

## Views from the Pews: Faith and reason

For a complete explanation of any material thing, we need to have answers to four questions: (1) What is it made of, (2) what does it look like, (3) who made it, (4) for what purpose. Easy questions to answer about, say, a table. Philosophers will recognise a simplified version of Aristotle's Four Causes. An ancient insight, but still valid.

St Thomas Aquinas put together the pagan logic of Aristotle with the Christian vision to create the medieval world view. Their answers to (1) and (2) were based on their direct observation, interpreted through ideas we have since updated. Their answers to (3) and (4) became simply that God made and sustains the world directly and for his own purposes and for human benefit, as defined in Genesis 1. Philosophers call this 'metaphysical reasoning', because it depends on 'beyond physics', assertions that cannot be measured, but are compatible with both faith and science. But if the earth exists, and was made by God, then God must exist. Therefore, the foundation of classical theism is that faith is primarily based on *reason*.

Scientists still apply the first three questions about the world. Their answers are: (1) it is made from minerals and chemicals, which are (2) formed into molecular structures specifying potential energy and information capable of constructing rocks and planets, living animals, and plants, which are (3) organised by the ongoing processes of gravity, plate tectonics, and natural selection into the dynamic universe we live in. But scientists do not consider (4). Any questions of metaphysical purpose were ejected from science some 350 years ago as 'teleology', or 'Aristotelian Final Cause', and have been a taboo subject ever since.

Medieval people saw the universe as a secure, logical whole, governed from top to bottom by the supreme intelligence and goodness of God. They confidently looked to his purposes as the certain, unarguable reference point for all logical reasoning and standards of morality at lower levels. But the wholesale rejection of Final Cause by materialists raised new questions about whether God exists, argued through standardised analyses of statistical probability. From there the difference between right and wrong was reduced to human judgement, and faith to an optional choice derided by rational people, so thence to the 'war' between science and religion. In pursuit of a rational view of nature, materialists have destroyed the metaphysical basis of all reason. Classical theism offers a route back to solid ground.

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