

Religion as an Art Form

Overview:

From the rise of science, its relationship with religion has been one of tension. The application of the Copernican Principle (world and the human must continually be removed from the center), progressively elevated the objective and scientific mentality over the religious as the measure of reality. More broadly, historically, all critical methodologies confronting religious expressions have demeaned them as being false both factually, and causally. In time, the entailments and operational processes of the universe being understood as governed by laws, deterministic, and existing apart from the universe, and outside of human existence, thought, and action, not only stripped away theological concepts of inspiration and revelation, but jettisoned the idea of freedom both in the universe and human action. The universe became a machine; humans were deprived of consciousness, free-will, self-identity, and the values associated with emotive expressions. With respect to reality these were illusory. In a sense humans were dehumanized. Quantum physics claimed reality was dependent on measurements made by a conscious observer, and the uncertainty principle offered a degree of freedom in the world; but the element of conscious observation altering the world was considered, to some, suspect.

Presently, largely due to the rise of the cognitive sciences, non-Cartesian linguistics, and a few theoretical scientists, laws are considered to be embodied expressions, their existence inseparable from their environments, and themselves responsible to a kind of prior causation, even acausation. The cognitive sciences have demonstrated that rational thinking is dependent on metaphors gained by experience and that scientific rationality cannot employ logic and mathematics to make claims beyond what is empirically accessible. The presuppositions of science began to gravitate to earth and the function of the human brain and mind became central to understanding. Cognitive neuroscience, particularly in the form of neurotheology began investigating brain functions involving religious data and influence. The discipline is in its infancy, but seeks to integrate body, and mind, which has several referents, including soul, and seeks to understand the brain's propensity for religious/spiritual content by scientific means. Since it claims it is not beholden to either science or God, it appears to be epistemologically novel and independent. Because God is the apposite to science, it would seem that the reference to God would be better understood as referencing revelation rather than the successes or failures of attempts to prove God's existence. How successful the research will be in defining human identity is still a work in process.

Beyond reductive materialism, the result of scientific methodology narrowly applied, the quest for human identity focuses on the values and actions without which the concept of humanity is impossible; without values inseparable from the subjective dimension of human life, human life is hardly worth living. From this point of view, the advocates and popularizers of a coercive scientific belief system, including an alternative to religious belief, seem to be exercising a kind of scientific tyranny which denies importance to actualities of human life that gave it the attributes upon which we can be human beings at all. These characteristics involve the emotions, consisting of love, appreciation of the arts, music and

poetry, but also any artistic expressions, empathy, sympathy, and relational expressions that give the greatest values to human life. While scientific research and theory are giving more credibility and prestige to the arts as the greatest contributors of value to human life, I have concentrated on “religion” as an art form, grounded primarily in basic spirituality. But despite the narrowing gap between metaphor and reason, clarification of the dualism between reason and emotion to exclude substance dualism and bring consciousness and free-will back into the picture, I take the position that regardless of scientific clarification, religion as artistic expression must “at present” be kept separate from the control of scientific ideology because it references aspects of deep belief that are felt to be true even though unknown, even unknowable; this puts them beyond any possible tyranny of science. Religious fundamentalism destroyed bodies, but science as scientism threatens to destroy souls, conscious beings, and minds. Religion does not begin with theology, although theology is eventually unavoidable, but with experience evolving along with the organism encountering its environment; from experience the religious create art and traditions. Traditions are metaphorical and subject to ever-new creative activity that changes, through conflation and excision, the images and meanings the community deems appropriate to express moral and theological points of view. The human, in a creative universe, is a co-creator, and as co-creator continually brings novelty into the world through artistic expressions as well as scientific invention. This departs radically from some contemporary advocates of the exclusivity of scientifically and technologically driven art as the only valid art, with its emphasis on computerization and robotics. On the other hand, the humanly, subjectively, generated art, may have a demonstrable basis in some interpretations of quantum science which redefines the classically conceived material world and the way it works. This subjectivity offers “re-enchantment,” or a recapturing of the “sacred” in our understanding of the world. But moral action, however we define and practice it, even though expressing the contradictory nature of human life, and belief, must be practiced as if science “as a substitutionary belief system” does not exist. For the religious this will be closest to spiritual expression, not moral law or consequentialism. For the scientific mind this will be an unsettling existential issue.

The Argument for Religion as an Art Form¹

The first question to arise in understanding religion as art with its metaphoric content is how does such juxtaposition arise; secondly, how does one avoid thinking of art, generically understood, as a proxy for religion which is an expression of the spiritual and tends toward some kind of confessional communitarianism, specifically expressed as creed or doctrine? Whatever we may say about the nature of religion and art, my first intention in understanding religion as an art form is not to nit-pick the issue of the distinction; nor is it to disengage with critical or analytical studies, which I practice and enjoy. It is to avoid portraying the content of religion as “believable after all” because some aspects of analytical studies, science in particular, allow it. On the other hand, my intention is to allow textual and traditional analysis, which exposes differences of witness, even contradictions which, to many, falsifies religious texts and traditions, thus devalues religious content. Therefore, we also justify making the comparison of religion with art to ameliorate the deteriorating public attitude toward religion, largely understood as organized religion, as irrelevant in the modern world, largely due to confrontation with science and the scientific contexts, also with historical criticism which produces similar results; and secondly, and in

specific, to avoid the “reality” conflict with the scientific community which models reality theoretically on the grounds of available physical evidence.

