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SCIENCE AND FAITH

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"I have studied nature on the very large scale (the cosmos), on the very small (the atom), and also biological systems. Everything I have seen gives me a sense of wonder and makes me worship the Creator."

Prof Brian D Hahn is in the Department of Applied Mathematics at the University of Cape Town

Reflections of Heaven in the mirror of Nature:

A SHELL ON A BEACH 20th May 1993

Frank Opie

Wandering along the soft, white beach sands of Betties Bay...I found a recently uprooted kelp plant across my path beached by the ebb tide. A shell of the limpet *Patella compressa* caught my eye and I picked it up...it was perfect..well almost, except for a tiny hole licked through its hardness by a dog whelk. Then the whole beach was full of these shells, large and small, clean and encrusted with barnacles. The same storm waves had swept them all away. A tragedy of sorts perhaps in their community. I turned one upside down in a pool and watched the "little boat" sail away on the outgoing tide.

But I had time to see. No matter how much they looked the same, they were different. Everyone had a different history and experience of life - all tide scoured and lost together in one raging night. How easily we name and discard small wonders, I reflected. A shell? Which one? *Patella compressa*! Oh, that one. Which one? The big one? The small one? The old, scarred one? The young, smooth, ribbed one? Or is it the one with the tiny cap? The eccentric one? The deep one? The shallow one? The wide one or the long one? The dark one? The light one? The encrusted, covered-up one? Which one? Every one is unique - not like new shoes, all different sizes. Rather like worn shoes, only fitting one foot, worn to the track and tread of one owner.

The creation is not just a careless mass duplication like a celestial assembly line, but the personal mark of a master craftsman who has taken the infinite trouble to work with each creature individually, fitting each to his own place - with the touch of love. Try as you might no two of these shells are the

same, each is as unique as a finger print. What a message of hope, where we see groups, He sees individuals in groups. Not a sparrow falls, or a Patella compressa washes up on the beach without Him knowing and caring. We are never alone with our problems!

Fallacies and Fabrications in the Name of God and Science:

BLINDING WITH SCIENCE

Mike L Anderson

Sometimes it is necessary to use technical jargon to communicate effectively. At other times it can be used to hide the truth.

Pierre and Jeanne Dubbois found this out the hard way. The Argus (4/6/1992 p. 16) tells the story. On holiday in Thailand they fell in love with "two furry, olive green, short-tailed pets in a cage labelled "Pim and Pam." They asked the dealer to identify the creatures. The response: "Callosciurus flavimanus." Unless one is a Zoologist how can one argue with that? The couple were satisfied and bought the cuddly creatures. It turned out that Pim and Pam were rats- Korean Super Rats to be precise. Several years later their 10 million or so offspring had over-run the French couple's town. People reported their houses being "ransacked." Police laughed as they identified the intruders - Super Rats.

This story raises the interesting question of exactly when abuse of jargon is being committed. It can't be simply a case of incorrect use of jargon because the dealer above was scientifically correct.

Sometimes, however, the case is clear. The following was actually said by an astrologer (The Star 19/03/1987): "Your personality is a description of DNA mutation induced by the intermodulation of the earth's magnetosphere, which results in the influx of sub-atomic particles from the solar wind, whose origin stems from the differential rotation of the sun's polar and magnetic field." It's not really worth the effort, but if one take the trouble to work out what is actually been said, it is nonsense. The reporter was clearly impressed and noted that the astrologer had looked in her straight in the eye when he said it. She became convinced that it was scientifically respectable to believe in astrology.

At other times it is more difficult. Robert Thouless in his classic "Straight and Crooked Thinking" (Pan Books, Ltd.) worried over this problem. He noted that the non-specialist would be at a loss to distinguish between a genuine passage from a technical journal on a difficult subject and a piece that was deliberately obscurantist. Thouless felt there was no sure way of distinguishing them. I think there is.

Thouless went wrong by trying to locate the fallacy solely in the propositions themselves. I think the fallacy is a function of one's audience. Being technical in a technical journal is not abuse of jargon because the intended audience is technically up to it. It is surely abuse of jargon when one gets overly

technical, whether correctly or incorrectly, with a lay audience. This is why the pet shop dealer above is guilty of the fallacy even though he was technically correct.

