

## Science's First Mistake and Religion

The 2009 Christmas season in London had Richard Dawkins teaming up with Ricky Gervais, Dara O'Briain, Jarvis Cocker and other celebrities, to put on a show they called 'Nine Lessons and Carols for Godless People,' at the Bloomsbury Theatre and the Hammersmith Apollo. This motley crew of smug self-professed humanists was intent on disgracing the much-loved Christmas institution, in much the same way a Black Mass profanes the Eucharist. How they must have chuckled at their cleverness, when they paid for the slogan "There's Probably No God" to be emblazoned across 800 double-decker buses, and all timed to coincide with Epiphany, the celebration of arrival of the Three Wise Men bringing gold, frankincense and Myrrh.

Virtuous in their indignation against religion, they set about offending every Christian in sight. Certain of their own faith in science, these contemptuous and contemptible bigots thought nothing of trampling on the beliefs of others. Such is the intellectual imperialism of scientism – a prevalent and predominant attitude among those who dogmatically project the scientific method as the one and only true way of acquiring knowledge about reality and the nature of things. They don't seem to realise that the scientific method is limited by paradox, even in Physics - science's backyard. Their 'rational' certainty in the natural laws of Physics is built on shifting sands, namely that of linear causality. All are guilty of making Science's First Mistake.

The phrase 'Science's First Mistake' is the title that Ian Angell and Dionysios Demetis chose for their new book. It is a play on Nietzsche's notorious words "Woman was God's second mistake". Before politically correct readers throw up their hands in disgust, they are asked first to reflect, and to recognise that this was Nietzsche's idea of a joke. Woman was not the target of his rhetoric. No, he was referring obliquely to God's first mistake, or rather humanity's: namely that *homo sapiens*, godlike, had been put in control of the planet – the Sixth Day as described in *Genesis 1, verses 27-28*:

*27: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*

*28: And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

How paradoxical, that in its attempts to replace God, Science should take up the baton of domination from Genesis. This too was recognized by Nietzsche in his most infamous quotation “God is Dead!”, although most people don’t realize these words are completed with “... And we have killed Him.” Here Nietzsche is pointing out the rise of secular societies, and what is of particular interest here - humanism, all grounded in the arrogance of certainty in scientism and the conceit of Modernism.

For there can be no dominion over the Earth! Control through the application of Science is a myth. There can be no permanent solutions to the ineffable human condition, only contingencies. We are all at the mercy of the Fates. Indeed, the hubris that comes with an unquestioned belief in scientific method, particularly when it is targeted at social, political, commercial, and even religious concerns is an accident waiting to happen.

It’s time to nail the big lie of the last three centuries, and stop this obsession with tidy methodical ‘rational’ solutions. ‘Understanding through scientific theory, and applied via its methods’ does not place us in control of human destiny. Indeed, there is no such thing as ‘understanding’, only mere description through observation ... and observation is itself a delusion steeped in paradox. Both authors must admit it came as quite a shock to them, both agnostics, that the words of a nineteenth century hymn should resonate so well with their thinking:

*Immortal, Invisible, God only wise*

*In light inaccessible hid from our eyes ...*

*(Hymns of Christ and the Christian Life, Walter C. Smith.)*

For human observation does not allow us access to the ‘real world:’ observation is deceived by the linearity inferred in causality. We don’t observe causality in the world; a belief in causality is a necessary prerequisite of observation and cognition. Indeed, without the delusion of causality there would be no observation; observation and cognition are only possible because linearity is erroneously imposed on what is an always complex, non-linear world.

Linearity - just one thing after another; an assumption of sequential and consequential developments that are free of interference and surprise. Linearity – bring A and B together,

and the outcome is predictably C: here A, B and C are the categorical ‘things’ that we observe and focus on in the world. However, that non-linear world is drowning in a chaotic bubbling alphabet soup of causes that has created effects previously, only for them to interact and become new causes, and on and on; any one of which may interfere with specific instances of A or B before they interact, or mess with and change C even before C’s existence has become apparent to us; and all is swamped in the delusion and paradox of observation.

Surely we must recognize that each particular A, B and C is an instance taken from an expanding set of categories that each of us has been developing self-referentially since birth, and that form the cognitive building blocks of individual ‘understanding’. However, these categories are abstractions, ideals, parts of a map; they are not the inaccessible things-in-the-world that they are supposed to represent – rather they are merely pale intellectual shadows created inside our heads. ‘The map is not the terrain’. “Everything that distinguishes man from the animals depends upon this ability to volatilize perceptual metaphors in a schema, and thus to dissolve an image into a concept”: Nietzsche again.

During our lifetimes, each of us continuously categorizes the things-in-the-world we observe – and we bunch each instance together with other similar things as if they are the same, and each group of similar entities is identified with a particular abstraction. However, in categorizing, that cognitive ideal must miss the unique totality of each particular instance of the thing-in-the-world to which it corresponds. Indeed, in order to observe, it is essential that we don’t observe every miniscule facet of all the components that make up the world. Without the filtering property of linearity we would be overwhelmed by the sheer enormity of the detail. This filtering out of the unobserved gives rise to interfering paradoxes that come with this categorical basis of observation; hence the imagined linear predictability of the behaviour of things-in-the-world, and the accompanying wish for control, will always prove illusory.

And yet observation is our cognitive laboratory, a place of enforced linearity, where we experiment as we make our way in the world; and that is only possible because we utilize the fiction of linearity that is categorization. It’s not only in the Harry Potter books that we humans can induce a change in the world by chanting incantations and waving a magic wand. We may not realize it, but this is what we humans do every day when we self-referentially use our categorizations/descriptions/observations of ‘objects in the real world’ (what is this but

casting a magic spell) to create ideas, so that when ritually applied, the world bends to our will ... usually.

However, we remain the apprentice, never to be the sorcerer – the paradoxes that stem from delusion, along with unexpected events, will ultimately conspire to upset our desired imposition of control mechanisms. Nevertheless we can create transitory stabilities that enable us to make our way reasonably successfully in the world. Our trick is to introduce social, cultural, intellectual, as well as physical artifacts into the world that form a pragmatic sink for much (but not all) of the surrounding noise, and which limits the disrupting influence of both detail and non-linearity.

However, these filters can never hold the complex world of surprises at bay indefinitely. The linear incantation that is ‘understanding’ will never totally control the non-linear world that can only be seen “in light inaccessible hid from our eyes” ... in other words a world that cannot be truly seen. Or as Niklas Luhmann so eloquently puts it: “observation is only possible because it is impossible.”

Science’s first mistake is its failure to recognize there is no permanent dominion over a world that can only ever be ‘observed’ by ignoring the delusion and paradox implicit in observation itself. People in humanist glass houses shouldn’t throw stones. So please Messrs Dawkins, Gervais, Uncle Tom Cobley, and all, sort out your own mistakes, before criticizing those you see in others.

All human observation is flawed; all understanding is delusion. Man cannot understand what is happening in the world. Mankind cannot understand or communicate with God. However God, should He exist, would not operate under the same restrictions. He is not trapped by human limitations, and so it is possible that He could communicate with us. Whether humanity can grasp His messages correctly, is of course quite another matter. And that’s where faith comes in, and also why no scientist can be in any position to deny Him

From within their own self-referential certainty many scientists see religion as absurd. Religion of course attributes Truth to an ineffable supernatural Being beyond the realms of observation and sense data, thereby displacing the paradoxes from human territory altogether. From that position, all non-belief is absurd.