

THE DEVOLUTION of GOD

The Oxford Templeton Advanced Conference: Dis-Ease with Some Religion & Science Considerations

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WHAT MIGHT THE MATTER BE?

A number of people attending the Oxford, England Templeton advanced conference on Science & Religion were uncomfortable with the theology of some presentations. After discussion and reflection the difficulty may be attributed to unspoken philosophical or theological assumptions with which members of the audience disagreed. Speaker assumptions, whether consciously intended or not, seemed to include:

- I) a deistic &/or pantheistic world view;
- II) selective rationality: rationality encouraged, but only within the narrow set of implicit and unstated deistic assumptions,
- III) allowing the scientific perspective to challenge religious perspectives without admitting valid areas where religion challenges the scientific perspective;
- IV) not quite admitting a spiritual realm;
- V) admitting only Left brain considerations to the exclusion of Right brain intellectual contributions; and
- VI) committing the common mistake in expositions on evolution whereby natural selection is presumed to be a FORCE which creates new species.

This paper will consider problems with I and IV.

THE SCIENCE OF GOD?

A pantheism diagnosis relates to the suggestions that the “laws of nature” as properly elucidated by science should generally and uncritically be incorporated into theology so as to correct religion. In itself, this poses no big problem. Science tells us a great deal about the physical and biological world. However, the Templeton perspective seemed to go much further assuming that science and evolutionary theory are the PRE-EMINENT sources of valid knowledge for modern theological development. Thus, the “laws of nature” were essentially proposed as the **primary** or **only** valid route for knowledge about god, the meaning of the cosmos, and human existence. Although occasional, *ad hoc*, asides did note that the Christian God need not be forgotten, the major thrust of the conference was that we

need to reconsider all Judeo-Christian theology principally on the basis of uncritically accepted (on faith, as it were) scientific models of nature and evolutionary theory. Presenters seemed to presume that scientific models are necessary and **sufficient** descriptions of creation and its Creator. The predominant view seemed that we have accepted the scientific views of the origin of the cosmos, and we must all now get on with uncritically accepting evolutionary models for the nature of man and meanings of life. In this way, the conference predilection was that a physics, biological and genetic world view was preferred, *a priori*, on questions of meaning and purpose of the cosmos and on explanations of human motivation and behavior.

This heavily scientized view raises concerns about uncritical acceptance of scientific models and theories. More problematically, however, it suggests that the god of all creation is **within** all the [physical, chemical, biological and evolutionary] laws of inanimate nature.

Consequently the Templeton god is NOT an independent actor who stands apart and outside his/her own creation. This view, that god exists principally within the physical and biological components of nature is, of course, the main perspective of **pantheism**.

GOD ON HOLIDAY?

Additionally, the conference perspective suggested that theologies holding that God might intervene into His/Her creation are tired old erroneous religious misconceptions that certainly do not fit with the science of god. Presentations implied that personal spiritual experience and scripture are steeped in archaic unscientific world views and consequently are inadequate to knowing the meaning of existence. The conference emphases seemed to be that a far more accurate route to ‘theological truth’ is to know, not God, but god’s scientific laws; not Judeo-Christian spirituality, but evolutionary genetics.

There is nothing inherently wrong with the scientific study of nature (I AM a neurobehavioral scientist with an extensive physics background) and such studies are a fascinating exploration of the nature of physical existence. In the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas opened the West to science with his reintroduction of Aristotle’s ideas on observation of nature. To Thomas, observation of nature was a means to discovering the Creator by studying Her/His handiwork, i.e., nature. These studies he called, “**general revelation**.” Thomistic theology fits very well with appreciating science as a powerful way of knowing the physical world. Thomas’ knowing God through studying nature was, of course, a major impetus to the development of science in Western culture in the 17th century. Aquinas, of course, held that God is also known by “**specific revelation**” which includes scriptures and human spiritual experiences.

By omitting both religious and humanities’ perspectives, the Oxford conference, in essence, presented us only with a “retired” creator from some past millennium, whose only lingering traces are the “laws of nature.” From this theological model, only physical and biological sciences can tell us the important “theological” stories of what the cosmos is and who human beings are. The assumption of god only being involved with the creation of the cosmos 15 billion years ago, and ever since not intervening in the operation of nature, is of course characteristic of **deism**.

