

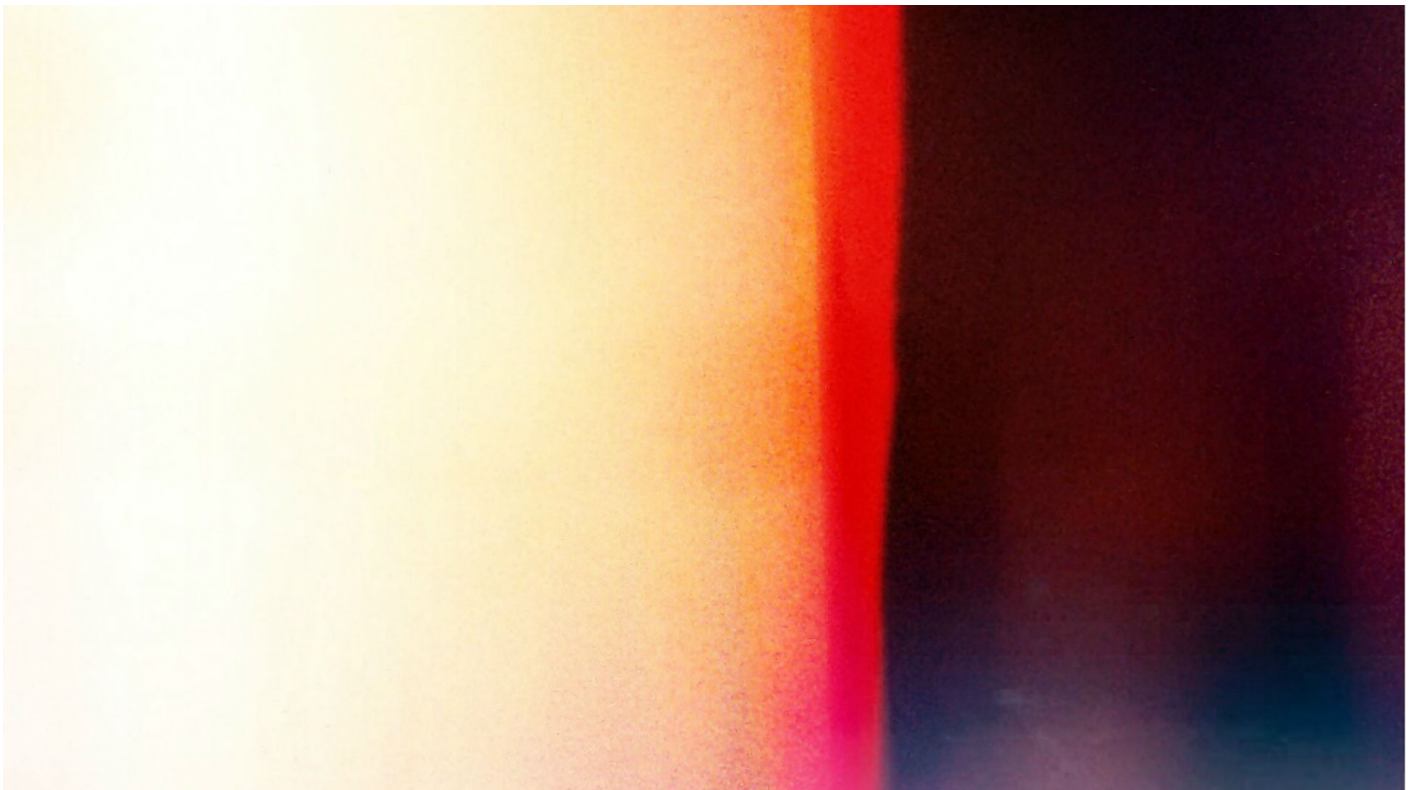


GRESHAM COLLEGE
Founded 1597

From Wonder to Understanding: Beginning a Journey Transcript

Date: Tuesday, 13 October 2015 - 1:00PM

Location: Barnard's Inn Hall



13 October 2015

From Wonder to Understanding: Beginning a Journey

Professor Alister McGrath

Most of us know that heart-stopping feeling of awed wonder at the beauty and majesty of nature. I remember well a journey I made across Iran in the late 1970s. I was travelling on a night bus through the vast desert between Shiraz and Kermān, when its ailing engine finally failed. It sputtered to a halt in the middle of nowhere. We all left the coach while its driver tried to fix it. I saw the stars that night as I had never seen them before – brilliant, solemn, and still, in the midst of a dark and silent land. I simply cannot express in words the overwhelming feeling of awe I experienced that night – a sense of exaltation, amazement and wonder. I still feel a tingle, a shiver of pleasure, running down my spine when I recall that desert experience, all those years ago.