In a sense, each of these communities views the other as trying to devalue, even destroy, something very important to their beliefs about the world and the resulting values generated: for the religious, science employs a critical methodology to many expressions found in religious tradition and literature which belittles “substantive” expressions in which religious faith is enclosed. For the scientifically aligned person, religious believers are viewed as launching unscientific and irrational religious attacks on the historical and physical data described by the methodologies of science. This seeming impasse is largely the result of ignorance and a neurologically imprinted attitude of conflict created over centuries of ideological belligerence. The values each community seeks to protect are arguably legitimate if one parses them carefully and with humility. Religious thought and expressions, for many is not most people, are spiritual representations of things that “matter most” to human living: love, hope, other human interactions, and realities that the arts embody, largely subjectively and emotionally expressed. Science, as a method, lives by scientifically compatible rationality and a commitment to the existence of natural law, independent of environments, thus disembodied, which in the hard sciences does not entertain consciousness and emotional expressions as demonstrative of facticity. The cognitive sciences and neuroscience have recently argued with much success that all concepts of reality are embodied; not outside the brain or world. And while this references the classical brain in a classical universe, some theoretical physicists and biologists have moved the discussion to embrace the working of the quantum universe and quantum brain.²

It must be recognized that when cognitive scientists speak of embodiment, whether it is recognized or not, bodies imply an understanding of “matter” or the nature of the material universe. If physics points beyond itself, the quantum enigma; that is, to a world-view which is not exclusively objective, but one that is also subjective, and the usual (classical) understanding of material is opened to change, as quantum physics strongly suggests, so does the world and the idea of embodiment take on other attributes. When at present, neuroscience is referenced by the cognitive sciences, it gives descriptions of brain activity when changes in brain states are observed by MRI during the introduction of emotional data; but at the scientific level it remains purely descriptive of a classical understanding of matter and its behavior. One might suspect that this understanding is incomplete.

An enigma seems to motivate some neuroscientists to postulate the presence of religious or spiritual content in the patterns of brain activity observed by MRI, especially in dedicated meditators. In a sense, as in physics, neuroscience seems to point beyond objectivity to a subjective understanding of what is taking place. In the field of neuroscience, given a theological content, not only is there a tendency to distinguish the religious from the spiritual, but to claim spiritual content observed in brain activity translates to life and well-being. But, how does one distinguish brain activity by introducing emotional data translated as religion or spirituality as neuroscientist, Andrew Newberg, seems to do?³ Newberg works with a method which is inclusive of what I consider to be “dual facticity,” That is, the facticity of the brain states and the spiritual results. Might it be that Newberg is brought to an emotional state of “wonder” by what he witnesses during an MRI, and this translates into a spiritual experience for him as well as the research subject’s meditations? Beyond this, I find Newberg’s distinction between spirituality

and religion understandable but a bit confusing, even with Newberg's intention of carefully defining the terms of discussion when it comes to neurotheology. Spiritual meditation, supposedly, influences the way we live, which involves choice individually and within a social environment. Neuroscientists claim they can introduce new and different, or unfamiliar, meditative data to the research subject and the result will be the same as it was with the familiar. This needs further scrutiny. But, there seems to be a problem in the way this is construed. The observer of the MRI determines that the unconscious mind, identified with a particular part of the brain, activates earlier than the conscious. By the current measure of the definition of mind, this may be so; but in the process of explanation the "conscious being" is minimized, thus conscious choice. This would seem to be the case because it is consciousness that concerns personhood and free-will, thus value formation, and this is important in the way we live as communities. This in itself demotes our humanity because personhood and will are surely grounded in being conscious. The unconscious seems to get "credit" because it activates first; but how does it in turn inform the conscious which is important to the way we live? That is equally significant. Also, the spiritual disposition being primary would consent to a person being spiritual without being religious, or without familiar religious references, engage any form of spiritual activity, and receiving beneficial effects.

Religion may be understood to explain the many ways humans define and process the spiritual into more organized personal and institutional forms. If we emphasize the corporate nature of personality, rather than the individual, that religious incorporation would seem a natural consequence of spirituality. Whether this would demand a separation from the importance of the familiar to the inclusion of many practices with the same results will be a point of contention for many. Understanding religion as an art form may well avoid this contention, because it shall be claimed that, metaphors are neither true, nor false, but are in the service of humanity in artistic ways. The meaning of metaphors cannot be exhausted; metaphors allow us to create novelty from old frames of reference and presuppositions. They allow us to feel, evaluate, and take action. I shall attempt to avoid the "scientific" bifurcation of the mind in understanding religion as an art form, because it is a metaphoric bifurcation, which seems to demote the mind of the subject studied to the consciousness observation of those objectively studying the subject. Also, I do not see how observation of brain activity can tell us anything about how motivating values might be formed in the mind resulting in specific actions taken. But then, I am not a neuroscientist concerned with theology.

