

GOD, SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

'There is nothing in the universe so much like God as silence.'
Meister Eckhart

Science and God

Western Judeo-Christian religious traditions have struggled with the concept of "God" for countless centuries. Professor of philosophy Jacob Needleman: "We use the word 'God' and rarely ask ourselves what is really meant by that word. We assume we understand the meaning of the word simply because we know how to use it in conventional contexts and grammatically correct sentences. But many of us have little conception of all that the idea contains and all the questions and answers that are part of it. And above all, many of us are not aware of the inner experience that validates the idea, that shows the way toward an impartial verification of the existence of that which we can justifiably and with good conscience call *God*."

For a long time the idea of God, the word itself, has taken on as many connotations and denotations as there are types and gradations of the human psyche. We can say, without much exaggeration, that the word itself has become meaningless – that is, that it can mean anything to anyone. And therefore, in order to think about God, we must think about many other things and ideas as well – ultimately, we must think about *everything*, about the laws and principles that govern everything! We must think about the sky and the oceans and the earth, the world of nature, human history, art, the human body, the meanings of beauty, social organization, the nature of friendship and love – everything. Such is one of the fundamental meanings of the work of philosophy. And this means, necessarily, that we must learn how to think, about what to think, and what inner demand upon ourselves is necessary in order to think well and fully, like human beings, and not like domestic animals or computers. (1)

The picture that science draws of the natural world, although congruent with observational and empirical fact, is mathematical and abstract, and not a direct perception of ultimate reality. English physicist Sir James Jeans once famously said that "the Great Architect of the Universe now begins to appear as a pure mathematician." Science is, for the most part, silent regarding questions concerning the meaning of the universe.

Astrophysicist George Davis argues that the widely-held assumption of science that the universe somehow sprang unassisted out of nothing and continues to operate without conscious guidance is untenable: "If a universe could create itself, it would seem to embody the powers of a creator, and we should be forced to conclude that the universe is itself a God."

The providence of science historically has been to describe *what* the universe is, not *why* the universe exists at all. Renowned physicist Stephen Hawking stresses the importance of discussing the question of why it is that we and the universe actually exist: "If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason – for then we would know the mind of God." Some scientists believe that although God "wound up the clockwork to start it off," the universe was allowed to evolve according to specific laws and God does not intervene in the physical universe to break these laws.

Hawking has contrasted the scientific model of the beginning of the universe with the concept of a creator God: "So long as the universe had a beginning, we would suppose it had a creator. But if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end: it would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?"

Science seems to have uncovered a set of laws that, within the limit set by the uncertainty principle, tell us how the universe will develop with time, if we know its state at any one time. These laws may have originally been decreed by God, but it appears that he has since left the universe to evolve according to them and does not now intervene in it. But how did he choose the initial state or configuration of the universe? What were the "boundary conditions" at the beginning of time? One possible answer is to say that God chose the initial configuration of the universe for reasons that we cannot hope to understand. This would certainly have been within the power of an omnipotent being, but if he had started it off in such an incomprehensible way, why did he choose to let it evolve according to laws that we could understand? The whole history of science has been the gradual realization that events do not happen in an arbitrary manner, but that they reflect a certain underlying order, which may or may not be divinely inspired. It would only be natural to suppose that this order should apply not only to the laws, but also to the conditions at the boundary of space-time that specify the initial state of the universe. (2)

The scientific enterprise is essentially materialistic in nature, ignoring the world of spiritual truths and values, and the human experience of consciousness and awareness. "The progress of modern science comes from the application of clear analytic thought; but the abstract symbols used in such thinking, for all their accuracy and flexibility in certain fields, have limitations that make them unsuitable for the understanding of other realms of experience." Science focuses almost exclusively on how phenomena perceived by our senses and instruments are organized and undergo transformation over time, while largely ignoring the consciousness of the subject or perceiver of those phenomena:

