



Biblical Literalism Influences Perceptions of History as a Scientific Discipline

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Abstract

Recent work on religious conservatives frequently finds biblical literalism to have a negative influence on individuals' attitudes toward science. We present a science-related issue for which biblical literalism seems, at least on the surface, to have a more positive influence. Specifically, individuals expressing a literalist view of the Bible are more likely than those who view the Bible as a book of fables to say that the field of history is scientific. This pattern remains even after accounting for a variety of other measures of individuals' religion, scientific attitudes, and demographics. We discuss this pattern in the context of historical and contemporary connections between the Bible, history, and science among those coming from a literalist worldview.

Keywords

history, Bible, biblical literalism, religion and science, public opinion

Located just off the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the Museum of the Bible opened in 2017. Walking into this museum, history looms large. The cascading set of glass stairs leads visitors to the first floor, and the sign reads, "Perhaps no other book in history has had a greater impact than the Bible." While biblical quotes and testaments to the beauty of God are found easily throughout the Museum of the Bible, the role of history and historical artifacts grounds the experience for visitors. Inside the exhibits, the role of the Bible for the founding members of the United States comes to life, and various historical interpretations of the Bible are presented. For instance, the vantage points of slaves and slaveholders are juxtaposed to underscore how the Bible may be read distinctly and often in opposition with itself. Throughout the museum, one central takeaway becomes clear: The Bible should be understood as a historical artifact that requires serious and sustained attention. It is dedicated to a set of ideas, a sacred icon, a historical object whose academic study is associated conventionally with seminaries and divinity schools rather than secular, public institutions.

The Museum of the Bible is illustrative of a larger question about how various members of the public relate to the academy. Given long-standing distrust of or negative associations with the academy's perceived secularity, research suggests that many religious and political conservatives do not hold secular institutions like science in as high regard as the rest of the public (Gauchat 2012; O'Brien and Noy 2015; Scheitle 2018). However, they still believe in science as an

approach, a set of tools to understand better the world around us. So how do lower levels of trust in science relate to conservatives' view of what is scientific? What particular academic disciplines are seen as more or less scientific? History as an academic discipline has long-standing ties to religious scholars' critical examination of the Bible as a historical and social artifact. However, does this influence how the broader discipline of history is viewed? This article examines individuals' attitudes about academic disciplines to explore how an individual's background may shape their characterization of its science-ness.

Historical Context of Biblical Literalism and the Academy

Naturalistic science and the Bible were at one point inextricably bound to each other. Following the sixteenth-century introduction of the Protestant Reformation's "sola scripture" (scripture alone) concept, scientists and religious leaders alike defended a literal interpretation of the Bible where natural world explanations were paired with a biblically inspired

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framework (Numbers 2003). Religious teachings aided interpretation of phenomena that were simply indecipherable from experimental and empirical perspectives. During this time, scholars largely upheld the Bible's legitimacy; widespread interest in the book of Genesis as a historical account of human origins correlated to which academic scientific research agendas were pursued (Browne 2003).

Eventually, natural philosophers took the lead in eliminating the supernatural from descriptive and empirical explanations of phenomena. By the turn of the twentieth century, the declining dominance of evangelical Protestantism marked the American religious landscape (Smith 1998, 2003). The publication and circulation of the seminal text *The Fundamentals*, a series of books published between 1910 and 1915 that advocated for a separatist society and a literal reading of the Bible, sought to stem the tide (Carpenter 1997). Its authors fought against the perceived encroachment of "this-worldly" concerns throughout the public sphere and the general moral fabric of the country. The focus on biblical inerrancy—which presumes any issue with biblical interpretation is a result of human error and insists on the impossibility of scriptural error—helped to establish a perceived degree of precision in religious authority, meanwhile shoring up an undifferentiated suspicion of secular scientific expertise. Practically, this focus on inerrancy also provided a sense of underlying coherence among groups of believers otherwise historically prone to schisms and calls for separation (Worthen 2014). Building off the historical sense of urgency fundamentalists initially cultivated, conservative evangelicals and their network of colleges and organizations embraced a moral righteousness. Many would insist on closer readings of the Bible as a guide for sociopolitical actions and scholarship throughout the rest of the twentieth century (Numbers 2003). Creationists are among the most-well-known groups to heed this call, particularly those who argue that the world is less than 10,000 years old, and many continue to do so well into the twenty-first century (Lienesch 2007).