For some, that sense of wonder – what Albert Einstein called "rapturous amazement" – is an end in itself. Many of the Romantic poets took this view. Towards the end of his life, the great German novelist and poet Goethe declared that a sense of astonishment or wonder was an end in itself. We should not seek anything beyond it or behind it, but simply enjoy the experience for what it was. But for many, it is not a dead end, however pleasurable, but is rather a starting point for exploration and discovery.

The great Greek philosopher Aristotle also knew that sense of wonder. It was, he declared, an invitation to explore, to set out on a journey of discovery, in which our horizons are expanded, our understanding deepened, and our eyes opened. As the great medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas once put it, this sense of wonder elicits a *desiderium sciendi*, a "longing to know", whose fulfilment leads to joy as much as to understanding.

This journey of discovery involves both reason and imagination, and leads, not to a place, but rather – as the novelist Henry Miller rather nicely puts it – to "a new way of looking at things." There are two main outcomes of this journey of exploration. One of them is *science*, one of humanity's most significant and most deeply satisfying achievements. When I was young, I wanted to study medicine. It made sense. After all, my father was a doctor, and my mother a nurse. Knowing my career plans, my great-uncle – who was head of pathology at one of Ireland's leading teaching hospitals – gave me an old microscope. It turned out to be the gateway to a new world. As I happily explored the small plants and cells I found in pond water through its lens, I developed a love of nature which remains with me to this day. It also convinced me that I wanted to know and understand nature.

Yet though I loved science as a young man, I had a sense that it was not complete. It helped us to understand how things worked. But what did they *mean*? Science gave me a neat answer to the question of how I came to be in this world. Yet it seemed unable to answer a deeper question. *Why* was I here? What was the point of life?

Science is wonderful at raising questions. Some can be answered immediately; some will be answerable in the future through technological advance; and some will lie beyond its capacity to

answer – what my scientific hero Sir Peter Medawar (1915-87), who won the Nobel Prize for Medicine back in the 1960s, referred to as "questions that science cannot answer and that no conceivable advance of science would empower it to answer". What Medawar had in mind are what the philosopher Karl Popper called "ultimate questions", such as the meaning of life. Popper famously argued that science is in no position to "make assertions about ultimate questions — about the riddles of existence, or about man's task in this world." So does acknowledging and engaging such questions mean abandoning science? No. It simply means respecting its limits and not forcing it to become something other than science. These are important questions, and we are right to look elsewhere for answers.

The great Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) put his finger on the point at issue here. *Scientists are human beings*. If we, as human beings, are to lead fulfilled lives, we need more than the partial account of reality that science offers. We need a "big picture", an "integral idea of the universe". As a young man, I was aware of the need for a "bigger narrative", a richer vision of reality that would weave together understanding and meaning. I failed to find it. What I found to be elusive I then took to be merely illusory. Yet the idea never entirely died in either my mind or my imagination. While science had a wonderful capacity to explain, it nevertheless failed to satisfy the deeper longings and questions of humanity.

Any philosophy of life, any way of thinking about the questions that really matter, according to Ortega, will thus end up going beyond science – not because there is anything wrong with science, but precisely because its intellectual virtues are won at a price. Science works so well because it is so focussed and specific in its methods.

"Scientific truth is characterized by its precision and the certainty of its predictions. But science achieves these admirable qualities at the cost of remaining on the level of secondary concerns, leaving ultimate and decisive questions untouched."

For Ortega, the great intellectual virtue of science is that it knows its limits. It only answers questions that it knows it can answer on the basis of the evidence. But human curiosity wants to go further. We need answers to the deeper questions that we cannot avoid asking. As Ortega rightly observed, human beings – whether scientists or not – cannot live without answering them, even in a provisional way. "We are given no escape from ultimate questions. In one way or another they are in us, whether we like it or not. Scientific truth is exact, but it is incomplete." We need a richer narrative, linking understanding and meaning. I think that's what the great American philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952) was getting at when he declared that the "deepest problem of modern life" is that we have failed to integrate our "thoughts about the world" with our thoughts about "value and purpose". Dewey was worried about this failure to integrate our thinking here – and I think rightly so.