The powerful and widespread roots of the scientific tree are intensely selective. They draw from the soil only those elements which will help the growth of that particular tree. To go no higher, almost all the emotional elements of the psyche are rejected: science recognizes little of human emotions except as factors that disturb its accuracy. Even the rich manifold of sensory experience finds small

place in the structure of that tree. The very world of sense which science sets out to explain is, in the end, explained away altogether. For, consider the universe that science sets before us, a universe devoid not only of colour, sound and warmth, but of all the sense qualities that make up the world of actual experience. The world of science is not *the* world, but merely an abstraction from it. We must emphatically state that the real world is a tissue of psychic experience. Whitehead in *Process and Reality*: "Apart from the experiences of subjects there is nothing, nothing, bare nothingness." Grass *is* green and the sky blue. The wind *does* sigh among the pine trees and the waves of the sea thunder on dazzling clouds of spray along rocky shores. These are elemental facts of the world, and a science that explains them away in the pretense of explaining them can never be fully satisfactory. (3)

There is a seemingly unending battle between faith and science, between those who believe in the existence of God and those who deny the actuality of such a Supreme Being and Creator of the universe. Scientists often unfairly criticize religions and those who believe in God: "It is not that the organized religions know nothing of the universal truths, for without that knowledge their teaching would attract no one. Their teachings are interpretations of the divine wisdom, presented in a socially approved manner."

Many scientists and others express a contemporary atheism articulated in rational and scientific terms which provide an alternative and antidote to the superstition, illusion and fantasy surrounding an unquestioning, blind belief in the traditional concept of God. On the positive side, this healthy skepticism propagated by scientists and writers such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens challenge religious self-deception, blind faith and rigid fundamentalism, and can open the door to a transformed understanding of the sacred and divine which speaks to the inner consciousness of human beings rather than reinforcing conditioned belief. Yet there is a danger that this scientific atheism may allow "new illusions to emerge, masquerading as the love of truth, but actually representing the very same qualities of arrogance and self-deception that they were designed to replace." Jacob Needleman:

Might we allow "atheism" to challenge our passive, hypocritical, or superstitious beliefs in order to make room for ideas and thinking that can nourish the human soul in a way that breathing nourishes the human body? Might we allow honest atheism without seeding into our culture and into the minds of our children toxic concepts of what we are and what reality is? By toxic ideas I mean ideas that deny the higher nature within ourselves that is still calling to us; concepts that smother the sense of wonder, the sense of the Higher in nature and in ourselves waiting to enter our lives. Such toxic concepts are now everywhere, presuming to be realistic only because they fight against an equally toxic religious arrogance. The growing human being – child or adult – has need for ideas that nourish the search for Truth and the development of the Will to the Good, that nourish the sense of the sacred in nature and, above all, in ourselves. It may not be necessary for everyone to enter the path of inner work, leading to the opening of the true

I Am within. But it may very well be necessary for the doors to be open to those who are touched by the great wish that leads to the personal search for God, whether that search takes place in the hidden heart of our own ancient teachings; or in the still living practical mysticism of Eastern teachings; or in the rediscovered path leading to the awakening of Conscious Attention; or in ways still, for all we know, hidden and waiting to be “switched on” in our civilization. (4)

Professor Needleman suggests that the human intellect by itself lacks the capacity to fully grasp the depth and subtlety of the task of realizing a comprehensive and experiential understanding of God:

One of the very first steps in learning how to think about God is to realize that the isolated intellect is incapable of going beyond a certain point in the work of thinking about reality. It will turn out that we need much more of the whole human psyche – which includes the function of authentic, non-egoistic feeling – to think about God. The isolated intellect, devoid of contact with the power of real, non-egoistic feeling, may ultimately be incapable of thinking past the most elementary stages of this task. Without much exaggeration, we can even say that the isolated mind, the head unconnected to the power of non-egoistic feeling, and dependent only upon primitive impressions brought by the external senses, the mechanical rules of logical forms, and the automatic associations of words and images – we may say that this mind is, intrinsically, an atheist. This is the hollow mind. (5)

