

**Institute for the Study of Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology**

## **Faith and Scientific Explanations**

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"Why has it been raining" may seem a simple question, demanding a simple scientific answer. Yet I was given three quite different answers when I posed the question to three of my grandchildren. Nicholas, aged six, responded with a meteorological explanation involving the role of clouds and so on. Victoria aged four, had a theological answer "God caused it", while Hannah, six, had a teleological answer suggesting that "the plants needed water".

In our more constrained adult world, we often think that such questions can only have a scientific answer. Religious explanations are considered to be conflicting and outmoded and must automatically be rejected. The logic goes something like this "Science tells us that we arose by evolutionary processes , therefore God cannot be involved".

Modern science rightly does away with certain inadequate concepts of God, but the Christian God cannot be so easily dismissed. Science and Christian theism are not alternative explanations of nature , but rather complement each other. They are different viewpoints of the same reality. A world with only scientific answers would be an uninteresting world indeed. Morality, love, art and literature would all be redundant. Such a complementarity is in fact demanded by science itself. Science often raises questions that are unanswered and unanswerable from within science. We can ignore such questions, yet it is perhaps more satisfactory to proceed beyond the boundaries of science to metaphysics to address such questions - in order to make sense of the "way the world is".

The processes of cosmic and biological evolution which produce humanity as persons capable of self awareness, having consciousness, a mind and capable of a relationship with the numinous, with God, are the result of a finely tuned interplay of scientific laws. The chemical elements that form the substance of biological life had their origin in the ashes of dead stars. Such a consequence requires long periods of time and a peculiarly narrow set of particular conditions. It is really a remarkable coincidence that we are here at all. A theistic answer makes sense of this data not in any "knock down proof" way, but as an answer that has consistency with the observed scientific data. Any atheistic or naturalistic answer has to face the same test of consistency and seems so often much less satisfying.

Faith also brings a moral dimension to science that is not intrinsic to science's methodology. Increasingly a scientific view of the world, particularly of the rapidly expanding biological world of genetic manipulation and of possible human cloning etc. needs an ethical context in which to operate. Not in any sense to gag science, but to give it moral direction. Playing God is, in one sense, part of the task of science, but it needs to be played within boundaries that science is unable to define.

Faith also brings a teleological dimension- a sense of purpose. Purpose was part and parcel of Aristotelian science. Very properly modern science is concerned with mechanisms, not purpose, but to restrict our overall understanding of nature to this purely scientific window is to remove any sense of purpose and hope to living. Without faith science has no anchor or context.

The Psalmist in the Old Testament exposes the insignificance of humanity in the face of the enormity of the cosmos "When I look at your heavens. What is man that you are mindful of him" Yet he goes on to indicate that humanity has been given significance as the creation of God, made in the image of God and privileged to act as steward even as co creator in God's world. We are not therefore specks of cosmic dust, but are part of God's creation - created by a rich and fruitful process, which has purpose and direction. By faith we can have hope not in the "blind watchmaker" of Richard Dawkins' purposeless design, but in the Christian God. - a God who identified in Christ with our humanity, who shared with humanity's suffering in the cross and who gives hope through the resurrection. Such a faith is neither irrational nor incredible, nor is it unnecessary in a scientific world

Let us return to the wisdom of children. All three grandchildren were right in their answers. Nature provides a complex interplay of events potentially describable by the methods of science, but it also demands metaphysical answers which go to the heart of ultimate reality and provide us, through faith with purpose and hope.

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