

## Something In the Air: Science's Supposed Superiority to Religion – 2

To borrow a line from Vox Day, this pair of sentences is so superlatively wrong that it will require the development of esoteric mathematics operating simultaneously in multiple dimensions fully to comprehend the orders of magnitude of its wrongness.

That was Timothy McGrew's opinion of the email a reader named Loren sent me earlier this week, which I wrote about a few days ago. Loren said simply this:

Science is knowledge of proven facts, religion is a belief system based on unproven theory. The matter is closed, science is alive and growing where as religion is based on ancient history.

McGrew's conclusion was the same as mine, only expressed so much better! And yet for many the whole thing seems sensible, believable, even right. We did a small-sample straw poll on this at our church this week, asking members of our youth group and our college/career group to rate Loren's message on a five-point scale from "Completely Wrong" to "Completely Right." Out of 54 students, 5 (9%) rated it mostly right, and 16 (30%) rated it about half-right, half-wrong. Our college and career students agreed with Loren considerably more than our youth group members were. No one at our church rated it completely true, thankfully.

I suppose I could have rated it mostly (not completely) wrong myself. There are a couple nuggets of truth in Loren's message. "Science is alive and growing," yes. Religion has a significant basis in ancient history, yes to that, too, though Christianity has current grounding as well. (Christianity is the one religion I have in mind throughout this blog post.)

When I was in high school I would have said that what Loren wrote was mostly true, if not entirely so. It just seemed to me that science was displacing religion. It

was “alive and growing,” and the more it grew, the more it showed that religion religion was dead. I don’t remember who taught it to me. I doubt anyone did, really; I think instead I absorbed it from the atmosphere around me. It just seemed sensible to think that the progress of scientific knowledge meant that religious belief was on its way out. I remember wondering if it would happen in my lifetime.

David Brooks put it this way, speaking retrospectively in 2003:

Like a lot of people these days, I’m a recovering secularist. Until September 11 I accepted the notion that as the world becomes richer and better educated, it becomes less religious. Extrapolating from a tiny and unrepresentative sample of humanity (in Western Europe and parts of North America), this theory holds that as history moves forward, science displaces dogma and reason replaces unthinking obedience. A region that has not yet had a reformation and an enlightenment, such as the Arab world, sooner or later will.

It hasn’t happened, of course. Secularizing theory has run into the facts of global reality. Brooks went on to write,

It’s now clear that the secularization theory is untrue. The human race does not necessarily get less religious as it grows richer and better educated. We are living through one of the great periods of scientific progress and the creation of wealth. At the same time, we are in the midst of a religious boom.

So religion (including non-Christian religions in this case) is not, in fact, being displaced by science and reason. Should it be? The New Atheists say so. That’s Loren’s message. The problem with it is that it’s based completely on false understandings of the relation of science and religion.

Implicit in Loren’s two sentences, for example, is the idea that science and religion are in conflict. They

aren't, or at least they need not be. Alvin Plantinga wrote recently on this in *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*. David C. Lindberg and Ronald Numbers, not Christian apologists, debunked the "Conflict Thesis" nicely in their [brief historical review](#). Secularism's claim to a monopoly on reason turns out upon inspection to be tenuous at best. And as I wrote [last time](#) in this pair of posts, scientific thinking was largely an outgrowth of Christian thinking.

What then about all the ways Christianity has stood in the way of science? I was talking about this with once a family member, a Christian who is better versed in these matters than most. Our conversation was in the context of the Church of the Middle Ages and early modern period. He said, "You have to admit the Church made mistakes with scientists, like Galileo." I said, "Name the other one." He couldn't. ***There isn't another one. Galileo gets held up in front of us as an example of religion's long pitched battle against the progress of knowledge—but the Galileo story is an example of itself and nothing else.*** Not only that, but even the Galileo story is not so one-dimensional as it's made out to be. The church did make a mistake with him, yes—but he was asking for it (read Lindberg and Numbers).

Still there has been this mood, this atmosphere of science's superiority over religion, and the coming displacement of religious knowledge by scientific knowledge. And it's not about the creation-evolution controversy. I know that because it predates it by decades, or centuries even. It goes back to the Enlightenment conceit that reason would win out over faith, and more recently it has been reinforced by influential—but thoroughly debunked—academic writings on a supposed historic conflict between science and religion (I refer you to Lindberg and Numbers yet one more time).

The mood reigns. It hangs in the air as a haze obscuring reality. It's never had any more substance to it than that, but that's been enough to confuse many of

us. Do you want to see reality? Then wipe away the fog from your own thinking, at least. Science is, by orders of magnitude, the best thing that's happened in the world of knowledge over the past few hundred years. Some people have extrapolated that—most unscientifically!—to the conclusion that it's the only good thing left in the world of knowledge. It isn't. Not by a long shot.



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## **34 Responses to “Something In the Air: Science’s Supposed Superiority to Religion – 2”**

- 1. Nick (Matzke) says:** December 20th, 2011 at 10:24 am [edit](#) What then about all the ways Christianity has stood in the way of science? I was talking about this with once a family member, a Christian who is better versed in these matters than most. He said, “You have to admit the church made mistakes with scientists, like Galileo.” I said, “Name the other one.” He couldn't. There isn't another one. That's indefensible whitewashing of history. (a) Look up how long Galileo's books were banned by the Index. Into the 1800s. This was about way more than one guy's personality. (b) Look up who else was banned. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_authors\\_and\\_works\\_on\\_the\\_Index\\_Librorum\\_Prohibitorum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_authors_and_works_on_the_Index_Librorum_Prohibitorum) Amongst others, we see Copernicus, Kepler, and Erasmus Darwin, as well as a host of Enlightenment figures (Kant, Descartes, etc.) as well as of course Protestants (e.g. Luther and Calvin). One could practically reconstruct the Enlightenment based on what was banned. And then we have a decent chunk of Christianity which has been in a pitched battle against

