



RELIGION & SCIENCE IN OUR NEO-MEDIEVAL AGE

Interfaith Scholar Weekend, 2014

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RELIGION & SCIENCE IN OUR NEO-MEDIEVAL AGE

Whence Knowledge?

Fundamentalist Theologians

Revelation and Authentic Religious Tradition but Reason is untrustworthy

Al-Ashari (10th c.)

Yehuda Ha-Levi (11th c.)

Al-Ghazali (12th c.)

Rationalist Theologians

Both Reason, properly employed, and Revelation

Mutazilites (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 (9th), Al-Farabi (10th)

Avicenna (11th)

Averroes (12th)

Maimonides (12th)

Radical Philosophers

Science is the only reliable source of truth, and religion is the enemy

Hivi Al-Balkhi (9th) (Jew/Gnostic Xian?)

Al-Razi (10th)

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 1:1 was uncontroversial!
- Rashi, like the Timaeus, has the correct idea.
- Questions of *ex nihilo* and eternity 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
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- 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 proficiencie 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

Science and religion are separate but they each have something to learn from the other, or, at least, religion has something to learn from science.

**Religious Philosophers
Rationalist Theologians**

Integration

Science and religion are describing the same reality using different tools. Religious texts are to be taken seriously, but not literally.

**Philosophers & Theologians w/a
Monistic or Mystical Worldview**

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