So we come back to that haunting and electrifying sense of wonder at the world. As we have seen, one of its outcomes is science – the attempt to understand the world around us. But there is another outcome. It is one that I initially resisted, believing that it was utterly opposed to science. The shallow materialism of my youth had no space for it. Yet I gradually came to realize that we need a richer and deeper vision of reality if we are to do justice to the complexity of the world, and live out meaningful and fulfilling lives. So just what we are talking about? *God*.

Like so many young people in the late 1960s, I regarded the idea of God as outdated nonsense. The 1960s were a time of intellectual and cultural change. The old certainties of the past seemed to crumble in the face of a confident expectation of revolution. Without quite realizing

what I was doing, I embraced a worldview that then seemed to me to be the inevitable result of the consistent application of the scientific method. I would only believe what science could prove.

So I embraced a rather dogmatic atheism, taking delight in its intellectual minimalism and existential bleakness. So what if life had to be seen as meaningless? It was an act of intellectual bravery on my part to accept this harsh scientific truth. Religion was just a pointless relic of a credulous past, offering a spurious delusion of meaning which was easily discarded.

In December 1970, I learned that I had won a scholarship to study chemistry at Oxford University. Yet I could not begin my studies at Oxford until October 1971. So what was I to do in the meantime? Most of my friends left high school in order to travel the world or earn some money. I decided to stay on at school, and use the time to learn German and Russian, both of which would be useful for my scientific studies. Having specialized in the physical sciences for two years, I was also aware of the need to deepen my knowledge of biology, and begin to think about biochemistry. I therefore settled down to begin an extended period of reading and reflection.

After a month or so of intensive reading in the school science library in early 1971, having exhausted the works on biology, I came across a section that I had never noticed before: "The History and Philosophy of Science." I had little time for this sort of material, tending to regard it as uninformed criticism of the certainties and simplicities of the natural sciences by those who felt threatened by them. Philosophy, in my view, was just pointless speculation about issues that any proper scientist could solve easily through a few well-designed experiments. What was the point? Yet in the end, I decided to read these works. If I was right, what had I to lose by doing so?

By the time I had finished reading the somewhat meagre holdings of the school in this field, I realized that I needed to do some very serious rethinking. Far from being half-witted obscurantism that placed unnecessary obstacles in the relentless path of scientific advance, the history and philosophy of science asked all the right questions about the reliability and limits of scientific knowledge. And they were questions that I had not faced thus far – such as the under-determination of theory by data, radical theory change in the history of science, the difficulties in devising a "crucial experiment," and the enormously complex issues associated with devising what was the "best explanation" of a given set of observations. I was overwhelmed. It was as if a tidal wave was battering against my settled way of thinking, muddying what I had taken to be the clear, still, and above all *simple* waters of scientific truth.

Things thus turned out to be rather more complicated than I had realized. My eyes had been opened, and I knew there was no going back to the simplistic take on the natural sciences I had once known. I had enjoyed the beauty and innocence of a childlike attitude to the sciences, and secretly wished to remain in that secure place. Indeed, I think that part of me deeply wished that I had never picked up that book, never asked those awkward questions, and never questioned the simplicities of my scientific youth. But there could be no going back. I had stepped through a door which up to that point I did not know existed, and could not escape the new world I now began to inhabit.

My own rediscovery of the enriched understanding and appreciation of the world made possible through belief in God took place at Oxford University. It was a somewhat cerebral and intellectual conversion, focussing on my growing realization that belief in God made a lot more

sense of things than my atheism. I had no emotional need for any idea of God, being perfectly prepared to embrace nihilism – if this was right. Yet I mistakenly assumed that its bleakness was an indication of its truth. What if truth were to turn out to be attractive?

Having already discovered the beauty and wonder of nature, I realized that I had – as the poet T. S. Eliot put it – "had the experience but missed the meaning." I gradually came to the view so winsomely expressed by C. S. Lewis: "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else." It was as if an intellectual sun had risen and illuminated the scientific landscape before my eyes, allowing me to see details and interconnections that I would otherwise have missed altogether. I had once been drawn to atheism on account of the minimalism of its intellectual demands; I now found myself discovering the richness of the intellectual outcomes of Christianity.