The most forceful and inflexible form of spirituality or religious interpretation may be referred to as Fundamentalism, where religion begins to depart from what I mean by religion being an art form. In religious Fundamentalism religion gravitates toward becoming a maverick form of science and history, although this is best understood as "alternative facts" or pseudo-science and tendentious history. When we look at religious fundamentalisms, the works of neuroscientists, Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman, offer what they consider evidence of the various brain functions that govern opinions which are held because they are thought to be objectively true, but are due to the structure and function of different parts of the brain.⁴ Viewing religion as an art form disengages both from the religious Fundamentalisms, which depend on infallible religious stories, interpreted literally for their

understanding of truth, but also the tendency of some to validate religion and religious experience by scientific means.

One may claim that converting a historically based religion into an art form with metaphoric content is an escape device, the dividing of one world into two; but I argue it is not. It is an attempt at universal tolerance of spiritual expressions understood as art. It is an attempt to understand the world through our complete humanity which is both emotional and rational, and of the world; such a statement may be translated in terms of the cognitive sciences as “though our embodied mind, or the neuro-scientific understanding of the way the human brain works; but any science remains theory driven, so makes no absolute rational truth claims about metaphorical expressions. It has also been claimed that the language of science is also metaphorical, but this does not mean it is meaningless. However, it would also be a mistake to consider religious expressions meaningless. This was the mistake of logical empiricism. Concerning religious language, if these expressions are to be thought of as affirmations or creeds they are to be “sung, not signed.” Singing, as metaphor, is a spontaneous artistically embodied emotional expression of the experience of the beauty of holiness, an emotive way of knowing. If it is not sung, but expressed purely in terms of scientific rationality, it contains nothing of the holy no matter how carefully argued. In a creedal religion, signing a creed presupposes that both the creators of the creeds and those who sign them understand what they wrote and signed at a rational level and turns an affirmation of faith into a lie and a denial of faith. Faith as used here always first references attributes of our humanity confronting the mysterious unknown and the humility of affirming the unknowable, not an affirmation of the rationally and scientifically demonstrable. Is this why religious faith persists against predictions of its eventual demise?⁵ We invent the unknown to discover the known whether we are speaking of the universe and the way it works or a god who is in control of it. This is the work of the collective imagination, a work of art, and the key to the continuity of faith.

One may point out that religious experience also may reference the demonic, and this is true; but order dominates chaos in the reflective mind, and godliness, joined with ethics, subordinates demonic expression to provide the creative emotion needed to give definition to how we as humans exist in the world. Artistically and metaphorically expressed, the dragon’s head will always be under the foot of a creator.

To say that religion is an art form suggests that our experience of religious content is analogous to that of other art forms: poetry, story, music, etc. All past cultures created poetry, story, and music. By it the stuff of knowledge morphed into wisdom to live by. By art human beings advanced beyond mere survival and procreation to embrace love, sympathy and empathy. The steps, say from the Pleistocene, for these attributions are unimportant. In this process religion was not disengaged. To say that religion is not a form of history or science is to say that, while its expressions may reference what is considered historical and scientific materials, its methodology and meaning-content are not analogous to that of science or history; rather its meaning-content is metaphorical and operates by contemplating and interpreting metaphors and the conflation and elimination of metaphors which provides artistic and religious content. It can be argued that art first confronts the unconscious mind and flashes as insight into the conscious mind. We look at or hear an art form and the subjectivity of the artist actualizes in the mind of the observer. Reason is not absent from this process, but functions within metaphorical frames,

which are artistically conceived. Thus, if the values and motives of religious life and expression are to be effectively understood, that understanding will be against a background of metaphor arising from expressions of what give “deep” spiritual, and emotional meaning and value to human life, not from a critical or analytical process of reason. For instance, reasoning from the metaphors of being created in the image of God, or the Incarnation, will give a different meaning to human life than reasoning from our universe-dependent evolutionary origin as organisms. One may attempt to recapture the sacred, lost to scientific territorial greed, and perceive the way the “creative universe,” the whole, exists by and for the good of the parts, and the parts exist by and for the good of the whole, thus being self-regulatory, and co-operative with human free-will; but while this is an awesome presentation of both the abiotic and biotic stages similar spiritual results were achieved in the past with other metaphors and remain dynamic.⁶

The sciences provide data for our self-understanding as organisms with highly developed brains suitable for reflection and introspection. This admittance will have different consequences for assuming that the essence of being human is that we are disembodied souls, or that being created in the image of God means we look like God or have absolute authority. Both ideas are metaphoric, and religion that takes the physical world seriously will employ reason to discriminate between them. If the implications of the cognitive sciences are to be taken seriously in critiquing the dominant Cartesian paradigms in Western thought, and replacing them with the conclusion that reason is not disembodied, then what we consider to be human values are not determined by a “rational person” expressing *a priori* truths by accessing a transcendent logic, or by extension, revelation from beyond the world which bypasses the creative function of the embodied mind. Thus, the functioning of the unconscious and emotional responses to our environment provides the ground for reason. Without that feature reason would be impossible.⁷ By this embodied understanding of mind, recognizing that our classical understanding of material may be incomplete, we may affirm support for the view that religion is an art form, and metaphoric. By the recognition of embodiment, all scientific-like discourse dependent on the presuppositions of disembodied laws and truth is brought into question, thus much of the negative commentary on the value of religious expression.

