

# Study Questions for Midterm Exam

28960 Christian Doctrine and the Natural Sciences

Dr. William Dembski, Fall 2005

The midterm exam, which will take place October 5, 2005 from 12:30 - 1:20 pm, will cover all of Phillip Johnson's *Reason in the Balance*, up through page 214 of Ben Wiker's *Moral Darwinism*, and up through page 106 of Henry Schaefer's *Science and Christianity*. Note that the questions (roughly) track the order of presentation in the respective books.

## JOHNSON:

1. What is naturalism? How does metaphysical naturalism differ from methodological naturalism? (Note especially the appendix of Johnson's book.)
2. Is the opposite of naturalism supernaturalism? Explain.
3. What is the "blind watchmaker thesis"? Who is the principal proponent of that thesis?
4. Who is Dean Kenyon? Why is he significant in the cultural controversy over naturalism?
5. What is America's established religious philosophy? What role does modernism have in it? What are the five points that according to Johnson render modernism so appealing?
6. Why does liberalism tend toward relativism and permissiveness?
7. What is theistic realism? Is this a legitimate Christian option? Is it the only Christian option? Why?
8. Who is Stephen Hawking? What does he mean by a theory of everything?
9. What is the mind-body problem? How did Francis Crick resolve the mind-body problem? Is his resolution of it an acceptable Christian option? Explain.
10. Briefly outline Darwin's theory of evolution? What are some of the scientific problems with this theory? Is this theory reconcilable with Christian theism?
11. What is theistic naturalism? Who are some of its principal defenders? What is its appeal? What are its faults?
12. Theology used to be called the queen of the sciences? Does Johnson want to reinstate theology in that role? What are his reasons one way or the other? Is it a good idea for

theology to become “the governing discipline” of all other disciplines? What form might this take?

13. Who is Richard Rorty? Describe briefly his philosophy of neo-pragmatism. Does this philosophy admit that there is an objective reality accessible to everyone? Why or why not?
14. What is the difference between reductionism and emergence?
15. How does natural law in the sciences differ from natural law in ethics? How can natural law in ethics be grounded in Christian theism and God’s design-plan for humanity?
16. What is the naturalistic alternative to natural law? Where does this alternative lead?
17. How does an educational philosophy based on naturalism differ from one based on theistic realism?
18. What is viewpoint discrimination? Compare the academic freedom cases of Phillip Bishop and Henry Schaefer? Why did Schaefer fare better than Bishop?
19. What is a “culture war”? Is the Carper-Sears case a model of how to resolve the culture war, at least in some limited instances? Explain.
20. What is Martin Gardner’s distinction between “loyal liars” and “truthful traitors”? Are these the only options for a Christian minister who is intellectually honest? Explain.

#### WIKER:

1. Who were Epicurus and Lucretius? How do they relate to one another? How were Democritus and Leucippus precursors to them?
2. How did Epicurus arrive at this materialist philosophy? In particular, what two concerns/worries caused him to dispense with the gods?
3. Was Epicurus himself a hedonist? Why has Epicurus’s materialism lead to hedonism?
4. What is an atom? What is atomism? Does Epicurean materialism require an atomistic natural philosophy?
5. What is the doctrine of the plurality of worlds? How does it flow out of Epicurean materialism? Is a “many-worlds” doctrine compatible with Christianity?
6. Was Epicurus a strict atheist? Explain.

7. How does Epicurean piety differ from Christian piety?
8. How do you explain Epicurus's dictum that the greatest pleasure is the absence of pain? Do modern Epicureans accept this dictum? Why or why not?
9. Describe the role of pleasure, pain, and utility within Epicurean ethics. What makes something wrong in Epicurean ethics?
10. What is the Epicurean "swerve"? How did Epicurus avoid strict determinism with it? Why did he want to avoid strict determinism?
11. Does a cosmology imply a morality and vice versa? Explain.
12. What is the title of Lucretius's poem in which he presented Epicurean philosophy? Why did he put this philosophy in the form of a poem?
13. Describe some of the parallels between Lucretius's account of organic evolution and that of Darwin.
14. Which came first, Epicureanism or Christianity? How did Christianity respond to Epicureanism?
15. Do Christianity and Epicureanism treat the soul differently? How so?
16. For Epicureanism, is nature moral or amoral? Are there any intrinsically evil actions within Epicureanism?
17. Who was William of Ockham? What was his philosophy of nominalism? How did it feed into Epicurean materialism?
18. Describe the significance of Isaac Newton in the rise of modern materialism? How did his mechanistic conception of the universe still allow for God to be a creator, designer, and mechanic? Elaborate on these three roles of God. How did these roles eventually get displaced, so that modern scientists now regard God as having no relevance to scientific inquiry?
19. Who was Polybius? What was his view of the role of religion? Is this view of religion compatible with Christian faith? Describe Thomas Hobbes's Polybian approach to religion.
20. Materialists have, according to Phil Johnson, a "two-platoon strategy" for dealing with theists. What is that strategy? Illustrate it. How is this strategy Machiavellian?
21. Describe Hobbes's "state of nature." How does it compare with Lucretius's Epicurean Edenic State?

22. What was the locus of sovereignty for Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau? (Choose from democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy.) What was the nature of law within their political systems? Was it natural law or positive law? Explain.
23. Describe Spinoza's view of religion? How was religion to be purified? What was his view of miracles? Why did he take this view?
24. What is deism? How does deism treat miracles? Was Thomas Jefferson a deist? What did he do with the New Testament?

SCHAEFER:

1. Who was Subrahmanyam Chandrasekhar? Did he find peace and contentment through science? Why or why not?
2. Why is it that science as we know it today developed within a Christian environment?
3. Who were Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell? Did their science prevent them from being good Christians? Did their Christianity hinder their science? Explain.
4. Why do you think that most of the contemporary Christian scientists whom Schaefer mentions are theistic evolutionists and resist intelligent design? How do they make their peace with evolution and their Christian faith?
5. Who is Steven Weinberg? What is his view of religion? Is Weinberg entirely happy with his materialism?
6. Why is it significant that the universe had a beginning? Does the Big Bang help or hinder Christian faith? Explain.
7. Why is Stephen Hawking so famous? Is he a Christian? Does he understand Christianity?
8. What are "anthropic constraints" and why do some people take them as evidence for God creating the universe?
9. Who is Richard Dawkins? What is his claim to fame? What is the "Richard Dawkins Award"? Who awards it and for what?
10. What are Stephen Hawking's requirements for a good scientific theory? What do you think of those requirements -- should they be revised or modified? When applied to evolutionary theory, what do those requirements tell us?