It will be clear that my conversion – if that is the right word – was largely intellectual. I had discovered a new way of seeing reality, and was delighted by what I found. Like Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957), I was convinced that Christianity seemed to offer an account of reality that was "intellectually satisfactory." Yet, also like Sayers, I found my initial delight in the internal logic of the Christian faith to be so compelling that I occasionally wondered if I had merely "fallen in love with an intellectual pattern." I did not think of myself as being "religious" in any way, and my new faith did not result in any habits of "religiosity". As far as I was concerned, I had simply discovered a new *theoria* – a way of seeing things which originated in wonder, and ended in a deeper understanding and appreciation of reality. To borrow Salman Rushdie's terms in a very engaging lecture he delivered at Cambridge some years ago, I discovered that "the idea of God" is both "a repository for our awestruck wonderment at life and an answer to the great questions of existence."

I tended at this stage to think of my Christian faith as a philosophy of life, not a religion. I had grasped something of its intellectual appeal, but had yet to discover its imaginative, ethical and spiritual depths. I had a sense of standing on the threshold of something beautiful and amazing, which my reason had tantalizingly only grasped in part. I gradually came to see that I did not need to see my faith as conflicting with science, but as filling in the detail of a "big picture" of which science was a major part – but only a part. As the great theoretical physicist and Nobel Laureate Eugene Wigner pointed out, science is constantly searching for the "ultimate truth," which he defined as "a picture which is a consistent fusion into a single unit of the little pictures, formed on the various aspects of nature."

If there was a conflict between faith and science, it was with the view sometimes called "scientific imperialism" (and now usually abbreviated to "scientism"), which holds that science, *and science alone*, is able to answer all of life's deepest questions. This distortion of science involves borrowing the language and apparatus of science in order to create the illusion that an essentially *scientific* question is being answered on the basis of what is declared to be "scientific data", using a universal method that will arrive at a "scientific" answer. This inflated distortion of science does nobody any favours, least of all scientists themselves.

We all need help in thinking things through. My own thinking on this matter was helped enormously by a conversation with Professor Charles A. Coulson (1910-74), sometime around 1973. Coulson was Oxford's first Professor of Theoretical Chemistry, and was a fellow of Wadham College, Oxford, where I was an undergraduate. As a prominent Methodist lay preacher, it was natural that Coulson should from time to time preach in Wadham Chapel. I

heard him preach on the fundamental coherence of nature and faith, and why the idea of a "god of the gaps" was to be rejected. As a recently converted atheist who was still feeling my way in the mysterious realm of the Christian faith, I talked to him afterwards about some of my questions. He was both gracious and sagacious, and within ten minutes had helped me grasp the idea of the ultimate coherence of science and faith, which remains with me to this day.

Coulson helped me to see that my new faith did not call upon me to abandon my love of science, but to see it in a new way – indeed, to have a new motivation for loving science, and a deepened appreciation for its outcomes. Some Christian writers hold that such an intellectual conversion entails the repudiation of one's past. I was more like Dante, who saw how his new spiritual vision allowed him to enfold his old life within the new, giving it a new place and purpose. The old was reframed by the new, and seen to have a new depth and significance.

And he persuaded me that the intellectual appeal of Christianity to a scientist did not lie in the location of explanatory gaps that could be arbitrarily and unconvincingly populated with gods. For Coulson, this demanded an indefensible "dichotomy of existence" and "intellectual partitioning." The solution lay rather in the Christian articulation of a luminous vision of reality that offered insight into the scientific process and its successes, while at the same time setting out a larger narrative that allowed engagement with questions raised by science, yet lying beyond its capacity to answer. Science, like faith, seeks to find and explore a coherent and satisfying understanding of the world in which we live. Might they not do so together, learning from each other's strengths and weaknesses?