While the meaning of metaphor in the cognitive sciences differs from metaphor found in discussions of artistic expression, it would seem unwarranted to dismiss the relevance of artistic and poetic metaphor which contributes to what is *most meaningful for human life* as “fanciful,” because they reference what is beyond the measurable or analyzable by linguistic science.⁸ Metaphor in cognitive science references concepts like “seeing” for understanding, “in front of, or beyond,” or “in the future,” for what is seen by the eyes, and “behind, or in the past” for what is behind what our eyes have seen. These concepts and many others are embodied, gained through experience; and employed unconsciously. They are the results of how our brain works (through the experience of the empirical). But in addition to creating art and artistic metaphors that tease concepts of reality gained by neuroscience and cognitive science, embodied minds also create a sense of “self, the “other,” and “free-will.” Contributing to the cognitive sciences, neuroscience seems intent on explaining all aspects of the physical brain and extending the understanding of brain structure and functions to explanations of the body, the self, and identity, and by extension to “social neuroscience,” which attempts to explain the “biological basis of social psychology”

which includes moral standards.⁹ Of course Newberg represents a departure from this vision of neuroscience, giving neuroscience a much wider field of inquiry than mere mechanics and the physical structure and function of the brain; but where and how neuroscience ends and cognitive and theological neuroscience complement and move beyond it is not all that clear. Perhaps grounding it in quantum physics would clarify an apparent incompleteness in the scientific base.

While metaphors are embodied, human life does not find the content of the physical sciences or the cognitive sciences coercively explaining the boundaries of values that matter most for lived human life; that, I think, is supplied by “artistic imagination” and the many metaphoric types which make it knowable: music, poetry, and I would include religious or spiritual belief, which generate artistic expressions which are the content of myth, ritual, and associated embodied responses. This does not separate it from historical or scientific or empirical references. The question for neuroscience, like all science, is does it recognize that the field of study is so vast and complex it may not allow a complete understanding of a physical and biological universe and brain?

To give the guise of critical authority to what is written above I first reference two sources that early on influenced my opinions and gave rise to the idea that human identity is legitimately formed from the values it creates and recognizes. The first of these sources is the sociologist, Karl Mannheim, who contended that art does not compete as does science.¹⁰ In science, hypotheses and theories are formed and compete to determine which accommodates the most data best. Without going into more specifics on the philosophy of science, the theories that fail at this goal fall away and are abandoned. Mannheim argues that art never competes for legitimacy in this way. I will avoid the further debates in the philosophy of science as peripheral to this presentation.

The second source is the work of mathematician, Noson S. Yanofsky,¹¹ Using a great economy of words, Yanofsky claims that the value laden meaning of being human differs from considerations of the universe because within the context of science, mathematics, and logic, the universe does not tolerate false facts or contradictions. On the other hand, humans are full of contradictions, and this is what constitutes the richness of being human: “The cacophony of various human desires gives color to our relationships with other people.”¹² Further, “Unless love, desire, music, and art exist, our world has no meaning. Real life has meaning only when it includes ethics, values, and beauty.”

To further complement these observations I find the works of theoretical physicist, Lee Smolin,¹³ and theoretical biologist, Stuart Kauffman¹⁴, along with the critical insights of Sean O Nuallain,¹⁵ instructive. All are critical of understanding law independent of environments, and everything in the material universe being the entailments of disembodied laws. Kauffman and O Nuallian are especially sensitive to the role of values and art. Both offer intense and deep critiques of contemporary and normative ideas of scientific knowledge which favors approaches to reality through materialistic reductionism that consigns the subjective content of religious language or spiritual expression to illusion. Kauffman comments that “being alive in the world is more important than knowing,”¹⁶ that language is at root metaphoric, and that art (poetry is his major reference), is the most comprehensive way of knowing our humanity, and that spirituality is part of the natural creativity of the universe. These observations

become codefendants against materialistic reductionism and reinforce Yanofsky's argument about what is most meaningful in human life being unassailable by reason, science, and mathematics.

How Did We Get To This Point of Conflict? The Copernican Principle

It is the case that many religious people feel science is a threat to religious faith. The most pervasive modern threat to religion and religious faith is what is sometimes called scientism. By this definition, science, attended by objective scientific reasoning, is the perspective and method of describing and understanding the material world and reality. Operating by presuppositions based on scientific and rational thought, humanity and its prescientific understanding of the world were removed from the center of understanding and the universe. This became known as "the Copernican principle." From its origin and later development the concept is framed against religious tradition; human beings must continuously be removed from the "center": the earth is not the center of the universe, human beings have evolved along with other life forms and are nothing special, the universe is oblivious to us and seems without purpose, and human consciousness of the universe has nothing to do with its existence. This procedure seems to minimize the significance of the fact that whatever our idea of reality, the human brain is processing the data, is doing the "knowing." But this is not to suggest that placing the human brain back as the way we know the universe elevates humans egotistically from and above the universe and detracts from our being one with the universe in its physicality, thus being an inseparable part of reality in origin and fate, if there is an origin and fate.

