



God and Science Do Mix

The Creator's Interference in Creation

By Tom Gilson | Published Date: August 21, 2009

In a *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece that is replete with unintended irony, cosmologist Lawrence Krauss says, "Science and God Don't Mix."

His message centers on this quote from geneticist J.B.S. Haldane (1892-1964):

My practice as a scientist is atheistic. That is to say, when I set up an experiment I assume that no god, angel or devil is going to interfere with its course; and this assumption has been justified by such success as I have achieved in my professional career. I should therefore be intellectually dishonest if I were not also atheistic in the affairs of the world.

As it relates to biblical religion, Krauss's point could be paraphrased, "Christianity is all about miracles and other such interfering-God nonsense. Science could never make sense under conditions like that."

He is right to a certain extent—science depends on nature generally behaving itself. But he is wrong to think this is incompatible with Christianity. It is, in fact, essential to the Christian faith, for several reasons.

Ironically, as a scientist, Krauss ought to recognize the first reason, for it is one that can be explained more readily in scientific terms than theological. Perhaps he may not know enough about God and His purposes to see it clearly. The God of the Bible seeks relationship with the humans he created, which requires *communication*. A central concept in scientific communication theory is signal-to-noise ratio. Simply stated, if there's too much chaos ("noise") in a transmission, the message or "signal" can't get through to be understood.

If God kept arbitrarily interfering in nature as Haldane and Krauss imagine, we could never distinguish His message, the signal, from the noise of nature's irregularities. To reveal Himself to humans—to communicate—He must break into nature *sometimes*, but He must do so *rarely*. There must be an ordinary course of events, so that we can discern what is out of the ordinary. If miracles happened everywhere every day, they would not be miracles at all. They would communicate nothing, and thus they would not serve God's relational purposes.

Further, God intended for humans to be *responsible moral agents*, for which we must be able to judge in advance the likely results of our actions. That would be quite impossible in a world of constant chaotic supernatural intervention.

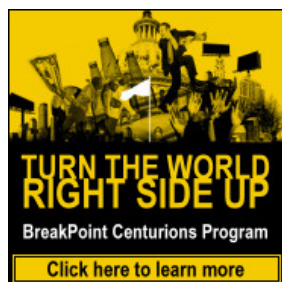
Suppose that on a few random days every decade, every vegetable were poison. Could we be held accountable for poisoning our children on one of those days? If we could not predict the results of our actions, we could hardly be responsible for them. This, too, would not serve God's purposes.

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God intends also that humans be able to *learn from experience*—that if we drop a seed, it will fall; that if we cultivate it properly, it will grow; that if we eat good things, we will thrive; that if we eat poisons, we will get sick or die.

This ties in with God’s intention that we be responsible moral agents. We need to *learn* that if we feed another person good foods, that will be good for them; but if we give them poison, they will quite predictably get sick or die. Again, chaos of the sort Krauss envisions would clearly work against God’s purposes.

With that in mind, the irony deepens. For what is science but systematized learning from experience? God made the world friendly for science, not for the sake of science alone, but to accomplish the whole scope of His purposes for us.

Krauss, following Haldane, says science could never move forward if spirits animated all of nature (a view typically called *animism*). Our next irony is this: Christians couldn’t agree with him more. The late Catholic physicist and philosopher of science **Stanley Jaki** said, “If science was to be born, nature had to be de-animized”; and, as **Richard Dales** explains, Christianity *led the way* in accomplishing that de-animization:

During the twelfth century in Latin Europe those aspects of Judeo-Christian thought which emphasized the idea of creation out of nothing and the distance between God and the world, in certain contexts and with certain men, had the effect of eliminating all semi-divine entities from the realm of nature.

Judeo-Christianity’s view of creation is unique among the world’s religions and philosophies. One large group of creation stories has the world beginning with an eternal dualism of mind (or spirit) and matter. The mind battles to contain and restrain unruly matter, with only partial success. Plato’s view was much like that. Another large group considers matter to be a kind of emanation from spirit, so that matter is actually spirit in another manifestation, sometimes even an illusory one.

The first view leads to no confidence in the world’s rationality, since mind’s mastery over creation is weak. The second is the picture of animized nature. A third version or origins, that of modern secular science, removes mind from origins completely. What early natural philosopher, looking at nature as such an essentially mindless thing and never having seen science succeeding, would have thought to look for a rational order in nature?

Only in the first chapters of Genesis do we have an account of a creation that is fully ruled by its Creator’s mind, yet remains separate from it: rationally ordered, but not animized. It’s ironic, isn’t it, that this all-important basis on which science was planted comes from the same biblical passage that scientists today love so much to scorn?

We can continue to speak of even more ironies. One primary intellectual home for these 12th century Latin Europeans was a site that, in the words of historian **Thomas Goldstein**, “seems the very embodiment of Medieval faith”—the Cathedral School of Chartres, of all places. Goldstein adds,




The abiding fact is that modern science grew out of the lovely Medieval idea of ordo mundi, the faith in a universal order, a religious feeling for the ultimate unity of all life. The recognition of nature as an autonomous, largely self-motivated world [was] the crux of Chartres’s natural philosophy.

History shows that biblical thinking has been more than agreeable to the well-behaved, de-animized view of nature that Krauss considers so crucial to science.

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God's desire to relate with a world of humans, to give us the power of moral agency and the ability to learn, and to make His occasional interventions meaningful, leads Him to let His creation run its ordinary course in ordinary times. Scholars and students at a Catholic cathedral school figured that out more than 800 years ago.

God and science do mix.

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