

Taking the Nature of God Seriously

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Abstract

Once it is appreciated that it is not possible for an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God to exist, the important question arises: What does exist that is closest to, and captures the best of what is in, the traditional conception of God? In this paper I set out to answer that question. The first step that needs to be taken is to sever the God-of-cosmic-power from the God-of-cosmic-value. The first is Einstein's God, the underlying dynamic unity in the physical universe which physics seeks to depict by means of a true, unified, physical "theory of everything". Science has already achieved some theoretical knowledge of this God-of-cosmic-power. The second is what is of most value in our human world, and in the world of sentient life more generally. Having cut God in half in this way, our fundamental problem, intellectual and practical, becomes: How can the God-of-cosmic-value (as it is represented on earth at least) exist and best flourish within the God-of-cosmic-power? Or, in other words: How can what is of value associated with human life – and sentient life more generally – exist and best flourish within the physical universe?

Clearly acknowledging that this is our fundamental problem, in academic inquiry, and in all that we do, might help what is of value in life to flourish rather better than it does at present.

Instead of debating the question "Does God exist?", we should rather, I claim, debate "What is the nature of God?", it being presumed that God, whatever He or It may be, does exist. Or rather, more accurately, the proper, crucial question is: "What exists that is closest to, and captures the best of what is in, the traditional conception of God?". In this paper I set out to answer that question.¹

In tackling this question, I make two obvious, modest methodological assumptions. First, any answer to our question must, inevitably, be a conjecture, a hypothesis, which may or may not be true. Our task is to assess the relative merits of rival conjectures about the nature of God.

Second, I assume that reason, though of limitless scope, has only very limited powers. It cannot prove beliefs about the world, about reality, to be true. All it can do, at most, is to establish that some set of factual beliefs is false, because inconsistent. As Karl Popper tirelessly argued, even our best scientific theories cannot be verified or justified; they remain, for ever, conjectures which, at best, can be empirically falsified (or shown to be incompatible with empirical results).²

It is important to acknowledge that reason has only limited powers because, if one does not, it becomes reasonable to hold that reason has its limits, and all sorts of beliefs, including religious ones, are beyond the scope of reason, defy reason, and are legitimately held as articles of irrational faith - even if inconsistent! Interpret the powers of reason more modestly, as helping us to choose, fallibly, between rival *conjectures*, and

no thesis, not even a religious one concerning the nature of God, lies beyond the reach of reason.

We come now to our first conjecture about the nature of God. Christianity, Judaism and Islam, traditionally, hold God to be a Being who created the world and everything in it, a Being who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving, the source of all value, a Being who cares, profoundly, for the salvation of our souls.

But this traditional answer to the question "What is the nature of God?" cannot possibly be correct. It is refuted by the most elementary facts of human existence. Or, put another way, this conjecture concerning the nature of God plus elementary facts of human existence is inconsistent, and thus cannot possibly be true.

A Being who is all-knowing and all-powerful is knowingly in charge of natural phenomena, in particular those natural phenomena that cause human suffering and death as a result of earthquakes, drought, disease, accident. Even when people torture and kill other people, God is always a co-torturer and co-murderer, in that He decides the knife will not, at the last minute, turn into rubber, the bullet will not evaporate before it hits its target, poison will not, abruptly, become harmless. Day after day, hour after hour, such a Being would knowingly torture and murder innocent children (children dying of painful diseases) – to put the point at its most emotionally inflammatory, but correctly. This is flatly and starkly inconsistent with being all-loving. Knowingly torturing and killing billions of people cannot, in any circumstances whatsoever, be compatible with loving.

The traditional conjecture concerning the nature of God must be rejected on the grounds that it cannot be true because, in our world, given the most elementary tragic facts of human existence, it is refuted.³ This conclusion is inescapable once one child has suffered and died as a result of injury or disease – suffered and died as a result of the knowing actions of God (if He exists). A loving God would take care of His children in at least as humane a fashion as, let us say, a petty thief. No run-of-the-mill petty thief would torture his child to death over a period of days or months, a commonplace action for God (if He exists). God tortures and murders billions; indeed none of us escapes.

