RELIGION & SCIENCE IN OUR NEO-MEDIEVAL AGE

Interfaith Scholar Weekend, 2014

Rav Shai Cherry, Ph.D.

RELIGION & SCIENCE IN OUR NEO-MEDIEVAL AGE

0

Whence Knowledge?

Fundamentalist Theologians Revelation and Authentic Religious Tradition but Reason is untrustworthy Al-Ashari (10 th c.) Yehuda Ha-Levi (11 th c.) Al-Ghazali (12 th c.)	Rationalist TheologiansBoth Reason, properly employed, and RevelationMutazilites (from 8th c. on) Saadia Gaon (10th c.) St. Anselm (11th c.)
Religious Philosophers Science is the only reliable source of truth, but religion can be an ally Al-Kindi (9 th), Al-Farabi (10 th) Avicenna (11 th) Averroes (12 th) Maimonides (12 th)	Radical Philosophers Science is the only reliable source of truth, and religion is the enemy Hivi Al-Balkhi (9 th) (Jew/Gnostic Xian?) Al-Razi (10 th)

Creation vs. Eternity

- Theologians maintain *creatio* ex *nihilo*, creation out of nothing
- Plato (*Timaeus*) and Genesis I occupy a middle ground of a divine ordering of eternal matter
- Philosophers maintain eternity of the world a la Aristotle

What's at Stake?

 The belief in eternity the way Aristotle sees it—that is, the belief that the world exists in virtue of necessity, that nature does not change at all, and that the customary course of events cannot be modified at all destroys the law in its principle, necessarily gives the lie to every miracle, and reduces to inanity all the hope and threats that the Torah has held out.

• -- Moses Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed (1180), II:25

Sa'adia's Translation of Torah into Arabic and then into English

- "In the beginning, God created...."
- Sa'adia wrote in 10th-century Baghdad
 - This is the Authorized King James Bible (1611)
- Rashi (11th-century Provence) understands Gen 1:1 as "When God began to create heaven and earth....")
 - This is the New Jewish Publication Society Translation (1985)
- Maimonides (1180) recognizes that the Hebrew is ambiguous

IN ANTIQUITY

- Genesis I:I was uncontroversial!
- Rashi, like the Timaeus, has the correct idea.
- Questions of ex nihilo and eternality were not yet on the table

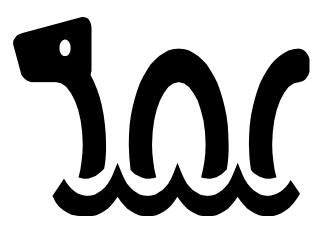
• So, *nu*, what *was* on the table?

"Let there be light" (v. 3)

 The source of light is God, not the sun which wasn't created until day 4!

"God created the great sea monsters" (v. 21)

 In other ancient near Eastern creation myths, the great sea monsters were eternal and challenged the good God's sovereignty.



"And God created humanity in His image" (v.27)

In Babylonia, only the King was "in God's image."



God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fruitful & multiply; fill the earth & steward it" (v. 28)

- Throughout the Torah, there are commandments. Only in the context of humans with free will do commandments make any sense. Babylonian culture had no sense of free will. They were governed by astral determinism/astrology.
- See verses 3 & 14!



What Genesis I Meant

- Only One God
- The stars are not gods
- There is no independent source of evil
- Humanity is equally divine
- Humans have free will

 Genesis I is a sustained polemic against other cultures' worldviews

Francis Bacon, 2 Books, 1605

- There are two books laid before us to study, to prevent our falling into error; first, the volume of the Scriptures, which reveal the will of God; then the volume of the Creatures, which express His power.
- To conclude, therefore, let no man ... think or maintain that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God's word, or in the book of God's works; divinity or philosophy; but rather let men endeavor an endless progress or proficience in both...only let men beware that they do not unwisely mingle or confound these learnings together.

Contemporary Postures between Religion & Science

Conflict The world wasn't created in 6 days. Dawkins, Dennet, and Hitchens (Radical Philosophers) Created by God, not evolution 38-42% of Americans, mostly Evangelical Protestants (Fundamental Theologians)	Separation/Independent Science is about how the world works and religion is about our purpose in the world. They should each stick to their sides of Mt. Sinai. The Torah provides no information and science provides no meaning. MODERNITY (Esoteric Medieval)
Dialogue	Integration
Science and religion are separate but	Science and religion are describing the
they each have something to learn	same reality using different tools.
from the other, or, at least, religion has	Religious texts are to be taken
something to learn from science.	seriously, but not literally.
Religious Philosophers	Philosophers & Theologians w/a
Rationalist Theologians	Monistic or Mystical Worldview

S

t

f

S

What Genesis I Means

- Conflict
 Natural History or
 Primitive Myth
- Separation God created the world God is not the world
- Dialogue Humans were created on the same day as other land animals showing our essential affinity
- Integration The unfolding of creation suggests a unified will