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Response to Dr. Aaron Dominguez on Science, Technology, and Faith

On Wednesday, October 30th, 2019, Dr. Aaron Dominguez gave his lecture called Science, Technology, and Faith. He is a professor in physics at The Catholic University of America and a researcher in high energy and particle physics. Dr. Dominguez lectured for approximately forty minutes before leaving the rest of the time for discussion and questions. He discussed the topic of fundamental particle physics, his work the CERN facility in discovering the Higgs Boson, and his rationale for his personal faith.

Dr. Dominguez’s lecture initially consisted of a brief introduction to elementary particles such as quarks, leptons, and bosons. He showed a table of the elementary components of everything in the universe. Shortly after, the topic transitioned to bosons, and more specifically, the Higgs Boson. Here, Dr. Dominguez introduced the audience to the Large Hadron Collider (LHC). His presentation displayed a picture of the collision chamber, which had a person in it for reference. It was a very big machine. He explained how the LHC has three layers of sensors, each designed to detect specific types of energy and subatomic particles. Next, he shared the challenges in discovering the Higgs Boson. He described the event that would generate the particle as incredibly improbably. Therefore, they had to cause billions of collisions and generate statistical models of the results to determine the existence of the Higgs Boson. Eventually, Dr. Aaron Dominguez and the thousand-something scientists and engineers who worked on the project discovered the Higgs Boson. Aaron Dominguez then deviated from discussing scientific topics and share some of his convictions as a “Catholic Boy.” He belief that the beauty of fundamental particle physics is a sign of intelligent design. The fact that the properties of these particles perfectly align to make our universe plausible convinces him that there is a grand designer. To Dr. Dominguez, science is not contrary to religion, but rather complimentary.

Aaron Dominguez tried to persuade the audience that science and religion work together. He claims that the view that science and religion are opposites is flawed, and that they rather complement each other quite well. In his explanation of his conviction, Dr. Dominguez claimed science is meant to discover and understand God’s creation. He used the Higgs Boson example to show the “beauty” in physics and creation.

Initially, Aaron Dominguez made sure it was known that he is neither a theologian nor a philosopher. While the audience might’ve been initially intrigued by the lecture subject, I feel that the title did not accurately reflect topic of the actual lecture. I came to this lecture expecting a philosophical argument for the marriage of science and faith, but the lecturer did not address that at all. All the audience got was “the way I see it, there is no conflict between science and Christianity.” I feel like this was more of a personal statement, less of a sophisticated argument relating science and faith. As the lecture progressed, anyone in the room could tell that it was getting boring. Also, Dr. Dominguez seemed insecure as a physics researcher because he constantly repeated multiple times a slide that he worked on the project he was explaining. It was almost like he was convincing himself that he contributed to the project. It made me, and likely the audience too, uncomfortable.

I want to note that I am obviously neither a professional theologian, philosopher, or physicist. However, I have some knowledge on the subject and can debate quite extensively several subjects relating to the Christian Bible and science. During the discussion phase of the lecture, I asked in the microphone about his response to when science does conflict with religion, such as the impossibilities of events described in the Bible or carbon dating evidence that disproves many religious claims. His response was this: “I can say as Roman Catholics, the Catholic Church, that there is nothing in science that is in contradiction to scripture.” He tries to justify his claim, explaining that some of the Bible is “actually the literal history of stuff,” and that some of it is less literal stuff. I find his words odd, considering that the scientific community is often at odds with the Catholic Church.

I learned very few things at this lecture. I learned about some basic concepts in fundamental particle physics that I will likely never discuss. Otherwise, his perspective on religion, science and faith, and the Bible is nothing I haven’t heard before. Overall, the lecture was disappointing, as I was hoping for a more sophisticated and unique perspective on science, technology, and faith.