Biblical Literalism and the Public's Attitudes about Science

Social scientists often examine how public attitudes about science may be influenced by demographic patterns, the degree of trust placed in institutions, and perceptions of the extent to which science and its practitioners should inform policy decisions. While some group demographics or individuals' willingness to acknowledge scientists' credibility and trust their scientific authority matters, the strongest patterns are tied to one's knowledge of science and education, political identity, and religious tradition (Gauchat 2011, 2015; Sherkat, 2011; O'Brien and Noy 2015; Gauchat and Andrews 2018).¹

¹See Oberlin (2016) for a broader review of the research on public understandings of science concerning the relationship between religious beliefs and attitudes toward science.

Whether one's view of the Bible has a significant association with attitudes about science depends on the particular issue being considered, but when an association is found, it tends to result in more pessimistic, hostile, or otherwise substantively negative attitudes. For instance, Ellison and Musick (1995) found that biblical literalism is associated with the opinion that science pries into inappropriate areas and breaks down people's ideas of right and wrong.

Beyond attitudes about science in the abstract, a literalist view of the Bible negatively influences the acceptance of specific scientific findings. Baker (2013), for example, determined that biblical literalism reduces the probability that an individual will accept evolution, and education did not weaken this association. Related to this study, Sherkat (2011) found that individuals holding a literalist view of the Bible score lower on measures of scientific knowledge.

Biblical literalism is also connected to individuals' attitudes toward the role of scientific expertise in policy making and science funding. For instance, in assessing individuals' willingness to defer to scientific expertise on 16 issues or policies, Blank and Shaw (2015) found that "biblical literalism is consistently negatively signed, meaning the belief that the Bible is the literal word of God always reduces one's self-rated deference toward scientific expertise" (p. 30). And Gauchat's (2015) analysis found that individuals holding a more literalist view of the Bible were less likely to say they support the federal funding of science.

Biblical Literalism and Perceptions of the Academy: History a Possible Exception?

Much of the research on the public's engagement with science focuses on the public's attitudes toward science, specifically the natural sciences. Often biblical literalism creates tensions with fields like biology, in part because of theological-scientific conflicts and politicization of issues like the origin of life and the age of the earth (Allum et al. 2008; Evans 2013). Yet the issues raised with biblical literalism vis-à-vis science could extend to other areas of inquiry as well. Consider, for example, the discipline of history.

Similar to many academic fields that are not in the core natural science fields (e.g., chemistry, physics, biology), the status of history as a scientific discipline is a decades-long debate among academics (Holt 1940; Goodheart 2005; Creath 2010). Notwithstanding its designation as scientific or not, the American Historical Association (2017) described the field of history as an "evidence based discipline" in its statement of support for the National March for Science in 2017.²

²For an overview of the disciplinary debates among historians about "Rankean" historical objectivity and progressive history's relativism throughout the twentieth century, see Novick (1988) and Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob (1994).

Studies of professors in the United States provide some insight into the potential tensions between historical inquiry, religiosity, and view of the Bible. Gross and Simmons's (2009) survey of academics, for example, found that history professors are middle of the road in their stated belief in God; they are more likely to express such belief than professors in fields such as psychology and mechanical engineering but less likely to express such belief than professors in fields such as economics or art. However, Gross and Simmons report that history professors are less likely to view the Bible as the actual word of God, which they attribute to professional boundary maintenance. That is, historians' "intellectual capital requires them to insist on the historicity of all texts," meaning that a view of the Bible as something other than a product of human history is "in tension with their professional expertise" (p. 123). This underscores how many historians maintain this distance given that otherwise they could be seen as less scientific due to a perceived bias; generally, this is similar to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. From this vantage point, naturalistic sciences would be regarded as most scientific by the general public, and other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences would subsequently be viewed as less scientific.

Conversely, those who hold a literal view of the Bible could potentially see all of the disciplines as less scientific. This may be informed by long-standing perceptions among religious conservatives in the United States throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As historian George Marsden (1980) argues, "[they] assumed that the abandonment, or at least substantial redefinition, of traditional Christian teaching concerning God's acts in history was implicit in the modern historical method which explained events in terms of natural cultural forces" (p. 229). In the academy, as theological documents and arguments were increasingly scrutinized and evidence-based approaches adopted, along with it went the trust of many members of the evangelical and fundamentalist communities in the mainstream institution.