Some will doubtless be surprised at any suggestion that science and religious belief can be held together like this, when the cultural establishment of the west seems to have locked itself into a "science versus religion" groupthink, a narrow and dogmatic view of reality which holds that any thinking person must choose science over religion. Yet as we shall see, this "science versus religion" narrative is stale, outdated, and largely discredited by a substantial body of research during the last forty years. It is sustained not by the weight of evidence, but merely by its endless uncritical repetition, which studiously avoids the scholarship of the last generation which has undermined its credibility. When the historical myths are laid to rest, it is clear that there is a plurality of narratives for understanding the relation of science and faith, none of which have the privilege of being self-evidently true or intellectually normative.

The relationship between science and religion is *complicated*, and cannot be reduced to dumbed-down slogans which ultimately serve polemical cultural agendas. Yes, religion and science can be in conflict. But they do not need to be at war with each other, and usually haven't been so in the past. The problem is that our culture tends to look at both history and present experience through this controlling lens, and sees what it wants to see.

In his important work *A Secular Age*, the philosopher and cultural theorist Charles Taylor notes how certain "metanarratives" – that is, grand stories of explanation and meaning – come to assume social dominance, often for reasons that rest on somewhat flimsy evidential foundations. To challenge or reject these dominant narratives is seen as a sign of irrationality. The "conflict" narrative is a classic example of a way of thinking that gained traction for cultural, not intellectual reasons, and is sustained by those with vested interests in ensuring its continued dominance. Yet to those in the know, this "science versus religion" narrative is stale, outdated, and largely discredited. It is sustained not by the weight of evidence, but by endless uncritical repetition, which studiously avoids the new scholarship which has undermined its credibility. We will have

more to say about this point later in this series of lectures.

For me, science is science. It is intrinsically neither for nor against religion, any more than it is for or against politics. It rightly objects when religion (or politics) gets in the way of scientific advance, and rightly applauds when religion (or politics) encourages scientific inquiry and engagement. In the same way, science is neither religiously atheistic or theistic, nor politically liberal or conservative, although it can easily be accommodated within such perspectives. And science is entirely right to challenge religious or political beliefs when these present themselves as science.

It is certainly true that science, if it is to be science and not something else, is committed to a method that is often styled "methodological naturalism". That is the way that science works. That's what is characteristic of science, and it both provides it with its rigor, and sets its limits. Science has established a set of tested and reliable rules by which it investigates reality, and "methodological materialism" is one of them.

But this is about setting rules for exploring reality, not limiting reality to what can be explored in this way. It does not for one moment mean that science is committed to some kind of philosophical materialism. Some materialists argue that the explanatory successes of science imply an underlying ontological materialism. Yet this is simply one of several ways of interpreting this approach, and there are others with widespread support within the scientific community. Eugenie Scott, then director of the National Center for Science Education, made this point neatly back in 1993: "Science neither denies nor opposes the supernatural, but *ignores* the supernatural for methodological reasons." Science is a *non-theistic*, not an *anti-theistic*, way of engaging reality. As the philosopher Alvin Plantinga so rightly observes, the fundamental conflict is not between "science" and "faith"; it is between a dogmatic metaphysical naturalism and belief in God.

As human beings, we try to integrate the many dimensions of life into a coherent and satisfying whole. We want to do more than just make sense of things. We want to position them within a greater whole, of which they are part. Instead of thinking of our mental worlds as a series of disconnected and incoherent thoughts and values, we try to weave them, like threads, into a pattern. We try to develop a "big picture" of reality which allows us to see science and religion as fitting together within a comprehensive map of the intellectual landscape. Where some compartmentalize their spheres of existence, I prefer to see them as interconnected and enriching. For many of us, the greatest human quest is for a framework of interpretation which can provide overall orientation for life.

It is all about stories, pictures, and maps. We live in a story-shaped world. But which story makes most sense? Many philosophers now use the word "myth" to refer to an imaginative pattern, which helps us find meaning in life. But which myth is the best? Others prefer to think in terms of "pictures", which help us visualize and organize our snapshots of life, lending coherence to what might otherwise be disconnected. Or we might talk about "maps of meaning", which help us make sense of the complex landscape of reality, and find our way within it.

Some psychologists use the term "schema" (plural: "schemata") to refer to such a mental map of reality, which provides both a framework for representing some aspects of the world, and a system of organizing information about it. Schemata are often presented and commended through narratives. Good stories, pictures, and maps can help us deepen our appreciation of reality – just as inadequate ones can lock us into reduced and impoverished ways of thinking.

Get them wrong, and they deprive and demean; get them right, and they illuminate and enrich.

