

Holy Trajectory, Batman! (It's Time for a New Cosmology)
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I admit it; there are days in which I am very tired of the so-called conflict between faith and science, or as it is sometimes narrowly and stereotypically identified as “Darwin versus Christianity.” I get intellectually stressed, emotionally worn-out, and spiritually depleted—well—when such proposals appear (or should I say, evolve) as “The Missouri Standards Science Act” which in its current manifestation is H.B 291. This bill would require public education to give “equal treatment” to evolution AND intelligent design; and in turn, describe empirical data as verified or non-verifiable; naturalistic processes in pre-history must be duplicated by analogous naturalistic processes; and textbooks only approved if they do the same, etc., etc. I don't know what that means . . . makes my head spin! Let's do it like Arkansas?? I get tired when there is yet another creationist “scientist” attacking geological science armed with yet another Day-Age, Ruin and Restoration, or Flood Geology interpretation of Hebrew scripture, namely the Book of Genesis.

There have been volumes written about the history of the stresses between some scientific communities and some faith groups, including the history of legal challenges. More recently: Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists*; and David Montgomery, *The Rocks Don't Lie*; and Edward Larson, *The Theory of Evolution: A History of Controversy*. But I offer a few contextual summary statements; a backstory.

First, roughly between 500 and 800 BCE, a considerable portion of the human population went through a period of very serious questioning of older religious pattern and consequently produced a number of progressive views of the cosmos. This period of history has been characterized by scholars as The Axial Age—the turning point **from** mostly sky-god institutions **to** philosophy, social justice, and reformation of faith practices. Indeed, it was the age of Greek philosophers (turning Greek gods into legends); it was the age of the Hebrew prophets (critiquing temple and monarchical control, and asserting the integrity of faith); it was the age of Asian reformers such as Gautama Buddha, and the Mahavira (transforming Brahmanism into Buddhism, Jainism, and therefor reformed Hinduism), and it was the age of the articulation of Taoism and Confucianism (emphasizing holistic relationship with the earth and ordered social harmony). In the Axial Age religion across the planet was dramatically altered—it evolved! Granted there were reactionary movements, and there was a good deal of social amnesia—anthropomorphic sky-gods are attractive, if not addictive, particularly to vested hierarchical power interests.

Secondly, I remind us that modern human beings have always known the relationship between metaphor and concrete human experience, and perhaps more

importantly known that life is always experienced in at least two dimensions: conditioned and unconditioned reality. Conditioned reality—how we experience the ordinary, quantifiable, existential, natural, waking, conscious world; but we also experience the extraordinary, qualitative, essential, supernatural, dreaming, subconscious world. We sometimes call conditioned reality secular or profane and unconditioned reality sacred or profound. The Greeks had two words for time, *chronos* (chronology, chronometer) for measured, calibrated, calendar, clock time; and *chairo*s (chairotic) for fullness, quality, eternal, non-measurable, feeling time. You know how that works. How does time feel when your sick? Sloooow. How does time feel when you are aware of aging? It went so fast! Where did time go? Some experiences of living are conditioned and quantitative but some are unconditioned and qualitative. Religion is the mask, or filter, or medium by which we interpret the unconditioned, mysterious, not exactly knowable experiences **in** the conditioned daily, quantifiable reality. The working definition of religion that I use with my world's religions' class is: **beliefs and practices that mediate powers of the universe, which provide identity and values, usually through community.** In other words, religion is the practice of metaphor, or the practice of **myth**. Myth is not anti-rational or irrational. I assert that it is non-rational, a non-rational means of interpreting, as the theologian Garrison Keillor (AKA Guy Noir) says, "making sense of life's most persistent questions." Myth is meaning making, it is truths, it is the power of STORY. Religion, via myth, gives us ultimate metaphors by which we live meaningful lives. As one interpreter of the Greek concept *logos* (used in the Christian gospel of John) is: story. "In the beginning was the story. And the story was with God, and the story was God."

The problem is that some scientists, some rational empiricists, forget that we all live by the stories, myths, derived meanings we make, however emotional, biological, or parochial they may be, like movies and sports events; **and** some proponents of religion forget that the most important truths are stories, **or** that stories alone do not build cars, the internet, or hamburgers. People cannot live by facts alone, neither can we live by trying to turn powerful meaningful myths into rational or factual concepts. We need both facts and myths. Turning myth into fact was what 20th Century American Protestant Christian Fundamentalism was trying to do—make laws, principles, facts, fundamentals out of faith stories. In part, this was a reaction to modern science; trying to make religion sound scientific; proving faith.