Nothing can excuse God for killing one child, let alone all of humanity, one after the other. And yet, over the centuries theologians, instead of emphasizing that this traditional conjecture concerning the nature of God is decisively refuted, have instead struggled to invent excuses for God's criminal acts. The excuses are dreadful, utterly immoral and hopeless, and yet they continue to be taken seriously today.⁴

"God must allow us to suffer and die, because He must allow us our freedom" runs one excuse. So, should we equally demand of human parents that if their child runs onto the road in front of an incoming lorry, they should not interfere, so that the child may have his freedom? "God is unknowable, and we human beings cannot know why God performs these monstrous acts" runs another. But if God is unknowable, one cannot also hold He is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving. And, in any case, nothing can excuse God murdering a child slowly and agonizingly by means of cancer, let us say. People living in the Soviet Union under Stalin are on record as endlessly excusing the frightful crimes of Stalin; these excuses are morally and intellectually dreadful (however excusable in the circumstances): how can any excuse, whatever it might be, be any better for God's far more dreadful crimes? "God lets us suffer so that we may grow spiritually" runs a third excuse. Are child molesters to be excused on similar grounds? Can we be so sure that suffering ennobles? Would not this argument imply that we do a person a

favour if we hurt him? "It is not God who does these dreadful things, but the Devil". If God is all-powerful and all-knowing, God has the power to stop the Devil; if He decides not to do so, then He is in part responsible for what goes on. "People suffer and die because of the sins of their ancestors." What an appallingly immoral argument! "God does not murder people; he acts as a surgeon, causing pain in order to cure: those who die live on in Heaven (at least those who deserve it do)." But a surgeon who caused unspeakable pain in a patient over weeks or months, without adequate explanation, and without anaesthetics, would be struck off the medical register, and would doubtless be prosecuted for assault to an extreme degree: even if God does cause us to suffer so that we may be released into the after-life, this might mean that God does not murder, but it does not remotely excuse His actions. (On these grounds, no true believer could be accused of murder either, of course!)

Religious communities should hang their heads in shame at producing such appalling, immoral arguments. Taking such arguments seriously, even if only to set about refuting them, is in itself to take part in a corporate dance of insanity.

Why has humanity, or so much of humanity, allowed itself to be so bamboozled? Because the need for God, in this traditional sense, is so potent, the fear of His non-existence so terrible. God's criminality is excused for the same reason, essentially, that Stalin's criminality was excused: the consequences of acknowledging that the crimes are real are too dreadful to contemplate. And this is backed up, in both cases, by a system of "education" which prompts one to believe that it is not God's (or Stalin's) criminality that is at issue, but one's own - any hint of a suspicion that God (or Stalin) is a monster instantly demonstrating one's own dreadful disposition for sin. How justified God (or Stalin) would be in punishing such suspicion, and how merciful God (or Stalin) so often proves to be in not bringing down instant punishment on those who so sin.

Granted that the conjecture that God is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving is untenable, the question arises: What do we put in its place? What should we conjecture to exist that is as close as possible to the traditional conjecture about the nature of God, and which captures as much as possible of what is best about the traditional conception of God?

One possibility, of course, is that God, far from being loving, is thoroughly evil. But this does not seem to do justice to all the wonderful things that there are in existence. What is so confusing is that life is such a mixture of joy and horror, the extraordinary, the prosaic and the unspeakable.

Perhaps God is confused, schizophrenic even, a dreadful mixture of love and hate? But this does not seem to do justice to the majesty of the universe, its intricate splendour. Could this have been created by a neurotic?

One might take the thing further, by postulating two equally powerful gods, God and the Devil, one good, the other evil, locked in terrible combat, humanity somehow the field of battle.⁵ But if this really were the case, there would be, one feels, more disruptive explosions in the natural world, as the two cosmic Beings fought out their mighty, eternal battle.

Another possibility, of course, is that God is all-loving, but lacks power. He sees the terrible things that go on, but is powerless to intervene. It is a version of this hypothesis that I wish to defend. As it stands, however, it is incomplete: nothing is said about the nature of that which *does* have power, which *is* the cause of natural phenomena, and thus

the cause of so much of our suffering.

