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The Human Condition Documentary Proposal

Q&A 1—Mixing Science and Religion, is it the place of science to consider matters such as 'purpose', 'meaning', 'God', 'morality', 'soul' and 'good and evil'?

by Jeremy Griffith

QUESTION:

Is it not simply wrong to mix science with religion and belief in the supernatural—indeed might this be seen to be about 'creationism' or 'intelligent design' by the back door, even some form of new religious movement propaganda? Similarly, don't questions of meaning and purpose fall outside the territory of science? Surely it is not the place of science to draw conclusions about morality? Further, aren't matters of religion to do with subjective beliefs which can neither be proved nor falsified? Also, shouldn't I be sceptical and dismissive of absolute, grandiose claims such as that 'the human condition has been solved' and 'we can now explain God as negative entropy'—and anyway, how can such a cold, mechanical interpretation of God as negative entropy possibly account for all the deeper spiritual dimensions, capacities and sensitivities that have come to be associated with, and attributed to God? Finally, for those who live through a religious faith is it science's place to intrude upon that, even to appear to threaten it?

ANSWER:

The premise of the Documentary Proposal is that it is only by addressing and resolving the underlying issue in all human affairs of the human condition that the deeper answers could be psychologically safely accessed to the fundamental, all-important, great questions of our purpose, of how we acquired our uniquely human moral sense and conscious state and, above all, of what caused our human condition and how can it be ameliorated. Incidentally, it can be appreciated that these are *the* key questions when it becomes apparent that the ability to explain them at last allows us to answer the everyday fundamental questions we humans have been asking about ourselves and our world since time immemorial, namely 'does God exist and if so why does he allow suffering, and why is he referred to as male, and why are we all equal before his eyes; what does it all mean; why was I born; what is the point and purpose of our lives; what are we doing on Earth; who are we and where are we going; what is the meaning of existence; what is "life" and how did it begin; what is our soul, how did we acquire it, and what has happened to it; did the human race once live in a Garden of Eden innocent state and, if so, why did we have to leave it; where does our conscience come from; what is consciousness, intelligence and thought; are we shaped by nature or by nurture; how are men and women different; why do we fall in love; how do we explain sex as humans practice it; what is our sense of humour based on; why do we live such superficial, artificial, material lives; why is there so much loneliness, suffering, unhappiness, inequality and hunger and will they ever end; can we ever become truly moral beings; what causes human alienation, aggression, selfishness, competitiveness, envy, greed, hate and egocentricity; what does "left" and

“right” wing in politics actually mean, and why do we have politics; why are people racist, sexist and elitist; why are children neglected the world over; why wars and will they ever stop; why did those people fly those planes into those buildings; why are humans religious and were prophets such as Christ humans like everyone else and, if so, why did they become so revered and even deified; what happens and where will I go when I die, and why do I have to die; what and where is “heaven” and “hell”; and are questions of “will the world and even the universe end and if so how” meaningful?. Biologist E.O. Wilson recognised how important finding understanding of the human condition is to making any real progress in understanding our world and place in it when he said, **‘the human condition is the most important frontier of the natural sciences’** (*Consilience*).

The point being made here is that such a fundamental-issue-focusing and ultimately all-encompassing treatise—such a synthesis—is necessarily going to deal with matters that biology, philosophy, psychology and even religion, indeed all the viewpoints upon our human situation, have looked at. Nobel Laureate Charles H. Townes, who has responded positively to the Documentary Proposal, was emphasising this point of the ultimate interrelatedness of all views upon our human situation when he said about how the two most traditionally separate viewpoints of religion and science, faith and reason—indeed the subjective and the objective, the more spiritual and the more material, the humanities and the sciences—must finally converge, when he said, **‘For they [religion and science] both represent man’s efforts to understand his universe and must ultimately be dealing with the same substance. As we understand more in each realm, the two must grow together...converge they must’** (*The Convergence of Science and Religion, Zygon, Vol.1 No.3*). Australia’s greatest educator and former Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sir James Darling, similarly said that, **‘The scientist can no more deny or devalue the truths of spiritual experience than the theologian can neglect the truths of science: and the two truths must be reconcilable, and it must be of importance to each of us that they should be reconciled’** (*The Education of a Civilized Man, 1962, p.68 of 223*).

