

Refutation of “Science Saved My Soul”

A critique by Bill Fortenberry

There is a video circulating the internet under the title: Science Saved My Soul. It is an attempt by an atheist to explain away his need for God. I have obtained a transcript of the monologue and typed out a few comments on errors made by the author. Here is a copy of the transcript along with my comments which are included in brackets and bold type. Please let me know if any part of my comments needs further clarification.

Science Saved My Soul Transcript

Three summers ago, I was staying in a caravan a long way from the nearest city. It was usually pitch black at night. I had given my word that I would not smoke inside, so at 1 a.m. I stepped outside for a cigarette.

After a few minutes of standing in the darkness, I realized that I could see my hand quite clearly—something I’d noticed that I could not do on previous nights—so I looked up, expecting to see the glow of the full moon, but the moon was nowhere in sight.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC FROM JOHN MURPHY'S "THE SURFACE OF THE SUN" BEGINS]

Instead, there was a long glowing cloud directly overhead. The Romans called it the Via Galactica (the Road of Milk); today we call it the Milky Way. For those who missed the lesson at school that day, the basic facts are these:

* Remembering that 1 light year is equivalent to 6 trillion miles, our galaxy has a total diameter of somewhere around 100 thousand light years.

* Our Sun is located towards the edge of one of the galaxy’s spiral arms—about 26 thousand light years out from the central bulge of the galaxy. It takes 200 to 250 million years for the Sun to complete one orbit of the central bulge.

* Surrounding the galaxy, above and below the disc in a spherical halo, there are approximately 200 globular clusters which may contain up to a million stars each. The Milky Way itself contains 200 billion stars, give or take.

These numbers are essential to understanding what a galaxy is, but when contemplating them, some part of the human mind protests that it cannot be so. Yet an examination of the evidence brings you to the conclusion that it is. And if you take that conclusion out on a clear dark night and look up, you might see something that will change your life.

This is what a galaxy looks like. From the inside. From the suburbs of our Sun.

Through binoculars, for every star you can see with your naked eye you can see 100 around it, all suspended in a gray blue mist. But through a modest telescope, if you wait for your eyes to adjust to the dark and get the focus just right... you will see that mist for what it really is: More stars. Like dust, fading into what tastes like infinity.

But you've got to have the knowledge. Seeing is only half of it.

That night three years ago, I knew a small part of what's out there—the kinds of things, the scale of things, the age of things, the violence and destruction, appalling energy, hopeless gravity, and the despair of distance—but I feel safe, because I know my world is protected by the very distance that others fear. It's like the universe screams in your face, "Do you know what I am? How grand I am? How old I am? Can you even comprehend what I am? What are you, compared to me?" And when you know enough science, you can just smile up at the universe and reply, "Dude, I am you."

[Violence requires malicious intent. For example, buildings which are brought down by explosives for the purpose of raising new ones cannot be said to have been destroyed by violence while the destruction of the same building with the same explosives by group desiring to bring terror would be described as an act of violence. Violence has nothing to do with the amount of physical force employed. That the author used this term is an admission that he sees God in the universe. Yes, he describes God as having malicious intent, but that does not change the fact that he cannot help but see the presence of God in the heavens. The same could be said of the terms "destruction" "appalling" "hopeless" and "despair" these terms are not descriptions of things but of the supposed nature of a being.]

When I looked at the galaxy that night, I knew the faintest twinkle of starlight was a real connection between my comprehending eye along a narrow beam of light to the surface of another sun. The photons my eyes detect (the light I see, the energy with which my nerves interact) came from that star. I thought I could never touch it, yet something from it crosses the void and touches me. I might never have known. My eyes saw only a tiny point of light, but my mind saw so much more.

[This is not exactly true. Energy cannot really be said to come from a particular object but rather to pass through it. The energy from the stars, for example, passes through the atmosphere before it reaches our eyes, but to do so, it is absorbed by the atoms of the atmosphere, utilized to perform a particular task, modified by that use and then sent out again when it's use for that purpose has been exhausted. Thus the light which the author saw could just as easily have been said to come from the atmosphere.]

I see the invisible bursts of gamma radiation from giant stars converting into pure energy by their own mass. The flashes that flashed from the far side of the universe long before Earth had even formed. I can see the invisible microwave glow of the background radiation leftover from the Big Bang. I see stars drifting aimlessly at hundreds of kilometers per second, and the space-time curving around them. I can even see millions of years into the future.

[This is incorrect in many ways.]

1. Matter cannot be converted into energy. It just releases stored energy as it changes from one state of matter to another. For example, the harnessing of energy from steam does not decrease the amount of water it merely decreases the amount of energy stored in that water.