None of these conjectures seem to capture what is best in the traditional conjecture about the nature of God. This traditional conjecture has two great merits. First, it asserts that *something* exists which is all-powerful in that it is, in some sense, responsible for everything that occurs, and thus such that everything may be explained and understood in terms of it. There is, in other words, *something* in existence which renders all phenomena, in some sense, intelligible or comprehensible. We might call this *something* "the God-of-cosmic-power". Second, the traditional conjecture asserts that *something* exists that is of supreme value. We might call this "the God-of-cosmic-value".

The traditional conjecture fuses these two into one entity, the traditional God. But it is just this fusing that is the source of the problem. That which is all-powerful cannot be an all-knowing, all-loving Being, and thus a Being of supreme value: such a Being would be a monster. In order to arrive at a conjecture about the nature of God which captures as much as possible about what is best in the traditional conception, the essential step we need to take is to sever the God of cosmic power from the God of cosmic value. God must be cut in half – an act I now perform.

The God of cosmic power is utterly impersonal. It is that impersonal *something*, whatever It may be, that exists everywhere, eternally and unchanging, throughout all phenomena, and determines (perhaps probabilistically) the way phenomena unfold. It is what theoretical physics seeks to discover. It is Einstein's "God", eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, but utterly impersonal, an It, not a conscious Being.⁶ It is that physical property of the fundamental physical entity, the fundamental physical field or whatever, that determines the way in which that which changes *does* change. It is what corresponds physically to the true unified theory of everything that physicists seek to discover.⁷

It is this cosmic It that is responsible for all our suffering. And precisely because It is an It, incapable of knowing and feeling, It can be forgiven the terrible things that It does. If It knew that the laws of nature, working themselves out as usual, meant, in this particular case, horrible suffering and death from cancer for this child, agonizing burns for this person, burial in rubble for that person, the It would at once bend a law of nature here and there, so that these ghastly tragedies can be avoided. But this cosmic It has no mind, no understanding, no awareness: it goes blindly on Its way, incapable of knowing anything, and therefore can be forgiven.

But what of the other half of the traditional God, the God-of-value? This, I suggest, is what is best in us. It is that potentially or actually aware and loving self within us that sees, feels, knows and understands, at least partially, and either *does* intervene to prevent disaster, or is powerless to do so. The God-of-value is the soul of humanity, embedded in the physical universe, striving to protect, to care for, to love, but all too often, alas, powerless to prevent human suffering. It is all that is of value in the experienced world. More generally, it is what is of most value, actually and potentially, in the world of sentient life.⁸

Cutting God in half may solve problems that haunt orthodox Theism, but it does so at the expense of creating an immense new problem. Having chopped God into two, into the God-of-cosmic-power and the God-of-cosmic-value, we are at once confronted by the problem: How are the two halves of the bisected God to be put together again? How is it possible for the God-of-cosmic-value to exist and best flourish embedded in the God-of-cosmic-power – the physically comprehensible universe? *How can we understand our*

human world, embedded as it is within the physical universe, in such a way that justice is done to both the richness, meaning and value of human life on the one hand, and what modern science tells us about the physical universe on the other hand?

This problem (created by cutting God in half) is, quite simply, the most general and fundamental problem confronting humanity. It is a *philosophical* problem – indeed, *the* fundamental problem of philosophy: How is it *possible* for our human world, imbued with sensory qualities, consciousness, free will, art, science, and much else of value, to exist embedded in the physical universe? (This embraces, as subordinate issues, the mind-body problem, the problem of free will, problems of knowledge, of perception, of the philosophy of science, of biology and evolution, even problems of moral and political philosophy, problems of language, culture, history, abstract entities, time, space and causation.) The above is also a fundamental problem of *knowledge* and *understanding* much more generally – the basic problem of science: What is the nature of the physical universe? How precisely do features of our human world, such as perceptual qualities, consciousness, and life more generally, fit into the physical universe? The problem can also be regarded as a fundamental problem of *living*, of *action*: How can we help what is of value in existence, actually and potentially, to flourish? What do we need to do, as individuals, so that what is of value to us may flourish? And what do we need to do, collectively, socially and politically, so that what is of value to people everywhere, to humanity, may flourish? The problem of fitting the God-of-value into the God-of-power (the underlying unified It of the physical universe) is not only a conceptual problem, a problem of knowledge and understanding; it is also a *practical* problem, the most general, fundamental practical problem that there is: to help the God-of-value, what is of most value in us, to exist in the physical universe in ways that are less painful and constrained, more exuberant and joyful, more just, peaceful and noble, than at present. Once we recognize that the God-of-value is what is of most value, actually and potentially, in us, in our world of human experience, it becomes our most profound religious obligation to help what is of value to flourish in the real world.