As you might be gathering, I am asserting that faith versus science is a false dichotomy, **when** it is framed as a conflict between God and godless humanism (or the various expression of that conflict).

Since mid-19th Century we have witnessed Christian Darwinists supplanted by Creationists in turn supplanted by Intelligent Design advocates, but they have

been informed by, in the context of, 20th Century American Protestant Evangelical Fundamentalist Christianity such that we wound up with Anti-Evolutionists on the one side and on the other side, what Peters and Hewlett call “shrink-wrapped” Darwinists (people who have used Darwin to justify materialism, unfettered capitalism, or even eugenics).

Before I make any suggestions on how we might get out of this bi-polar conflict, I need to let you know (as we say in Missouri), where I’m coming from.

- I am a self-conscious follower of the teachings of Jesus **and** I understand evolution is the process of developing life on the planet; but (and big “but” here), **but** I am not necessarily an adherent of Christianity as the majority seem wont to organize it. In other words, although I have been shaped by 19th Century American Protestant Christianity, I am a critic of the narrowing of that context—I am a disciple of Jesus, not a child of Constantine.
- And you need to know I embrace a diversity of spiritualities; indeed encourage diversity. (A position I think both religion and science should share—diversity supports survival; monoculture does not.
- And know that I acknowledge the importance of scientific reasoning and research, but I endeavor to think critically about scientific worldviews just as I would think critically about any philosophical system.
- I am a qualitative researcher in my disciplines of Human Geography, Religious Studies, and Sociology, not quantitative. I am more interested and skilled at raising questions of meaning than determining structured physical causality.
- **And**, I believe the universe has much revelation yet for us.

Maybe what I can say about myself, at present, is that I am on a quest for a **well-grounded faith**. As a storyteller, clergy, and educator I readily admit that no ONE STORY tells the whole story. Or say that even more negatively, there are great risks in a single story. We need to be careful as scientists and religionists not to wrap it up too neatly. (Gee, modern empirical science and prophetic religion share the value of critical thinking?)

There are a number of **faith perspectives** on evolution. Since the late 19th Century there have been:

1. **Darwinian Biologists** who, using the scientific method, see God as setting up the rules, so to speak, for natural causes;
2. **Darwinian Ideologues**, who have an atheist philosophy of natural causes. (I have to insert that I frequently have students in my Geography of the World's Religion class come to tell me they are atheists. Which usually prompts me to ask which gods they don't believe in. And if they can answer that, I normally can say, "me neither." Which then often gets a "but I thought you were a preacher?" Which then opens the door to some serious discussion about the meaning of GOD. What I usually discover is that atheists have a religious context: there are Christian atheists, Islamic atheists, Jewish atheists—even Buddhist and Baptist and Catholic atheists. Most often they are reacting to some very specific and quite narrow view of deity.) , I digress---I was giving you some of the types of faith perspectives on evolution. . . there are:
3. **Biblical Creationists** what have a theology—God was, is, and ever more shall be the natural cause.
4. **Scientific Creationists** who use scientific methods to “prove” God is the creator of the natural world.
5. **Intelligent Designists** who use some degree of scientific methods, but see God as an interventionist, a sort of divine controller of natural processes. And there are:
6. **Theistic Evolutionists** whose theology sees God as primary cause, but nature secondarily has its own causes. One could also make some distinctions about pantheists en-theists, or pan-en-theists. I have, in the past, thought of myself as a pan-en-theist.

But I don't want to get into long explanations of categories, suffice it to say, there are thoughtful rational people trying to express their religious and scientific grounding but there are also less thoughtful and less rational people trying to assert their view on all of us, through various political, economic, legal, and other cultural means.

I know that everything has a context. Any cosmology (worldview) is rooted in historical social experience, and what I think is, right now, particularly in America, **we are in a new context**. The extremists may be ranting but while they are ranting, **human consciousness and technology is rapidly evolving**. From GMOs to drones to electronic privacy to toxic energy production to political-religious

fundamentalism to 21st Century-style fascism—we have to get our cosmology straight, or else—there is no cosmos--for us. A cosmos, but without human beings.

