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A Daring Approach in Bridging God and Darwin by Francis S. Collins in *The Language of God*

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Abstract: Francis Collins, in his book *The Language of God* bravely addresses the issues of conflict between scientific observations and religious claims. As a dedicated Christian, who had faced challenges to his Christian faith, he emerges as a strong advocate for the creation of the universe by a personal God. Collins echoes the common understanding that the Moral Law, along with the development of language, awareness of self, and the ability to imagine the future makes us, human beings stand unique as the pinnacle of God's creation created in His own image. The purpose of this review is to analyse if Collins had succeeded in his endeavour of bringing a harmonization between science and faith. Though Collins makes a genuine effort in synthesizing many conflicting issues, he falls short in providing a convincing theory that would eventually harmonize science and faith.

Keywords: Harmonizing science and faith, Theistic Evolution (BioLogos), Darwin's Origin of Species, Moral Law, Big Bang.

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Introduction

Francis S. Collins, Director of the Human Genome Project, a physician, geneticist, evolutionist, humanitarian, and as witnessed in his *The Language of God* is a commanding opponent of intelligent design theory. Collins is also a staunch born-again Christian. His most recent work is the act of bringing together in the public's eye, a harmony between William Paley and Charles Darwin; a scholarly effort to bring about harmonization between faith and science. Collins' work is an outstanding deconstruction of intelligent design theory and also a reverent version of evolution as the expression of God's plan. *The Language of God* is, therefore, the latest account on "theistic evolution." In the next section, we would find Collins confirming the evidence for Evolution and supporting Darwinian Theory to a certain extent.

Proof of Evolution

The book deals with "creation science," or "intelligent design." It includes a clear, honest summary of the latest evidence for evolution, which also includes human evolution, exactly as mainstream scientific study provides it. These chapters are filled with fascinating charts and simple diagrams that confirm origin with modification. For instance, there is a chart that reveals the probability of finding a similar DNA sequence in the genome of other organisms in connection with the human DNA. The statistics are fascinating, especially if one starts with a randomly chosen, non-coding stretch of human DNA. In Chimpanzee DNA, the probability of a match is 98 per cent. 52 per cent with a dog, 40 per cent with rat, 4 per cent with chicken, and zero with the roundworm. One can never find a more convincing demonstration of relatedness and

origin than this. According to Collins, such data make sense only in light of evolution (Collins, 2006: 127).

Collins, in the second half of his book, reconciles science and faith by exploring three options; atheism/agnosticism, Intelligent Design, and theistic evolution

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(BioLogos). The primary argument of Collins in the chapter on atheism and agnosticism is against the claim of Richard Dawkins that a study of evolution and natural origins inherently leads one to atheism. He is against the idea that methodological naturalism necessitates philosophical naturalism. Collins gives a reasonable conclusion that it would be impossible to gain insight into the natural and the supernatural if they inhabit separate realms (Collins, 2006: 6). The powerful tool that Collins uses as a defence against Darwinian Evolutionary Theory is the universal law of Morality; the sense of right and wrong.

Moral Law: The Cornerstone of *The Language of God*

This distinguished scientist is an admirer and student of C. S. Lewis, the remarkable Oxford literary professor, essayist, and novelist who dedicated the latter part of his life to Christianity. Lewis was looked upon as one of the most talented of the 20th-century Christian apologists and as a brilliant writer. But he made no outstanding impression on theology or philosophy. The view that human life differs from animals in its universal moral law; the sense of right and wrong and an altruistic tendency towards all life forms is an idea that Collins borrows heavily from C. S. Lewis. For him, it is an impossibility to find an explanation from an evolutionary perspective as he explains that it must have been programmed by God. Other arguments

are minor in comparison. According to him, moral law is beyond biology and history. Though the author is well aware of disciplines such as evolutionary psychology, which mainly deals with altruism, a tendency or virtue not just present in human beings, he merely brushes them aside as “sociobiology.” The evidence of God is present in our longing to do the right thing. If a multitude of believers are convinced that God wants them to annihilate their fellow humans, that’s just their fault. Human behaviour has evolved, similar in the case of animal behaviour; but Collins makes an exception with morality (Collins, 2006: 200-201). Morality becomes his powerful tool to engage in battle against the Intelligent Design Theory of Darwin and his followers.