Abuse of jargon should be seen for what it is - intellectual bullying. It is trying to get people to believe something without their being properly persuaded. Putting it this way also helps us to see that it is an intellectual sin.

And very unchrist-like. How does God deal with a spiritually uninitiated audience? His best revelation of Himself to humanity was in the weakness of flesh, rather than in great demonstrations of His omniscience and power. As Paul says of Jesus Christ: "Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but making himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

Unfortunately, Christians do not always follow their Master. Allow me give one fairly detailed example. Dorit et al (1) did some work recently in which they looked for genetic differences between a particular region of the Y chromosome of 38 men living in different parts of the world. One Christian writer (2), commenting on the work of Dorit et al, gave just enough information to befuddle the largely lay audience of his magazine (I saw letters to the magazine coming from thirteen, fourteen and fifteen year olds). He writes: "To their great surprise Dorit and his associates found NO NUCLEOTIDE DIFFERENCES AT ALL in the nonrecombinant part of the Y chromosomes of the 38 men. This non-variation suggests that NO evolution has occurred in male ancestry" (emphasis his).

Would his audience understand the term "nonrecombinant part." Would they understand that this is just where variation is less likely to occur? Would they understand that the original researchers were talking about a specific and restricted site not a broad region of the Y Chromosome? The writer created the impression that the researchers were stunned because the results were contrary to Darwinism. Actually, the results are stunning because variation is so common. (Similarly, the occasional doubles of movie stars stir up interest because they are so rare). Did the writer get technical to obscure the truth that variation is widespread because it is so compatible with evolution?

It seems there has been a pre-occupation with whether the RESULTS of our scientific reasoning are biblical. But surely the WAY we reason should be held up to Christian reflection. It is not an act of love, for instance, to give people an allegedly scientific basis for faith which they cannot properly evaluate. It is great irony that God who knows all should woo the spiritually ignorant to Himself through the simple gospel, while some of His less than omniscient followers try to do the same by dazzling their audiences with high-sounding but fallacious arguments.

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THE BIBLE AND LITERATURE

Brian S Lee

A good way to consider the question of the Bible in relation to literature might be to examine the literary qualities of one of the best-known stories in it: the raising of Lazarus. There is no doubt that John 11 brilliantly exemplifies some typical features of a good short story: there is suspense (will Lazarus be healed or not?), surprise (that our Lord should delay His arrival), pathos (as Mary and Martha mourn their brother's death), excitement (as the astounding miracle is performed), and a joyous conclusion, in which tensions are resolved and a satisfying sense of an ending is reached. But the story also raises questions that a more literary treatment might be expected to answer. Why, for example, is no notice taken of so remarkable an event in the other Gospels, or, apparently, in the history of the early Church? What, moreover, were the thoughts and feelings of Lazarus? It is surely strange that we know next to nothing at all about the person at the centre of the story, for nowhere in the Bible does Lazarus say a single word.

Evidently John regarded the theological demonstration of Christ's power and compassion as more important than the story's historical or psychological interest. By way of contrast, it is worth considering a literary treatment of the same story: Robert Browning's poem entitled "An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab physician". Browning imagines the effect on a sceptical yet fascinated scientist-magician of his meeting the resurrected Lazarus, who now sees the world in a quite different light from everybody else because he has encountered eternity. The poem is a historical fiction and an imaginative portrayal of the possible thought processes of the characters involved.

We may conclude from this that the Bible does not set out to satisfy the same expectations as those with which we usually approach a work of literature. Hence my title is "The Bible and Literature" rather than "The Bible as Literature". Calling the Bible literature, even "great literature", reduces it in most people's minds to a form of entertainment that is not to be taken too seriously, and offers an excuse to avoid confronting its divine imperative: "Repent, believe, and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour".

We need to try to say what we mean by literature if the Bible is to be usefully distinguished from it. No easy definition is possible, but three points may be helpful.

