

GOD AND SCIENCE.

By

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Bertrand Russell, the famous British mathematician and philosopher, did not believe in God. He was once asked by a woman - 'Mr. Russell, you don't believe in God, but what will you do if, after you die, you unexpectedly find yourself rushed before the throne of God for judgement?' Russell replied - 'In that case Madam, I will be happy to change my mind'.

As a science columnist I have been struck by the number of correspondents, over the years, who automatically assume that I don't believe in God. Is it possible to be a scientist and to believe in God? The answer is yes. There are innumerable examples of eminent scientists, both past and present, who believe in God. I am a scientist and I am also a Christian.

What do I mean by believing in God? I mean belief in a supreme being of infinite knowledge, wisdom and goodness, by whose will the world exists. Christians believe that human nature somehow reflects the image of God, and that our purpose is to develop this nature so that we can approximate better to the divine image. (I have no competence to discuss other than the Christian concept of God).

Science is the study of the natural mechanisms that underpin the natural world, and, as such, has nothing to say about the existence of God. A scientist is free to hold such beliefs about God as his/her wits, as a whole human being, can construe for him/her.

God is not self-evident from a study of the natural details of the world, and there is no evidence that God's on-going intervention is necessary in order to keep the world working. It seems to me that God's existence can never be 'provable'. If it could, then all but the insane would be bound to believe and that would remove our freedom of choice to accept or reject God. It is much more likely that we are supplied with just enough evidence to allow us to reasonably conclude that God exists, but only if we apprehend this evidence with all our faculties.

The philosophy of materialism holds that the material structure of the universe explains all phenomena that exist. Many people think that a scientist must also be a materialist. This is not true. Many scientists are materialists, many are not. Many prominent scientists in the past have either had a straightforward belief in the Christian concept of God, or else have accepted the existence of some form of supreme supernatural creative intelligence. These scientists include Isaac Newton, James Clerk Maxwell, Charles Darwin, Max Plank, Werner Heisenberg, George Boole, Albert Einstein, etc.

Probably the single greatest thing about the natural world is that it is understandable and its laws can be stated mathematically. Einstein had a deep reverence for the rational nature of reality. He declared - 'Certain it is that the conviction, akin to religious feelings, of the rationality or intelligibility of the world lies behind all scientific work of a higher order ... this firm belief, a belief bound up with deep feeling, in a superior mind that reveals itself in the world of experience, represents my conception of God.' He also said - 'I want to know how God created this world. I want to know His thoughts, the rest are details.'

Neither is there any shortage today of eminent scientists who believe in God. The book *Cosmos, Bios, Theos* (edited by H. Margenau and R.A. Varghese, Open Court, 1992) is a collection of

interviews with 60 prominent scientists, many of them Nobel Prize winners. Thirty seven of these scientists profess an unambiguous belief in God.

Humanism is a widespread western alternative to religion. It denies the existence of any power or moral value superior to humanity, and rejects religion in favour of a belief that humanity can advance itself by its own efforts. The humanist believes that human beings are the product of blind evolutionary forces, and that conceptions of God are merely delusions that flicker through the brains of many. Humanists do not believe that humans arose for any particular purpose. The humanist believes that when a person dies that is the end of him/her, and that in 5 billion years, when our sun dies, that will be the end for humanity.

The humanist vision is tragic in at least two senses. One relates to the limited prospects for developing human capacities, and the other to the irredeemable nature of human suffering. Human beings have the unique capacity to grow in wisdom, knowledge, self-awareness, and love. In principle there would seem to be no limit to the development of these valuable aspects of human nature. But if the humanist philosophy is true these aspirations can only be fulfilled in a very limited and temporary fashion. Such aspirations would be appropriate to beings made for eternal life in a universe designed for the development of personal values.

Human suffering is widespread. Even today, a majority of people on the planet live under conditions of abject poverty, malnourishment and disease. Over ages past, the sum total of human anguish and pain that has been endured beggars the power of the imagination. According to humanism, suffering of the innocent in this life is just an unfortunate fact; the suffering is irredeemable. On the other hand, Christianity views life in relation to a divine purpose of love, and sees how out of suffering can come a good of infinite value, a good which justifies the pain of the suffering.

Because certain aspects of the vision offered by humanism are unpalatable does not mean that the philosophy must be untrue. However, it seems to me that, since the God-hypothesis can answer the tragic aspects of the humanist philosophy so comfortably, it should at least be carefully considered by all.

On the other hand, while it may well be comforting to believe in the existence of God, is such a belief reasonable, or just a comforting illusion? After all, there is no logical or scientific proof that God exists. A belief that is reasonable simply means that there are adequate grounds for the belief. Are there adequate grounds for belief in God? I believe that for some people there are adequate grounds and for others there aren't.

Belief in the Christian God centres around our response to the life and the teaching of Jesus Christ. Did Jesus himself have adequate grounds for belief in God? It is clear from the gospel that Jesus believed with every fibre of his being that he lived in the presence of God, with whom he had easy and open communication. For Jesus not to believe in God would have been to reject his own sanity. So, what about the reasonableness of our belief in God? If we find that the teachings of Jesus strike a deep chord in us and stake a claim on our hearts and minds, if the words of Jesus strike us as coming from a cool and sane mind, if following the teaching of Jesus produces positive effects in our lives, then I believe we have adequate grounds for belief in the God of whom Jesus spoke. On the other hand, if a person finds that he/she cannot respond positively in these ways, then such a person does not have adequate grounds for belief in God.

As a scientist I am proud of the spectacular progress that science has made over the past several hundred years in advancing our understanding of the natural world. And there is no reason to think that this progress will not continue indefinitely. But there is more to understanding the world in its entirety than science alone can command, powerful and all as it is. I believe that the appropriate way to approach such a large question as the existence of God is by the apprehension of the world with all our human senses, that is using our wisdom gained from experience, our intuition, our capacity to love, and our emotions, in addition to our analytical minds. If the question is approached exclusively through logical scientific analysis one will probably come to the same conclusion as Bertrand Russell.

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