Yet throughout the twentieth century, the role of history for those who hold a literal view of the Bible may have shifted as Bible colleges, conferences, and evangelical organizations began to spread across the country (Lienesch 2007; Worthen 2014). Individuals who perceive the Bible as a literal account of history could potentially hold historical inquiry in higher regard than would an equivalent individual with a different view of the Bible. That is, if both an individual's identity and their perception of history are grounded in the Bible, then historical inquiry could become an almost religious endeavor. Brophy (2016) points to how orthodoxy among religiously conservative groups frames their identity in light of the past; they are the defenders of morality and push back against the onslaught of cultural relativism and modernity. In so doing, they also construct an outlook toward the future. With this historical and theological context in mind, we consider the following question from a social

science perspective: How does biblical literalism shape attitudes toward history as a scientific discipline, and what motivates this association?

Data and Measurement

The data used in this study come from the 2006 and 2012 editions of the General Social Survey (GSS) (Smith et al. 2017). Primarily funded by the National Science Foundation and conducted annually or biennially since 1972, GSS utilizes probability sampling to measure the demographics, attitudes, behaviors, and other characteristics of the noninstitutionalized U.S. adult population. Interviews are conducted primarily in person, although in recent years a small proportion (~10 percent) were completed over the phone. Each edition of GSS includes core questions consistently asked along with questions that appear once or more sporadically. We focus here on the 2006 and 2012 GSS, as these are the only years in which the question representing our outcome measure was asked. The response rates were 71.2 percent in 2006 and 71.4 percent in 2012 (GSS 2017).

Outcome Measure

In the 2006 and 2012 GSS, a series of items were included to assess how scientific U.S. adults view different academic disciplines. These items began with the statement, "How scientific are each of the following fields? If you have not heard of a particular field, just say you haven't heard of it." One of the fields respondents were asked to rate was history ("Is history very scientific, pretty scientific, not too scientific, or not scientific at all?"). This serves as the outcome of interest for this study. We code the *not scientific* and *not too scientific* responses together as 0 and the *pretty scientific* and *very scientific* categories as 1. This grouping was based on the negative-to-positive shift in the response labels and patterns found in preliminary analyses below.

On its face, history as a field would seem to be unlikely to be rated as scientific, particularly when placed next to fields like biology and physics. Our concern here, though, is not whether history is seen as more or less scientific by the general public as compared to biology. Instead, we are interested in how differences in views of the Bible are associated with differences in perceptions of history as a scientific discipline, regardless of the fact that all groups on average rate fields like biology or physics as more scientific.

Bible View

Our measure of respondents' view of the Bible comes from a question on GSS asking,

Which of the following statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible? (a) The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word. (b) The Bible is

the inspired word of God, but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word. (c) the Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by man.

Respondents also could volunteer a response of “other.” We include this “other” response in the analysis as a distinct category rather than treat these cases as missing or group them with a different response, although it is obviously difficult to know how to interpret such a category. In the analysis, the “book of fables” response is used as the reference group.

Other Religion Measures

Our aim is to isolate the association between Bible view and perception of history as a scientific discipline. To accomplish this, we must account for a number of other measures that could influence this association. First, we include measures of a respondent’s religious tradition and religious service attendance. These will allow us to separate the influence of an individual’s view of the Bible from their religious tradition or religiosity. We measure religious tradition using a commonly used classification of respondents’ reported religious and denominational affiliation (Steensland et al 2000). This classification places individuals into one of seven categories: (1) evangelical Protestant, (2) mainline Protestant, (3) black Protestant, (4) Catholic, (5) Jewish, (6) other religion, or (7) none/unaffiliated. Religious service attendance comes from a question on GSS asking, “How often do you attend religious services?” Responses range from (0) *never* to (8) *more than once a week*.

Evangelical Protestants (59.9 percent) and black Protestants (66.6 percent) are the most likely to say that the Bible should be taken literally. However, 21.4 percent of mainline Protestants and 15.6 percent of Catholic respondents also report a literal view of the Bible. Similarly, frequent attenders of religious services are more likely to hold a literal view of the Bible, but literalists are among those attending less frequently as well. For example, 13.5 percent of those respondents never attending religious services hold a literal view of the Bible compared to 41.8 percent of those attending weekly and 73.6 percent of those attending more than once a week.