I want to say: Science, you are a gift to Religion (especially the gift of the concept of evolution); Religion, you are a gift to Science (especially in the meaning-making and value-making department). Or, let me say it another way: I think it is time for a sacred view of science (with a subtitle, science is a religious vocation). I think a sacred view of science may give us a more positive future. There might be a Holy Trajectory, Batman! Is there is a more comprehensive cosmology? Theillard de Chardin was articulating that; Michal Dowd, with his *Thank God, For Evolution* is trying to develop a new cosmology. After all, the term God (G-O-D) is a word, a symbolic representation, a metaphor for that which drives the universe. The ancient Hebrews used the name Yahweh, which scholars think is a verb form of “to be” (being) for “that which brings things into being” or “being itself” or “creativity itself,” crudely expressed as “I am that I am” or perhaps, “I will be what I will be.” I riff on Paul Tillich a bit, and suggest maybe G-O-D is **Ground Of Destiny**.

I do think a bit Hegelian dialectic sometimes, or some say I think “Trinitarian,” at least it has been helpful for me to organize life’s chaos when I see it as:

Thesis versus Antithesis prompts Synthesis; or
Establishment versus Anti-establishment prompts Trans-establishment; or
Conforming versus Reforming prompts Transforming; or maybe Science
versus Faith prompts new cosmological principles.

Stasis versus Change, evolutionarily speaking, prompts Diversity and Possibility. So I say, Religion, think intellectual curiosity; Science, think holistically. Religion versus Science may prompt . . .?

Perhaps you know Complexity Theory (or sometimes called Chaos Theory); new orders are emergent, especially in times of turbulence, as processes seek stability. But you cannot always see, predict, or necessarily understand the new order until it has emerged. I want the best of scientific and religious thinkers to think evolutionary trajectory as a sacred path, a holy path. Something new is emerging; anticipate it; appreciate it. Borrowing from other movie and TV metaphors, “trust the force, Luke”—a friend of mine wears a T-shirt that has printed, “metaphors be with you.” Or, maybe we could say, “May the Transformers be with you” in this new Axial Age.

As I conclude, I need to move from this more philosophical discussion to being a bit more practical. What might anticipating and appreciating a Holy Trajectory look like in daily experience? I offer three modest suggestions:

1. Know the big picture; that is to know God. The universe is evolving and we are a part of it. Could we not trust the universe, anticipate purposes in complexity, or believe that truth is emergent?

You may recall that over one hundred years ago Rudolph Otto tried to study the phenomena of the experience of the Holy. He was one who initiated phenomenology, or as we say in Geography, phenomenography (writing about phenomena). He termed the experience of the Holy as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*—the mystery that is both terrifying and fascinating; it is awe; awe—full encounters. I recall awaking one morning in Nicaragua where I was working on a project and sleeping in the school we were helping to build. As I awoke I became aware I was surrounded by little children, watching “the giant” awake, as if I was Gulliver here on my travels. We both were filled with awe, as we from two different worlds were appreciating a common holy path. Can we believe that systems do self-organize and we might possibly walk humbly with the universe?

2. Be, with integrity; that is spirituality. Cooperation and competition are not mutually exclusive, but rather can produce synergy. Look for the relationships; look for community even among what seems to be divergent paths. Dowd says that science speaks “day language” and religion speaks “night language.” Maybe they speak of the same things. Can we choose to love the other, mercifully? I have come to appreciate the perspective and teaching of Brian McLaren, who has been “translating” traditional Christian language into meanings for contemporary “non-churched” people. He goes back to the earliest stories of Christianity, pre-Constantine, and finds relevant truths for our current imperial age.

3. Do whatever we do, honoring diversity; that is the practice of faith. The past is complete, and the future is possibility, emphasized when we have a global perspective. I heard someone say, years ago, “all the cultural gifts belong to all the people.” When we respect differences there is no need to worry about losing one’s identity. I recall the dramatic difference in the lives of some white suburban teenagers I helped to visit the racially tense community of Philadelphia, Mississippi in the early 1970s. We worked among the poorest Choctaw people and talked with the poorest rural Blacks in the context of dominant white culture and when we came back we saw our own communities with new eyes, and became passionate about justice. Honoring diversity certainly can become a motivator for doing justice.

Hmmm, these three points sound like the Hebrew prophet, Micah: walk humbly, love mercifully, do justly. Holy Trajectory!