

PURPOSE IN THE UNIVERSE

By

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"Of course, it may be said that the impulsion to "make sense of existence" is just the beginning of wish fantasy, a desperate subterfuge to conceal the unbearable truth that existence is indeed absurd.. This may be the case. But at least let us give the matter a hearing before we make up our minds to dismiss it."

John Macquarrie in "Principles of Christian Theology".

1. Man's search for meaning and purpose, in human life leads to the necessary question as to whether there is meaning in the existence and evolution of the universe of which man is a part. Despite much of the nihilistic thinking of our times there are significant movements in thought which lead in quite the opposite direction to nihilism, in fact to the idea of a purposive universe. These movements are firmly grounded in science and in rational thinking about philosophy and religion. In particular, this address will be primarily concerned with the movements becoming known as process philosophy and process theology. Some recent examples are most of the books listed in the attached suggestions for further reading.. What follows is frankly a theistic proposition: not in the sense of a God outside the universe but in the sense of Aquinas' remark that he who knows anything knows something about God. In this view there is-no distinction between sacred and secular.

2. Integrity v. Estrangement .

The search for integrity or wholeness in human life in contrast to the experience of separateness or estrangement.

Three sources of estrangement and three needs for integrity.

- A man may be estranged from his real self. Erickson's concept of "identity confusion" and its opposite the "discovery of one's identity".
- A man may be estranged from other human beings. The need to accept other& and to be accepted by others. The loneliness of modern urban man.
- A man may be estranged from "the whole scheme of things". Camus speaks of the "Unreasonable silence of the world". T.H. Huxley questioned if the universe was "friendly".

By contrast Teilhard de Chardin describes this as a "personalizing universe". Our attitude to nature betrays our estrangement from her and our loneliness. We talk about conquering, exploring, controlling nature. What does it mean to be at one with nature?

3. Simplicity v. Complexity

It was easier to believe in a meaning to existence when the universe was small and cosy in man's imagination. Science has exploded that myth. The trouble with simplistic images of the universe is that they close out the modern universe instead of including it. So religion tried to get 'along for a while without the scientific view of the evolving universe and' an evolving man.

When simplistic pictures are shown to be inadequate, it is easy to (a) conclude that the universe is inscrutable or (b) to opt for a new simplistic image such as the universe as contrivance, self made and self propelling. Neither are solutions.

4. Universe v. Multiverse

Man, as contrasted with other animals, has a need to have a conscious unitary response to the world around him. All inclusiveness is what is required. Many go for less, e.g. for humanism or the so called "secular theologies". Most humanism is deficiently humanistic; while it casts some light on the foreground of morality it leaves the "background" wholly obscure.

A question: "Is there an adequate objective in the universe worthy of my total devotion that is also an appropriate recipient

of any contribution I may make and of the contributions of all that exists in the creation?" The proposition that there is some-thing ("someone") that is not only the object of our integrity within self, with others and with the whole scheme of things but that enjoys and remembers, not partially but fully, all that we and the rest of creation can contribute to the universe. This is an aspect of what religion has meant by God. The proposition that "worship" is the integrity of one's thoughts and purposes and values and meanings; it is. ascription of worth to that which is of ultimate concern "with all" that we possess. That which we love is itself love that not only gives but responds. The idea that at the heart of the universe there is persuasive love that integrates all that is and that responds to the love of the creature who seeks integrity,

5. Order v. Disorder

The old arguments from design of the universe to a God who designed it are fallacious. Science showed that. The problem of the order of the universe is the problem of how it **is** that reality is not just a shapeless chaos. The existence of an ordered universe implies an ordering principle. Two sorts of ordering principle (a) dictatorial - which was the conclusion of the old arguments of design, i.e. God identified with absolute law and non--chance; (b) democratic -- order by persuasion with a degree of freedom to respond or not to respond and chance as a fact of existence. Why then the partial disorder and evil in the world? It is not God alone who acts,, Every individual does. There is no single producer but one is universally influential. Otherwise it is impossible to understand how there could be any limit to the confusion implied by the idea of a multiplicity of creative agents.

6. Matter v. Mind

Materialism has no adequate doctrine of-mind and so it tries to get rid of it. In creationist thinking-the universe is composed of "experiencing entities" or what Whitehead calls "occasions of experience". Reality is process. The universe is a feeling universe.

Twofold nature . of God.

- God as the provider of the possibilities of the universe. Possibilities as unseen realities that transform, guide and lure, to further completion and integrity.
- God as the great experiencer of the: universe' who saves experience.

7. Mortality v. Immortality

The universe as we know it will perish. Will all perish?

The idea that one personality and one immortality (God) suffices to save the` meaning of existence. The participation of the divine in all experience.

Only two things matter for us: the creaturely life between birth and death and the unborn and undying life of God.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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Mentor.