Both unquestioning belief and inflexible disbelief may be out of touch with our own inner being and experience, with deleterious consequences: “God or not God, ‘belief’ or ‘science’ – it makes no real difference for my personal life unless the call of the Self and its need to ‘breathe’ is heard and, ultimately, respected. Not only can thought about ultimate reality make no difference to the world or to my personal life unless we hear and respect the call of the Self, but such empty thought can bring down our personal and collective world, even our Earth itself. When thought races ahead of Being, a civilization is rushing toward heedless destruction.”

Those who deny God, those who disprove His existence, who persuade others to deny God – do they have any idea what they are really taking away from people? Do they offer anything to take its place? – anything, that is, that carries with it the flesh and blood of the heart of childhood with all its essence knowing, its essence participation in humanness, its ancient, timeless seeds of love, hope, care. (6)

Philosophers, scientists and religious authorities have debated the question, “Does God really exist?” for millennia without reaching any definitive conclusion. And for each of us, at some point in our lives, the question of the nature of ultimate reality touches the very core or essence of our humanness. “To understand what God is demands from the very outset the presence in ourselves of what God is. God – or whatever we call essential reality – must already be active within our awareness when we turn to think about God. If we look and observe

ourselves, we will discover that the presence of a higher vibration within ourselves is already there, activating the impulse to think about the question of God."

When a man or woman directs his or her attention to questions of ultimate reality which are in their essence the question of the nature of God – something awakens within us and calls to us; when a man or woman directs his or her attention to questions of ultimate value and ultimate obligation – which also are in their essence the question of the nature of God and God's need of us – something within us awakens and calls to us. That awakening something has no interest in material, worldly needs and attractions; no interest in pleasure or success or money or being first. I am calling it the soul (or the Self) for lack of a better word. It is not interested in what the *me* wants. It wishes only to live and grow and be. (7)

To truly comprehend the nature of God may require the activation of a higher conscious energy in individuals receptive to the call of the divine. Some have suggested that awakened human beings are necessary to act as instruments of God in the earthly realm: "Without this conscious energy on the earth it may not be possible for divine justice, mercy or compassion to enter the lives of human beings because so few human beings exist who in themselves incarnate the action within their own human frame of the great conscious forces and laws of creation and conscious evolution."

Spirituality and God

The concept of God lies at the heart of the world's great monotheistic religions. In the Old Testament (Genesis 1:1-2), it is written: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Other spiritual traditions use different language to point to the same inexpressible Source of All:

Is there only the One God – of Judaism, of Christianity, of Islam? The one state of Awakening of Buddhism? The One Absolute Brahman above and within all the countless gods of Hinduism? Always and everywhere the religions of man speak of the highest reality which it is man's duty to obey. And always and everywhere they warn us not to take the creature for the Creator, not to give our hearts and minds to anything less than the One God, the State of Awakening, the Absolute Mind of the universe. Again and again the language of the religions commands, invites us to worship only God, not gods; to seek the one force that everything within our being yearns to obey and serve. Are our religions not speaking also of an *inward monotheism*? Not to regard as our "Lord" our better (but lesser) states of understanding or faith, and certainly not our concepts or dreams of God, which may well be illusions, "idols," however "sacred." (8)

Mystics throughout history who have experienced higher dimensions of reality use a variety of terms to metaphorically point to the Divine principle underlying phenomenal reality:

God is not one thing among many things, or the sum of many things, or the dynamic interaction of many things – God is the condition, the nature, the suchness or the reality *of* each thing, or event or process. It is not set apart *from* any of them, yet neither is it in any way confined *to* them. It is identical *with* the world, but not identical *to* it. The Absolute is prior to the world but not other than the world. That is the doctrine of *tathata*, or suchness – Meister Eckhart called it the *isness* of each thing-event; the Taoists call it *tzu jan*, the so-ness of every object; it is also very close to the meaning of both *dharma*, for Buddhism, and *sahaja*, for Vedanta. The doctrine of suchness, combined with the doctrines of *advaita* or nonduality and *sunyata* or unqualifiability, form the most fundamental and elemental starting point for all mystical traditions, although the terminology is, of course, different. (9)