<p>Darwin for about 153 years, and a pitched battle against geology for 200 years, which is rather a lot considering that science in anything like the modern sense is really only about 400 years old. I don't go in for the view that the science-Christianity relationship has been unremitting warfare, but to deny that significant chunks of Christianity have made a significant attempts to oppose mainstream science over the history of modern science is ludicrous whitewashing. <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.<b>SteveK says:</b> December 20th, 2011 at 10:47 am edit <b>Nick, There are Christians and there is Christianity. There are scientists and there is science. Christians have opposed scientific conclusions just as scientists have opposed Christian theology. But I don't think Christianity has opposed science. Christianity does not oppose the science of Darwin nor the science of geology. It has nothing to say about the science of either one. Edit More Options</b></p> <p>4.</p> <p>5.<b>Tom Gilson says:</b> December 20th, 2011 at 11:04 am edit <b>Nick, That index is one piece of evidence. If you take that as the whole story then you give up any claim to a scientific approach to knowledge. Read Lindberg and Numbers. If you knew the whole Copernicus story you would know where his opposition came from: scientists, more than clergy. If you knew the history of the transmission of the classics, you would know how it was dependent on the church. There have been lies told to the contrary. They were ideologically motivated. The church has always supported learning. Kepler was a <i>strong</i> believer. Are there any other scientists on that list? As for the "pitched battle against Darwin," we've covered that ground before. I think YEC is a misinterpretation of Scripture, and I think it's a question remaining to be settled <u>within Christianity</u>, as well as on the intersection of</b></p>	<p>Failure to address this distinction</p> <p>Failure to address the fact that the scientists were churchmen (clergy), and that the church was in historical fact the guardian of knowledge through the Dark Ages and Middle Ages. Failure to address distinctions concerning YEC</p>
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<p>Christianity and science. I don't dispute that. If your reference to "Darwin" means "unguided evolution by just natural processes," however, that is <i>not</i> a debate between Christianity and science. It's a debate between Christianity and naturalistic metaphysics. <b>Edit More Options</b></p>	<p>Failure to recognize metaphysical component of the discussion</p>
<p>6. 7. <b>Holopupenko says:</b> December 20th, 2011 at 11:38 am edit Leaving aside Nick's usual ignorance on these matters, I wonder upon what portion of his scientistic DarwinISM he is able to make such morally absolutist condemnations. Per his usual approach, he helicopters in, leaves behind some ignorant droppings, and runs away. Cowardly atheism is not an oxymoron. <b>Edit More Options</b></p>	<p>Moral absolutism</p>
<p>8. 9. <b>BillT says:</b> December 20th, 2011 at 12:18 pm edit Nick the culture warrior hard at work making sure no one challenges the propaganda about Christianity they've so successfully marketed. And Nick using a link from Wiki as evidence. Wow, how little self respect do you have to have to do that. <b>Edit More Options</b></p>	<p>Failure to respond (other than "hey I wasn't defending the conflict thesis" later on) to this about false, lying propaganda marked for decades—largely through using Galileo as the symbol.</p>
<p>10. 11. <b>Nick (Matzke) says:</b> December 20th, 2011 at 8:09 pm edit If you knew the whole Copernicus story you would know where his opposition came from: scientists, more than clergy. That must be why heliocentrism was widely accepted by the scientific community generations and generations before the Church removed heliocentric works from the Index. Look, I'm quite familiar with the work of Lindberg and Numbers, and I have no truck with the simplistic view of science-religion warfare which traces back to e.g. White. But it's no good to overcorrect in the opposite direction and proclaim that Galileo was as guilty as the church, or that Galileo is the "only" case of church oppression of science, or that the science-Christianity relationship was all love and flowers except for Galileo. The record of</p>	<p>Laser-focus on the Index, in spite of the fact that science was carried out and moved forward through believers and in fact through clergy</p> <p>I didn't proclaim that.</p> <p>I claimed that Galileo was the only case of his type. Nor that it was all love-and-</p>

<p>Christianity is decidedly mixed, and all we need to demonstrate that is to note the huge messes that ensued around significant chunks of Christianity's reaction (the conservative, inerrantist chunks, to be specific) to heliocentrism, the falsity of Noah's flood, the age of the earth, (google "Scriptural geology", this wasn't just a feature of 20th-century YECs) and common ancestry. It's particularly hard to take when the people attempting the whitewashing are creationists who still don't even accept common ancestry, directly in the teeth of massive amounts of overwhelming physical evidence, based solely on their literalist reading of the Bible. <b>Edit More Options</b></p>	<p>flowers</p>
<p>12.</p> <p>13. <b>Crude says:</b> December 20th, 2011 at 10:36 pm edit <i>That must be why heliocentrism was widely accepted by the scientific community generations and generations before the Church removed heliocentric works from the Index. Yeah, ignoring the inaccuracy of your response – do you notice that, even if we accept it for the purposes of argument, it does nothing to dispute the original claim? ‘The main opposition to Copernicus at the time came from scientists rather than clergy.’ is compatible with ‘heliocentric works were on the index for a long while’. Not to mention that there wasn't always a clear dividing line between “scientist” and “clergy”. Scientists are entirely capable of – let's use some nice, incendiary language here to keep with your responses – promoting pogroms against other scientists and scientific theories. But it's no good to overcorrect in the opposite direction and proclaim that Galileo was as guilty as the church, or that Galileo is the “only” case of church oppression of science, or that the science-Christianity relationship was all love and flowers except for Galileo. Nick, y'ever notice you have a nasty habit of arguing against what you seemingly wish people were saying, rather than what they actually</i></p>	<p><i>Who on earth are you talking about?</i></p> <p>Continuing to ignore this point.</p> <p>You didn't notice this point</p>