The outcome of treating the traditional God thesis with a modicum of intellectual honesty is that we are led straight to the most fundamental problems of knowledge, understanding and living that there are. The character of these fundamental problems of thought and life is brought sharply into focus. And as a result, much is changed. Academic inquiry is transformed. It becomes a fundamentally *religious* enterprise: to improve our knowledge and understanding of how the cosmic God-of-value fits into the cosmic God-of-power and, above all, to help the former to flourish within the tight embrace of the latter. Education is transformed. All education becomes religious in character. It has, as a basic task, to explore aspects of the fundamental problem: How can the God-of-value fit into, and flourish within, the God-of-power? Politics is transformed. It too becomes religious, in that it seeks to implement policies which help the God-of-value to flourish inside the God-of-power. Our lives are transformed. Personal life too becomes religious in that the basic task is to discover how we can help that part of the God-of-value associated with our life to flourish in the cosmic God-of-power. The task, of course, is somehow to get the God-of-power so to act that the God-of-value flourishes. Even theoretical physics is transformed, in that it becomes a religious quest, that part of science devoted to discovering the precise nature of the cosmic God-of-power. The traditional division between the religious and the secular is annihilated. The secular is

entirely engulfed by the religious.

These, at least, are some of the changes that would be brought about were we to take seriously and act on the implications of the simple idea that putting the two halves of the bisected God together again is indeed our fundamental problem of thought and life. Much is lost if we merely discard the God conjecture altogether. Believers in the traditional God have much to learn from bringing some intellectual integrity to religion and to ideas of God – and non-believers have much to learn from this as well.⁹

At this point it may be objected: But why continue to talk of God at all? Is it not far better to get rid of God altogether, and put our faith, straightforwardly, in science and humanism unadorned with irrelevant theological trappings? And in any case is not all this stuff about chopping God in half very old news? Did not Friederich Nietzsche declare God to be dead long ago in the 19th century?¹⁰ In cutting God in half, am I not merely repeating what Nietzsche and others did long ago, in killing God off? How, in any case, could God survive being brutally cut into two pieces in the way I have recommended?

God is too important a notion to discard. It is a focus for fundamental issues. What, ultimately, is the explanation for everything? What is the ultimate purpose of life? What is ultimately of value in existence? These are among the questions the traditional God hypothesis seeks to answer. And this answer – the idea of God – has had a profound, long-standing impact on our culture and social world. We should not merely discard the notion, declare the whole idea to be defunct, or God to be dead. Rather, in the face of the devastating objections to the traditional God hypothesis, we should do what I have indicated: *improve* the thesis so that it overcomes these devastating objections (while retaining as much of what is of value in the traditional thesis as possible). This serves at least two purposes (there are others as we shall see).

First, it holds out the hope of keeping alive an awareness of ideas and problems at a fundamental level in our culture. As I shall indicate below (and as I have argued in some detail in Maxwell 2010), abandoning – instead of *improving* – the traditional God hypothesis has had damaging consequences for a range of endeavours and institutions, from science and the humanities to education, ideas about what is of value in existence, and our capacity to solve global problems intelligently, humanely and effectively. If God had been cut decisively in half in the way I am recommending long ago in the 17th century, let us say, this might not automatically have cured these ills, but it would have helped.