Scientific Knowledge and Attitudes

We also want respondents’ ratings of history as a scientific discipline to be independent from their general attitudes toward science or their knowledge of science. To this end, we include several items assessing respondents’ scientific knowledge and attitudes. The first item represents respondents’ stated confidence in “the scientific community,” which is used in recent studies examining public perceptions of science (Gauchat 2012). This item comes from a question asking respondents, “I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions

are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?” Relatively few respondents reported “hardly any” confidence in the scientific community, so we group this response with the “only some” response as 0 and code the “a great deal of confidence” response as 1.

We also include an item that asked respondents their level of agreement with the following statement: “Science makes our way of life change too fast.” It is possible that some people view history and the Bible as cultural, social, or theological stabilizers. In contrast, these individuals might view science as destabilizing. Individuals who hold such views might give history higher ratings due to its perceived association with continuity or stability. Responses are coded as (1) *strongly disagree*, (2) *disagree*, (3) *agree*, and (4) *strongly agree*.

Finally, we also want to account for differences in scientific knowledge, as one’s perception of what is or is not scientific could be shaped by exposure to and knowledge of scientific claims. We account for respondents’ scientific knowledge through the inclusion of a summed scale of correct answers to eight science knowledge questions presented to respondents. We focus on the items that Evans (2011) refers to as “uncontested” scientific facts that are not confounded with religion like questions about evolution or the big bang. These questions begin by telling respondents, “Now, I would like to ask you a few short questions like those you might see on a television game show.” Seven true-false items offering the following statements were included in the measure: “Electrons are smaller than atoms,” “Antibiotics kill viruses as well as bacteria,” “The center of the Earth is very hot,” “All radioactivity is man-made,” “It is the father’s gene that decides whether the baby is a boy or a girl,” “Lasers work by focusing sound waves,” and “The continents on which we live have been moving their locations for millions of years and will continue to move in the future.” An eighth item asked, “Now, does the Earth go around the Sun, or does the Sun go around the Earth?”

Controls

We control for several other factors that could relate to respondents’ ratings of history as scientific. First, we include two measures consisting of summed scales of respondents’ ratings to the other disciplines asked about by GSS. This can be thought of as a latent measure of individuals’ general tendency to rate disciplines as scientific. That is, we expect that individuals who tend to rate all of the disciplines high or low will tend to rate history in a similar fashion. A recent study by Gauchat and Andrews (2018) identified two disciplinary clusters within the GSS scientific ratings measures. The first cluster groups the disciplines of biology, physics, and medicine as disciplines high in “scientific authority” or scientific prestige. The second cluster groups the disciplines of accounting, economics, and engineering as disciplines that

Table 1. Cross-tabulation of Respondents' Bible View and Rating of History as a Scientific Discipline.

Respondents' Rating of How Scientific History Is as a Field	Bible View (%)			
	Word of God, Taken Literally	Inspired Word of God, Not Literal	Book of Fables	Other
Not scientific at all	25.0	28.0	25.7	37.3
Not too scientific	34.5	43.8	47.3	22.9
Pretty scientific	22.1	21.4	20.8	23.2
Very scientific	18.4	6.7	6.3	16.7
Total	100	100	100	100

$F = 5.73, p < .001$

Source: 2006 and 2012 General Social Survey.

Note: $N = 1,862$. Columns may not add precisely to 100 percent due to rounding.

have “heteronomous authority” or a primary focus and affinity with powerful economic and political sources of influence.³ To examine these sets of disciplinary groupings, we create a summed scale of respondents' ratings of the three scientifically prestigious disciplines and a separate summed scale of respondents' ratings of the three heteronomous disciplines. Gauchat and Andrews (2018) did not include the history item in their analysis. However, we would expect that history might be more associated with respondents' ratings of the heteronomous disciplines than the scientifically prestigious disciplines.

Recent research has shown attitudes toward science to be increasingly associated with political ideology, with conservatives showing less trust in scientists in recent years (Gauchat 2012). Political conservatism also tends to be associated with religious conservatism (Piazza and Sousa 2014), and both are often seen as intertwined in predicting various social and moral attitudes (Whitehead 2014). Given this, we include a control for respondents' political ideologies, which comes from a question asking, “We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal—point 1—to extremely conservative—point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?”

Education is often a strong predictor of attitudes about science as well (Bak 2001). We include measures representing the respondent's highest educational degree: (1) *less than a high school degree*, (2) *high school degree*, (3) *associate's/junior college degree*, (4) *bachelor's degree*, or (5) *graduate degree*. In the analysis, the *high school degree* group serves as the reference category.