1. Literature is about, or includes, anything that interests people. Essentially, it concerns people: a work about magnetic forces, or the anatomy of cats, however well-written or informative, would be a text-book and not literature. Literature about animals (like "The Wind in the Willows", or "Watership Down") is really about humanized animals. Literature can include encyclopedic material, like some bestselling novels that

disguise their frivolity under a pretence of imparting educative information, but the main focus of such books will be on the adventures that befall the human characters represented.

2. A literary work constructs its own world. Critics sometimes talk of the chronotope of a literary work, borrowing a metaphor (space-time) from the scientific theory of relativity. Thus literary criticism appropriates a scientific term in a non-scientific sense, illustrating literature's habit of analogizing. The term suggests that literature creates a world analogous to but not contiguous with the real world. For example, the world of "Hamlet" has a locale (Denmark) and a time (several months in the unspecified past) which are different from the site and duration of the theatrical performance. The chronotope of drama or narrative is the fictitious past, and the chronotope of lyric is the contemporary imagination of the lyricist. We need another term for time-and-value, because literature not only constructs its own world, but also valorizes the time-place it describes - there would be no point in presenting a fictitious world if it were not interesting or for some reason valuable to read about.

3. Literature aims at closure. Unlike life, the beginning and end of which we are unaware, a literary work aims at compressing a unified slice of experience into the short time that it lasts without leaving anything unexplained; it does so by selecting events in full knowledge of how they are going to turn out. The events chosen are, in other words, predetermined by their end. Even open-ended art forms, constructed to resemble the unfinished continuum of ordinary life, invite assessments of their presumably purposive and now finished selection of material. Oscar Wilde's paradox "life imitates art" indicates how we try to synthesize experience in order to make sense of it: even newspapers endeavour to report the end of stories that happen to have begun in earlier issues. This compression achieves intensity, and helps the process of valorizing. Life is full of "loose ends"; we prefer stories not to be.

The Bible resembles literature in the inclusive range of the human experiences it touches on, and in its unified sweep over all human history from Creation to Doomsday it provides the largest closed scheme possible; but its chronotope is historical rather than imaginative. Likewise there's no question of its value (2 Timothy 3:16 speaks of the profitability of Scripture), but it aims to do something (save one's soul) of quite a different order from what one would expect from literature, and does it by prompting action (faith) which literature only does if at all in a much more limited sense.

The aim of literature is nowadays regarded almost exclusively as to entertain. Works primarily concerned with passing on information, or with exhortation and propaganda, have come to be regarded as distinct from descriptive and affective works of the imagination. This was not always so, and in some cases still is not. The little girl who borrowed a library book that told her "more about penguins than I wanted to know" disliked the book because she found it didactic rather than entertaining. Dr Johnson called reading Milton's "Paradise Lost" a duty rather than a pleasure; however, he believed in the priority of duty. Milton's epic is perhaps the last great literary textbook of

theology.

The Bible is didactic and homiletic: it teaches and it exhorts. Except in parts, it is not literature in the modern sense. How then does it differ from it?

1. It presents truth, not fiction. But not necessarily scientific truth. For example, the story of Jonah raises certain questions, such as, Could a whale swallow a man? Well, perhaps it could, but if we insist on making the story biologically plausible we sacrifice something of the force of God's miraculous intervention: literature prefers the unique to the common instance.

Preachers sometimes argue that Christ attested the literal truth of the whale story - and perhaps He did; but someone with a literary training might be prepared to accept that He was referring to it as a text: to the book His hearers knew, rather than to the history they had not experienced.

Theologians in the Middle Ages accepted not only the existence of a literal garden of Eden, but the consequences of its existence as well: they were prepared to wonder what had become of Eden after the Fall, and how it had survived the Flood. With a literary training, one need not find it too troublesome to distinguish between "myth" and "untruth". Medieval theologians both asked and answered the question where Christ got His clothes after the Resurrection. A novelist would need to anticipate and answer the sort of questions people ask: the Bible doesn't.