These six lectures are an invitation to journey along a road that is less travelled. I have spent the last forty years exploring this road, and want to tell you about the questions I have faced, and what I have found helpful as I travel along it. I am asking you to explore another way about thinking about science and faith – a way that may seem strange to some, but which I believe holds them together in a way that is both rationally satisfying and imaginatively exciting. Science and faith can thus provide us with different, yet potentially complementary, maps of human identity. I cannot prove it is right, but I can assure you it is deeply satisfying and well worth exploring.

So let us look at some ways of beginning to frame the relation of science and faith. Because the universe is so complex and profound, we need a rich palette of colours to represent it and enjoy it. We cannot limit ourselves to only one method of exploring reality, or a single level of description or analysis. Reality is so complicated that we need a series of maps to describe it. No single map is good enough for such an integrated engagement with our world, even though it may be adequate for a particular and limited purpose. As the philosopher Mary Midgley remarks, "For most important questions in human life, a number of different conceptual tool-boxes always have to be used together."

Our first approach could be called "multiple perspectives". We find this in the writings of Charles Coulson, who I mentioned a moment ago. But one of its most important contemporary advocates is Mary Midgley. Let us look at what she has to say on the matter. Midgley argues that we need "many maps, many windows" if we are to represent the complexity of reality, reflecting the fact that "there are many independent forms and sources of knowledge". She suggests that it is helpful to think of the world as a "huge aquarium".

"We cannot see it as a whole from above, so we peer in at it through a number of small windows ... We can eventually make quite a lot of sense of this habitat if we patiently put together the data from different angles. But if we insist that our own window is the only one worth looking through, we shall not get very far."

No single way of thinking is adequate to explain, on its own, the meaning of our universe. If we limit ourselves to the methods of science in general, or one science (such as physics) in particular, we needlessly lock ourselves into a "bizarrely restrictive view of meaning".

Midgley's basic principle of using multiple maps to represent a complex reality raises some challenges and some significant questions – such as the need to develop and deploy an appropriate interpretative framework to settle boundary disputes. Yet it also opens up some important possibilities for integration and enrichment of our vision. We need a rich palette of colours to represent the complexities of our observations of the world around us, and our experience within us.

Yet there is more to how we think about the complexities of our world and experience than "points of view" or "perspectives". We also need to think of different levels of reality, which are engaged in different ways. Let us explore this further, as we look at this second way of understanding the relation of science and faith.

The philosophy of "critical realism" is often implicitly presupposed by scientists, and occasionally made explicit in their writings. This way of thinking invites us to envisage reality in terms of

different "levels" or "strata". Physics, chemistry, and biology engage with reality at different levels, and have developed subtly different methods of investigation, each adapted to its own domain of competence. Really complex natural systems demand engagement and explanation at multiple levels. Otherwise, we only see *part* of the picture, and are prone to assume that this is the *whole* picture.

The classic example is any attempt to make sense of humanity. A total account will involve multiple layers of analysis: the physics of vision; the chemistry of phosphates; the biology of cells; the biophysics of the transmission of genetic information; the psychology of learning; the anthropology of culture; and the social behaviour of human groups. All of these are studied by dedicated sciences, each of which illuminates one level of human nature. Occasionally, arrogant biologists pretend that they alone see the full picture. But they do not. Science is collaborative, not competitive, patiently building up a rich multi-layered account of humanity. Biology is one such level – and *only* one such level. And, as we shall see, one level of human nature concerns religiosity. The cognitive science of religion – about which I shall say more in a later lecture – has helped us realise that this is part of who and what we are.

So how does critical realism help us fit faith into our broader reflections on the universe and life? Critical realism allows us to think of science and religion offering insights about reality and answers to the questions of life *at differing levels*. The best picture of reality is that which weaves together coherently the greatest number of explanatory threads.

The distinguished geologist Frank H. T. Rhodes, who served as President of Cornell University from 1977 to 1995, made this point using the analogy of a boiling kettle. Why, someone might ask, is this kettle boiling? Rhodes notes that two types of explanation might be given. At the scientific level, energy is being supplied, which raises the temperature of the water to its boiling point. Yet another answer can be given. "The kettle is boiling because I put it on to make a cup of tea". So which of these answers is right? Let us listen to Rhodes's assessment of the situation, and see what you make of it.