³Heteronomous authority stands in contrast with Gauchat and Andrews's (2018) third category, “autonomous authority or a disinterest in socially dominant audiences outside the profession and field of knowledge production” (p. 569). Gauchat and Andrews find that sociology fits into this category, a discipline we do not examine in this article.

Several demographic measures are included as controls. Age is measured with a continuous measure ranging from 18 to 89, although the latter represents “89 and older.” Respondent's sex is measured as (0) *male* or (1) *female*. Race is measured with three indicators: (1) *white*, (2) *black*, and (3) *other race*. The *white* category is used as the reference in the analysis. A dichotomous indicator representing whether the respondent lives in the South also is included as a control. Finally, a dichotomous indicator is included representing the GSS year in which the respondent participated: (0) *2006* or (1) *2012*.

Results

We begin by examining the bivariate association between biblical literalism and respondents' rating of history as a scientific field. As seen in Table 1, 18.4 percent of respondents stating a literal view of the Bible say that history is very scientific. This compares to 6.7 percent of respondents saying that the Bible is the inspired but nonliteral word of God and 6.3 percent of respondents saying that the Bible is a book of fables. In other words, the literalist group is two to three times as likely to state that history is very scientific as compared to the book of fables and inspired word groups.

This pattern stands in contrast with Table 2, which presents the respondents' ratings for physics. Here we find that 64.9 percent of literalists rate physics as very scientific. That is obviously higher than their ratings for history, but this percentage is more than 10 points lower than those for the inspired word (78.1 percent) and book of fables (79.1 percent) groups. In sum, literalists are more likely to rate history as very scientific and less likely to rate physics as very scientific as compared to the other groups.

We turn to Table 3 to assess whether other measures might account for this pattern. This table presents the results of logistic regression models predicting respondents' rating of history as more (1 = *very scientific* or *pretty scientific*) or less (0 = *not very scientific* or *not at all scientific*) scientific. The table presents odds ratios, so coefficients greater than 1 represent an associated increase in the odds of rating history as

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of Respondents' Bible View and Rating of Physics as a Scientific Discipline.

Respondents' Rating of How Scientific Physics Is as a Field	Bible View (%)			
	Word of God, Taken Literally	Inspired Word of God, Not Literal	Book of Fables	Other
Not scientific at all	2.1	0.6	1.0	3.8
Not too scientific	6.1	2.0	4.8	3.9
Pretty scientific	27.0	19.3	15.1	14.5
Very scientific	64.9	78.1	79.1	79.8
Total	100	100	100	100

$F = 3.27, p < .001$

Source: 2006 and 2012 General Social Survey.

Note: $N = 1,862$. Columns may not add precisely to 100 percent due to rounding.

more scientific, and coefficients less than 1 represent an associated decrease in the odds of rating history as more scientific.

In model 1, we examine the Bible measure alongside respondents' ratings of other disciplines as well as religious and demographic controls. The pattern seen in Table 1 remains supported even after accounting for differences in religious tradition and religious service attendance. It appears that literalists' more positive perceptions of history as scientific relative to those who see the Bible as a book of fables is not a by-product of religious tradition or religious practice. The odds of a literalist's rating history as more scientific is slightly more than double the odds of an individual's stating that the Bible is a book of fables. Examining the other religion measures, we find that none of the religious traditions significantly differ in their rating of history as a scientific field when compared to the religiously unaffiliated, although the black Protestant and Jewish coefficients approach significance. Religious service attendance, however, is associated with reduced odds of rating history as more scientific.

Moving down model 1, we find that political conservatives have reduced odds of rating history as scientific. The analysis also shows that relative to high school graduates, college graduates rate history as less scientific. We do not find any significant effects for age, sex, race, southern residence, or year of survey. Again, model 1 shows that net of education, demographics, religious affiliation, religious service attendance, and any underlying tendency to rate disciplines as scientific, literalists have significantly greater odds of rating history as more scientific than individuals who view the Bible as a book of fables. Could literalists' attitudes about and knowledge of science account for this finding?

