

CHAPTER 4

GOD'S WORD AND GOD'S WORLD IN CONFLICT?

FIVE DIFFERENT WORLDVIEW INTERPRETATIONS OF ONE SCIENTIFIC RESULT

Even after scientists come to a consensus about *what* is happening in the natural world, there can still be a lot of disagreement about *why* it happens and what it means for humanity. People of different religious and philosophical view points (worldviews) can interpret the same scientific result in very different ways.

Here is one example. Several centuries ago, many people believed in *vitalism*—the idea that living organisms had some special “vital substance” that made them alive and different from ordinary physical objects. Science has now shown that all of the characteristics of life (like metabolism and reproduction) can be explained in terms of the complex chemical reactions that go on inside living cells—without the need for some vital substance to animate the organism.

Here are five significantly different worldview responses to the scientific result that living organisms do not have a “vital substance”:

- ▶ This scientific result is unacceptable because it denies the breath of life that God breathes into living organisms. The scientific result must be incorrect.
- ▶ Life is reducible to matter. Living organisms are nothing more than collections of atoms obeying the laws of physics. Science shows that life is not special; living organisms have no more value than non- living objects.
- ▶ Life is reducible to matter. But we can choose, despite this scientific result, to believe that living organisms have more value than ordinary physical objects. The claim that life is special is a personal, moral, or religious choice that is independent of science.
- ▶ Life is explainable scientifically in terms of complex chemical reactions, but it is precisely the complexity and the capabilities of living organisms that make them valuable to us. Science itself informs us about *why* they are valuable.
- ▶ Life is explainable scientifically in terms of complex chemical reactions, but the special value of anything derives from the value given to it by its Creator. Because the Creator holds life to be special, we should too.