Since the issue of the human condition is the underlying issue in all human affairs and the realm of inquiry where religion and science finally overlap it is naturally, at least initially, going to be an extremely contentious and polarising subject. The issue of the human condition deals with the subjective dimension to life, the issue of ‘self’, the horrifically depressing **‘primeval terror’** that Berdyaev referred to and which is quoted on page 8 of the Proposal of the core issue for humans of our non-ideal, ‘good-and-evil’-differentiated, corrupted, even, for the believing, ‘sinful’, ‘God defying and defiling’, ‘fallen’ state. The subject of the human condition also involves the question of the meaning and purpose of existence, and indeed of our own lives—another contentious area that religions have traditionally exclusively catered for. However, while the human condition has been *such* a difficult subject for humans to deal with that science has traditionally avoided it, that doesn’t mean it is a subject science should never address. In truth, as Wilson said, it is **‘the most important frontier for the natural sciences’**.

Demystification of all the subjects that have historically been associated with the religious domain, such as ‘God’, our ‘soul’, our ‘spirit’, our corrupted, ‘fallen’, ‘sinful’, ‘evil’ human-condition-afflicted state, ‘heaven’ and ‘hell’, ‘the afterlife’, etc, has traditionally been avoided by science, but, as Townes emphasised, religion and science **‘must’ ‘converge’**. Science has, in particular, avoided demystifying ‘God’ as integrative meaning because it confronts us squarely with the question of our own non-integrative, divisive nature; and science has avoided attributing our instinctive moral nature or ‘soul’ to nurturing because it confronts us with our inability to nurture our children adequately today, and also with our own variously inadequately nurtured, psychologically damaged

upbringings; and science has avoided recognising that alienation is the main factor when considering how our consciousness or ‘spirit’ emerged because it brings the issue of the alienated state of our human condition into focus; and, finally, science has avoided addressing and explaining the human condition itself because we humans have been legitimately terrified of confronting the subject. Physicist Paul Davies was alluding to the real issue in demystifying religion of the insecurity of our human-condition-afflicted state when, in his 1995 Templeton Prize acceptance speech, he said, ‘**A lot of people are hostile to science because it demystifies nature. They prefer the mystery. They would rather live in ignorance of the way the world works and our place in it...**[in particular] **many religious people still cling to an image of a God-of-the-gaps, a cosmic magician**’.

What makes it possible to at last safely address issues that have traditionally been left in the religious domain is the ability now to explain the human condition. With humans’ upset state finally defended with understanding, the gap between the material and the spiritual worlds can at last be safely bridged. In my book *A Species In Denial* the chapter titled ‘The Demystification of Religion’ is specifically dedicated to explaining all manner of religious concepts that prior to finding understanding of the human condition could not be safely explained, such as heaven (our species’ past innocent state and our species’ future human-condition-free state) and hell (our current human-condition-afflicted, immensely upset, dreadfully alienated, Plato’s-dark-cave existence), the trinity (God The Father is integrative meaning; God The Son refers to the gene-based learning system and its product in us of our original innocent, cooperatively orientated instinctive soul that the great prophets such as Christ were a relatively uncorrupted expression of; God The Holy Ghost or Spirit refers to the nerve-based learning system and its product in us of our fully conscious, currently alienated mental state), the afterlife (the hope of living free of the human condition), the resurrection (the religious metaphor for letting go, transcending and being ‘born again’ from our own troubled, upset, human-condition-afflicted state by living through faith in the soundness of a great prophet such as Christ), prophets (a fully-nurtured, hurt-free and thus denial-free, truthful thinker—the opposite of those who have ‘**a personal stake in denial of truth**’ described by Janov on page 38 of the Proposal), the virgin mother (a metaphor for an innocent mother, one who has been relatively unexposed to the upset state of the human condition and who is thus capable of nurturing a psychologically hurt-free, secure and thus denial-free thinker or prophet), etc, etc.