Sufis hold that 'Objective Truth' or the 'First Cause' lies beyond appearance and is divine. The Koran (Sura 24, verse 35): "God is the Light of the Heavens and of the Earth." The great Sufi master Jalaluddin Rumi expresses the mystical understanding of God in traditional religious terms. "The universe is indeed marked by such power, beauty, order and harmony that man is in danger of worshipping them. In the perishable and the mutable, therefore, man's reason must grasp the evidence for the necessary and transcendent existence of the Creator."

The universe is created and is dependent for its continuance upon something else, but the Creator is not dependent upon any other being. The whole creation has proceeded from Him and reverts to him. He is the First and the Last. He is Self-Existent and Uncreated. He is neither begotten nor He begets. He is unique in all His powers and attributes. All the beautiful names belong to Him, but they are all inadequate in conjuring up the Reality of God. He is Omnipotent, Omniscient. He is the Lord of Unity, absolutely One and Unique, absolutely Self-sufficient. He is wise and knows all about everything. There is nothing that is outside His ken . . . He is not remote, aloof and distant. He is close to man. In fact, He is closer to him than his jugular vein. (10)

In Advaita Vedanta, God is conceived as existing both within and without as pure undifferentiated consciousness: "You think that you are an individual; outside you there is the universe and beyond the universe is God. So, there is the idea of separateness. This idea must go. For God is not separate from you or the cosmos." God is immanent in every person and every object throughout the universe. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: "When you see the world you see God. There is no seeing God, apart from the world." From the perspective of Advaita Vedanta the Self or "I Am" is God and can be realized through inner stillness: "Silence is the ocean in which all the rivers of all the religions discharge themselves."

Ramana Maharshi taught that natural laws pertaining to the physical universe are manifestations of God's will and omnipotence which, ultimately, must remain mysterious and inscrutable: "No motive can be attributed to that Power – no desire, no end to achieve can be asserted of that one Infinite, All-wise and All-powerful Being. God is untouched by activities which take place in His presence. There is no meaning in attributing responsibility and motive to the One before it becomes many."

God has no purpose. He is not bound by any action. The world's activities cannot affect Him. Take the analogy of the sun. The sun rises without desire, purpose or effort, but as soon as it rises numerous activities take place on earth: the lens placed in its rays produces fire in its focus, the lotus bud opens, water evaporates and every living creature enters upon activity, maintains it, and finally drops it. But the sun is not affected by any such activity, as it merely acts according to its nature, by fixed laws, without any purpose, and is only a witness. So it is with God . . . God has no desire or purpose in His acts of creation, maintenance, destruction, withdrawal and salvation to which beings are subjected. As the beings reap the fruit of their actions in accordance with His laws, the responsibility is theirs, not God's: God is not bound by any actions. (11)

For most people the idea of "God" is a concept based on memory and purely mental representations. Advaita Vedanta teacher Jean Klein: "Free yourself from the concept and be your natural being, what you are fundamentally. There you will find your answer. It is only in your absence of being somebody that you come to feel what God is, what He is."

Q: Is there a place for God in your teaching?

A: What *you* call God is a concept. You can add many qualifications: good, almighty, omniscient, etc., to this concept but it still remains intellectual and fuels a representation and a state of emotivity. To really know God you must free yourself from the idea of God. To come to experience God you must be empty of all personal images and projections which are false idols that take you away from being God. There is a saying, 'If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.' Meister Eckhart said that to know God you must free yourself from the concept of God. (12)

The Buddhist perspective of reality is very different from the theistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Buddha spoke of "truth without form," the spirit or absolute energy that pervades the whole universe: "The body of truth is the formless spiritual essence of all things. It is pure consciousness, filling the universe with endless and infinite light."

