Religion essays - religion versus science

Religion versus Science

Science has often challengedreligious dogma, since Copernicus first upset the Church-approved, heliocentricmodel of the cosmos. However, after the Enlightenment, when the empiricalmethod of scientific enquiry was fully established, science has come to be seenas a competing, and viable method of explanation for all phenomena. Darwininitiated interest in the modern science of biology, in *The Origin ofSpecies* , which advanced the theory of evolution, and this was contra to thetraditional religious explanation. This stated that all animals, humansincluded, were evolved through natural selection from single-celled organismsto the multi-cellular ones that are extant today. This laid the foundationsfor the study of genetics, which was advanced by Watson and Crick whodiscovered the way DNA, the chemical code in each cell nuclei, could replicateitself. In June 2000, the first draft sequence of the human genome waspublished, representing a breakthrough for the Human Genome Project.

Creationism

The religious explanation forthe origin of life is based on some form of creationist account. This, in themonotheistic religions, and most notably in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is adoctrine, often in the form of a story, of how a superior, divine being createdthe world according to a master plan, and for a teleological end. In theJudeo-Christian tradition, we find such an account in *Genesis* which manymodern, liberal Christians are content to take as allegory rather than as astraightforward factual account. This tells how God created the world in sixdays, and on the seventh rested. Mankind was

created last, and given dominionover all the animals. Humankind is also made in the image and likeness of man, and is for this reason most like God. However, in a later part of *Genesis* , we learn that woman was created second to man, and was in fact formed out ofhis flesh (the rib of Adam) for the purpose of being a companion to man. It isobvious from this story that man plays a secondary role to God, being formed onhis image and likeness.

Religious Objections toEugenics

Eugenics is from the AncientGreek *eu* (meaning well) and *genos* (meaning tribe, or race). Thescience is therefore concerned with producing the best human beings byselective breeding. The modern understanding of genetics has enabled eugenicsto be carried out on a highly scientific basis, though it is worth noting thateugenics is by no means a modern phenomenon alone. Humans have practisedagriculture and farming for many centuries, and for much of this time haveknown to select the best animals for breeding, so that desirablecharacteristics are passed along to the next generation. In modern times, the science ofeugenics has figured badly in the popular imagination, largely due to the Naziparty’s vision of a supreme state (the Third Reich) from which inferior raceswere deliberately excluded (such as the Jews).

However, religious objectionsto eugenics do not necessarily stem from its former negative associations. Ifone believes that God played a direct role in the creation of mankind, then itis an upset of a divinely-ordained system to take such a discriminatory view ofhuman sexual reproduction. If God has allowed able-bodied and disabled, healthy and diseased humans to be born, then surely He desires both to be ableto reproduce?

Religious Objections toGenetic Engineering

Genetic Engineering is thescience of selecting specific genes from cell nuclei, and then splicing theminto a second nuclei, in order to engineer species with a specific gene suchthat could confer some biological advantage. This is commonly done with crops, in order to create strains that have been engineered with a high resistance topests, and so will be less in need of expensive fertilisers. Maybe humans will be able to'order' their children, and to ask for certain characteristics to be selectedfor their offspring. These could range from the trivial, such as eye-colour orhair colour, to biological, such as resistance to disease and full physical andmental soundness, to the more subjective, such as musical talent or high IQ. However, there have been increasing worries over the application of geneticengineering to humans. Religious objections usually stem from the idea that itis an act of hubris to meddle with the created order.

Religious objections stemfrom the eschatology contained within most religious doctrine. This means thatsome idea about life after death is a significant part of most religiouscodes. If can extend life for many, many more years, then this naturally leadsus to wonder about the importance of life after death as well. The idea ofHeaven, salvation, or even damnation may recede in importance as average life expectancyis extended well beyond the traditional Biblical three score years and ten.

The Human Genome Project hasshown conclusively that we do in fact share the majority of our genes withother species – especially other vertebrates.

This is troubling for those whohold that mankind is separate and above other animals, since we are created inthe likeness and the image of God.

Conclusion

As difficult as the ethics ofgenetic technology are, we should remember that scientific advancement hasoften been viewed in negative light, initially. Organ transplantation startedin the 1970s, and was first seen as controversial, yet now it is a routinepractice, and there are very few who have any religious objections to thismedical procedure.

Geneticengineering and eugenics have both advanced by leaps and bounds in the 20 th century, and no doubt will continue to do so, as humans continue to facesignificant population problems which could be eradicated by genetictechnology. It seems that genetic technology could solve many of theseproblems, such as disease and ageing. However, religious objections remind usthat these new technologies often ask as many new questions as they answer.

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