The Copernican principle, while having helpful content, is a part of the developing presupposition that there are deterministic changeless laws and a priori truths apart from our understanding, by which we can observe the universe from outside of it and our humanity. Disembodied laws independent of human thought and action determine everything in the universe. Objective access is by measurement and mathematical reason. Referencing humanity, we become machines with illusory consciousness, and without freedom of will. This view is endemic in the history of science from Pythagoras to Newton and Bacon.

The unhappiness with anything human having anything to do with reality is present in debates within quantum physics where according to the Copenhagen interpretation consciousness plays a crucial role in measurement. But for some scientists objectivity must banish consciousness. This has far reaching consequences, particularly in particle physics where the role of consciousness is wrestled with in connection with the role of measurements in producing an *Eigenstate*. At this point I must confess to an insufficient understanding of quantum physics and my description of what follows. As I assess the popular literature, to counter the vexing issue of human consciousness, which raises the idea of observation having an effect on the reality of the universe, "quantum decoherence" is sometimes argued. This implies that because the environment itself collapses every wave in a superposition an observer is unnecessary. This situation in quantum physics has become so disputable that many, if not most, physicists do not attempt to solve it, rather choosing to stay with the Copenhagen Interpretation.¹⁷

The dissatisfaction of the idea of consciousness having anything to do with the nature of the universe certainly raises the issue of subjectivity in scientific investigation. The attempt to downplay the role of conscious by arguing decoherence seems to be behind physicist, Sean Carroll's negative opinion on the role of consciousness in understanding reality.¹⁸ What seems to drive the question regarding consciousness is whether or not it, as an immaterial substance, has causal effect on the universe. One may argue that human consciousness has nothing to do with the existence of the universe, but that the universe is never the same after a measurement is taken. Or one may argue that consciousness, not to be understood in the context of Cartesian substance dualism, is not substantially separate from the universe. This position modifies the implications of decoherence. With the Copenhagen position, the conscious human observer makes a measurement of the wave function and it results in decoherence of a superposition of waves into an eigenstate or a particle. The possibility of any other constituent of the superposition becoming reality is reduced to zero.

With new scientific perspectives of decoherence without a human observer, the wave-particle entities consciously measure each other, thus decohering the wave function. This does not take place causally by laws understood in the classical sense, but acausally, by free-will, which can only be understood in the context of possibilities among which choice can be made. Everything is measuring everything else. This position has become a major point of attention argued and popularized by Stuart Kauffman and others. It subordinates the idea of a deterministic universe thus opening the evolution of the universe, not to the operation of laws of which all things in the universe are entailments, but to a universe coming into being by free-will where each entity is enabled, as it enables another, to find a niche in the environment as the enabling universe offers opportunity. With specific reference to the biosphere, the biosphere is continuously creating, and is created, by enablement of all its parts even as the parts enable the biosphere. This is not a process of deterministic law but of enablement. The door to a creative universe has been opened and with it human creativity in a creative universe. Into this niche religion or spirituality will better find a scientific environment to express itself; but as an art form religion expresses the creativity of human imagination in creating and measuring "the things that matter most" to human life.

Sidelining, for the moment, the idea that the universe is the entailments of disembodied laws or laws independent of environments and that the past could not have been different, and accepting as the human thing to do, the alternative position that some form of consciousness and free-will has some responsibility for the "way things are" (Kauffman's position, *et. al.*); if there is to be any future scientific understanding of "human nature" it will be responsible to recapturing the essential subjective pole and the universality of free-will rather than determined by the traditional understanding of the deterministic consequences of adaption by natural selection. The values that compose what matters most to humans, within the limitations of our vocabulary, are best understood as subjective and artistic in formation and nature; and if there is any unitary characteristic it will be the grace of free-will across communities. This idea, sparked in my mind by Kauffman, tracks well my view of religion as art, and that humanity still stands at the center of anything we can consider reality because the human brain functioning as mind and inter-related measuring with environments, namely the universe, does the knowing. However, as Kauffman and others have noted, science often goes to great lengths to discredit religion or any idea of

the spiritual.¹⁹ A few past and present scientific voices in the anti-religious/spirituality campaign are, Bill Nye, Steven Weinberg, Richard Dawkins, and Lawrence Kraus; although their rants are mainly against religious Fundamentalism.