2. In the Bible human feelings are not pursued in the detail one would expect of literary workmanship. The account of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 is very sparse: the emotions of the participants are scarcely conveyed at all. In a medieval play on the subject, however, its potential for pathos is exploited to the full. Isaac requests a blindfold, bids his father not protract his suffering by delay, and most pathetically of all asks him not to tell his mother what has happened, but to pretend he has gone to a far country. His relief when he learns that the ram is to be offered instead of him is tempered by the fear that his father has simply invented a ruse to catch him off guard.

3. The Bible often raises sociological questions which it does not examine in detail. For example, in the terrible story of Dinah in Genesis 34, the victim is given no voice: her views are never enquired into. This may tell us something about attitudes to women in a patriarchal society. The emphasis of the story falls on the treachery of her avenging brothers Simeon and Levi, and on the honourable reparation that her violator Shechem vainly seeks to make. It is a tale in which the threat of miscegenation becomes an excuse for ethnic cleansing. Jacob is angry with his sons because he fears retaliation, rather than because their revenge has exceeded the bounds of justice. In short, it is a story which describes conduct that does not get the social criticism it seems to invite, and we are left wondering whether we should look instead for a doctrinal or ethical meaning, such as, that even God's people are sinners; or that at all costs they must avoid the contamination of the ungodly.

4. What about the "poetic" books? The atheistic poet Shelley loved to read Job for the splendour of its language. The anguish of human suffering and the joyous celebration of praises to God are poignantly and powerfully presented in the Psalms. To come from the (comparative) dreariness of Leviticus to the splendour of the opening chapters of Deuteronomy is to detect a stylistic or literary difference. Christ's metaphors, such as the remarkable one of the camel passing through the eye of a needle, are admirably vivid and apt.

But to concentrate on the poetry misses the essential religious point of the nature of God's dealings with man. The Bible aims to inculcate faith, not simply to teach, or to inform, or to entertain, though it does those things. It conveys God's revelation to man, but without (more than a little) answering his major questions: what is it like after death? and what is God really like? For its authors were human and however inspired had limited human insights.

Literature seeks to explore and to set forth what human beings are capable of imagining. But the Bible is about God, Who is finally unimaginable. We can know something of the attributes of God (He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient; He is love, He is light, and He is spirit) but His infinitude escapes us. All we know of Him is summed up in the human Christ - God manifest in flesh, yet without sin. And that too is unique and beyond the power of imagining.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON SCIENCE

Brian D Hahn

Let me start with some brief biographical details. As a schoolboy I was always interested in Science (especially physics). At the tender age of 17 I decided I wanted to find out how the universe worked, and what it meant. As a first-year BSc student at the University of Cape Town I went to YM/SCA Mission, where I heard a talk on the resurrection of Jesus. I accepted that it was true, and that I needed to pay attention to him, and so I received him as my Lord and Saviour. I went on to do a PhD in high energy physics at Cambridge after which I got a post in applied mathematics at Wits and subsequently at UCT.

Thirty years after starting my youthful quest I still do not understand in large part how the universe works, but as a Christian I am understanding more and more what it means. Over the years I have studied the relationship between Science and the Christian faith, and would like to share some thoughts on this great subject with you now.

THE RISE OF MODERN SCIENCE

Why did the Greeks with all their intellectual achievements fail to establish science as we know it 2000 years ago? Why did the scientific revolution only really start in the 16th century, and flourish from then on? Was it related to the religious

re-awakening of the Reformation? It is accepted by many secular historians of science that Greek thought actually inhibited the rise of modern science. There is of course much of value in ancient Greek thought

- the insistence that the world did have order in spite of apparent chaos;

- the belief that the universe obeyed a Law and was capable of understanding

- they saw value in a body of knowledge about nature;

- they developed deductive reasoning, as in mathematics (Pythagoras)

- they also initiated astronomy, physics and biology.

But on the other hand Greek thought held that the universe was non-created, and therefore eternal, and therefore divine. Consequently it was inhabited by divine forms (human beings). The human mind was therefore divine, so was the faculty of reason - with the mind one could "read off" information from divine nature.