Intelligent Design Debate

Collins in his historically significant work on the Human Genome Project has mapped the genetic language, DNA, in which he is certain that God directs his living creation. The concept of genetic information is impressively taught to the lay public by the author. The proof for Darwin’s understanding of the evolutionary mechanism, Collins explains, may be observed in strange, nonfunctioning features of the genetic code. According to Darwin’s theory, there was no transcendent intelligence to guide this mechanism, which raises the question among believers, of what need was there of a God to command his creation. Obviously, this burns down to the Intelligent Design debate. For Darwin, an unguided and purely material mechanism of natural selection was advocated, which operated on random genetic variation. According to Intelligent Design, there is no positive evidence that this mechanism was guided. To summarize, the coding or the

software in the DNA just happened on its own (Collins, 2006: 100-107).

Argument from Personal Incredulity

Collins rejects the argument of Intelligent Design as an “argument from personal incredulity.” According to him, it is difficult to comprehend how such a mechanism, as propounded by Darwin could have produced certain aspects of

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biological information. This calls forth for an accomplished Designer to have done it. Some argue that Collins has misrepresented Intelligent Design, and it appears that he has not followed the latest scientific trends on the subject. A common misconception among the general public is that Darwin’s theory does not deny God as the creator. Evolution was programmed, just like a clock by the clockmaker which negates the idea of being guided all along. The problem with such thinking is that it comes into conflict with the mainstream Darwinian Theory. Collins cleverly moves away from this approach of proving God’s guidance in his creation. His focus shifts from the external to the internal; the presence of love in our hearts. This view is akin to the view of the famous philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose popular phrase is that he is filled with awe and wonder “the longer and more earnestly I reflect on them: the starry heavens without and the Moral Law within” (Goodreads, 2018). But this places Collins in the exact same situation which he rejects while arguing about the “Intelligent Design,” which is the “argument from personal incredulity” (Collins, 2006: 186).

Collins' take on "Moral Law" could be weighed on the same scales. The demonstration of God's being and caring; his favourite objection against "argument from personal incredulity" suffers under its own weight. For him, the source of ethics, charity, and altruistic attitude can come only from God. The DNA sequence is inadequate to offer explanations to the human characteristics, such as the knowledge of the Moral Law and the Universal search for God. According to the Darwinian Evolutionary Theory, particularly in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin propounded evolutionary progress to altruism. Collins' finds satisfaction in his clever way of bridging Darwin's evolutionary process with the Christian belief by stating that God is beyond the confines of time. Therefore, the unpredictability of evolution is, in fact, predictable from the perspective of God.

Collins' Questions to his Readers

At the end of the book, Collins addresses specific questions to readers who are theists and atheists. He formulates five questions as to why their acceptance is difficult:

1. If the hypocritical behaviour of those who profess belief turned one down? (Collins, 2006: 231)
2. If philosophical questions such as the problem of evil are a hindrance to one's faith? (Collins, 2006: 231)
3. Is it due to the lack of answers owing to the insufficiency of scientific tools that could explain the mystery of existence? (Collins, 2006: 232)

4. Does recognizing the possibility of God places one in a situation that might make one rethink one's life project and actions? (Collins, 2006: 232)
5. Ever considered thinking about the worldview from a spiritual perspective? (Collins, 2006: 232)

Collins is a remarkable man and a shrewd writer, but it is easy to sense where he is arriving at with these questions. The main purpose for him to write *The Language of God* was to make any sceptical reader who approached the book with one of these questions now begin their conversion to Christianity. Now coming to his questions, I would like to answer the first three, as for the rest, they are more subjective and depends on one's attitude and orientation towards life and I leave it to the readers of this review to formulate their own answers.

The Challenging Core Concepts

Coming to the first question, he is addressing times when religion has caused more harm than good or when Christians have not been what they profess to be. In his book, he describes human beings as rusty containers who simply carry the pure holy water of God, and warns not to evaluate Christ solely based upon the impressions of his followers. But, that is not the case everywhere. It may also be due to certain core values within the Christian Faith such as the Virgin Birth, the doctrine of Consubstantiation, Resurrection, the Second Coming of Christ, etc., which may not have sound appeal to reason and at times even appear incorrigible; like eating the body and blood of another person that sounds cannibalistic; or the events in the Bible that side too much on the realm of supernatural and do not follow the laws of physical nature like rising from the dead and walking on water.