<p>said? You throw “only” up in quote marks – so please tell me, who said that the Galileo case was the “only” case of church ‘oppression of science’? Or that the relationship has ‘been all love and flowers except for Galileo’? Not only that, but the very claim that the Galileo event was an incident of the church “oppressing science” is disputed – oppressing Galileo, perhaps. But guess what? Oppressing a scientist is not the same as “oppressing science”. <i>It’s particularly hard to take when the people attempting the whitewashing are creationists who still don’t even accept common ancestry, directly in the teeth of massive amounts of overwhelming physical evidence, based solely on their literalist reading of the Bible.</i> So, your claim is that the creationists in question are A) aware of all the “massive amounts of overwhelming physical evidence”, B) are not only aware of this and understand it, but believe the evidence is massive and overwhelming – not (even if only in their view, even if that view is mistaken) gravely flawed on its own terms, and C) related to B, have no other reasons for their skepticism about the evidence? C’mon Nick. <b>This is a hair away from saying that the only people who ever questioned mainstream evolutionary claims were all creationists, therefore Hoyle, Margulis, Popper, Woese and others must have been creationists.</b> You really need to think these things through more clearly. Stop being an advocate or a grand Defender of Science or Opponent of Whatever for a few moments, and just try to actually understand and discuss a topic. You may learn something about what other people actually think. <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p>14.</p> <p>15. <b>SteveK says:</b> December 20th, 2011 at 10:52 pm edit <b>What do you call a scientist who doesn’t accept common ancestry, directly in the teeth of massive amounts of overwhelming physical</b></p>	<p>No response to this direct challenge to your veracity.</p> <p>No response to this direct challenge to your veracity</p>
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<p>evidence, for reasons that have nothing to do with the Bible – an oppressor of science? <a href="#">Edit More Options</a></p>	<p>No response to this question</p>
<p>16.</p> <p>17. <b>Crude says:</b> December 20th, 2011 at 11:04 pm edit SteveK, <i>What do you call a scientist who doesn't accept common ancestry, directly in the teeth of massive amounts of overwhelming physical evidence, for reasons that have nothing to do with the Bible – an oppressor of science? Yeah, I'd like to know what 'oppressing science' actually entails anyway. Nick makes it sound like merely rejecting a (mainstream?) scientific theory is the oppression of science. If so, that would be interesting – since science would thrive on oppression of science.</i> 😊 <a href="#">Edit More Options</a></p>	
<p>18.</p> <p>19. <b>BillT says:</b> December 21st, 2011 at 10:27 am edit "You really need to think these things through more clearly. Stop being an advocate or a grand Defender of Science or Opponent of Whatever for a few moments, and just try to actually understand and discuss a topic. You may learn something about what other people actually think." <b>Look at Nicks posts here. Think about Nicks posts from the past. How likely do you think this is? Look at his use of pejorative terms. The "whitewashing" is all coming from those "creationists". The truth is the secular/academic community has been lying about the suppression of science by the church for 150 years. But try and make any corrections to these lies (which Nick admits to) and he starts complaining about "whitewashing" and "creationists". Correcting widely held, completely inaccurate, beliefs about this isn't whitewashing. But Nick knows the cultural warfare rules well. A brief nod to the facts "simplistic" "science-religion</b></p>	<p>No response to this challenge to your integrity, even though I referred back to it several times. As a "challenge to your integrity," I remind you, this is not in the form of name-calling. It is substantive and well supported.</p>

***warfare***, ***“blah, blah, blah”***, ***“e.g White”***  
**then right back on the offensive. Once**  
**you have the lie established, never give**  
**an inch. Edit More Options**

20.

21. **Nick (Matzke) says:** December 21st, 2011 at 9:27  
pm edit Hey, I didn't make Tom write the  
following highly inaccurate statement: He said,  
“You have to admit the church made mistakes  
with scientists, like Galileo.” I said, “Name the  
other one.” He couldn't. There isn't another  
one. Galileo gets held up in front of us as an  
example of religion's long pitched battle against  
the progress of knowledge – but the Galileo  
story is an example of itself and nothing  
else. Don't blame me for pointing out that it's  
wrong. And I didn't make various conservative  
evangelical schools fire faculty that dared hint at  
common ancestry of humans with animals.  
That's oppression of science: taking a well-  
supported scientific theory and banning it and  
its proponents because it seems to contradict  
your interpretation of the Bible. It happened to  
Galileo and it's still happening today at the  
hands of some churches. **Edit More Options**

22.

23. **Nick (Matzke) says:** December 21st, 2011 at 9:40  
pm edit So, your claim is that the creationists in  
question are A) aware of all the “massive  
amounts of overwhelming physical evidence”,  
B) are not only aware of this and understand it,  
but believe the evidence is massive and  
overwhelming – not (even if only in their view,  
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evidence? C'mon Nick. This is a hair away from  
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were all creationists, therefore Hoyle, Margulis,  
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creationists. **Neither Margulis nor Popper nor**