Deism holds that God did indeed create this wondrous cosmos, but since the time of creation, God does NOT intervene in His/Her creation. Consequently, all creation, including human existence, runs solely according to the impersonal laws of science, instituted by the now absent creator, and understood only by scientists. As one conference attendee stated, “as though God made it all, then went on holiday.” Deism presumes a god who is an absentee and nonmeddling landlord. Thus, deism goes hand and glove with pantheism’s gods existing only within the scientific laws of nature. The conference struggled mightily, it seemed, to dis-abuse us of any notion that god was in any way necessary for sustaining His/Her creation [cf. T. Aquinas] or that, god forbid, the divine might intervene into nature or human experiences. The “laws of nature” were deemed too sacred for any such divine meddling. T. Aquinas died defending the theology of the ever active personal god against deistic philosophies newly hatched from Aquinas’ own concepts of general revelation!

ABSENTEE GODS HATCH UN-INSPIRITED MEN

Another serious problem with these two perspectives, pantheism and deism, is that they DE-personalize God... making Him/Her distant from humans. In essence, deism/pantheism gives us a scientized model of a god who has nothing special to do with human origins or human nature. Thus, humans become solely the product of evolution... highly advanced “naked apes” wandering through this senseless cosmos surviving in our “struggle for existence.”

Leo Tolstoy gave us an impressive description of a deistic existence by characterizing the scientized view of dis-inspired man:

Ever since Levin... had for the first time looked at questions of life and death in the light of what he called the new [scientific] convictions, he had been horrified not so much by death as by life without the slightest knowledge of its origin, its purpose, its reason, and its nature. Organisms, their destruction, the indestructibility of matter, evolution, the law of conservation of energy, were the terms that had superseded his [previous religious] beliefs. These terms and the conceptions associated with them were very useful for intellectual purposes, but they gave no guidance for life... he was like a person naked, who out in the frost for the first time, must inevitably die a painful death from exposure.

“Without knowledge of what I am and why I am here, it is impossible to live,” said Levin to himself.... “In an infinity of time, in an infinity of matter, and an infinity of space, a bubble-organism emerges which will exist for a little time and then burst, and that bubble am I.”

This was a tormenting fallacy, but it was the sole and last result of centuries-long labor of human [scientific/deistic] thought in that direction.

[Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 1877, Part VIII, Ch. 8]

To have our BODIES the product of inexorable, random, meaningless biological evolution, if this model indeed endures in scientific history, is no big problem. However, problems arise when uncritical applications of evolutionary models and unexamined scientized assumptions

a priori discredit and disallow the human SPIRIT. Human spirit which enables humans to rise above the beasts (albeit not as frequently as we might hope) is clearly noticed in human experience. Michelangelo's "*Creation of Adam*" on the Sistine Chapel ceiling was not done to depict human biology and anatomy of *Homo Sapiens*. The biology of Adam, as human organism, is impressively depicted. However, Michelangelo's Adam is not truly human without the necessary touch of the finger of God which is so essential to transform the "naked ape," the un-inspired representative of the biological species, into an inspired real human. Michelangelo, Ghandi, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, Abraham, Jesus, and many loving humans, all convey a human spirit which rises way above the "adaptation for survival" model of evolutionary biology. In scientized deism/pantheism we are totally without Michelangelo's inspiring of man. How indeed can one say the dis-inspired scientific evolutionary model COMPLETELY explains human nature?

One might rationally, and even humbly, suggest that a "struggle for existence," "survival of the fittest" human organism model is hardly worth the writing of a novel or a poem about, and certainly does not need to be depicted in great art or theology, and can not be presumed to conceive a spirituality or a Beethoven's 9th *Symphony*. While there may be no great import if the age of the earth is 4.5 billion years (geology model) or 10,000 years old (Christian literalist model), the loss of the human spirit would be catastrophic indeed. The Templeton conference seemed not to give this perspective of human nature much significance. Conversely, if there is no spiritual nature to humans, as seemingly assumed at this conference, then my analysis is, of course, quite moot.

APOLOGIA.... SINE CERCE:

Incidentally, in this analysis, I in no way am claiming that evolutionary theory is any more or less important than any other science theories. I am merely contrasting physical/ biological science with religious/spiritual perspectives of human nature. I am not giving anyone the easy "red herring" cheap escape of labeling me a "creationist," since in fact I am not. I am a dedicated neurobehavioral scientist examining what my scientific tools can, and can not measure, much as physicists have had to reexamine their understanding of physics models and theories since the evolution of Newtonian into modern physics.