Without going to lengths to discuss how Neils deGrasse Tyson's subtle propaganda, embracing a popular scientific view with an antireligious tone, fits into the popular cultural picture, we can mention a few similar scientific scenarios of our own notice. Popular science appears more often than not as a kind of commercialized art with accompanying music and authoritative sounding commentary. Even though the wonder and mystery of the universe is sometimes evoked by the presentations, the problem with such scientific art is that as both aesthetic wonder and fearful destruction, it takes form in a quasi-artistic and quasi-religious framework. It may be observed in almost every scientific documentary for popular public consumption. The universe has a beginning a history and an end, usually depicted as a massive explosion, then with cosmic predation, black holes consuming galaxies, galaxies colliding like unpiloted plane crashes, and a host of features that are designed to make the viewer feel insecure, gobbled up by a monster, a meaningless accident in the vastness of the universe; and while some sort of will to salvation is at times envisioned with humans colonizing other planets or evolution moving beyond humans as organisms to humans becoming machines, and possibly escaping death and a doomed earth, the ultimate end of all life and the universe as we know it is guaranteed. The "Big Rip" is presented in such a way that it represents fact. This scientific picture of art is outside the bounds of religion as an art form; it is a violation of human will and freedom.

Similar observations may be made of presentations of the biological sciences because they are "films" with artistic intent. There is a psychological "problematic" in the predatory and other individualistic survival aspects of biological life which are described by human language emerging from evolution. These species' specific behaviors which are defined as survival tactics are described as if the organism is engaged in deception, blackmail, murder, and sexual trickery. Because these behaviors and the language describing them are anthropomorphic, they would hardly be intelligible except against a background of human cultural ideas and of human motives and moral behavior. It may be wise at this point to revisit, "What Is It Like to be a Bat," by Thomas Nagel.

These construed forms of popularized science, even though there are some scientists protesting their ideological intent, are influential in providing a popular base for understanding science, and may influence the way the role of science is generally understood in the future. These popularizations of science become confusing allies with another dubious scientific understanding which involves the construction of a tendentious framework for the understanding of a method or methods with governing laws and constructed causality as omniscient and immutable. This camouflage can quickly lead to the acceptance of a form of ideologically grounded scientific tyranny, not unlike what is encountered in religious fundamentalism with an infallible text which embellishes interpretations and applies an institutional rule of discipline. In fact, it suggests an inverted fundamentalism. It is not only the attempt to place human life in a volatile universal and biological context which betrays the attempt to create a scientific alternative belief system to religion, but there is an additional insistence that humans are mere machines in a mechanistic universe. This scientific confusion is destructive of both responsible science

and those aspects of human life beyond science and scientific reasoning. It is a threat to our humanity in expressing values, the things that matter most in human life.

If we seriously consider religion an art form it will not fare well against the claimed scientific based opinions of art expressed by Arthur I. Miller.²⁰ Beyond the well-known popularized attack on art as emotional “eye candy” by Stephen Pinker, and contributing nothing to adaption, Miller forms an opinionated argument for the unifying of science and art. But this form of art will not be a subjective emotional expression; it must come through scientific observation and understanding, a sense of wonder made possible by science and technology, which translates to engineers and technicians. This is the legitimate methodology and mechanism of artistic creativity, appreciation, and contemplation. Micho Kaku, in a TV interview, expressed a similar disdain for art uninformed by science as being expressions of emotion and pure subjectivity. Artists, poets, in particular, he claims, most likely do not write about the wonders of the evolved vast and marvelous universe because they are insufficiently informed about it.

When it comes to the mechanization of art by science and technology we are at the doorstep of computers, robotics, artificial intelligence, and a futuristic application of holography. These will not only render human creativity irrelevant by anticipating the creative genius of the artist, but challenge the values that define our humanity such as the importance of love, sympathy, empathy, music and the rest of the arts. We will become so integrated with our bots that the need for human love²¹ and companionship will be replaced by the sufficiency of our technology.²² When it comes to the application of holography within the context of “the world as information,” we lose contact with reality and normative human relations.²³

I think the issue of scientific tyranny cannot quickly be pushed aside. Our presuppositions of disembodied laws “up there” or “down there” and belief in a priori truths discoverable by a rational person accessing the disembodied rules of logic fail our humanity. We are defined by a mechanistic determinism. The universe is a machine and human beings are digitally programmed machines analogous to computers. If methodological omnipotence is actually an absolute, then there is no reason to deny its application to all things human; if it is not, then assuming it is will be a temptation to tyranny, the destruction of what matters most in human life. I do not pretend to be competent as a working scientist, but the unsettled issues²⁴ in contemporary science and the question of what we can know and possibly will never be able to know creates room for a stubborn, existential position regardless of the results of scientific debates over the essence of reality, or research into the conditions of normal and damaged human brains, which merits lengthy, but in my opinion, questionable discussion in nearly every book I have read on neuroscience. If our knowledge of the essence of reality remains incomplete or is ultimately unknowable, then we may pose the question if the nature of the conscious human being is ultimately inaccessible and unknowable to scientific probing and prediction. If scientists, despite their best intentions, confuse the competence of the method with the mystery of the complexity of the subject, believing that the human being is completely and legitimately accessible to the presently formulated methods of science, or that every aspect of human data is controllable by science, this is an invitation to tyranny--beyond the mere substitution of science as an alternative belief system to religion.

There is also a hint of an old criticism: in analyzing the physical base of the human mind one cannot help but destroy the subject in the process.