<p>Woese ever challenged common ancestry in the usually-understood sense, e.g. common ancestry of humans with animals. Hoyle was (a) not a biologist and (b) a crank in his later years, when he claimed that diseases rained down from space, that insects were hyperintelligent, that Archaeopteryx was a fake, and a host of other silliness in addition to denying evolution. And Hoyle even called his own position creationism at one point. Re: creationist motivations, I have read about as much creationist literature as anybody ever has, and the overwhelming picture you get when you do this is that it is made up overwhelmingly of a bunch of amateurs who don't really know what they are talking about, who are denying evolution for all kinds of alleged reasons which don't hold up to any kind of serious investigation or scrutiny, and they believe all of their incredibly sloppy arguments and "evidence" because they already "know" evolution is wrong because the Bible tells them so. Even the very few creationists with serious training in evolutionary biology (e.g. Todd Wood and Kurt Wise) will admit the poor quality of most creationist argumentation, and will admit that the reason they are creationists is not the physical evidence, which taken on its own terms supports evolution, but the Bible. And actually I don't have a huge problem with that, if someone wants to make that decision, that's their right, it's a free country. But don't try and tell me that there are no "ways Christianity has stood in the way of science", to use Tom's words. <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p>24.</p> <p>25. <b>Crude says:</b> December 21st, 2011 at 9:51 pm edit First off, Nick – I love how when you're caught being dishonest, you just blow past it totally. I point out a variety of flaws in what you say, and you skip it. Right from the culture warrior handbook: "Ignore it and hope it's forgotten. If that doesn't help, change the</p>	<p>You have taken my Galileo discussion and assumed that, since I said there was no other incident like his, there was no other manner in which Christianity had contested some science. This is ludicrous. What I said was there was no other Galileo-like incident. And later when I point this out to you, you call it "moving the goalposts"!</p>
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subject.” *Hey, I didn’t make Tom write the following highly inaccurate statement: No, Nick – it’s not inaccurate. Meet Tom’s challenge: name another scientist who had an interaction with the church like Galileo. The closest you’ll get is non-scientist Bruno’s treatment. Tom was right: Galileo’s story is an example of itself, and nothing else. What you’ve done here is water down Tom’s remarks completely, where ‘a religious school with particular commitments disallowing the teaching of a theory they dislike’ with ‘treatment like Galileo experienced’ and ‘oppressing science’. But if you cast a net that wide, then – guess what? Scientists are major players in the history of science oppression. We saw it with Lysenkoism, we saw it with the treatment of Margulis, and we even saw it with a recent Nobel prize winner. By your definition, this is a case of oppressing science. Face it, Nick: Tom was right, and you were wrong. Galileo is repeatedly held up as an example precisely because his case is so singular with regards to the Catholic Church, and Christianity in general. And when you try to hedge and argue that denying or not wanting to promote the teaching of one or another scientific idea or theory is ‘oppressing science’, then various other groups – including scientists themselves – have a tremendous track record of ‘oppressing science’. This is history and reasoning 101 Nick. How can you expect anyone to take critics like you seriously when you fail to do the basic research and thinking necessary to bolster your points? This isn’t some obscure bits of history and reasoning. This is very easily accessible stuff, known for decades. And you still have yet to understand it in even the most fundamental and basic details.* **Edit More Options**

On the same point here

You’re whitewashing the oppression of religion carried out in the name of religion’s supposed constant oppression of science. But you won’t even begin to notice that this is a topic in the discussion. How many times was it mentioned? This is your lack of interest in dialogue, brought into full view.

26.

27. **Crude says:** December 21st, 2011 at 10:02

pm edit *Neither Margulis nor Popper nor Woese ever challenged common ancestry in the usually-understood sense, e.g. common ancestry of humans with animals.* What they did was reject mainstream evolutionary theory and argued against it, rejecting it. Or wait – are you NOW saying that ‘oppressing science’ is this extremely narrow thing, such that it only takes place if your rejecting is in some way, any way, connected to religion? Even if you deny you’re taking the position due to religion? I’ll note, by the way, that Behe doesn’t reject common descent either, nor has he ever to my knowledge. So I guess Behe gets filed with Margulis, Popper and the rest, right? *Hoyle was (a) not a biologist* So what? So now you have to be a biologist for you to be ‘oppressing science’? Well done – you just let most “creationists” off the hook. They aren’t biologists – even if they’re wrong, they can’t be expected to realize why they’re wrong. They’re not oppressing science after all. Likewise, you know that many of the ‘creationists’ who oppose evolution and common descent to the extremes you describe base their arguments on far more than ‘God said it’. Even if you believe the arguments for their position are bad, even if you’re certain they’re bad, that doesn’t suffice to show that ‘the only reason they reject evolution is because of the bible’. Think it through, Nick. You deal with all manner of people – including atheists – who hold beliefs you think are wrong. Your own field is filled with a variety of people who disagree with each other, some strongly. Yet they all have access to the same evidence. Why is it that when it comes to religion you’re seemingly 100% certain that the ONLY reason people reject evolution is ‘because the Bible said so’, rather than for any other number of reasons? Because if you think an argument is bad, clearly everyone thinks the argument is bad? Because if you regard an argument as fatally flawed, everyone can see it’s flawed? This is what I

Failure to recognize that you are focusing illegitimately on church disagreements with “science.” This is important, too. You acknowledge some of this to an extent later, but you do not see how strongly the issue plays out.

mean about sitting down, cutting your act, and just thinking things through for a chance. You're flailing here, and you don't have to be. You just have to be, you know. Fair. [Edit More Options](#)

28.

29. **Tom Gilson says:** December 21st, 2011 at 10:23 pm edit [Nick](#), Let me add to your identified points of dishonesty here: That must be why heliocentrism was widely accepted by the scientific community generations and generations before the Church removed heliocentric works from the Index. Who was the scientific community when heliocentrism gained acceptance? Tell me about Kepler. Tell me about Newton. You're portraying it as some dichotomy, either Christianity or science, and that, my friend, is a lie. **The Church took a long time to remove Copernicus from the Index. Okay. I don't know the history on that, but I do know this: the Church *did not* continue to fight against heliocentrism. It did not stand in its way. I don't know how effective the Index was in limiting distribution of anything whatsoever, but I know that the great majority of scientists in Copernicus's day were Churchmen, and their big problem with heliocentrism was that Copernicus's theory didn't match the observations any better than Ptolemy's. My guess is that what kept those works on the Index so long was bureaucratic inertia. It happens. There are cities in America that still have laws on the books requiring you to tie up your mode of transportation—to a hitching post, which some cities still have laws requiring hotels to provide—before you leave it. If you know of any history to the contrary, please provide it.** Meanwhile check your false dichotomies at the hitching post. Bill, your comment 10 is worth repeating in full: Look at Nicks posts here. Think about

Failure to recognize the Christians who advanced science; while insisting that Christianity retarded science. Failure to recognize the false dichotomy.