Certainly, given how fearful a subject the human condition has been, scepticism about claims that the human condition has finally been able to be addressed and solved is entirely appropriate—but that doesn’t justify dismissing such claims out of hand. Somewhere, sometime, someplace, the riddle of the human condition had to be explained by science and it is critical that society always remains open to that possibility. Rather than being summarily rejected, what is required is to read the explanation of the human condition put forward in Part 4 and decide if it has or has not in fact, and at last, been rationally explained.

With regard to mixing science with belief in the supernatural, in Part 1 of the Proposal God is demystified not as a supernatural being living in the clouds somewhere but as the law of negative entropy. To quote from page 8 of the Proposal, world-leading physicist Stephen Hawking, who has also responded positively to the Proposal, said ‘**I would use the term God as the embodiment of the laws of physics**’ and ‘**We could call order [ie negative entropy] by the name of God**’. Similarly, it would be an unfair, indeed malicious, misrepresentation to label this synthesis that actually demystifies religious concepts, and in so doing explains the physics of purpose and meaning, as having any relationship to ‘creationism’ or ‘intelligent design’. On page 18 of the Proposal it is made very clear that ‘**while a personal,**

interventionist [“creationist”, “intelligent”] **God was not involved, God in the form of an integrative purpose to existence was.** Further, while the Documentary Proposal deals with religious concepts that doesn't for a moment mean it is some form of religious propaganda, such as a promotion piece for some new religious movement. Clearly, the presentation can't be concerned with demystifying religion and at the same time be concerned with promoting or even creating a religion.

The deeper issue involved in mentioning God or religious concepts at all these days is the resentment that has developed towards the concept of God and indeed religion in general. As is explained in detail in *The Great Exodus: From the horror and darkness of the human condition* (an essay that is also available online at <www.humancondition.com/exodus>), as people became more upset from humanity's heroic but upsetting journey to find knowledge there would come a time, which has now arrived, when upset would become so great that religion's acknowledgment of a perfecting God and focus on the soundness and truth of a prophet would become unbearably confronting and depressing. About religion, author Mary McCarthy perceptively wrote that **'Only people who are very good can afford to become religious; with all the others it makes them worse'** (*Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*, 1957). As stated in the *Great Exodus* essay, in recent years the resentment and anger towards God for **'condemning people'** (*What the Bleep do We Know*, 2004), and towards religion for being **'the church of perpetual misery'** (from a 2005 animated TV cartoon), has grown so much that secularism is on the rise everywhere. This now extreme resentment and anger is palpable in a statement made by Oxford University's Professor of Public Understanding of Science, Richard Dawkins, that **“faith is one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus, but harder to eradicate. The whole subject of God is a bore”...those who teach religion to small children are guilty of “child abuse”** (quoted by Garth Wood, *The Spectator*, 20 Feb 1999). The creationist and intelligent design movements have no doubt arisen in part to counter this move towards secularism. These movements are trying to reinstate the concept of God but in a fundamentalist, literal way that is not overly confronting. Once upset becomes extreme the only alternatives in coping with the confronting exposure that the concept of God represents are to dismiss the concept of God or accept the concept but in a non-interpretative, abstract, metaphysical, literal, non-confronting way.

Indeed the depth of religious faith in, and reverence and deference towards the concept of God and the prophet/s who represent/s 'him' is a direct measure of how insecure religious adherents are about their human-condition-afflicted states. Laurens van der Post made this point about humans' religious images reflecting their degree of alienation when he wrote: **'It seemed a self-evident truth that somehow the sheer geographical distance between a man and his “religious” images reflected the extent of his own inner nearness or separation from his sense of his own greatest meaning. If so this made the conventional Christian location of God in a remote blue Heaven just as alarming as, conversely, the descent of his Son to earth was reassuring'** (*Jung and the Story of Our Time*, 1976, p.31 of 275).

