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Evolution and creation ...science, reason, and faith

The "News Scan" section of the September 2005 issue of the *Scientific American* reported on the Templeton series of lectures at Cambridge University held last June. Entitled "Clash in Cambridge," the feature's subtitle --- "Science and Religion Seem As Antagonistic As Ever" --- summed up the writer's spin on the two week meeting.

Among the various topics covered, one exchange on evolution between biologists Simon Conway Morris of Cambridge and Richard Dawkins of Oxford became particularly disputatious yet civil. In the course of the conversation Dawkins referred to Morris's explicitly Christian perspective as "gratuitous." Morris retorted that Dawkins's "atheism" was "archaic."

The Templeton Foundation sponsors a variety of programs and publications for the purpose of establishing common ground between science and religion. Yet, tensions on that very issue did surface between presenters and spirited respondents. Although the polarization of opinions limited consensus at the conference, writer John Horgan surmised that "pondering the meaning of life --- or the lack thereof --- was jolly good fun."

The positions taken by Richard Dawkins would be no surprise to anyone familiar with literature in the field since his reputation as a leading proponent of evolutionary materialism is well known. John F. Haught, a theologian at Georgetown University, identifies Richard Dawkins as a major advocate of scientific materialism.

In his *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Con-*

versation (1995) Professor Haught, the director of Georgetown's Center for the Study of Religion and Science, placed the thinking of Richard Dawkins in the company of Carl Sagan, Stephen Jay Gould, and E. O. Wilson who are viewed as promoters of that ideology. Moreover, most of these thinkers enjoy a broad audience through the widespread popular marketing of their writings and media appearances.

In another study, *Deeper Than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in an Age of Evolution* (2003), Haught judges that Gould, Wilson, Dawkins and others "find it impossible to separate Darwinian biology from a metaphysically materialist setting."

The philosophical tenets which are the matrix of evolutionary materialism, however, should not be confused with evolutionary biology or the science of biology. Again, John Haught's counter position argues that evolutionary biology "neither requires a materialist metaphysics nor provides ultimate explanations."

In reality, evolutionary materialism does not simply function as science but as a philosophy. It is a species of scientific materialism that reduces the validity of truth to the scope of the scientific method. In other words, unless reality can be empirically verified, it is meaningless.

This brand of scientific materialism postulates "matter as all there is." Thus, spiritual entities such as the spiritual soul and God are illusions or myths.

Metaphysics is the philosophical discipline which studies "the ultimate causes and constituents of real-

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ity." Biological materialism elevates the scientific method to the status of metaphysics or an ultimate explanation of reality. In this vision, there is no room for God, final causes, or any level of explanation beyond the scientific method. Consequently, theology and philosophical realism are a priori excluded as sources of truth.

As science, evolutionary biology brackets the question of God on methodological grounds. By contrast, in the words of John Haught, scientific materialism engages in a "metaphysical exclusion of God."

Unfortunately, in far too many instances, the science of evolution has been mistakenly perceived as atheistic because it appears to be wedded to the materialistic assumptions espoused by scientific materialists.

In an article "The Truth of Christianity," Pope Benedict XVI distilled the crux of the conflict about evolution and religion which stems from a dominant scientism. After briefly tracing the separation of faith and reason in modern philosophy, the Holy Father discussed the historical severing of science from metaphysics. He writes: "The theory of evolution has increasingly emerged as the way to make metaphysics disappear, to make the 'hypothesis of God' (Laplace) superfluous, and to formulate a strictly 'scientific' explanation of the world." As a result, the Christian concept of God is dismissed as "unscientific" and the "doctrine" of evolution stands as the exclusive "natural theology."

An ironic twist emerges from the ideology of scientism replacing classic metaphysics.

In *Fides et Ratio* ("Faith and Reason," 1998), Pope John Paul II explored the relationship between faith and reason and surveyed various philosophical models that had sundered the linkage of faith with reason. Among the threats to theological truth, the late Holy Father criticized *scientism*. The encyclical defines scientism as "a philosophical notion which refuses to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences; and it relegates religious, theological, ethical, and aesthetic knowledge to the realm of mere fantasy." (F&R n. 88)

Values are dismissed "as mere products of emotion" and the metaphysical notion of being is replaced by "pure and simple facticity." The tra-

ditional ultimate questions on the meaning of life are consigned "to the realm of the irrational or imaginary."

A contemporary "crisis of meaning" calls for a recovery of the *sapiential dimension* of philosophy, i.e., "the search for the ultimate and overarching meaning of life." (F&R n. 81)

At mid-20th century, Etienne Gilson (d. 1978), had become a major figure in that task of recovering that "sapiential dimension" in the unity that was forged in the medieval synthesis of faith and reason. The scholarship of Gilson explored the issues of science and philosophy, particularly through the lens of the existential metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas.

For instance, in *God and Philosophy* (1941) Gilson observed: "Scientific problems are all related to the knowledge of *what* given things actually are." In this vein, Gilson continued: "A religious interpretation of nature never worries about what things are ---that is a problem for scientists --- but it is very much concerned with the questions why things happen to be precisely what they are, and why they happen to be at all."

In fairness, Gilson also conceded that there were moments when "metaphysics played havoc with science." Ironically, the disdain for or suspicion of metaphysics (or religion) within science might be rooted in philosophers' "centuries-long meddling in matters of physics and biology."

Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, praised the progress of the empirical sciences in probing "the secrets of the material universe." It also affirmed the human search for "truths of a higher order," for the human mind cannot be confined "to the range of what can be observed by the senses." Rather, the human intellect seeks to discover its genuine perfection in wisdom "which gently draws the human mind to look for and to love what is true and good."

That wisdom draws men and women "through the visible realities to those which cannot be seen." *Gaudium et Spes* confirms the hope that by the gift of the Holy Spirit men and women can come "to contemplate and savor the mystery of God's design." (GS n. 15)

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