Failure to address the scientific opposition Copernicus feared before publication

Nicks posts from the past. How likely do you think this is? Look at his use of pejorative terms. The “whitewashing” is all coming from those “creationists”. The truth is the secular/academic community has been lying about the suppression of science by the church for 150 years. But try and make any corrections to these lies (which Nick admits to) and he starts complaining about “whitewashing” and “creationists”. Correcting widely held, completely inaccurate, beliefs about this isn’t whitewashing. But Nick knows the cultural warfare rules well. A brief nod to the facts “simplistic” “science-religion warfare”, “blah, blah, blah”, “e.g White” then right back on the offensive. Once you have the lie established, never give an inch. And to this, Nick responds, “Hey, I didn’t force Tom to write one inaccurate statement!” **By the way, Nick, I agree with this at least to a degree, though with the strong caveat (learned from life experience) that no simply-told story of this sort is as simple as it appears:** And I didn’t make various conservative evangelical schools fire faculty that dared hint at common ancestry of humans with animals. That’s oppression of science: taking a well-supported scientific theory and banning it and its proponents because it seems to contradict your interpretation of the Bible. It happened to Galileo and it’s still happening today at the hands of some churches. **But I disagree with you that it has had any substantive impact on the world of science. I think it’s a stretch even to say that it represents “Christianity” standing in the way of “science.” But wait: don’t you disagree with yourself, too, on that point? Or do you think that these schools’ impact on science is that substantial after all? Crude put it well:** First off, Nick – I love how when you’re caught being dishonest, you just blow past it totally. I point out a variety of

You mentioned something later on about not being simplistic, but you kept on practicing it anyway.

Later you said this was moving the goalposts. Actually you were the one who moved them earlier. The topic was

<p>flaws in what you say, and you skip it. Right from the culture warrior handbook: "Ignore it and hope it's forgotten. If that doesn't help, change the subject." Now if you want to show me some non-fallacious example of Christianity oppressing science, one that doesn't resort to false dichotomies, one that's actually substantive, I'm all ears. I am not opposed to correcting myself. I did it just a few hours ago on another thread here on this blog. But I'm a lot more open to correcting myself when I have some reason to trust the corrector knows how to discern reality and is motivated to discover truth. <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p>30.</p> <p>31. <b>Crude says:</b> December 21st, 2011 at 10:52 pm edit <b>Tom, That's a very good point, so obvious that I forgot it. Apparently when a clergy-scientist promotes a scientific theory, and other clergy-scientists condemn it, it's an example of Christians opposing science. Go figure. Edit More Options</b></p> <p>32.</p> <p>33. <b>Nick (Matzke) says:</b> December 22nd, 2011 at 10:53 am edit In reply to various: No, Nick – it's not inaccurate. Meet Tom's challenge: name another scientist who had an interaction with the church like Galileo. The closest you'll get is non-scientist Bruno's treatment. Tom was right: Galileo's story is an example of itself, and nothing else. Bruno was burned at the stake, apparently for diverse reasons. (It's still a horrible crime committed by the church against freedom of thought, just not specifically against science, so I'll leave that case aside.) Galileo just had his works banned because they contradicted what was thought to be the plain meaning of the Bible. Other people like Copernicus and Kepler had their works banned for the same reason. Galileo's situation is much more like theirs than like Brunos. Thus there are other cases like Galileo's, and Tom's characterization of the situation was not</p>	<p>Christianity's supposed historic retreat before the advance of science, in view of Christianity's supposed historic ignorance. It's a large-scale, broad-scope topic I was discussion. Substantive, substantial impact is what I had in mind. You're the one who brought in these relatively insignificant incidents in the broad sweep of the history of science and religion.</p> <p>Failure to note this again.</p> <p>Bruno was not burned for science. (Talk about moving the goalposts!!!)</p>
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<p>plausible. And, since there are various other cases where religious actors have banned well-supported scientific ideas, and/or fired their proponents or controlled their behavior on the threat of firing (e.g. banning of evolution in the schools from the 1920s-1960s; firing of numerous people at evangelical institutions for being too pro-evolution), we have even more evidence that Galileo's case was not unique, not by a long shot. For pointing this out, I get called "dishonest" and the like. I think you guys are fighting back on this point mostly because you hate it when I'm clearly right and Tom is wrong. <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p>34.</p> <p>35. <b>Nick (Matzke) says:</b> December 22nd, 2011 at 11:06 am edit What you've done here is water down Tom's remarks completely, where 'a religious school with particular commitments disallowing the teaching of a theory they dislike' with 'treatment like Galileo experienced' and 'oppressing science'. But if you cast a net that wide, then – guess what? Scientists are major players in the history of science oppression. We saw it with Lysenkoism, we saw it with the treatment of Margulis, and we even saw it with a recent Nobel prize winner. Hey, I'll agree with you on Lysenko, that's a case of a scientist oppressing science with the help of Stalin. You've established that religion is not the only source of science oppression, congratulations. Of course, that wasn't the original claim, which was that the Galileo case was the only case of religion oppressing science. Re: Margulis and the quasicrystals guy — those don't qualify at all. Those people got tenure, Margulis got elected to the National Academy of Sciences, and the quasicrystals guy got a Nobel. All they experienced in terms of "oppression" was other people disagreeing with them early on. That's not oppression, that's normal science, particularly when you've got a radical new</p>	<p>You're saying that Kepler, who was supported and encouraged by many clergy and was a strong Christian himself, was similar to Galileo, just because they put his books on the Index? Come on.</p> <p>The banning of evolution in the schools was perhaps a point I would concede to you. Please don't quote "Inherit the Wind," though. It was lousy history.</p> <p>And please don't say "and for this I get called dishonest." This was the first time you brought it up!</p>
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<p>36.</p> <p>37.</p> <p>38.</p> <p>39.</p>	<p>idea. <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p><b>Victoria says:</b> December 22nd, 2011 at 11:32 am edit <b>One thing I have noticed about our critics is that they seem to have a bad case of tunnel vision when it comes to Christianity and modern science: firstly, they focus only on a particular subset of Christians (mostly YEC's, it seems) and forget about the fact that there are others, like Biologos(<a href="http://biologos.org/">http://biologos.org/</a>), The American Scientific Affiliation (<a href="http://www.asa3.org">www.asa3.org</a>)[of which I am a member, being a Christian physicist], The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion (<a href="http://www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/faraday/index.php">http://www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/faraday/index.php</a>)n in the UK and Hugh Ross's Reasons To Believe (<a href="http://www.reasons.org">www.reasons.org</a>). These organizations represent professionally trained scientists who are also professing Christians, who take both modern science and Christianity seriously. Secondly, they seem to have the impression that Christianity stands or falls with the results of modern science, which it does not. Hint: Christianity stands or falls on the historical events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (see 1 Corinthians 15 for that argument). Find a tomb somewhere that contains the earthly remains of Jesus, and Christianity is dead. What Christianity opposes is <b>scienTISM</b>, the metaphysical 'materialistic naturalism' that denies the existence of the eternal, self-existent God of the Bible and all that this implies. Thirdly, they use modern science as the basis of their world-view, which seems to me to be an inversion of the proper relationship, deriving the metaphysics from the physics, so to speak. Once again, I cite <u>Romans 1:18-ff</u> – this so clearly explains the skeptics' true problems. <b>Edit More Options</b></b></p> <p><b>Nick (Matzke) says:</b> December 22nd, 2011 at 11:45 am edit The Church took a long time to</p>	<p>Failure to open up your eyes to your tunnel vision.</p>
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remove Copernicus from the Index. Okay. I don't know the history on that, but I do know this: the Church did not continue to fight against heliocentrism. Eventually. The Soviets \*eventually\* gave up on Lysenkoism, too, but that's not really a point in their favor, is it? I don't know how effective the Index was in limiting distribution of anything whatsoever, but I know that the great majority of scientists in Copernicus's day were Churchmen, and their big problem with heliocentrism was that Copernicus's theory didn't match the observations any better than Ptolemy's. My guess is that what kept those works on the Index so long was bureaucratic inertia. It happens. There are cities in America that still have laws on the books requiring you to tie up your mode of transportation – to a hitching post, which some cities still have laws requiring hotels to provide – before you leave it. This is more apologetic whitewashing, I'm afraid. The Index was actively updated and revised on a regular basis, and the Church was taking flack continually for the banning in Protestant circles. Eventually it became sufficiently embarrassing and anachronistic that they removed it, but it took hundreds of years. Quoth wikipedia: In 1758 the Catholic Church dropped the general prohibition of books advocating heliocentrism from the Index of Forbidden Books.[44] It did not, however, explicitly rescind the decisions issued by the Inquisition in its judgement of 1633 against Galileo, or lift the prohibition of uncensored versions of Copernicus's De Revolutionibus or Galileo's Dialogue.[44] As a result, the precise doctrinal status of heliocentrism remained unclear, and many Catholic scientists continued to pay lip service to the view that it could only be treated as a hypothesis.[44] Others, however, openly endorsed it as an established fact without