"Now these are different answers . . . But both are true, both are complementary and not competitive. One answer is appropriate within a particular frame of reference, the other within another frame of reference. There is a sense in which each is incomplete without the other."

Rhodes's basic point is that both answers can be right, because they are concerned with different levels of reality. He affirms a "complementarity of description" which tries to capture at least something of "the total picture of reality".

We hadoe looked at maps, and thought about levels of reality. Yet there is a third, and perhaps a far more important way in which human beings make sense of our world, and ourselves within it – the telling of stories. As social anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers of history, and literary theorists have emphasised, it is natural for us to use stories to explore fundamental questions of meaning. Here is the American sociologist Christian Smith, reflecting on the role of stories in human life.

"[We] are animals who must fundamentally understand what reality is, who we are, and how we ought to live by locating ourselves within the larger narratives and metanarratives that we hear and tell, and that constitute what is for us real and significant."

From an anthropological perspective, we uses narrative because they are useful and helpful as

a way of making sense of experience across human cultures, allowing the narrator to impose order on otherwise disconnected events, and to create continuity between past, present, and imagined worlds. Sometimes these narratives are local, telling the story of the founding of a city, or the identity of a group of people – as, for example, the great narrative of the people of Israel escaping from captivity in Egypt, crystallizing their identity in the period of "wilderness wandering", and finally taking their place in the Promised Land.

Yet the great narratives of humanity have a wider scope, telling stories about the universe and human identity which appeal to the imagination, emphasise our location in the flow of time, and convey or generate ideas and values. These "metanarratives" are grand stories which capture our imaginations, and give us a conceptual framework that helps us make sense of things. As literary scholars such as C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien have stressed, Christianity primarily takes the form of a narrative, which subsequently and secondarily gives rise to creedal and doctrinal formulations, a vision of morality, and a sense of meaning. Yet however great its scope might be, this narrative of faith needs amplification in other areas. No single metanarrative is adequate to organize and correlate on its own the complexities of human existence and experience.

As Smith himself points out, this means that we must – and, as a matter of observable fact, we *do* – use multiple narratives to locate ourselves within our world, and understand what we experience. Smith notes a number of such narratives encountered in the twenty-first century, which provide frameworks of meaning for those who hold them – such as the Christian narrative, the Militant Islamic Resurgence narrative, the Capitalist Prosperity narrative, the Progressive Socialism narrative, the Scientific Enlightenment narrative, the Liberal Progress narrative, and the Chance and Purposeless Narrative. Other narratives also emerge from various schools of psychology, anthropology, and sociology.

The point is this: even if we are committed to the primacy of one "master narrative", we find ourselves drawing on others to provide detail, texture and colour. That is just the way we are as human beings. It is natural. And that's what I am doing in this work – weaving together the narratives of science and faith, to yield a richer vision and understanding of our world, while respecting and maintaining their distinct identities.

Now in one sense, what I propose is nothing new. These narratives of enrichment were the common currency of earlier ages, especially the Renaissance. These have been displaced by a rival narrative that has already lost its academic credibility, and is in the process of losing its remaining cultural appeal. Once the default position of the western media, its obvious failings and shortcomings have led it being restricted to the ghetto of militant scientific atheists. We deserve better than this – and we can draw on the wisdom of the past to help us recover better ways of thinking about things, which fully engage the human desire for knowledge and meaning.

So where do these reflections on multiple maps of reality, multiple levels of meaning, and narratives take us? Science and faith can provide us with different, yet potentially complementary, accounts of human identity. And we need both, if we are to flourish as human beings, and lead meaningful and fulfilled lives. Both science and faith are prone to exaggerate their capabilities. Religion cannot tell us the distance to the nearest star, just as science cannot tell us the meaning of life. But each is part of a bigger picture, and we impoverish our vision of life if we exclude either – or both.

Now I have only scratched the surface of my topic, and I have no doubt that I will have raised

lots of questions! In the next lecture, we will look at what I think will be one of those – the place of proof and evidence in our beliefs. We want to believe what is reasonable; what is right; what is well-grounded. In our next lecture, we will open up this fascinating question. But I am sure there are many other topics you would like to explore, and I will be delighted to do that right now. Thank you so much for listening!

© Professor Alister McGrath, 2015