Where Do We Go From Here?

If being a religious person, one follows the history of science one gets the impression of being duped. I remember being in my third year of training for the Bachelor of Divinity degree at the seminary when I chose to research Logical Empiricism for my final seminar research project. What a way to leave religious training for the ministry--being confronted by the claim of some of the world's most respected academics that any belief not empirically verifiable (by the laws of physics and chemistry), was meaningless. Stuart Kauffman recounts his confrontation with the same scientific environment as a young scientist. Eventually, both of us realized the fallacy of the argument; the proposition itself was not empirically verifiable. Why didn't those popularizing the idea see the flaw in the reasoning? By my choice of a profession in ministering to those seeking spiritual guidance I was predisposed to being in touch with human beings over the things that matter the most to them at the deepest existential level of life. I got along in life in ministry with only a hangover of critical angst.

I was a student of theology and philosophy; Kauffman was a science student, and after recognizing the flaw in this particular philosophy of science, he took a different route to the reconciliation of science with mind, emotion, and consciousness, all of which were beyond the tools of materialistic physics. Kauffman attacked the very foundational law bequeathed to us by classical physics as the basis of knowledge. From the study and interpretation of quantum physics he recovered the "subjective pole" of our existence as humans in a creative universe where measurement and consciousness even in at the subatomic level play an indispensable role in the way all things come to be. Again, citing Kauffman, "Being alive in the world is more important than knowing."²⁵ Human living by its created values only makes sense when it takes consideration of our subjectivity. Of course, other brilliant minds had been suspicious of the bold claims of materialistic physics and mathematics,²⁶ but the climate of scientific respectability muffled their voices. Kauffman was also a victim of this scientific attitude. Then things changed, one of the results being Kauffman's research, books, and professional papers. These works helped dispel the arrogance and focused on a more inclusive approach: the nature of our human becoming in a universe of which we are an integrated part. Creativity means novelty and art, the imprint of mind. But the question remains: is religion or spirituality dependent on science for definition and understanding; are we now able to believe in the legitimacy of the spiritual or religious life because of works like Kauffman's? Kauffman, and others, by reinventing the sacred, by offering a sense of enchantment to the universe, have opened a door of compatibility to the fields of science and spirituality. As one who as an academic still ministers to the spiritually distressed and the physically ill who confess to religious faith, and wonder about the future, I, not possessing any great competency as a scientist, have to confess that the only thing that matters is what I say at the bedside or at a counselling

session. If I cannot bind myself with how we are human in this world, I have removed myself from humanity itself.

The Unnegotiable

Therefore, regarding the ongoing scientific debate over the nature of reality, although science changes our views of ourselves as physical humans, we should *consider unnegotiable the value of human beings in the face of scientific or philosophical discrediting. The question of reality should be placed under the conditions of human existence and value, not the conditions of human value under those provided by scientific and rational conditioning.* Although this statement if submitted with knowledge of implications of embodiment from cognitive science, and changing views of “material” due to quantum physics which advances how the material body is understood, particularly the human brain, these progressive discoveries cannot give sufficient cause to abandon the claim to the priority of human existence over the scientifically described nature of reality. Reality itself is an assumption which selectively both attracts and scraps data in the process of discovery. The artistic, subjective, spiritual imagination tells us who we are as fully human beings. How we make our peace with science is the work of the collective imagination.

The Next Academic Step

I have mentioned the metaphoric base of language and reason. More definition should be given not only to discussion of this metaphoric discovery, but examples should be examined to discover how important values and spiritual insights arising from the seemingly inexhaustible ability of metaphor to enable new possible insights become integrated with a living religious environment. Complementarily, as the environment enables the insights to find a niche in that environment, the insights have enabled the creation of the whole, the whole moving to new values and spiritual insights, new actuals. Then following the paradigm, actuals become new possibles, and the spiritual dimension continues to create itself metaphorically. It does this not by reason but by expressions of the artistic imagination. We are entering a new era with a new paradigm which will demand a serious response to what the Seventh-day Adventist Church will be within a larger question of *the religion of the future*. I hope these observations and ideas will stimulate thinkers in all disciplines, but particularly artists, to contribute to this discussion, most of whom, I think, understand that art has the power to change the world.

Endnotes

¹ The claim that religion is art is not new with me. Karen Armstrong has claimed this for years, though without giving a sufficient reason for it other than her experience in the cloister and her exposure to critical thinking.