Dishonesty.

When I say "I don't know but I conjecture," that's not whitewashing, that's putting my cards on the table for the purpose of constructive dialogue. I think this was the point in the discussion when I really threw my hands up in the air and said, "Nick doesn't care a whit about dialogue. He's an ideologue."

But when I brought that up later on, you ignored it

meeting any official opposition from the Church.[45] The issue finally came to a head in 1820 when the Master of the Sacred Palace (the Church's chief censor), Filippo Anfossi, refused to license a book by a Catholic canon, Giuseppe Settele, because it openly treated heliocentrism as a physical fact.[46] Settele appealed to the then pope, Pius VII. After the matter had been reconsidered by the Congregation of the Index and the Holy Office, Anfossi's decision was overturned.[46] Copernicus's *De Revolutionibus* and Galileo's *Dialogue* were then subsequently omitted from the next edition of the Index when it appeared in 1835. Even today you get less than forthright statements from catholic authorities about it, e.g. Ratzinger's statements. But I disagree with you that it has had any substantive impact on the world of science. I think it's a stretch even to say that it represents "Christianity" standing in the way of "science." But wait: don't you disagree with yourself, too, on that point? Or do you think that these schools' impact on science is that substantial after all? Crude put it well: [...] Now if you want to show me some non-fallacious example of Christianity oppressing science, one that doesn't resort to false dichotomies, one that's actually substantive, I'm all ears. I am not opposed to correcting myself. I did it just a few hours ago on another thread here on this blog. But I'm a lot more open to correcting myself when I have some reason to trust the corrector knows how to discern reality and is motivated to discover truth. So, now, "substantive impact" has been pulled out of thin air and added to the list of conditions that are required? Football games are so much each when you can move the goalposts. But, since you brought it up — it would be difficult to argue that religious oppression of science has impeded the global

See above. I already addressed how you moved the goalposts.

progress of science. But this is true only because science could flee the oppression and move to countries and institutions where it wasn't so strong. The oppression definitely retarded science in the places where it was attempted. E.g.: \* Many of the early leaders of the Scientific Revolution were Catholic like Galileo, but the leading roles in science soon moved to places like England where the Inquisition didn't hold sway. \* The same process occurs at conservative evangelical institutions today, where academics who are doing their work and following the scientific facts get booted, or leave before they get booted, and the best workers stay as far away from such intellectual tar pits as they can get. I'm sorry if it upsets some apologetics talking point, but, just as "conflict thesis" for science and religion is wrong, it is equally wrong to move to the opposite extreme and say that examples of conflict are absent or vanishingly rare and unique. There are plenty of examples of conflict. Since people seem to have endorsed Ronald Numbers as a credible authority on these issues, I can do no better than to endorse what he says on pages 3-4 of his book, here: Science and Christianity in pulpit and pew <http://books.google.com/books?id=O-g2QwK6PUYC&lpg=PP8&ots=jtbaQNT1y8&dq=Science%20and%20Christianity%20in%20pulpit%20and%20pew&lr&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false> Neither the conflict thesis nor the "Christianity gave birth to science" thesis can be supported, in his view. **Edit More Options**

40.

