

It's God

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth... (and) on the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing. Such were the origins of heaven and earth when they were created. (Genesis 1)

Whether the universe was created in seven days, or whether it happened over vast ages of evolution, either way we believe it was God who was creating and who continues to create. While science is closed-minded to the existence and work of God (because his existence cannot be proved scientifically), faith does allow for the evolutionary theories of science (because there is no contradiction with our belief that it is God who was, and still is, at work in them). We put God into the picture and that's the difference.

In a recent television documentary, vast numbers of insects (cicadas) were shown emerging from the ground where they had been living at depths of up to eight feet for seventeen years waiting for this one specific event. How do they know after seventeen years that it is time to head for the surface? How do they know there even *is* a surface – and which way it is? There have been many similar, almost unbelievable, activities featured in David Attenborough's natural history documentaries: insects that emerge from the ground, seeking out and climbing one particular species of tree to shed their skins and then fly and mate before dying. Why just that that one type of tree and how do they know which one, and how do they know to climb it? Another insect "arranges" for a particular species of ant to take away its eggs and hatch and feed its young. How does it know to do that? How does it know which ants? How does it know the ants won't eat the eggs or the larvae?

How do birds know that they have to migrate with the change of seasons? How do they know where they are going and that they have to fatten themselves up first? Some will follow older birds who have done it before, but some species make those trips for the first time all by themselves – how do they know where to go and why? When a seagull returns to a nesting site after feeding at sea, how does it know – out of hundreds of thousands of nests and millions of birds – which is its nest and which are its young? How does a cuckoo know to lay its eggs in the nest of another bird? Obviously it couldn't see when it's mother laid the egg that it used to be, so how does it know? How do weaver birds know how to weave their nests? How do paradise birds know which objects to collect in order to attract a mate? When starlings swarm to avoid attack from predators, the theory is that they are in tune with the nearest seven of their kind and follow their swirling movements exactly. Can they count to seven, why seven, and how do they know to do that?

How do crocodile hatchlings know to head for the water and why aren't they afraid of this gigantic creature (their mother) lurking in the water? After all they have never seen a crocodile before to know what one looks like – nor do they know that's what they are! How do turtle hatchlings know to head for the sea rather than inland? How do predators know exactly the night when this is going to happen? How do fish know to swarm in tight formations to escape being eaten by larger fish? Why do whales swim thousands of miles from the north Pacific to the south to give birth and then lead their young all the way back to the northern ocean again? While salmon may recognise the taste of the river where they were hatched, how do they know they have to go back there to spawn – the parent fish are long dead so how do they know to do that? How does an octopus know how to change colour to exactly match its background?

The experts will say that such behaviours are the result of “instinct”, impulses hard-wired into often very primitive systems, and that the creatures concerned can't help themselves, they are programmed to do what it is they do. I'm sorry but I don't accept that the explanation is that simple. Some of these behaviours are so unique, so complex, so inexplicable, sometimes so illogical, that simply calling it “instinct” just seems too soft an option. I don't believe it is purely instinct – I believe it is God. I believe it's God having a little fun with the vast and complex process of creation (it is *his* creation after all) that is on-going in the world around us. But that's not how scientists think.

Attenborough will talk about plants doing things (for example pitcher plants trapping insects for nutrition), working out from past experience the most beneficial way of evolving, devising strategies to survive in harsh environments and so on, as if they were thinking for themselves! Ridiculous. Even the instinct theory is no use here - it's God.

Curiosity finally got the better of me and I decided to drop Sir David a line and share my theory with him. First of all, of course, I complimented him on his wonderful documentary – no less wonderful despite the absence of any credit being given to God. I knew from an interview that I had seen previously that he doesn't believe in God, but still I asked him how he could have spent a lifetime in his field of work and not recognised the hand of God at work. I explained my “instinct versus God” theory, citing examples from his programme as above. His reply was prompt and polite but he was giving no quarter. His explanation was purely scientific - the creed of instinct, hard-wiring, innate behaviour - with no room for God whatsoever. I had expected that, but it's a little sad that faith in God can't exist in parallel with his faith in natural history.

The late Cardinal Basil Hume wrote¹:

¹ in *To Be A Pilgrim – A spiritual notebook* (St Paul Publications)

We need in our day, in spite of all the knowledge which the world can give us, in spite of all the marvellous advances in our society, to recapture a sense of wonder as we probe the mysteries of God and of His love for us. But we shall never be able to discover any of the secrets about God unless we are humble and small.

The mysteries, which we have been given to reflect upon and make part of our lives, are so much greater, so much beyond our capacity to understand. We are so very small.

The Cardinal may well have been talking about purely theological mysteries, but he could also have been referring to the mysteries of creation that we see in the world, and the universe, around us and into which, as people of faith, we have to place God.

There is a very real lack of humility, not to mention belief in God, when we begin to put ourselves and our theories at the centre of our world. Science likes to think it has all the answers and, worse still and more dangerous, that we are somehow in charge. A prime example is the current political scaremongering over climate change: not only that we are responsible for it, but that we can reverse it.

I don't want to get into politics here, but we do need to differentiate climate change from global warming – though the politicians conveniently use the terms interchangeably. We may be adversely influencing global warming² and should be being more responsible in our stewardship of creation and the legacy we leave to those who will come after us, but we really can't do anything about climate change which is a planetary phenomenon that has been occurring, positively and negatively, since before we were ever on the face of the earth. We are not in charge of planetary events – witness how well we control earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, tornadoes and tsunamis! We don't even seem able to predict and moderate the effects of droughts and disease which we *do* understand and so could influence.

Where is our humility? Where does God fit into our picture?

I have my own little theory which, while it could perhaps get me taken away in one of those jackets with sleeves that tie at the back(!), does at least allow for God's hand being at work. I offer the following, of course, tongue in cheek, but then who knows?³ I can't help wondering whether the earth is a lot younger than science suggests and that God simply created the “evidence” for how and

² Though there is currently considerable doubt being cast over the reliability of the statistics and evidence that have been used to-date by people like former US vice-president Al Gore and all who follow unquestioningly in his wake.

³ Well God does, of course, and so will we one day when we are with him in heaven and will then have all the answers.

when the world was formed, burying a few fossils and dinosaur bones here and there just to give us something to do and think about (even at the risk of then thinking we have all the answers). Similarly, did he make space look a lot bigger than it is – again just to give us something to occupy our minds in inventing astrology and theories on where it all came from? Maybe it's all just a curtain and heaven is just on the other side?

As long as science thinks we are in charge and God isn't and that it has all the answers, our world is impoverished to a degree that can only be measured in terms of God. Why can't God have a little fun with his creation by telling a swarm of insects to emerge after years underground and climb a specific tree as a preliminary to propagating their species? Why can't God call huge flocks of birds to gather in vast, swirling masses before they roost, so providing a spectacular ballet for those privileged to witness it? Science calls this voice of God "instinct" and so can we as long as we remember that it isn't the mysterious thing that science struggles to understand. It's the voice of God in his on-going work of creation – sometimes a "mystery" beyond our understanding, but one that is enlightened by faith.

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