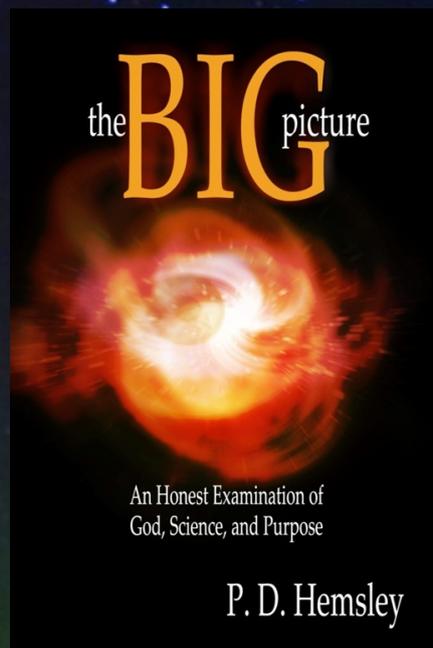


God, science and purpose

A discussion series based on
The Big Picture
by PD Hemsley



Leaders Guide

Introduction

Thank you for deciding to consider running a

God, science and purpose

discussion series.

The objective of the discussion sessions is to encourage people to explore and think more deeply about the fundamental questions of how and why are we here. The approach is to provide a broad range of information in order to allow discussions based on facts and reasoned thinking, rather than urban myth.

In well run sessions the discussions are friendly, and are held in a comfortable environment. Every opinion is valued respected, and every person welcomed.

Participants go away having met some new people, discovered some new information and enjoyed hearing diverse opinions. The experience is enjoyable, and the next session is anticipated with relish.

It is worth emphasising that you don't need to be a scientist to run the discussion sessions. The presentation material includes guidance notes, and there are more detailed descriptions in the book "The Big Picture". There is no need to pretend to know all the answers; the objective is discussion.

Session leader's role

The session leader has an important role in establishing the atmosphere for the discussions. The role is to introduce the material, and to facilitate discussion, ensuring everyone feels that their opinions are listened to and valued.

The leader must be careful not to present a fixed conclusion, but to allow the participants to explore their own interpretation of the information. The aim is to guide and encourage fresh thinking rather than to convince.

The leader must be something of a diplomat, since individuals may already hold strong opinions on many of the issues discussed. Although discussion of such opinions is encouraged, the leader needs to ensure that disagreements are expressed in a respectful and amicable way. This may require reflecting back what people are saying, and clarifying that the disagreement is not between individuals but about interpretations of the facts. It may be necessary to remind some characters that the aim is to enjoy the discussion rather than to win an argument.

It is quite acceptable to have different session leaders for each session, or even to have an overall leader and different individual session presenters. But make sure there are familiar faces at the front; don't hand over a session to someone new that hasn't been to any of the earlier sessions unless you absolutely have to.

The course is structured around *The Big Picture* by P.D. Hemsley, and it is recommended that the session leader(s) obtain a copy and read the relevant sections of the book in advance of the discussions. Session participants can be encouraged to explore the topics further in the book.

Selecting the venue

Many different types of venue can be used to run the discussion series. Perhaps the most important attribute is the 'feel' of the place; will everyone feel comfortable in the chosen environment?

The key requirements are:

- Laptop computer or pad with the presentation material.
- Data projector, screen, and speakers, or a suitable TV.
- Tables and chairs to seat four to six people to allow small discussion groups.
- Refreshments: a bar, coffee/tea facilities or similar.

Not all venues will have the computer and projection equipment, in which case you may need to bring some of your own equipment.

The venue needs to be available for perhaps 15 minutes before the meeting to allow you to set up and check everything is working.

Preparing the material

A full set of presentation material is downloadable from:
<http://pdhemsley.com/>

The idea of presenting the wide range of material for discussion may be rather daunting, and so the session leader needs to be as comfortable as possible with the slides being used. Therefore it is quite acceptable for the standard material to be tailored to suit the style and knowledge of the presenter.

The basic slides can usefully be augmented by downloading short video clips from the internet. Light-hearted clips can

be used at the start of the session to help establish a friendly atmosphere. Embedding clips can be technically challenging, but with the friendly atmosphere the participants will be understanding and sympathetic to technical difficulties. Nevertheless it is worth running through the slides and clips in the meeting place to iron out any gremlins.

Reading the section in The Big Picture will help build confidence, and the guidance notes for each slide will help in knowing what to say. But try to present in your own words, and be willing to say that you don't fully understand something yourself – there may be someone in the room who is more knowledgeable and would be happy to explain something in more detail. This can help build the atmosphere of a shared journey, although you will need to be careful not to let them go on too long or take over the session.

It can be helpful to recap the previous session during the introduction, but make sure that the recap doesn't become a rerun! You might like to note some of the conclusions or key outcomes from the discussions, or simply list the items covered.

Right after the introduction there is a slide introducing a 'logical fallacy of the day'. This is to alert the participants to many of the techniques used to win arguments with unsound logic, and you may find people spotting it in later discussion. As a leader you may find yourself using logical fallacies – we all tend to, but if caught out the simplest thing is to admit that it's a 'fair cop'.

Feel free to replace the fallacy with one you prefer, or to describe it in a different way. Once again, it is important for the presenter to be comfortable with the material.

Structure of the sessions

Each session will follow the following format:

- Get settled with a drink
- Welcome and introduction
- Logical fallacy for the day
- Introduce today's topic
- Presentations
- Video clips
- Discuss in groups (typically 4 to 6 people)
- Share feedback from groups (session leader facilitates a common discussion)
- Arrangements for next time
- Thanks and closing

Be aware that participants may want to continue discussions after the session has ended, so you need to consider if that will be possible at your venue (e.g. if it is in a pub) or how much you can allow (e.g. while you pack up any equipment).

Charging

You will also need to decide whether there is any charge for the sessions, and if so how much to ask (will it be a fixed charge, or on a voluntary contribution basis). You will also need to decide how you are going to collect the money. It's quite acceptable to discuss and clarify this with participants at the end of the first session, perhaps sharing the actual costs of putting on the sessions if you have had to hire a venue.

Publicising the series

It is best to decide your own ways of publicising the discussion series and inviting people to come. However, if you want to download some standard material and graphics then please visit <http://pdhemsley.com/>

Further questions?

If you have further questions or would like to discuss any aspects of running a

“God, science and purpose”

discussion series then please go to:
<http://pdhemsley.com/contact.html>