41. **SteveK says:** December 22nd, 2011 at 12:25 pm edit Never give an inch. Never. **Edit More Options**

42.

43. **Victoria says:** December 22nd, 2011 at 12:36 pm edit Nick [hi, it's been a while - hope you are well] Why are you (and other skeptics) so hung up on the issue of science and faith (Christianity in particular)? This is not core Christian

There is conflict today on exactly one issue. You may think this is "Christianity" oppressing "science," but if you do, then you have blown up "evolution" into the equivalent of "science."

Have you read Hannam?

doctrinal belief, even though historically the Christian community once thought it was. This is a question of the interpretation and understanding of Scripture in relation to its view of the created order (nature to you), which is really a secondary issue in God's revelation of Himself and His relationship with the creation, and mankind in particular. Is it simply that you don't want Christianity to be true? Is it that you don't want to be in a right relationship with your Creator, who invites you to join His kingdom and offers you the life that He meant for you, because it means having to acknowledge Him as your sovereign? **Edit More Options**

44.

45. **Tom Gilson says:** December 22nd, 2011 at 12:53 pm edit Nick, stop it. For your own good, stop it. For the good of your intellect, for the good of the pursuit of truth, for the good of your reputation, stop it. Stop what, you ask? You wrote, This is more apologetic whitewashing, I'm afraid. The Index was actively updated and revised on a regular basis, and the Church was taking flack continually for the banning in Protestant circles. Eventually it became sufficiently embarrassing and anachronistic that they removed it, but it took hundreds of years. Quoth wikipedia... **You have no place to use the word whitewashing in this conversation until you respond to Bill in #10.** Your lack of intellectual integrity stands exposed for all of us to see—especially for you yourself to see—and you ought to be horrified at your own public display of hypocrisy. As for “apologetic whitewashing,” I will quote back to you again some other things I wrote in the context you criticize here: The Church took a long time to remove Copernicus from the Index. Okay. I don't know the history on that.... My guess is that.... If you know of any history to the contrary, please provide it.... Now if you want

This is apparently of no interest to you

This is where I corrected you on this ideologue behavior. You ignored it

to show me some non-fallacious example of Christianity oppressing science, one that doesn't resort to false dichotomies, one that's actually substantive, I'm all ears. I am not opposed to correcting myself. I did it just a few hours ago on another thread here on this blog. But I'm a lot more open to correcting myself when I have some reason to trust the corrector knows how to discern reality and is motivated to discover truth. "Whitewashing" is making unsupportable assertions repeatedly in the teeth of contrary evidence. "Whitewashing" is what you are doing with respect to the 150 years of lies Bill spoke of, when it was taught falsely that religion was in deep conflict with science. Dialogue is when each person advances his or her own knowledge *appropriately* with respect to the truth and their knowledge and their competence. I did that: I was, I am quite sure, appropriately open, inviting you to provide facts that would correct me. You don't do that. You don't pay the slightest attention to information that doesn't agree with your preconceived opinion. Dialogue is where persons admit error when shown it. I have done that on another thread here on this blog recently. I'd be willing to do it here, if there were any sign that doing so would advance dialogue. But to the extent that I own up to, for example, fundamentalist errors regarding science, I am *absolutely certain* you will magnify those errors beyond all proportion, and take it as my admission that you were right all along and I was wrong all along. Do you see the position you have placed yourself in? It's the flip side of the position you've placed me in. You are so blindly and stupidly committed to a one-sided, narrow-minded, ideological and propagandist version of the story of science and religion, it's impossible for me to speak with you about it in a manner that reflects the true multi-dimensionality of reality. If I tried to do that, you would twist it. If I avoid doing it, you twist

You don't seem to have much to say about caring about dialogue. I wonder why?

<p>that, too. So if you're going to participate in dialogue on this blog, correct your ways. If you're not going to participate in dialogue, you have two choices: either continue pretending to do it as you have been, which only results in you embarrassing yourself, or else quit pretending and go away. My preference is not that you go away. My preference is that you stay, but that you quit pretending. <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p>46.</p> <p>47. <b>Tom Gilson says:</b> December 22nd, 2011 at 12:54 pm edit <b>Whatever you do, though, Nick, please read what Victoria wrote and take it seriously.</b> <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p>48.</p> <p>49. <b>Nick (Matzke) says:</b> December 22nd, 2011 at 3:55 pm edit Ah, yet another thread in which you folks go meta instead of just manning up and making a few concessions to acknowledge that the initial claims were overstated. I never defended the Conflict Thesis, in fact, I have explicitly rejected it, yet I somehow get accused of defending it. Tom, on the other hand, put forward the ridiculous view that the Galileo situation was unique and no similar examples exist, and when challenged with numerous other cases, they go meta and ask me to look inside my soul rather than just dealing with the evidence. I'm sorry I mess up the telling of simple "just-so stories" about history around here, but, as the Numbers link shows if you would just read it, the real history of science &amp; religion in the West is complex, with both numerous cases of conflict and numerous cases of harmony. Any generalizations made about the history have to acknowledge this. <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p>50.</p> <p>51. <b>Nick (Matzke) says:</b> December 22nd, 2011 at 3:56 pm edit Football games are so much each when you can move the goalposts. -&gt; Football games are so much easier when you can move the goalposts. <b>Edit More Options</b></p>	<p>Not true. You're being accused of whitewashing it.</p> <p>There are no similar examples to the Galileo incident, in intensity, scope, or impact on science. None.</p>
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52.

53.