In models 2 through 4, we examine the role of respondents' science attitudes and knowledge. In model 2, we include the measure of respondents' confidence in the scientific community. This measure does not show any relationship to respondents' rating of history as scientific. Model 3 looks at the measure of respondents' agreement that science changes our way of life too fast. As we expected, agreement with this sentiment is significantly and positively associated

with rating history as scientific. Despite this significant finding, however, the difference between biblical literalists and those saying the Bible is a book of fables remains significant, suggesting that literalists' more positive perception of history as scientific is not tied to their perception of science as disruptive. We also note that in this model the Jewish coefficient moves below the .05 significance level and indicates that Jewish respondents have greater odds of rating history as scientific relative to religiously unaffiliated respondents.

In model 4, we examine the role of scientific knowledge in the more positive ratings given to history by biblical literalists. We find in this model that individuals who score higher on scientific knowledge give history significantly lower ratings as a scientific discipline. The Jewish coefficient and the religious service attendance coefficient both become nonsignificant in model 4.

Finally, model 5 presents the full model with all predictors included. The results in this model are largely the same as what was seen in previous models, although the coefficient for the "science changes our way of life" measure falls below the significance level. Of most interest here is that biblical literalists still have greater odds of rating history as more scientific than those stating that the Bible is a book of fables. Furthermore, individuals scoring higher on uncontested scientific knowledge give lower ratings to history. Individuals who tend to give higher ratings on other disciplines high in scientific authority tend to give lower ratings to history, while those giving higher ratings to other disciplines high in heteronomous authority tend to give higher ratings to history. College-educated respondents give lower ratings to history relative to those with high school degrees. We discuss these findings further below.

Discussion

Our findings suggest that the public's perceptions of academic disciplines' scientific legitimacy are not uniformly divided into a core (life and natural sciences) and a periphery (social sciences and humanities). Biblical literalism is a

Table 3. Logistic Models Predicting Respondents' Rating of How Scientific History Is as a Field.

Odds Ratios Shown (>1 = History More Scientific, <1 = History Less Scientific)	Model 1: Religion and Demographic Controls	Model 2: Confidence in Science	Model 3: Science Changes Life Too Fast	Model 4: Scientific Knowledge	Model 5: Full Model
Bible view					
Word of God	2.08**	2.08**	2.03**	1.78*	1.77*
Inspired word	1.33	1.33	1.34	1.28	1.28
Book of fables (reference)	—	—	—	—	—
Other	2.60*	2.60*	2.54*	2.08	2.06
Science views and knowledge					
Scale of scientific authority discipline ratings	0.76**	0.75**	0.76**	0.78**	0.78**
Scale of heteronomous authority discipline ratings	1.52**	1.52**	1.51**	1.53**	1.53**
Confidence in scientific community	—	1.01	—	—	1.08
Science changes way of life too fast	—	—	1.23*	—	1.17
Scientific knowledge scale	—	—	—	0.80**	0.81**
Other religion measures					
Religious tradition					
Evangelical Protestant	1.19	1.20	1.16	1.19	1.18
Mainline Protestant	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.90	0.89
Black Protestant	2.09	2.09	2.08	1.95	1.96
Catholic	1.19	1.19	1.16	1.15	1.10
Jewish	2.32	2.33	2.32*	2.26	2.27
Other	0.59	0.59	0.57	0.61	0.61
None (reference)	—	—	—	—	—
Religious service attendance	0.94*	0.94*	0.94*	0.95	0.95
Controls					
Political conservatism	0.90*	0.90*	0.89*	0.90*	0.89*
Highest degree					
Less than high school	1.45	1.45	1.43	1.19	1.18
High school (reference)	—	—	—	—	—
Junior/associate's	0.78	0.78	0.77	0.83	0.82
Bachelor's	0.55**	0.55**	0.57**	0.63*	0.63*
Graduate	0.65*	0.64*	0.68	0.80	0.83
Age	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.99	0.99
Female (reference = male)	0.90	0.92	0.92	0.82	0.83
Race					
White (reference)	—	—	—	—	—
Black	0.80	0.80	0.77	0.68	0.67
Other	1.10	1.10	1.01	0.94	0.89
South (reference = non-South)	1.22	1.21	1.21	1.17	1.17
2012 (reference = 2006)	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.03	1.17

Source: 2006 and 2012 General Social Survey.

Note: $N = 1,862$. Dashes indicate a reference group or variables not included in the model.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

consistent explanatory factor in our models examining respondents' perceptions of how scientific history is as a field. Interesting to note, in a Christian-centric country like the United States, the biblical literalists subgroup appears to stretch the boundaries of what is viewed as scientific beyond a more traditional set of popular presumptions about science rooted in naturalistic definitions—objective, hypothesis-driven, controlled experiments (presumably in a lab) and quantitative orientation (Gauchat 2011).