In the situation that now exists where upset and its alienation has become extreme and the resulting gulf between our spiritual world and our rational, material world is very great it is understandable that the explanation of God as the laws of physics, in particular the law of negative entropy, can at first seem entirely inadequate in accounting for all the deeper spiritual dimensions, capacities and sensitivities that religious followers have come to associate with the concept of God. How, for example, could negative entropy possibly account for the deep personal, comforting, spiritual experiences that many humans now derive from their belief in God? There is a chapter in *A Species In Denial*, beginning on page 416 and titled 'Where is the spirituality in negative entropy?', that addresses this question. Essentially it explains that as a result of our extreme insecurity about our

corrupted human condition we humans are now so immensely alienated from the ‘true’, ‘Godly’, integrated, negative-entropy-complying state that only an attitude of extreme reverence and humility towards that pure state can adequately express the extent of our disconnection from it. Our alienated life has left us devastatingly estranged from the ‘true’, all-sensitive, enthralling ‘spiritual’ dimensions of existence. On pages 14 and 56 of the Proposal R.D. Laing is quoted talking about the ‘**fifty feet of solid concrete**’ that lies between us and the ‘true’, alienation-free state and world. The extent to which we are alienated is the extent to which we are lonely and in need of some acknowledgment of another greater potential and state that we have lost access to. The quotes by Berdyaev and Kierkegaard on page 9 of the Proposal describe how fearful and thus in denial we have been of integrative meaning. It is this denial and the resulting alienation from the fact of our alienation that creates the impression that negative entropy is an inadequate explanation for the God people pray to and derive so much comfort from. Again it has to be emphasised that Part 4 of the Proposal explains that the greater truth is that humans’ divisive condition turns out to be compliant with the Godly integrative state because our divisive, upset condition was an unavoidable and necessary stage in the development of the integration of matter on Earth.

A number of people have responded to the Proposal arguing that matters of God, soul, morality and even ‘good and evil’ involve faiths, beliefs and propositions that cannot be either ‘proved or falsified’ by science, but as has been argued and evidenced in the Proposal, such matters as integrative meaning, the existence of our species’ original instinctive moral self or ‘soul’ and the issue of the human condition itself can all be given first-principle-based, testable, rationally accountable explanations. It should be noted here that many asserted that ‘natural selection’ was an untestable hypothesis when it was first put forward, for instance Bishop Wilberforce, the opponent of natural selection in the great debate about the theory at Oxford in 1860, who said it was a ‘**theory which cannot be demonstrated to be actually impossible**’ (Wilberforce’s review of *Origin of Species* in *Quarterly Review*, 1860, p.249); and geologist and bishop Adam Sedgwick who said it was ‘**not a proposition evolved out of the facts**’ (*Objections to Mr Darwin’s Theory of the Origin of Species*, *The Spectator*, April 7 1860) and that it was ‘**based upon assumptions which can neither be proved nor disproved**’ (Sedgwick in a letter to Darwin, 24 Nov. 1859); and palaeontologist Louis Agassiz who said ‘**absolutely no facts...can be referred to as proving evolution**’ (William Penman Lyon, *Homo versus Darwin: A judicial examination of statements recently published by Mr Darwin regarding ‘The Descent of Man’*, 1872, p.140); and, more recently, philosopher Karl Popper who said, before later changing his mind, that ‘**Darwinism is not a testable scientific theory**’ (*Unended Quest*, 1976, p.168).

It seems perfectly clear that once again the deeper issue here is the problem of the insecure state of our human condition where so many important truths have been denied because they are too dangerously psychologically confronting. Until the human condition could be explained there has been a legitimate need to avoid these dangerously depressing truths and one of the best contrived excuses for evading them was to dishonestly claim they involved beliefs, propositions and assumptions that could not be scientifically proved or disproved. While such evasion has been necessary, the truth once again is that all mysteries can, and ultimately must be scientifically explained if we are to be responsible conscious managers of our lives and world. We can’t hope to effectively manage what we can’t understand. Without understanding of our world, management of it is arbitrary guess work, an existence of endless chaotic, destructive mistake-making, a life of perennial hurt, pain, misery and suffering. Even though the practice of evasion and denial has been necessary while we couldn’t explain the human condition, ultimately the whole responsibility of being a fully conscious organism is to understand our world and our