**Tom Gilson says:** December 22nd, 2011 at 4:10 pm edit Bill wrote, and I quote: Look at his use of pejorative terms. The “whitewashing” is all coming from those “creationists”. The truth is the secular/academic community has been lying about the suppression of science by the church for 150 years. But try and make any corrections to these lies (which Nick admits to) and he starts complaining about “whitewashing” and “creationists”. Correcting widely held, completely inaccurate, beliefs about this isn’t whitewashing. But Nick knows the cultural warfare rules well. A brief nod to the facts “simplistic” “science-religion warfare”, “blah, blah, blah”, “e.g White” then right back on the offensive. Once you have the lie established, never give an inch. **And would you kindly show me the other thread in which we failed at “t manning up and making a few concessions to acknowledge that the initial claims were overstated.”** The reason I “go meta” on you, as you put it, Nick, is because you I think you need it. That has always been the case. You have consistently failed to acknowledge criticism here. I have already explained to you the conditions under which I would be willing to treat this as a dialogue. In short, I will treat it as a dialogue when I see more evidence that you are. **Edit More Options**

Please?

54.

55.

**Tom Gilson says:** December 22nd, 2011 at 4:20 pm edit **Sometimes before you respond to a question, you want to know whether the person asking it has a genuine interest in the truth. There’s a model for that in Matthew 21:23-27. Nick, I see you pushing a whole lot of agenda, but consistently evading questions or challenges directed your way. You have put out a challenge to me again. I could work with you on it. I would be willing to adjust my position in light of new**

<p>information, in dialogue with a person who actually practiced dialogue. I'm not going to do that with you, because you are not that kind of a person. You don't practice dialogue. You could construe my silence as whitewashing, and you probably will. But here's the better way to regard it: I'm not interested in perpetuating a sham conversation, so I'm not going to participate in it. <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p>56.</p> <p>57. <b>Tom Gilson says:</b> December 22nd, 2011 at 4:26 pm edit <b>By the way: I do have a correction to offer on the way I presented what I first said about Galileo. I stated it incorrectly there, by way of careless writing. In a real dialogue I would go further and explain that. Instead I'm just going to edit the original post. Accuracy is important to me. Perpetuating a sham dialogue is not. Edit More Options</b></p> <p>58.</p> <p>59. <b>JAD says:</b> December 22nd, 2011 at 6:28 pm edit I am finally beginning to understand Nick's thinking... The propaganda value of the Galileo incident must be defended at all costs! Why? Apparently it is critical to a naturalistic, or materialistic, world view. <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p>60.</p> <p>61. <b>Charlie says:</b> December 22nd, 2011 at 7:27 pm edit I am finally beginning to understand Nick's thinking... The propaganda value of the Galileo incident must be defended at all costs! Why? What do you expect from someone who posits the "Gott Mit Uns" belt-buckle as an argument and who accuses particular ID-proponents YEC until they correct him personally. And then he calls them liars and insists that they are, in fact, YEC. <b>Edit More Options</b></p> <p>62.</p> <p>63. <b>JAD says:</b> December 22nd, 2011 at 10:22 pm edit <b>One of the things that gets overlooked in the propaganda version of the Galileo incident is the relationship that he had with the</b></p>	<p>No response from you on this, but then, I wasn't much expecting one.</p> <p>No response to this expanded perspective account</p>
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Jesuits. While there were a number of minor circumstances in Galileo's life, where if he had made a different decision things might not have turned as badly as they did for him, it is hard to blame the victim for lacking sufficient foresight. None of us, after all, have 20-20 foresight. His relationship with the Jesuits, however, is a different story. There he knew exactly what he was doing. For example, in the autumn of 1618 three comets appeared in quick succession. Galileo incorrectly believed, like the Aristotelians, that comets were a meteorological phenomena. On the other hand, Jesuit astronomer Orazio Grassi after observing the appearance of the comets in 1618, argued that comets were interplanetary objects, with orbits outside that of the moon. Galileo, who had been unable to observe the comets because he had been bedridden, wrote a book, *The Assayer*, which mocked, attacked and ridiculed Grassi's conclusions even though Grassi had written nothing attacking either Galileo or the Copernican theory. Of course we now know that Grassi's conclusions were the scientifically correct

ones. <http://benedett.provincia.venezia.it/come-nius/comunicazione/eng/comets.htm> Galileo's attack on Grassi alienated the Jesuit's many of whom up till then, at least tacitly, had been his allies. After his trial in 1633 one of the Jesuits wrote, "If Galileo had known how to keep on good terms with the Fathers of the College, he would live gloriously in this world. None of his misfortunes would have come to pass and he would have been able to write as he wished about anything, even about the motion of the world." Did Galileo even care? Not in 1622. By that time he had a better, much more powerful friend, Pope Urban VIII, who was none other than his old Florentine friend Maffeo Barberini who was elected Pope in 1622. Compared to the pope the Jesuits were bit players. The book the Jesuits hated, *The Assayer*, the Pope loved.

Galileo was willing to play the power and influence game, but in the end, as so often happens when one plays with fire, it came back burn to him. Galileo no doubt gained fame and fortune because of his drive, ambition and ego. That same ego, however, appears to have tragically played a role in his down fall. **Edit More Options**

64.

65. **Nick (Matzke) says:** December 22nd, 2011 at 10:32 pm edit Re: whitewashing — part of why I use that word is that whitewashing of the Galileo Affair on the part of the Church and its defenders continued right into the 20th century, and this has inappropriately influenced many other commentators. See e.g.: [http://www.galilean-library.org/site/index.php/page/index.html/\\_/\\_/essays/history/the-galileo-affair-part-5-the-aftermath-r69](http://www.galilean-library.org/site/index.php/page/index.html/_/_/essays/history/the-galileo-affair-part-5-the-aftermath-r69) **Edit More Options**

66.

67. **Tom Gilson says:** December 22nd, 2011 at 11:54 pm edit When you decide to have a dialogue rather than a monologue on whitewashing, then I might decide to have it with you. Until then my disrespect for your unwillingness to have honest conversation will continue to surge, and by now it might be an unrecoverable situation. You have been very consistent in your pattern for a very long time. See above. See previous threads in which we have, as you say, gone “meta” on you. There is a reason for it. **Edit More Options**

All you can think of is one thing. See everything you missed above. You have a narrow mind, you don't display any interest in genuine dialogue, and your integrity is shot.