There was therefore no need for experiments - the Greeks believed world could be understood by contemplation - there was no need to stoop to handle it in order to understand it. Unaided reason was enough. As someone said, "Greek philosophers tried to explain nature while shutting their eyes."

So, for example, the Greeks held that an object fell with an acceleration proportional to its mass, so that a heavier object would fall faster than a lighter one. No one dreamt of doing an experiment! We had to wait for Galileo in the 16th century to push two weights off the Tower of Pisa to prove that all objects fall at the same rate. The rediscovery of the Bible during the Reformation brought new impetus to science.

By contrast to the Greek view, the Judaeo-Christian tradition holds that the Universe depends on God, and was created by him. The natural order is non-eternal, and not divine. God is separate from his creation.

This is also in contrast to Deism, which views God as the "absentee landlord" who set the machine going, like a clock. He prods it, and winds it up now and again. The Christian view holds that the Universe depends on God for its moment-by-moment existence. Hebrews 1:3 states that Jesus "upholds the universe by his word of power."

Since the mind of man is non-divine, it is subject to error - it cannot infallibly read off from nature its secrets. We cannot by contemplation figure everything out. There are also limits to the human intellect, since God's thoughts are higher than man's (or woman's for that matter). We have to get our hands dirty handling the Creation - we need to make observations, and do experiments.

So Kepler by observing the movements of the planets relative to the Sun was able to deduce their elliptical orbits. He modestly described this great achievement as "thinking God's thoughts after him".

When the Royal Society was founded at this time, seven out of the 10 founding members were professing Christians. They

properly regarded science, and the study of creation, as a worthy pursuit for Christians and a means of glorifying God.

Many early scientists were professing Christians, or at least believers in God: Boyle, Newton, Faraday, Maxwell. I recall walking through the entrance to the old Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge (Maxwell was its first professor) under an arch with the inscription "To the greater glory of God".

These early modern scientists who were Christians saw their science as a gentle means of evangelism and were convinced that God reveals himself through his creation. This is what theologians call general revelation, as opposed to the special revelation of God through his written word and supremely in Jesus Christ. As Romans 1:19 succinctly puts it, "For what can be known about God is plain to (men and women). Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse ... "

The Bible claims that the created order is evidence of the Creator - so our early scientists felt that by understanding the nature of creation they were making it easier for the rest of us to perceive his eternal power and deity in the things that have been made. Many scientists still do, for example David Block of Wits with his magnificent presentation on the Cosmos. I am prepared to bet that there are probably more Christians academics in Science and Engineering than in Arts and Social Sciences!

"When I look at they heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which thou hast established;
what is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?

(Psalm 8)

Many academic colleagues do not share this view, especially biologists. When studying the fascinating intricacies of embryology I am frankly amazed that some insist that it all happened by chance, that it has no intrinsic purpose, that the universe has no purpose. In his book Chance and Necessity, Jacques Monod (a 1971 winner of the Nobel Prize for Medicine) makes this breath-taking statement:

"Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, is at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution ... man at last knows that he is alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe ... Neither his destiny nor his duty have been written down."

I sometimes think that to be able to make statements like that, an atheist requires more faith than a believer.

THE GOD OF THE GAPS

Some misguided scientists have misused the concept of general revelation. Newton for example did not understand cometary motion, so he attributed this phenomenon to God's direct intervention. He just did not know about hyperbolic orbits (only parabolic ones). Consequently when cometary orbits were

explained without reference to God, He was no longer needed to explain them. As science advances, God is squeezed out of the natural world. Fewer and fewer oddities are left to invoke God in order to explain. Hence he becomes the "God of the gaps".