In fact, I owe much of this analysis to my training [U of Rochester] in physics after its Newtonian existential crisis. I was much impressed with the careful cautions about the validity of physics models depending heavily upon: a) fundamental assumptions made BEFORE the science was performed; and b) what actually our instruments were measuring. These cautions are merely good science.

In this paper we are examining the fundamental ASSUMPTIONS of Oxford Templeton theology. If deism/pantheism are basic assumptions, then Templeton's theological outcomes, which include an absentee god and dis-inspired men are NOT at all proven by scientific (or other) reasoning, but rather are the inescapable outcomes **preordained** by the unreasoned deistic/pantheistic presumptions... much as some feminists who presume all males to be

aggressors always devise studies which somehow find dysfunctional males rather than men of compassion and high integrity.

THEO-LOGOS of COMPETING GODS

A humanities professor at my university, also an ordained minister, describes the unique contribution of Judaism to Western culture as introducing a **PERSONAL** God who cares for His/Her people in creation. This is in stark contrast to the gods of the contemporaneous Early Iranians, Zoroastrians, and the Greeks... the “gods of other nations.” Zoroastrianism is a dualistic religion in which two gods, the god of good and one of evil, had to be worshipped and appeased. The Greek gods are whimsical, capricious, arrogant, aloof, uncaring and sometimes malicious to their co-existing humans. ... neither religion’s gods related personally to humans.

Thus, a Hebrew God of justice and mercy, who cares for widows and orphans, who resents our religious sacrifices when we forget to care for fellow humans, who has a passionate “steadfast love” for His/Her people, and who is PRESENT to us, who walks with prophets, comes to us in humane insights, gives us a truly human example of how humans should live, and who leaves Her/His Spirit within us to guide and instruct us... THIS is the remarkably unique PERSONAL God of the Judeo-Christian experience.

This intimate God/Creator of Jews and Christians, involved with her/his creatures, stands in stark contrast to the passive, absentee, objectified gods of deism and pantheism which seemed suggested by the Templeton conference. The impersonal god of deism is not the God commented upon by the then atheist, C. S. Lewis [*Surprised by Joy*]. Lewis tried to avoid conversion in order to elude the all-too-personal Judeo-Christian God whom he considered the “Transcendental Interferer”... the God, as in “The Hound of Heaven,” who demands to be personally present in one’s life. I tend to liken the personalness of this God to a strong, devoted, loving spouse who supports and cares... even when we wish s/he wouldn’t... and who also requires recognition, communication, and being personally acknowledged. And, when necessary for our own good, a determined spouse who will NOT leave us alone! A quality personal relationship demands nothing less. My wife, and good spouses everywhere, are part of my evidence, in nature, against the deistic god.

In contradistinction, Templeton presentations seemed to deprive God of Her/His most important Judeo-Christian feature... His/Her PERSONAL involvement in Her/His creation and with His/Her creatures. Here, I believe, is where the Templeton presenters and a knowledgeable audience diverged. Audience members, personally and professionally aware of the personal nature of the Judeo-Christian God, felt uneasy with the Templeton portrayal of the god within the laws of natural science... as one might feel uneasy with a judge who is a computer... or a spouse who relates to you as only one organism of the opposite gender.

TO WHICH GOD-MODEL ARE WE WEDDED?

A “value,” as it were, of deism and pantheism is that they allow a “respectable” claim to believing in god while the absent, or “forces of nature,” image of god exonerates one from any personal commitment or any change in life style... much like a “modern” marriage [or perhaps a marriage of nobility or the rich and famous] where both partners are so busy with their careers that they live mostly separate lives, meeting mainly at professional social functions... a “marriage of convenience” requiring no probing interpersonal communication, no deep discovery of the *OTHER*, no dedicated caring, no spiritual or psychological sharing, no obligation to discover and respect the other, and no interpersonal growth. Deism gives us a god of convenience, who is there occasionally, within our control when needed for political purposes, but most certainly NOT a god-person who might change our life.

As C. S. Lewis wrote,

Here lies the deepest tap-root of pantheism... the pantheist’s god does nothing, demands nothing. He is there if you wish for Him, like a book on a shelf. He will not pursue you. [To a pantheist] an impersonal god is well and good... a formless life-force surging through us, a vast power which we can tap... but God himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, perhaps approaching [us]... the hunter, king, husband [or wife]... that is quite another matter... And therefore this is the very point at which so many draw back - I would have done so myself if I could - and proceed no further with Christianity... Supposing we really found Him [an independent, personal Creator, Lover, God alive and involved in His/Her Creation]? We never meant it to come to that! Worse still, supposing He had found us?.... One may be in for anything.” [C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, 1947].