2. If the background radiation were really from the big bang, then we wouldn't be able to observe it. The background radiation is supposed to have traveled to us at the speed of light from the farthest reaches of the universe, but the universe is expanding at a rate much slower than the speed of light. Therefore, this "initial light" from the edge of the universe should have passed us a very long time ago.

3. There isn't a single star which drifts "aimlessly" through space. Every single object in the universe is following a path established for it by the combined gravitational effect of every other object. If the paths of the stars were aimless, then we would not have been able to navigate by them for the entirety of our history.

4. No one has observed the curving of space-time. That's why it's categorized as theoretical physics. The curvature of space-time and even the supposed relationship between the two is merely a mathematical possibility.]

That blue twinkle will blow up one day, sterilizing any nearby solar systems in an apocalypse that makes the wrath of human gods seem pitiful by comparison—yet it was from such destruction that I was formed. Stars must die so that I can live.

[Predicting that a star will become a supernova if it is given enough time is like predicting that a record in the Guinness Book of Records will eventually be surpassed. Such predictions reveal more of an understanding of the past or the present than a vision of the future.

Furthermore, no one has ever observed the formation of anything from a supernova other than a supernova. The idea that a supernova could be the birth of a planetary system is pure speculation.

I stepped out of a supernova... And so did you.

[FADE TO BLACK DURING SIX SECOND PAUSE]

In light of this inarguable fact (this hard-earned knowledge, this partial but informative truth), what place then in the 21st century and beyond for the magical claims of organized religion?

[If it is inarguable, then it is not science. Science is the answering of challenges through reason and observation. Once a position becomes immune to challenges, it ceases to be scientific. It is then relegated to the realm of superstition reserved for those ideas that are asserted as truth regardless of reason and observation.]

["THE SURFACE OF THE SUN" INSTRUMENTAL FADES OUT, TRIBAL DRUM BEAT BEGINS]

The first religions were primitive by any definition. For reasons of limited population, communication, and plain old geography, they never grew to be anything other than a local concern. But religions mutate in time and grow in sophistication as each generation of holy men learn what works and what doesn't. What makes people obedient and what causes rebellion. What ideas people can easily escape and which will haunt them until they have to pray just to stop the nagging fear.

[The claim that the first religions were primitive is redundant. Primitive simply means that which is first, so the author is saying that the first religions were the first religions. This is admittedly correct, but the fact that something is first does not in anyway explain why it must be a concern.]

Furthermore, the author's own admission that religions mutate and grow indicates that the first religions may have been very good religions indeed which greatly benefited mankind but were later corrupted by the wicked desires of those in positions of leadership.]

When populations grew due to the slow but steady growth of knowledge, as if confronted by a bumper harvest, the religions went into an arms race with each other. From gods of wind and thunder and sea, the threats, incentives, and claims of power escalate until every dominant organized religion has a god that is all-powerful, all-loving, all-seeing, and words like "infinity" and "eternity" are deployed cheaply while all other words are open to abuse until they mean exactly what the religions want them to mean.

[Population growth is not directly related to a society's level of knowledge. If this were true, then Japan's population would not be decreasing. There are only three things which directly affect a society's population level – birth rate, death rate and travel.]

Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism and Taoism are just four of many dominant and organized religions that do not have an all-powerful, all-loving and all seeing god.

The changing of definitions has been a prominent component of atheistic regimes. For example, this practice was employed by every historical leader of the socialist movement from its beginnings with Babeuf and the French Revolution to the works of Marx and Engels to the practical application of national, socialist policy by Joseph Stalin.]

That night under the Milky Way, I who experienced it cannot call the experience a religious experience, for I know it was not religious in any way. I was thinking about facts and physics, trying to visualize what is, not what I would like there to be. There's no word for such experiences that come through scientific and not mystical revelation. The reason for that is that every time someone has such a [moment of clarity], religion steals it simply by saying, "Ahh, you had a religious experience." And spiritualists will pull the same ****. And both camps get angry when an atheist like me tells you that I only ever had these experiences after rejecting everything supernatural. But I do admit that after such experiences (the moments when reality

hits me like a winning lottery ticket) I often think about religion... and how lucky I am that I am not religious. You want to learn something about God? Okay, this is one galaxy.

[The act of visualization can only tell us what we want to be true. It is observation that tells us what is really there, and as the author himself already stated, "Seeing (observation) is only half" of what he is describing the rest comes from some other source of knowledge.]