In Western philosophy and theology there are various theories about the existence of God, and attempts are made to prove His existence. In Buddhism, when the eye of the heart is opened and the universe viewed, the Buddha is everywhere. To Shakyamuni at the moment of enlightenment, things animate and inanimate, all together became the Truth. In all the phenomena of the world the Buddha spirit is

active – the courses of the sun, the moon, and the other heavenly bodies, the cycle of the seasons. In that regularity there is no disorder, and we cannot suppose that a universe which displays such regularity can be just in movement to no purpose. We can observe a purpose to which the spiritual activity is moving. There is a progress, there is a development, and it is the process by which all become Buddhas. This supreme goal the philosophers call truth, call the Absolute, call reality. Because its being is a mystery it is also called God, but different from the God-in-heaven worshipped by Christians and others. We can indicate it as the spiritual essence of the universe, the great Life of all. (13)

Buddhism, unlike many world religions, does not posit an all-powerful deity or Supreme Being who created and governs the universe. Buddhists believe that ultimate, transcendent reality cannot be personified, named or described – it is beyond all categories of thought.

Buddhism teaches that everything in the universe operates according to cyclical processes, under the law of causation: “Aside from this endless chain there is no creator and no ruler of the universe. Buddhism places the center of the universe in the subjectivity of the individual mind, whereas other religions place it in the objectivity outside the mind.” For the Buddhist, God is not remote or distant – the Buddhist God resides in our own mind and consciousness.

Buddhism is not based on belief or speculation about the first cause or the reality of God – it points to finding the answer in one’s own personal spiritual realization. In the words of Zen master Nyogen Senzaki: “Buddhists understand the universe and God as one. There is no remainder in the mathematics of infinity. All life is one; therefore, there cannot be God and man, nor a universe and God. All things return to one, and one operates in all.”

Q: If there is no God outside this world, who created the world?

A: If you are so attached to the word “God,” then the universe is God and God is the universe. To say that God created the universe, and then to say that He stands outside this universe is a contradiction. Neither God nor non-God can exist outside this oneness. We create the world anew each moment of each day. When we are asleep, there is nothing, but once we are awake, then the world of form, color, odor, taste, and touch are instantly created by our senses. Buddhists see the world as a phenomenon of flux consisting of various relations, but not created by a divinity. This world is conceived in the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. The Buddha concluded that without this relationship of the world to the elements, subjective and objective, there is nothing. If you believe this world is created by a supreme being, then you must feel powerless to change it, thus leaving your fate to the mercy of the creator. Buddhists know that the world is your own production. You may change it, rebuild it, or improve it to suit your own will. (14)

In certain spiritual teachings God is sometimes described as the “Artist of Creation,” in which every element of the phenomenal world is seen as a reflection of the Divine. In the *Dance of*

Shiva, Ananda Coomaraswamy explores this idea: “We are justified in speaking of Absolute Beauty, and in identifying this beauty with God. Insofar as we see or feel beauty, we see and are one with Him. God is the first artist and every natural object is an immediate realization of His being. The true human artist who discovers beauty is one who reveals the Supreme spirit wherever the mind attaches itself.”

The idea of God as Love is enshrined in many spiritual traditions. In Hinduism, Krishna revealed that: “One who lives in the heart is close to God.”