The “modern marriage” overlooks most of what the Judeo-Christian tradition holds most significant about marriage. Similarly, the deistic/pantheistic god model denies much of the major characteristics of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Mary, Joseph, Jesus and most genuine Jews and Christians. Where once there was a God who walked the earth with His/Her great religious leaders, who talked with Her/His prophets and faithful people, who dwells within each person of good will, the Templeton perspective seemed to offer us only a 15 billion year old fossilized “foot print” of a helpless bygone author of rules for interactions by which matter and energy propel the cosmos and our existences. If this deistic/pantheistic god is, indeed, the creator-god, then most all of Judeo-Christian scriptures completely misrepresent god, or describe an illusory god, or need never have been written at all.

Just perhaps, might an audience, composed not of naive undergraduate students but of experienced professionals in Judeo-Christian religion &/or science, be expected to contract some dis-ease with this seeming bio-evolutionary paleo-theology... the theo-logos of a fossilized god?

SELECTIVE (RESTRICTED) RATIONALITY

II) The term “rational” was used more than the word “God” in the Templeton conference. To be rational was why presenters emphasized “theology” rather than “religion” we were told. However, the outcomes of ones rationality depends inescapably upon the initial ASSUMPTIONS one makes about the world to which one applies rational considerations. [Here I speak, not as some “irrational” religionist but as a student of physics, in the post-Newtonian age, when the basic Newtonian assumptions about the world were replaced by new assumptions of quantum mechanics. We were hence cautions to always ask WHAT ARE THE INITIAL ASSUMPTIONS from which these equations are derived]

In the Oxford Templeton conference there were a number of instances when audience members (presumably all professionals and quite knowledgeable in areas of science &/or religion) asked rational questions, or proposed rational critiques which were not received nor considered in a rational fashion. Two cases come to mind: A) Michael Behe’s perspective [*Darwin’s Black Box*] challenging the occurrence of new species by chance; and B) a description of science as a “materialistic reductionist way of knowing.” Behe’s impressively rational analysis was dismissed as though he were an irrational creationist, and the description of science was dismissed with a warning that we do not care to use any “Boo words” in our discussions.

IS THE PLAYING FIELD LEVEL?

III & IV) The lack of religious challenges to scientific assumptions, to the scientific method & models, and to areas of existence to which science can not speak seems to relate to Templeton attempts to focus solely on Left brain intellectual processes to the exclusion of human Right brain intellect. Here, to speak of intellectual processes and human nature, I will interject my professional area of competence as a neurobehavioral scientist [NOT a creationist]. Conference presenters frequently emphasized the “rationality” of their perspectives and expositions. “Rationality,” it seemed, was mentioned far more than was “God.” Rationality usually relates to logical analysis, which is primarily a human Left brain intellectual function.

Left brain intellectual processes include analysis, categorizing & time sequencing of information, mathematical & scientific type thinking, viewing PARTS of a system or process rather than a whole, and verbal, word-based descriptions. Present human neurobehavioral understandings view these intellectual processes as mainly functions of the Left cerebral neocortex, and therefore, only a PART of human intellectual functioning... a part highly emphasized in university science, engineering, mathematics, technological education.

Human intellectual functioning is view as incomplete without Right brain intellectual processes. Right

.... as Left brain does musical theory, artistic musical analysis, but can not produce artistic or musical creativity or esthetic or spiritual experiences. Left brain in fact seems to BLOCK more holistic human experiencing. In the sciences, Left brain does most of the laboratory analyses and factlet finding, done by overwhelmingly most of the worlds’ scientists. It is

Right brain which produces the great creative syntheses, the major paradigm shifts, and the new theories. As both Einstein and Jonas Salk have said, there is NO logical path to the great syntheses, only a great creative leap.

In our present religion and science considerations, Left brain generally tries to produce “theology” the thinking and talking about religion, while Right brain relates more to “Spirituality,” unique human experiences, both outer [of compassion, caring, sacrifice and love] and inner experiences [of the transcendent, of acceptance, of “the Spirit” within]. The latter was significantly missing in the Templeton considerations. Thus our Templeton presentations MISSED out on TWO significantly human experiences: A) Right brain intellectual considerations; and B) human spiritual experiences. However, these latter human characteristics both provide major human evidence for human experiences which challenge science; AND deny the part of human intellect most capable of validly evaluating that in existence which scientific analysis and theological “rationality” can not imagine.