I suggest this is bad science, and also bad theology. It's bad science to invoke God to help us out when we can't solve a problem with our present understanding and data. It's bad theology because the Bible asserts that the creation is orderly. The best illustration I have seen of this is due to Donald MacKay, author of *The Clockwork Image* (IVP). We are all familiar with watching cricket on TV. Imagine a clever TV "artist" who can simulate a cricket match. Not a computer simulation, but a set-up by which the artist can directly manipulate events on the screen by some sort of keyboard - he literally keeps whole cricket match going. If he is good at his job, by watching the match we will be able to discover some of the laws of motion. Why did the ball deflect as it went past the bat? Because it nicked the bat, and was so caught behind. If he designs his show well, any event in the created scene should be causally explicable in terms of earlier events. Scientific questions and scientific answers will continue to make sense as long as our TV creator wills it to continue like this.

If we are suddenly reminded that the whole existence of the cricket scene has another explanation, viz. that it is upheld by the creative will of our TV artist, this does not devalue our science of the created world, although there will obviously be unexplained gaps in it. It is simply pointing out that the existence of the TV scene as a whole needs explaining on a different level.

And so it is with God and his creation. There is no scientific oddity which directly suggests the creation's dependence on God. That would be as if the existence of our TV artist could be detected by a peculiarity in the design of the cricket bat used, for example. However, it is the existence of the cosmos as a whole - the whole show - which begs for an explanation, viz. that God created it.

ORIGINS

Talking about creation, perhaps I need to say something about our origins. From time to time a fuss is made about Evolution vs Creation. This debate usually generates much heat, but little light. I Just want to make a few observations.

Suppose God did create the universe on 25th October 4004 BC (at 09h00). Since creation was perfect, Adam and Eve, and all the trees in the Garden of Eden would have had the appearance of age. If Adam had cut down a tree, it would have had annual rings. For that matter, did Adam (and Eve) have tummy buttons? For anyone present at 09h01 that day, the universe would have had an "inferable" past. Any scientist examining the data would have been completely scientifically justified (and not irreligious) in concluding something about the past. What about the stars in the sky that night? For them to be visible that night (from many light years away) God would have had to create the individual photons all along the way from the earth to them in outer space so that as our scientist looked up each night, more and more of the photons would collide with his retina, as if

they had been coming in from light years away.

I have no problem with that - God could have done it that way. He could have created the fossils in the rocks to give the appearance of great age, as was suggested seriously by a member of the Royal Society last century.

The point is that God is able to create an inferable past, as well as a present and a future. Consider again our TV artist. The players in the created match would be in their 20s and 30s. They would have an inferable past. We would be quite correct in concluding this by observing them.

So in terms of our origins, the vexed issue of Creation vs Evolution is simply a non-starter. Unless someone was there at 08h59, there is no scientific way of proving whether the Universe was created then, or whether it went back so far into the past. We are justified in examining all the fossil data and carefully extrapolating backwards in time. This is a proper scientific enterprise. But we are not justified in making a scientific statement about the origin - whether it was created by design, or evolved by chance - there is no evidence. Monod's statement about blind chance at root of universe is a theological statement, to do with meaning (in his view there is none); it is not a scientific statement. In same way that to assert that God created the universe is a theological statement, not a scientific one.

Will a future scientific discovery shake my faith in God?

Yuri Gagarin after his trip into space observed (trite) that he did not find God there. I want to submit he was looking in the wrong place! God was nearer to him than he ever imagined, waiting to be acknowledged. Suppose one day some clever biochemists mix some water (about 70%), carbon, nitrogen, potassium, sodium, and a few other elements up in a test tube, and human life results. What then? Will this shatter our faith in God? If so, he is our God of that gap too! My response would be that God has been doing that for centuries anyway - he didn't need some smart Aleck biochemists to tell him how!

Seriously, as Christians we believe we are made in the image of God, fearfully and wonderfully made. He formed our inward parts, and knit us together in our mothers' wombs (Psalm 139). Yet every one of us resulted from intercourse between our mother and father - if they had not done it then, we would have been someone else! Our parents created us in that biological sense. Yet that doesn't undermine our faith in God.

It would be the same if biochemists do it. They would simply be thinking God's thoughts (a long time) after him. The test-tube creations will still be in his image, and therefore able to communicate with each other and with him. It is still he who confers eternal life on those human creatures who believe in him and respond to his offer of salvation, whether they were conceived in love, accidentally, by rape or in a test tube.