

Einstein's "Science and Religion": How the Ideas Presented Are Evident in Genesis and Australian Aboriginal Legends of the Dreamtime

Mary M. Mohay

"The situation may be expressed by an image: Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind" (Einstein 406). Albert Einstein, in his article "Science and Religion" draws connections between the two. Throughout history, the struggle between science and religion has been debated, and the idea that they cannot coexist has emerged. However, in his article Einstein challenges this idea by suggesting that without science, religion is merely a belief without any support; and therefore, science without religion has no real or significant value in life. Examining closely the Book of Genesis, from *The Norton Anthology: World Masterpieces*, as well as *From the Dreamtime: Australian Aboriginal Legends*, one will see how Einstein's belief that science and religion are not only deeply connected, but in fact, they cannot exist without one another.

Evolution is a widely discussed and controversial topic, especially for those who are at opposite ends of the evolution vs. creationism spectrum. For example, a scientist might believe that evolution coupled with the "big bang" theory is solely responsible for the existence of this universe, this galaxy, this planet, and the living organisms--plants, animals and human beings which inhabit this planet. However, a devout Christian might believe in the story of "The Creation," in which God created light, heaven, earth, water, wind, all the animals, including man, whom he made "in his own image" ("Genesis" 53). Although Einstein does not make a direct correlation to the idea of evolution versus creationism, it could be inferred from statements such as the one below that there are some boundaries where the two cannot mix. For the most part—scientific evidence can strengthen religious beliefs as long as those who are religious are receptive to the idea of their interrelation.

A conflict arises when a religious community insists on the absolute truthfulness of all statements recorded in the Bible. This means an intervention on the part of religion into the sphere of science... On the other hand, representatives of science have often made and attempt to arrive at fundamental judgments with respect to values and ends on the basis of scientific method, and in this way, have set themselves in opposition to religion. (Einstein 406)

In this statement, Einstein is showing readers that when religious believers ignore scientific evidence and blindly accept scripture as truth, they are not strengthening their beliefs; instead, they are weakening them. They are doing so by offering no explanation and simply refusing to acknowledge factual evidence. Einstein argues not for complete acceptance, but for an understanding, a balance between the two.

In *From the Dreamtime: Australian Aboriginal Legends*, the Aboriginal people use mythology or religion as a way of describing scientific phenomena. In this sense it is the religion that is science, because it is being used to describe an occurrence or a presence of some sort that the Aborigines could not explain otherwise. For example, in "The Lizard Women" legend, the Djauan people tell the story about a woman who was fearful of being attacked by dingoes. Since she was afraid, she alerted her women friends that were with her, and they prayed to the gods to be saved. In return, the gods transformed all but the one woman into lizards. They turned that one woman, who had alerted the rest, into a large rock. This rock is known as the "mysterious and majestic Uluru, the great rock, also known today as Ayer's Rock" (Ellis 70, 71). In this legend there is an obvious balance between science and religion. The Aboriginal people have used their religious beliefs to explain the presence of a scientific element, such as behaviors of animals in nature, as well as the presence of certain structures in nature.

Einstein says that science sometimes fails humanity because even though it may be correct, it is far more complex than humans are capable of comprehending, at least at that

particular moment in time (407). He goes on to comment on the idea of a personal God. He argues that a personal God is dangerous to scientific advancements because “the doctrine of a personal God interfering with natural events could never be refuted, in the real sense, by science, for this doctrine can always take refuge in those domains in which scientific knowledge has not yet been able to set foot” (Einstein 408). He does not want people to hide behind personal Gods in areas where there have yet to be scientific discoveries and advances. Einstein believes that using religion to hide behind or using it as a way to ignore the facts enables the idea of a personal God to become harmful.

A great example of religion stepping in where science has yet to define itself is seen in “The Lightning Man” legend. In this legend, the Aboriginal people believe that lightning is caused by a “lightning man” named Wala-Unayua (Ellis 105). The Aboriginal people see lightning as the result of Wala-Unayua’s fury over the contamination or disturbance of his waterhole or the arrival of the monsoon season. It does not matter what goes wrong, he becomes greatly angered and reacts ferociously, “hiding in the thick clouds, and his angry voice would thunder, crashing and echoing across the land” (Ellis 106).

Einstein by no means tries to discourage people from having a religious faith. Rather, he tries to encourage people to remain faithful in the light of scientific discoveries. He mentions this idea when he says, “Intelligence makes clear to us the interrelation of means and ends” (Einstein 404). He uses evolution as an example, telling readers that having the evidence, the scientific facts that prove that one animal developed from another, and another, and so on does not mean that there is no God. It could simply mean that God is responsible for the evolution of these species—Einstein does not want someone simply to disregard scientific proofs in order to remain stubbornly rooted in religious beliefs; he wants them to incorporate the facts into their faith.

Einstein further explains the interconnectedness of science and religion in this way:

A realization of how great is the danger is spreading, however, among thinking people, and there is much search for means with which to meet the danger—means in the field of national and international politics, of legislation, of organization in general. Such efforts are, no doubt greatly needed. *Yet the ancients knew something which we seem to have forgotten. All means prove but a blunt instrument, if they have not behind them a living spirit.* But if the longing for achievement of the goal is powerfully alive within us, then shall we not lack the strength to find the means for reaching the goal and for translating it into deeds. (Einstein 405)

Einstein clearly states in the italicized section of the excerpt that science alone is not enough. Religion instills within a people a passion, or a drive (the “living spirit”), which provides the foundation for values. These values, coupled with scientific knowledge, help mankind accomplish great things. The values that are developed over time based on scripture and its lessons are the values that appear in scientific fields, such as “national and international politics, legislation, and organization in general” as well as in areas of technology, medicine, and medical practices (Einstein 405).

In *Genesis* there is a great example of some of the lessons taught through scripture. The story of Job teaches humanity that not all suffering is a form of punishment from God for an evil deed done (50). The Bible illustrates how God uses Job to teach this lesson: “Job loses his family and wealth in a series of calamities, which strike one after the other like hammer blows, and he is then plagued with a loathsome disease” (50). Job, being an old man, is incapable of overcoming the trials set before him and wants to die, except for the fact that he wishes to understand God’s motives (50). Job continues on through the duration of his life, believing in the Lord, trusting in Him and praying to Him. However, the readers Job’s story know that God intends to use him as an

example to Satan. God intends to show Satan that human beings are capable of retaining faith in Him and His justice during even the most difficult, incomprehensible trials of life (50). Job is never told this purpose because revealing it to him would have defeated the entire purpose of his suffering. This lesson is only one of many in religious scripture that helps to shape and guide humans' morals and values that they need to practice each day. It is these lessons, morals, and values which Einstein believes are necessary for the existence of science because they bring life and excitement to science and make it relevant to humankind (Einstein 405).

Einstein could not have been more correct when he stated that there is an irreconcilable conflict between science and religion (404); it is true that the two oppose and contradict each other to a great extent. However, it is those differences that strengthen both religion and science when they do happen to act in harmony together. Harmony does not mean that scientists find evidence of Noah's Ark ("Genesis" 57); it simply means that the two find a way to coexist; it means recognizing the contradictions and acknowledging their existence while still holding onto one's personal beliefs, and maintaining a healthy faith in one's religion and its teachings.

Works Cited

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