Respondents' overall rating of other disciplines high in scientific authority is significantly associated with reduced odds of rating history as more scientific. On the other hand, respondents' rating of disciplines high in heteronomous authority is significantly associated with increased odds of rating history as scientific (Gauchat and Andrews 2018). This suggests that individuals who put more emphasis on the scientific authority of a discipline will be less likely to see history as scientific. Yet, the more an individual puts emphasis on the perceived

authority of a discipline aligned with core economic and political sources of power, the more likely they are to see history as scientific.

A few possible dynamics may explain the relationship between biblical literalism and perceptions of history as scientific. A conventional expectation would be that literalists' perceptions of history's science-ness would coincide with accounting, medicine, and sociology (not very scientific). The results presented here suggest that it is important to disentangle history from these other disciplines to examine what it is about the discipline that biblical literalists could find distinctive. Though a conservative worldview may influence individuals' perceptions of disciplines, we found that biblical literalists across political identification rated history as more scientific than did the overall population as well as the inspired word and book of fables groups. This suggests that there may be a narrative within some literalist circles (e.g., creationists) that historical research will validate the Bible and therefore is "good," which in these survey questions is translated by respondents into "scientific."

This perspective coincides with a steady interest in the field of archaeology among Christians more broadly, and those with a literalist view of the Bible specifically. Once seen as a "handmaiden to history," archaeology as a discipline is rooted in an initial focus on early history and the Bible (Delgado 1991). Now, readers of *Christianity Today* regularly read about findings of recent excavations, and the creationist group Answers in Genesis suggests on its website that "archaeology provides us with fascinating and amazing affirmations of Scripture's accuracy and trustworthiness" (Govier 2017; Answers in Genesis n.d.). Potentially, these developments point to the increased role prominent evangelical actors may play in suggesting history and systematic examination of historical artifacts go hand in hand with a close reading of the Bible. Historical analysis is how scholars know when the Bible became an actual text rather than a collection of oral traditions and disperse writings. Historical comparison is how groups of believers examine different versions of the Bible to see how translations varied and interpretations altered. And some academics and journalists argue that places like the Museum of the Bible serve as rallying sites to strengthen a broader swath of evangelicals to sympathize, if not outright identify, with calls for a more sustained engagement with the Bible as a historical record of events (Moss and Baden 2017; Tooley and Milliner 2017; Stewart 2018).⁴

Another explanation could be that biblical literalism is oriented toward stability. Perhaps history as a discipline also

is perceived as connected to stability, making it attractive to biblical literalists. That is, historians uncover more details, but they do not typically overturn shared understandings of a particular event quickly. If over time leadership within religious traditions advocating biblical literalism uphold the historicity of the Bible, then individuals may disentangle the discipline of history from other social sciences/humanities and their perceived secular bias.

A third possibility is that the relationship could be causal. Biblical literalism could directly affect an individual's differentiation of uncontested scientific knowledge, which leads to higher ratings of history. More scientific knowledge may lead to greater differentiation of what counts as scientific; less scientific knowledge leads to fewer distinctions among disciplines.

Ultimately, why does it matter if religious conservatives find history to be more scientific than those who hold a moderate or indifferent view of the Bible? Beyond the empirical findings presented in this article, it speaks to how the boundaries of science continue to intersect with a public full of religious believers. Many members of the public believe in the goals of scientific inquiry, support funding systematic research, and have a moderate level of understanding scientific knowledge (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics 2016). Yet across the public, subgroups like biblical literalists hold differing views of which specific disciplines are more or less scientific. This provides insight into how perceptions of disciplinary approaches and forms of scientific knowledge making may be connected to goals that fall outside of the contemporary secular academy. These patterns warrant further inquiry given the broader implications for the public's understanding of science and perceptions of scientific legitimacy as it relates to religious conservatives like biblical literalists.

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⁴The Museum of the Bible's chairman of the board, Steve Green, is the CEO of Hobby Lobby. The Green family are the founders of the national chain Hobby Lobby and are well known for their religiously conservative stance due to the high profile 2014 Supreme Court case, *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, for example. They are the driving force behind the Museum of the Bible and its vast collection of historical artifacts related to the Bible.

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