relationships. This is in contrast to historical approaches where individuals, organizations, and companies intentionally protected information about themselves. Examples of information kept secret included trade secrets, intellectual property, proprietary information, closed-door meetings, and details of our personal comings and goings.
- ADD:** Attention Deficit Disorder: A medical condition characterized by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity
- metacognition:** Awareness or analysis of one's own learning or thinking processes.
- hack:** To gain access to a capability by cheating or use of illegal means.

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Separating Observational & Philosophical Science*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Colossians 2:8-9, John 3:12*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Proverbs 2:11-17, Proverbs 3:21-24, Proverbs 5:1-4*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Proverbs 11:22, Proverbs 19:11*

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THEME: *Separating Observational & Philosophical Science*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Corinthians 10:13*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Proverbs 4:20, Daniel 12:4*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Matthew 6:26*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *John 12:42-43, Hebrews 11:1-2*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Corinthians 15:33*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Romans 1:20*

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How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?