The Problem of Evil

When talking about the problem of evil, he originally ascribes it to God, who is perfect; a God who created human beings who incurred imperfection through sin and became the cause of evil by his own volition. Unfortunately, Collin's handling of the problem of evil is inadequate. His theodicy is elementary. He is of the opinion that it would not be interesting if God were to reveal himself too clearly to human beings. Because it would result in a uniform belief. According to Collins, the necessity of evolution is the cause of evil, like crest and trough, constructive and destructive patterns change over time with necessary failures along the path. That contradicts God's omnipotence and goodness, which doesn't seem to be a matter of concern. One finds here a theistic evolution, but not a weak version with an uninvolved or a remote God, but on the contrary, the strongest version.

The Inadequacy of Science

Coming to the third question, Collins makes a clear distinction between the questions of "what" and "why". Science, according to him can answer the "what" questions but it struggles to answer the questions of "why" such as, why only earth? Why am I here? Scientists in the 19th century presumed that the universe was eternal. But this view changed with the rise of the Big Bang theory in the 20th century. The cosmologists of today commonly agree that the Universe had a beginning followed by a period of rapid expansion. In line with many other contemporaries, Collins offers the conclusion that behind the event of Big Bang and fine-tuning there is an intelligent cause. He employs the method of "Inference to the Best

Explanation” (IBE). He asks which offers the best explanation for the life forms to exist on earth despite there are billions of planets and even multiple universes with various constants exist. This cannot be explained as a matter of chance as the odds are against it, and moreover, the majority of celestial bodies are unobservable with the present technology (Collins, 2006: 76). He uses Ockham’s razor to deduce design; from which, the scientific world from further exploration and analysis would establish that the physical constants that so far are determined by experimental observation may not be accurate in their probable numerical value. Therefore, there may be something more profound that may not be known at the moment with the given resources. Science, according to Collins is always on the verge of change. So, the argument for design is not emphasized to merely fill a gap in our knowledge, but rather, based upon the present evidence. Intelligence could be the best explanation available according to him (Collins, 2006: 204-210).

The unconceivable machination of the physical laws of the universe, at the moment of the Big Bang, against incredible odds is a signpost for us to believe that we were pre-conceived ideas in the mind of God. Collins quotes Stephen Hawking, “It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create us” (Hawking, 2020). Collins’ take on the Big Bang is that there is no possibility that nature could have created itself.

Accepting science and religion is the most philosophical and fascinating way of penetrating into “the mystery of mysteries,” for Darwin, the puzzle of the origin of species.

Conclusion

Harmonization is a strong and continuing human need but it has not happened so far. Science, like any other branch of knowledge, is prone to changes, some aspects gradually, some instantly. Nothing could be right about the physical reality of things recorded or written some millennia or centuries before, then, or now. The same applies to the way of things right now, which may be proved absolutely wrong within the turn of this century or even sooner. *The Language of God*, intrigues and challenges anyone who has doubts about whether if, Darwinism may reasonably be encompassed alongside biblical faith. Collins, though offers an attractive, passionate, and sincere defence of his own Christian faith, argues that there is no need to choose between Science and God. Accepting them both, according to him, is the most philosophical and fascinating way of penetrating into “the mystery of mysteries,” for Darwin, the puzzle of the origin of species.

The book’s subtitle “Evidence for Belief,” suggests that there must be a mistake. Maybe it was meant to read, as certainly it should have been, “Evidence of Belief,” for that is what it culminates into. If we start the book with the hope that Collins would teach us something new about the harmony of the scientific facts of human life with the spiritual; then our hope is not

The students and readers interested in this topic owe their debt of gratitude to Francis Collins for deepening our thinking about issues that get easily brushed aside. One thing is certain, it is not possible to harmonize fully the paradoxes of theology and science in a book review, nor perhaps in any book that has yet to be written.

fully satisfied. Surprisingly, Collins did not try any other approach to harmonize science and faith, an approach more promising. Intelligent Design could be dismissed but with a rich variety of Theological and philosophical approaches. Collins could have offered a perspective that totally negates the random and unguided evolutionary approach while still endorsing Darwinism. If a meaningful result is the result of a meaningless process then it is highly likely that the meaninglessness was a mere camouflage for the goal which was already envisioned at the beginning of the entire process. The end justifies the means, the end result sheds light on the complete process.

It is doubtful whether it would be possible to reconcile science and faith without striking a compromise. But, the students and readers interested in this topic owe their debt of gratitude to Francis Collins for deepening our thinking about issues that get easily brushed aside. One thing is certain, it is not possible to harmonize fully the paradoxes of theology and science in a book review, nor perhaps in any book that has yet to be written.

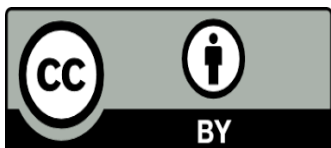
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