Sometimes it is difficult to reach God. At the end everything becomes simple as love dawns in the heart. But then love must be without attachment. It is a reciprocal self-giving. You give to the Lord and the Lord gives to you. Through love you find the way you could not find through knowledge. (15)

In his *The Walled Garden of Truth*, the classical Sufi Hakim Sanai taught that disentanglement from the ‘lower self’ is necessary in order to perceive the reality of God:

Reality is a synonym for God in Muslim thought. Both Jesus and the Muslim martyr Mansur al Hallaj figure prominently in Sanai’s poem as exemplars of total identification with that reality to the complete exclusion of self . . . Both are said to have uttered the same ostensibly blasphemous proclamation, ‘I am the truth,’ and as a result to have suffered death at the hands of an outraged community. Mansur’s utterance was taken by contemporaries to be the supreme blasphemy and arrogance. Only God was entitled to such an attribute. What was meant, however, was the very reverse of arrogant: that the self had been annihilated and only God remained. ‘It is God who is speaking through him. His self is dead.’ For Sanai, then, the self is unreality and God the reality. To divest oneself of self is a gain, not a loss. God, as apprehended by Sanai, is the very reverse of remote and unapproachable. He is approached as one would a beloved friend. A human love worthy of the name is one in which the participants transcend the self, in which the sense of ‘I’ and ‘you’ is completely left behind in the fullness of the supervening contact. To experience this, however fleetingly, is to have an intimation of the reality of God. (16)

Ultimately, God is discovered within the silent depths of each human being. Stillness is primordial intelligence itself – the eternal, underlying consciousness from which every form is born. Eckhart Tolle: “Your innermost sense of self, of who you are, is inseparable from stillness. This is the *I Am* that is deeper than name or form.”

In the Bible, it says that God created the world and saw that it was good. That is what you see when you look from stillness without thought. Wisdom comes with the ability to be still. Just look and just listen. No more is needed. Being still, looking and listening, activates the non-conceptual intelligence within you. Let stillness direct your words and actions . . . In you there is a dimension of consciousness far deeper than thought. It is the very essence of who you are.

We may call it presence, awareness, the unconditional consciousness. In the ancient teachings it is the Christ within you, or your Buddha nature. (17)

Meditations

God said: I was a hidden treasure; I sought that
this treasure should be revealed.

Rumi

The Absolute Being is *what* is – It is the Self.
It is God. Knowing the Self, God is known.
In fact God is none other than the Self.

Ramana Maharshi

God is not only true and good, but also beautiful.
The Supreme creates beauty – for the joy of it.

Kabir

All gifts of nature and of grace have been given us
on loan. Their ownership is not ours, but God's.

Meister Eckhart

What is God? Is God not the very light by which
you ask the question? 'I am' itself is God.

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

The Great Mystery, the Mystery of mysteries embraces all of
the wonders of life. This unnameable and unknown Essence
is God – the ultimate Divinity. By its agency, out of utter no-
thingness has arisen everything in the universe.

Guy Murchie

I see a painter painting a picture. The picture I call the world,
the painter I call God. God is the ultimate cause and the world
is the effect. They are different but not separate.

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

A spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe, a spirit vastly superior
to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers
must feel humble. In this way the pursuit of science leads to a religious
feeling of a spiritual sort.

Albert Einstein

Whoever knows God does not say 'God.'
Bayazid

God is not found in the soul by adding anything
but by a process of subtraction.
Meister Eckhart

He that loves not knows not God, for God is love.
John 1:4

The light by which you see the world, which is God,
is the little spark "I am."
Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

God is in all and works through all. But the Presence
of God is better recognized in purified minds.
Ramana Maharshi

All is God's and all is for the best. Welcome all that comes
with a glad and thankful heart. And love all creatures. For
this, too, will take you to your Self.
Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Patience is a mission in itself, it is God's own gift. Then you live in
Infinity and nothing else matters. Remember that God is infinite,
infinitely patient with you.

Sri Anirvan

The seed of God is within us. Given an intelligent, hard-working
farmer, it will thrive and grow up to God; whose seed it is; and
accordingly its fruits will be God-nature. Pear seeds grow into
pear trees, nut seeds into nut trees, and God seeds into God.
Meister Eckhart

You want to see God in all, but not in yourself? If *all* is God,
are you not included in that *all*? Being God yourself, is it a
wonder that *all* is God?

Ramana Maharshi

The bare fact that you are alive, you are, that is the grace of God. And all
the activities that happen through you are the expressions of the grace.
Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

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