

of anything. But in making that hypothesis, we are adopting a personal attitude to the cosmos, seeing it as purposive and valuable, and responsive to human acts and thoughts. The natural sciences firmly exclude taking such a personal attitude, and stress the importance of dispassionate observation and experiment. So the theistic hypothesis is not scientific. It expresses a view about what things are ultimately real, and it presumes that scientific analyses of the physical world apply to the realm of appearance, and not to the more ultimate realm of spiritual, noumenal, mind-like, reality. This is not a minimal inference, it is the statement of a comprehensive, elegant and coherent conceptual scheme for interpreting reality. It is an explanatory postulate that subordinates scientific theories to the realm of appearance. The view that there is no spiritual realm beyond that is a meta-scientific theory that cannot be established on purely scientific grounds.

I have argued that the general process of evolution can be seen as evidence for an intelligent creator, though I concede that many, perhaps most, biologists, do not see it that way. But that is largely because they hold a materialist worldview that does not allow the possibility of a conscious supernatural reality. I have also shown that many biologists argue that Darwinian evolution eliminates the possibility of an intelligent designer, holding that any such designer would be lazy, stupid and cruel. But that is only true if we think of a designer directly designing every organism as perfect – in other words, the creationist view that God creates each species directly. As I have stressed, the ID view is not creationist, and sees evolution in terms of mutation, trial and error, and natural selection. The designer of such a process would be extremely intelligent, since the process is both efficient and guaranteed to reach goals of great value.

From the unconscious circling of electrons arises the conscious formulation of an Einstein equation. From the value-indifferent interactions of unfelt physical forces arises the transfiguring beauty of a Beethoven symphony. From the blind mechanisms of molecular conflict arises the intelligent formation of future goals and purposes. And from the deterministic processes of atomic interactions arises the creative pursuit of responsible freedom.

The basic laws and processes of nature are remarkably, indeed perhaps uniquely, well-formed for the arising of conscious intelligent agency by a process of cumulative and progressive development from a primal relatively simple material origin. The process is efficient. That is one vital element of a design-explanation.

Values

But what of the values it produces? Are they really worth-while?

Again, I will utilise some words of Professor Dawkins. At the end of his fascinating book 'The Ancestor's Tale' (Phoenix, 2005, p. 628 f.), he writes of his consideration of the process of evolution, 'My overwhelming reaction is one of amazement'. He goes on to

advocate a sense of reverence for life, even of piety and reverence, before the 'sublime grandeur of the real world'. So seeing evolution as cruel is not the whole story. Evolution is an amazing, sublime, reverence-inspiring process, of great beauty and elegance. This seems to be supremely worth-while. And the particular values of this world, and the particular personal agents who come to exist in it, could not exist at all in a world without risk, pain, conflict or frustration.

There could, after all, be an intelligence who wanted to create sorts of value that could only exist in a universe that contained some suffering, and the ineliminable possibility of much more suffering under specific conditions. Perhaps the creator necessarily expresses itself by creating such a world. We need to escape the naïve picture of a supernatural person who could create a perfect world, but chooses not to. We could think, instead, of a cosmic mind that by its own innermost nature expresses itself in relation to a community of personal beings that are morally free, capable of self-development through disciplined action, uniquely creative, cumulatively complex, socially related, and oriented, though not compelled, towards the ideals of beauty, goodness, and truth.

The existence of such beings could reasonably be considered to be intrinsically worth-while. But they can only exist in a universe the structure of which permits creative and co-operative action. That entails that the physical laws are flexible and open enough to allow alternative possibilities of action, and forms of holistic causality that enable complex organized physical structures (like brains) to exercise causal influence on their less complex constituent physical elements.

This, it is reasonable to suppose, entails a degree of indeterminism in basic physical laws, which, seen from the point of view of the simple physical elements themselves, will seem random (indeterminate), though in fact there will be a stochastic (not wholly determinate, but statistically predictable) propensity towards complex self-organisation.

In such a universe chance would play an important part, as the necessary basis for emergent creativity and personal agency. Such a world would contain the possibility of conflict, evil, and frustration of the divine intention. But in it God could work patiently to attract persons by love towards the goal of a creative and harmonious community, devoted to goodness and beauty and friendship. It would not be absurd to describe the character of such a God as 'self-giving love', though we would have to see such love as operating in a cosmos that is developing and autonomous and necessarily expressed in an incessant dialectic of creation and destruction. God creates such a cosmos by necessity, and seeks to move it towards conscious communion with that perfect Beauty beyond all finite worlds. In this process, values are realized that could exist in no other world. Even though the world falls far from perfection and into isolation and self-destruction, it does not fall into complete non-being, and it can be drawn onwards towards that eternal communion of being which is love.

The nutshell response to the very real problem of suffering and evil is that we humans could only exist as the sort of emergent, creative, social, and self-shaping beings we are, in a universe like this in its general features. If we are to exist, this universe, in its general structure, is necessarily the way it is. The Christian claim, based on divine revelation, is that we have a future beyond this cosmos in which we can grow into fully conscious communion with a being of absolute beauty and bliss. If anyone is to take Christianity seriously, they must consider such a claim, founded on belief in a good God and on the experience of the risen Christ, with proper attention.

It is unreasonable to call the creator of such a process malevolent or incompetent. But it is true that we cannot see God as a kindly being who could have created us without suffering, but chose not to do so. Major theologians never have seen God like that, but it is a consequence of more naïve views of what it is for God to be loving.

Evolution teaches us that we are integral parts of a developing cosmos, and that we could have been born in no other universe. It is an efficient process that issues in many states of great and otherwise unobtainable value. So it certainly looks purposive. But it contains much suffering, conflict, and destruction, and that certainly leads one to question whether a good and intelligent creator could be responsible for such a process. I think the only possible response is to say that these things are necessary to the sort of universe in which alone we could exist. For some, that may be enough. But most religious believers suppose that there is value beyond our wildest expectations in the presence of God. That would enable us to affirm that all things work together for good, and that the creation is indeed very good. I would not expect evolutionary biologists to accept that on the evidence of biology alone. But I would expect them to allow that there might be other sorts of evidence and argument about the ultimate nature of reality, about the objectivity of consciousness and value, and about the possibility of revelation. So I would expect them to stop talking about the malevolence, cruelty, and incompetence of a creator, and to recognize that these evaluations are beyond the competence of scientific biology, that they rest on ignorance of competent theology, and that they rely on unduly anthropomorphic views of what God is.

If evolutionary biology does indeed rest on a presupposition of materialism, and if it encourages ill-considered and prejudicial remarks about religious beliefs, then it should not be taught in schools. Of course I will probably be called an 'intelligent design creationist', and, if I held office in the Royal Society, I would be asked to resign. What that shows is the urgent necessity for some clear distinctions to be made and for some hard thinking to be done about the way in which ideological presuppositions can be built into what is called pure science in a most misleading way. And the culprits in this case are not ID theorists; they are some of our most eminent scientists, who think they are just being objective, wholly dispassionate and reasonable. The time for a more serious and penetrating discussion has come.