² Significant works which promote such a discussion are: *Philosophy In the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, by George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson; Marcelo Gleiser, *The Island of Knowledge: The limits of Science and the Search for Meaning*; Noson S. Yanofsky, *The Outer Limits of Reason: What Science, Mathematics, and Logic Cannot Tell Us*; Stuart A. Kauffman, *Humanity in a Creative Universe* (and other works of his which are more fully developed here); Sean O Nuallain, *One Magisterium: How Nature Knows Through Us*; Andrew B. Newberg, *How God Changes Your Brain*; and his latest work, *Principles of Neurotheology*. Germane to

the discussion is research into quantum brain activity and its application to consciousness (Roger Penrose and Stuart Hameroff, "Consciousness in the Universe," more completely understood engaged with Penrose in, *The Emperor's Clothes*, and *The Road to Reality*. Indispensable to attempting a layman's understanding of what Penrose is proposing are reviews of his books: Kelley Ross <http://www.friesian.com/penrose.htm>. For one of the more successful tries to understand the evidence for quantum biology, see, Filippo Caruso: Lindou Laurette Meetings, <http://www.lindau-nobel.org/what-is-quantum-biology/>. Also, see <https://www.quantamagazine.org/a-new-spin-on-the-quantum-brain-20161102/>; Of course, like much in science, there are serious disagreements among scientists, largely based on their understanding of the limitations of a proper field of scientific research and what can be considered a legitimate application of the scientific method ("Can Quantum Physics Explain Consciousness?," *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/11/quantumbrain/506768>). Much research on quantum brain processes, including that of Hameroff's theory of micro-tubules may be found under quantum brain processes headings.

³ Andrew Newberg, *How God Changes Your Brain*, pp. 40ff; also, *Principles of Neurotheology*, pp. 23-49)

⁴ *Supra vide*, "Changes," pp. 137ff; "Principles," pp. 109f.

⁵ Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts*, demonstrates that consistent predictions by ideologs of the modern era (think of Freud's opinion of religion, not so much as illusion but delusion), that religion would atrophy and disappear have not come to pass; indeed, religion presently has taken the stage as a major actor.

⁶ For recapturing the sacred or life's enchantment, the reader is advised to look at the many works of Stuart A. Kauffman where this theme is discussed.

⁷ Lakoff, and Matthews: *Op. cit.*, pp. 65ff, 555ff.

⁸ *Supra vide* p. 505.

⁹ Alain Berthoz, *The Vicarious Brain, Creator of Worlds*, p. 53.

¹⁰ This quotation by Karl Mannheim is so popular that it may be googled for reference. I came across it in my second cousin's PhD dissertation. Brian Longhurst, currently is a professor at Manchester University, UK.

¹¹ *The Outer Limits of Reason: What Science, Mathematics, and Logic Cannot Tell Us*.

¹² Yanofsky, *Op. cit.* p. 352.

¹³ *The Singular Universe and the Reality of Time*, pp. 244, 261. Smolin argues that laws emerge from earlier factors and are part of the physicality of the universe. Brought into being, they are not primarily causal in the sense of laws being the cause of everything. Furthermore laws are not eternal and immutable, given the ultimate nature of time as dynamic, which is contrary to time as static and reduced to space. The reality of time as dynamic changes all things, including change itself. In Smolin's opinion this view allows genuine novelty to appear in the universe, not a universe bound by eternal, immutable laws.

¹⁴ Kauffman, *Humanity in a Creative Universe*.

¹⁵ *One Magisterium: How Nature Knows Through Us*. On this website, read Stuart Kauffman's review of this difficult book.

¹⁶ Kauffman, *Op. cit.*, p.244.

¹⁷ Marcelo Gleiser, *The Island of Knowledge: The limits of Science and the Search for Meaning*, p. 226.

¹⁸ *From Eternity to Here*, pp. 238 ff.

¹⁹ See on this website the book review on Kauffman's, *Humanity in a Creative Universe*.

²⁰ *Colliding Worlds: How Cutting-edge Science is Redefining Contemporary Art*.

²¹ The futurist, Gray Scott (grayscott.com), supports the future of humanity as humanoid robotics. This transitioning, he predicts will occur within the next twenty years. In discussing the Sexbot, he imagines present humans preferring robots to flesh and blood people.

²² Marcel Gleiser, *Op. cit.*, in a chapter entitled, "Sinister Dreams of Transhuman Machines, Or, The World as Information," discusses these ideas which are subversive to our humanity.

²³ Jim Baggott, (*Farewell to Reality: How Modern Physics Has Betrayed the Search for Scientific Truth*), is a critic of these popular productions of imagination. Furthermore, he claims that this speculation can only be sustained by reinforcement of string theory and a novel understanding of mathematics. Multiverses, for which there is no empirical evidence, discussions of dark matter, and other productions of theoretical physics also come under scrutiny.

²⁴ The positing of multiple universes which are forever cut off from us and one another seems to be the result of the failure of science to solve the issue of the “initial conditions” of the universe and “fine tuning.” In a multiverse every possible condition can be represented in an infinite number of universes, thus no need to worry about fine tuning. A list of scientists opposed to the idea of a multiverse is given in *Wikipedia*, “Multiverse.”

²⁵ The limitations of science and the danger to the reputation of science by proposing ideas that cannot be empirically tested, thus falsified, receives considerable attention in Gleiser, *Op. cit.*, and Baggott, *Op. cit.* Lee Smolin’s conception of universes following each other in time, whereby the initial conditions of the present universe were present at the end of a previous one (*The Singular Universe and the Reality of Time*), at least allows the possibility of testing for evidence in the background noise, and beyond, it would seem, even from the discovery of gravitational waves and the possible application of this new science to the question of a previous universe.