If God exists, God made this. Look at it. Face it. Accept it. Adjust to it, because this is the truth and it's probably not going to change very much. This is how God works. God would probably want you to look at it. To learn about it. To try to understand it. But if you can't look—if you won't even try to understand—what does that say about your religion? As Bishop Lancelot Andrewes once said, "The nearer the church, the further from God."

[This is not entirely accurate. It is true that if God exists, then He must have created everything; but that would not necessarily mean that He created it in the same manner in which a given individual might believe that it was created.]

[TRIBAL DRUM BEAT ENDS]

Maybe you need to run. Away from the mosque. Away from the church. Away from the priests and the Imams. Away from the Books to have any chance of finding God. Squeeze a fraction of a galaxy into your mind and then you'll have a better idea of what you're looking for. To even partially comprehend the scale of a single galaxy is to almost disappear. And when you remember all the other galaxies, you shrink 100 billion times smaller still—but then you remember what you are. The same facts that made you feel so insignificant also tell you how you got here. It's like you become more real—or maybe the universe becomes more real. You suddenly fit. You suddenly belong. You do not have to bow down. You do not have to look away. In such moments, all you have to do is remember to keep breathing.

[This is correct. The facts about the size of the universe do tell us quite a bit about how it all got there.]

[MUSIC FROM JOHN MURPHY'S "KANADA'S DEATH, PT. 2 (ADAGIO IN D MINOR)" BEGINS]

The body of a newborn baby is as old as the cosmos. The form is new and unique, but the materials are 13.7 billion years old, processed by nuclear fusion in stars, fashioned by electromagnetism. Cold words for amazing processes. And that baby was you. Is you. You're amazing. Not only alive, but with a mind. What fool would exchange this for every winning lottery ticket ever drawn? When I compare what scientific knowledge has done for me and what religion tried to do to me, I sometimes literally shiver.

[This contradicts the author's previous statements about matter and energy being interchangeable. This also ignores the immaterial nature of human existence. Life is more than just a body. Nearly every organ of a dead body can be placed in a living body and continue functioning, and science can keep the body and the brain alive long after the

individual has died, but they cannot reanimate that dead body. There is more to life than just the right components in the right place.]

Religions tell children they might go to hell and they must believe, while science tells children they came from the stars and presents reasoning they can believe. I've told plenty of young kids about stars and atoms and galaxies and the Big Bang and I have never seen fear in their eyes—only amazement and curiosity. They want more. Why do kids swim in it and adults drown in it? What happens to reality between our youngest years and adulthood? Could it be that someone promised us something so beautiful that our universe seems dull, empty, even frightening by comparison? It might still be made by a Creator of some kind but religion has made it look ugly. Religion paints everything not of itself as unholy and sinful while it beautifies and dignifies its errors, lies, and bigotry (like a pig wearing the finest robes). In its efforts to stop us facing reality, religion has become the reality we cannot face. Look at what religion has made us do, to ourselves and to each other. Religion stole our love and our loyalty and gave it to a book—to a telepathic father that tells his children that love means kneeling before him. Now I'm not a parent, but I say that those kids are gonna turn out messed up—it cannot be healthy for a child or a species.

[There are many religions that do not teach anything about heaven or hell, and there are many religions that present the universe as beautiful and amazing. Religions also beautify many things that cannot be described as “errors, lies, and bigotry” such as love for one’s enemies. Nor is there anything inherent to the act of kneeling before a superior that is dangerous to one’s health.]

We were told long ago and for a long time that there was only the Earth—that we were the center of everything. That turned out to be wrong. We still haven't fully adjusted. We're still in shock. The universe is not what we expected it to be. It's not what they told us it would be. This cosmic understanding is all new to us. But there's nothing to fear. We're still special. We're still blessed. And there might yet be a heaven, but it isn't going to be perfect. And we're going to have to build it ourselves.

[There are several errors in this paragraph.

- 1. The microwave background radiation that the author mentioned earlier proved that the earth is at the center of everything. The current, “official” scientific explanation of our position in the universe is that we are at the center just like everything else.**
- 2. Special means unique. Therefore, if the earth is the only center of the universe, then we are still special, but if every other point in space is also the center, then we cannot be special. By the same token, if life is no more than just the right collection of physical components, then we cannot be said to be special because those same physical components have been around since the beginning of time. We would just be another random compilation of them. If, however, there is a unique metaphysical aspect to life such as the eternal soul taught by many religions, then each human being could be said to be special.**

3. One cannot receive a blessing from natural processes. A blessing implies the bestowment of favor, but natural processes cannot be said to bestow favor upon anyone.]

If I have something that could be called a soul that needed saving, then science saved it... from religion.

[ENDING CREDITS AND COMMENTS]