

Truth and Tension in Science and Religion. By Varadaraja V. Raman. Center Ossipee, N.H.: Beech River Books, 2009. xiv + 390 pages. \$24.00.

Recent books by militant atheists, such as *The God Delusion* (Dawkins 2006), have polarized the science-and-religion dialogue. V. V. Raman's voice of reconciliation can lead us to multifaceted truth. His broad understanding of science and the world's religions will become increasingly relevant in this era of globalization and climate change.

For Raman, both science and religion are lofty expressions of the human spirit. Yet tensions arise from differing faiths, frameworks, and truth claims. Raman contrasts a single belief mindset—monodoxy—with an anything-goes attitude. Monodoxy regards a system of ideas as the only acceptable orthodoxy (literally, “right belief”) to such a degree that differing views are dismissed or vilified. For example, scientism asserts that scientific methods are the only valid paths to truth. Religious fundamentalists believe that the words in certain sacred texts are literally true, and some even regard science as atheistic materialism that has led to such atrocities as the Holocaust. In contrast to monodoxy, the anything-goes attitude can result in indifference and even anarchy.

Raman enjoins us to replace such extremes with the doctrine of multiple perspectives, illustrated in the Jaina parable of the blind men and the elephant. Each blind man examines the elephant from his partial perspective and concludes that it is (1) a snake (squirming trunk), (2) a wall (broad and sturdy side), (3) a spear (round and smooth sharp tusk), (4) a tree (leg), or (5) a rope (swinging tail). When these multiple perspectives are combined, a better representation is achieved, but it also is important to recognize our limitations (in the parable, the men, though wise, are blind) before drawing conclusions.

The multiperspective approach characterizes Raman's well-referenced work. He examines in great detail the different criteria of science and of religion for achieving reliable knowledge (epistemology) and truth. What is truth? “There are no whole truths, all truths are half-truths,” according to philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1953, 14). For Raman, truth is multifaceted.

Raman gives a comprehensive overview of the world's belief systems and their theology, based on logic and reason. Some branches of Hinduism embrace God while others are atheistic. It is ironic that Raman includes Kurt Gödel's ontological proof of God after Gödel had proved the limitations of logical systems. Perhaps this is why Raman concludes, “The aesthetic beauty and spiritual grandeur of mathematics are like the soul-lifting magnificence of Art, Music, and Poetry. To contrive proofs of God through them is like using the piano to prove a Euclidean proposition” (p. 152).

From the beginning of civilization, all cultures have had their creation stories, which satisfy our human desire to know where we came from. Raman describes stories of the Babylonians (which are similar to Genesis 1), Chinese, Iroquois, Australians, Buddhists, Jainas, and Greeks.

Only in the last century has science shown evidence of how our whispering cosmos emerged. The priest George Lemaître was the first to propose, based on Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity, that the universe originated from a “primeval atom” in a hot big bang explosion of space-time. Lemaître's primeval atom is surprisingly similar to the Hindu story of the universe's emergence from a golden egg.

“The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless,” according to physicist Steven Weinberg (1977, 154). In response Raman notes, “The more we Fourier-analyze a Beethoven symphony, the more it seems musicless” (p. 29). Scientific analysis does not always lead to the beauty and meaning we experience in music and story.

In his insightful book, Raman shows how ultimate meaning and purpose can be found in spiritual poetry and art, which can articulate the awesome universe revealed by the continuing discoveries of science. The book contains many of Raman’s poems. Is the first line of his “Transcendence” reminiscent of Alexander Pope’s “Epitaph for Isaac Newton”?

“Transcendence”

by V. V. Raman

. . . Nature and her laws were occult in the dark,
Till consciousness came, and lit them with its spark.
How did this happen, for what purpose and whence?
Could the answer for this be in Transcendence? (p. 202)

“Epitaph for Isaac Newton”

by Alexander Pope

Nature and its laws lay hid at night.
God said: “Let Newton be.”
And all was light. ([1727] 2006, 242)

Medical science has increased our lifespan, and advances in agriculture have enabled the earth to support a record-breaking population. In the Introduction to biologist E. O. Wilson’s *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* (2006, 3), he wrote a letter to a Southern Baptist pastor saying, in effect: “I do not agree with you theologically, but we must work together to save our earth.” Similarly, Raman’s book is an appeal to all “the religions of the world to wake up to enlightened visions of tolerance,” which will enable them to work together with scientists and governmental leaders to save “the only spaceship that is ours to share. . . . Just as science without religion is simply heartless and unpoetic information, religion without scientific awakening could remain fantasy-based fulfillment.” (p. 338)

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