

Considering Creation

by Rabbi Dr Shimon Cowen

What Bertie wouldn't venture

One of the great secular philosophers of the last century, Bertrand ("Bertie") Russell wrote an important and honest chapter of his work *An Outline of Philosophy*, called "Philosophical doubts". He himself was not a religious believer, but he noted that a religious opponent of Darwinism, had argued that "The world was made suddenly, but was made such as it would have been, if it had evolved". Then Russell went on to say, "There is no logical impossibility about this view. And similarly there is no logical impossibility in the view that the world was created five minutes ago, complete with memories and records. This may seem an improbable hypothesis, but it is not logically refutable".

Russell also dealt with philosophical issues of continuity, identity, memory and the ostensibly reiterated "laws of nature" and motions of the creation. Why do we see ongoing patterns and seeming causalities in nature and the world around us? For philosophy, this is called the problem of "induction": I have observed over a long time, and many others before me, that whenever "A" occurs, say the astronomical season of autumn arrives, "B" occurs, the leaves fall of many kinds of trees. It *looks as though* I have a law of nature here, "B" will always be linked to and follow "A". I induce or infer this from the observed constant conjunction of A and B. But there is a problem here - "the problem of induction": namely that from *past* conjunctions of A and B, there is no compelling inference that it must happen the next time around. Russell was honest enough to acknowledge the doubt, whilst stating his own preferred belief: "I am convinced that induction must have validity of some kind of some degree, but the problem of showing how or why it can be valid remains unsolved. Until it is solved, the rational man will doubt whether his food will nourish him, and whether the sun will rise tomorrow."

and what the religious person regards as "obvious"

Religious people, who are happy to make use of science for its pragmatic value, without taking on board all of its non-empirical and extra-scientific conjectures, exercised different preferences and fewer doubts than Bertie. Informed by the writings of Chassidic philosophy in particular, this view takes as reality that the creation was first brought into being 5770 years ago, and beyond that, in every moment is re-enlivened, recreated, reanimated. That is to say, the creation does not subsist in or of itself; it is perpetually dependent for its existence on its Creator, Who wills and brings it into being in each moment in the form it takes in that moment. They are happy to take up the alternative view that the world *was* also created "five minutes" – or even a second – ago, and so it always is, ever since the original creation. First thing in the morning they acknowledge their recreation, or at least in the re-installment of their living souls, with a brief prayer to this effect.

Again, for the religious person, there is no problem of induction. Nature is not an autonomous process. It is something willed into being by G-d from moment to moment. If it is willed in a manner of reiteration, repetition of what was, or with certain gradual changes, that is G-d's decision, based on His will and His commitments to His Creation; and if it is His will, the creation or any of its individual "processes" can become something radically different in the next moment. Bertie *preferred* to see only a Darwinistically evolving nature and not a G-dly Animator of the Creation, but he was intellectually honest and rigorous enough to acknowledge that the

"rational man" is bound to *doubt* both the autonomy of a self-subsistent nature and its laws. The religious person is perfectly open to G-d's interventions and seeks to merit to them.

The Head of the Year (Rosh HaShonah) and the human being

The concept of a soul, made in the image of G-d, is a big problem for the doctrinaire Darwinist. How could a "soul" evolve from an amoeba? This is not a problem for the religious person. For not only did (and does) G-d create from nothingness the human being together with all creation; He also installed (and maintains) a soul within the person. This unique feature of the human being has to do with the central role which G-d gave the person in the Creation: as Chassidic thought points out, the task of fusing the Divine with the earthly, to make the creation G-dly, was given to the creature – the human being - who itself is a fusion of the earthly (the body) and the Divine (the human soul).

Rosh HaShonah, the Jewish term for the "Head of the Year", is celebrated this Saturday (and Sunday, 19-20 September by the secular calendar). It commemorates the original creation, 5770 years ago. It is replete with prayers that G-d *renew* the Creation in a general sense with all the requisite blessings for a bountiful (and more than this, a redemptive) new year. And its exact date commemorates not the first, but the sixth, day of creation: the day of the creation of the human being, upon whose service G-d chose to make His blessings depend. The specialness of this day is also one which allows us to experience the majesty of G-d and gears us for the whole year to take up Bertie's doubt and to reject his preference: to see G-dliness as the primary reality, and the physical creation as the secondary and dependent one. It is a chance to become (more) religious.

Is the earth the centre of the universe?


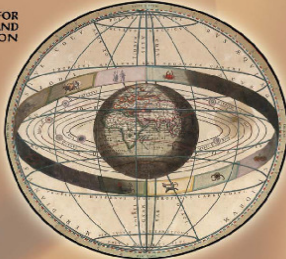
If we can doubt, and reject, Darwinist cosmology, can we also doubt and challenge the Copernican and Newtonian view of the heliocentric sun-centred structure of our cosmos? Maimonides did not hold of it. The Institute will be holding a forum on Judaism and geocentrism (the earth-centred view of the Universe) in the Glen Eira Town Hall (cnr Hawthorn and Glen Eira Rds) on Wednesday 23 September at 8 pm with Emeritus Mathematics Professor Avraham Hasofer. Entry \$10/\$5.

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**The Institute for Judaism and Civilization invites
you to a forum on
Judaism and Geocentrism**
(the earth-centred view of the Universe)

**With Professor Avraham Hasofer,
Emeritus Professor of Mathematics**

At a time when secular scientific cosmologies such as those of Darwinism are being called into question, it is also timely to examine the scientific and philosophical status of the Geocentric model of the Universe as set out in the work of Maimonides, and its relationship to the teachings of Judaism (and indeed of universal religious principles).

Wednesday 23 September 2009 at 8 pm