place in it. As Socrates said, ‘**the only good is knowledge and the only evil is ignorance**’ and ‘**the unexamined life is not worth living**’. In his renowned 1733 work *Essay on Man*, the poet Alexander Pope similarly emphasised the need to understand the human condition when he said, ‘**Know then thyself, presume not God to scan** [ie we can’t leave it to God to produce that understanding of the human condition]; **The proper study of Mankind is Man.**’

It is not surprising that it was a church minister, Bishop Wilberforce, who led the attack on Darwin in the great debate at Oxford, or that the malicious and dishonest attack on my work in the Australian media in 1995 was led by a fundamentalist minister of the church who has said ‘**I talk about God as transcendent...and I don’t know of any other way to relate to God**’ (FHA video, 8 Feb. 1995). For some religious people having their need for faith explained and their religious beliefs demystified can seem unbearably destabilising, and similarly, for the more alienated, having the issue of the human condition addressed can seem unbearably confronting, but the fact of the matter is science, which literally means ‘knowledge’, is, and must be, primarily concerned with replacing dogma and mysticism with rational understanding.

William Wordsworth understood how the more aesthetic, feeling, spiritual, soul-acknowledging, unevasive, ‘poet’ side of ourselves will ‘welcome’, support and ‘follow’ science when science is finally able to provide insight into our human condition, writing: ‘**If the labours of men of Science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our [human] condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present, but he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of Science...he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the Science itself...If the time should ever come when what is now called Science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man**’ (Wordsworth’s preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1802 edn). The reconciliation of science and the humanities, the material and the spiritual, indeed of science and religion, brings about the unification of humans, the unification of body and soul, which is the great fulfilment of our journey to enlightenment.

Physicist Paul Davies was appreciating that without understanding of ourselves we could never be fully integrated beings when he said, ‘**science offers a surer path to God than religion**’ (*God and the New Physics*, 1984). George Bernard Shaw likewise understood our knowledge-based destiny when he said, ‘**All problems are finally scientific problems**’ (*The Doctor’s Dilemma* Preface, 1906). In religious texts, and in the words of the prophets around whom great religions were founded, there is recognition and acceptance of a time when knowledge and understanding would be able to replace dogma. In Genesis in the Bible it says a time will come when we ‘**will be like God knowing**’ (3:5). Christ too has said, ‘**Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I [denial-free knowledge] will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father**’ (John 16:25), and ‘**another Counsellor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth [soul-infused, denial-free knowledge, the instinct and the intellect finally working together]...will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you**’ (John 14:16,17,26). Buddha similarly foresaw that ‘**In the future they will every one be Buddhas. And will reach Perfect Enlightenment**’ (*The Lotus of the Wonderful Law*, tr. W.E. Soothill, 1987, p.148 of 275).

The truth is religions aren’t being threatened by science, as some religious people fear, they are being fulfilled—and, for its part, science has always expected to make religion redundant. To quote more from Paul Davies’ 1995 acceptance speech for the Templeton Prize, which is awarded for ‘**increasing man’s understanding of God**’ (*The Templeton Prize*, Vol.3 1988–1992, p.108 of 153): ‘**Yet among the general population there is a widespread belief that science and theology are forever at loggerheads, that every scientific discovery pushes God further**

and further out of the picture. It is clear that many religious people still cling to an image of a God-of-the-gaps, a cosmic magician invoked to explain all those mysteries about nature that currently have the scientists stumped. It is a dangerous position, for as science advances, so the God-of-the-gaps retreats, perhaps to be pushed off the edge of space and time altogether, and into redundancy.’ Science’s role is to obsolete dogma. Its ultimate task is to bring an end to faith and belief and introduce the age of knowing, and with it a world of psychologically secure human beings.

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