In this arena, despite numerous questions from and opportunities offered by the audience, presenters answered with more or less deistic dogmatic assertions and avoided the wonderful opportunities the audience offered for a fuller, rational consideration of the issues. In this light, it also seemed that presenters were not able to accept the PROFESSIONAL competencies present in the audience.

Humans experience [Right brain intellect] the existence of love, altruism, compassion and admire and long for [a major theme in the J-C scriptures] justice, mercy, goodness, peace, fairness, courage and faithfulness. “I do not want your rituals nor your animal or child sacrifices....” [psalms, Micah, Amos, and twice from Jesus]. I also do not want your religious dogmatic rules as warned by St Paul and spiritual Christians and Jews. Curiously, these warnings seem aimed at Left brain theological, rational idea behaviors. “What I want is... justice and mercy....” “Care for widows and orphans...” Different races and religions showing compassion and respect for each other [the Good Samaritan and the Roman Centurion]. Not surprisingly, these great moral concepts are conveyed by stories [amenable to Right intellect] and NOT by rational exposition [amenable to Left brain].

Experiences of these human values provides EVIDENCE that humans have more, are more, than are displayed in the genetic determinants in animal behaviors, which are principally dominance, submissive, reproductive, territoriality, nesting and self-survival behaviors. These latter behaviors CAN substantially be explained as derived from evolutionary genetic determinants and substantially aid in “survival of the fittest” and in “struggle for existence.” It is the human behaviors, love compassion, mercy, self-sacrifice] which do NOT easily fit the biological adaptive model which provide the major challenges to evolutionary models of human existence. The latter appear to all be based upon INTangible human values-based behavior and thus [quite rationally] would ESCAPE measurement, evaluation and description by the [materialistic] scientific methodologies.

It seems there are three responses which science and scientists may make to the existence of human INTangibles: 1) deny their existence by denying human experience; 2) reduce the

immense human and moral significance of these values to some lower materialistic descriptor; or 3) admit we have here some delightfully novel [to science] human characteristics to rationally and experientially investigate.

The first adjustment to human intangibles was proffered by one conference presenter whose response to the description of science as a materialist, reductionist method of knowing, was that the conference wanted no “Boo-words” used, which I took to mean no irrational, emotive, misleading scare tactics. I found this puzzling in the context because one of the most rational and accurate epistemological descriptions of science is that it is, *de facto* and *a priori* a MATERIALISTIC way of knowing which when confronted with an intangibles, e.g., the human mind, will reduce such intangible into a substitute tangible observable, e.g., the brain. This definitional description of science, I derive, NOT from any “creationist” contamination, but from my six years as a physics major and my reading in history and philosophy of science. This “Boo-word” experience led me to conclude that by dogmatic assertion, not rational consideration, any limitations of science to investigation of its proper realm, matter & energy, would not be allowed. This I would categorize as a “materialist fundamentalist” faith assertion.

The second stance was demonstrated by a discussion where the intangible human characteristic or value or motivational principle of “love” was presented as a “case in point” to challenge the assertion that evolution and adaptation models explained ALL human behavior. A participant dismissed this fascinating arena for rational consideration by asserting that “love is just an emotion.” In neurobehavioral sciences, and emotion is a genetically determined innate behavioral urge built within the brain’s limbic system... and is more accurately termed, “reproductive drive.” Thus we had a clear example of the scientific materialist process of reductionism.... what may be one of human’s most impressive intangible values, love, has been summarily and without rational consideration demoted [reduced] to a far more material, genetic robotic involuntary survival drive, called “reproductive instinct.”

Similarly, human “altruism” was elucidated as, if I followed the argument, as having two genetic components. Mammals were described as having a genetically deterministic behavior which involuntarily urged to die for the good of the species or social group. This was a logical extension of the “selfish gene” biological hypothesis and was denoted as “altruism” “with a small ‘a’.” Humans were described as being unique in having additionally a “Mother Theresa Altruism ‘with a Large A’.” The ‘Altruism’ of humans resulted from both the mammalian gene to urge social survival PLUS a gene which induced humans to MISakenly think we were performing caring self sacrifice [“Altruism”] evolutionary.

If human “love” may possibly exist the reductionist process miraculously transmutes it into some material, biological process, sex drive, and if human “Mother Theresa Altruism” the reductionist process *a priori* redefines it to be a biological selfish gene phenomenon. which is significantly DEVOID of most of the major human significance of “love” and many have been fortunate to experience!!