Secondly, *improving* rather than abandoning the traditional God thesis provides believers with an open road along which they may travel, rather than leaving them stuck in a cul-de-sac. If, in our culture, there are clear indications as to how the God hypothesis can be improved so that it overcomes the devastating objections it faces, and becomes intellectually and morally acceptable – even fruitful – this is something individuals and groups can avail themselves of to learn, to improve their religious ideas and lives. But if our culture does no more than confront one with the stark choice, “hold onto an intellectually and morally bankrupt idea of God, or abandon the whole idea of God altogether”, the chances are that believers will opt for the former choice, since otherwise they must simply abandon their fundamental beliefs. As I have said, the believer is left stuck in a cul-de-sac.

There is another option. It is to cease to take God seriously, soften and

sentimentalize Him, shroud Him in metaphor and double-speak, so that nothing that is said is to be taken at face value. As a result, religious belief is turned into something subjective and intangible, beyond the scope of reason and criticism. But this option is perhaps even more intellectually and morally disreputable than that of holding on to traditional Theism.¹¹ Ultimate questions about the nature of the world and the purpose of life deserve to be treated with clarity and intellectual integrity. Doing that enhances the possibility of learning, of improving our ideas and even, perhaps, our lives. This is sabotaged when clarity and transparent content are converted into metaphor and double-speak.

The chief reasons, then, for taking seriously and adopting the conjecture about the nature of God that I have indicated are: (a) it does better justice to what is best in the traditional conception of God than rival conjectures; (b) it is more likely to be true than rival conjectures (so that God, in this sense, does exist); (c) adopting this conjecture focuses attention on our fundamental problem, in thought and life and, as a result, may enable us to help what is of value in life to flourish in the real world rather better than we are doing at present.

I conclude with some remarks about the last point. Elsewhere,¹² I have argued, in great detail, that science, and academic inquiry more generally, are damagingly irrational, in a wholesale, structural way, when judged from the standpoint of helping us make progress towards as good a world as possible. This is sabotaging efforts to create a better world. We urgently need to bring about a revolution in our schools and universities so that they come to seek and promote wisdom, and do not just concern themselves with the acquisition of knowledge. The argument for this academic revolution – in my view absolutely decisive, but as yet largely ignored – is independent of the bisected God conjecture I have put forward here. Nevertheless, adopting this conjecture concerning the nature of God would powerfully reinforce the case for the urgently needed academic revolution. Let me explain.

The argument for the academic revolution begins with science. Scientists and non-scientists alike take for granted that the basic intellectual aim of science is truth, the basic method being to assess theories impartially with respect to evidence. According to this orthodox view, no thesis about the world may be accepted as a part of scientific knowledge independently of evidence, let alone in violation of evidence.

But this orthodox view, which I have called *standard empiricism*, is untenable. In physics, only unified theories are ever accepted even though one can always formulate endlessly many disunified rival theories tailored to fit the facts better, and thus be even more empirically successful. (A unified theory is one that attributes the same laws to all the phenomena to which the theory applies.¹³) This persistent acceptance of unified theories only, in the teeth of endlessly many empirically more successful disunified rivals, means that physics makes a persistent, substantial assumption about the nature of the universe as a part of scientific knowledge: there is some kind of dynamic unity in nature. This assumption is substantial, highly influential and profoundly problematic: it needs, therefore, to be made explicit within physics so that it may be critically assessed, so that rival versions may be considered, in an attempt to improve the assumption that is accepted. Rigour demands that this be done. Thus a substantial thesis about the universe *is* (implicitly) accepted as a part of scientific knowledge, and that suffices to demolish standard empiricism. The basic intellectual aim of science is not truth *as such*; it is rather

truth *presupposed to be unified*, or explanatory. In ignoring endlessly many disunified theories empirically more successful than accepted theories, physics presupposes that the universe is, in some way, physically comprehensible (i.e. such that the true physical theory of everything is unified), the aim being the highly problematic one of discovering, in the form of a testable theory, in what way, precisely, the universe *is* physically comprehensible.

In order to give ourselves the best chance of improving the substantial assumption

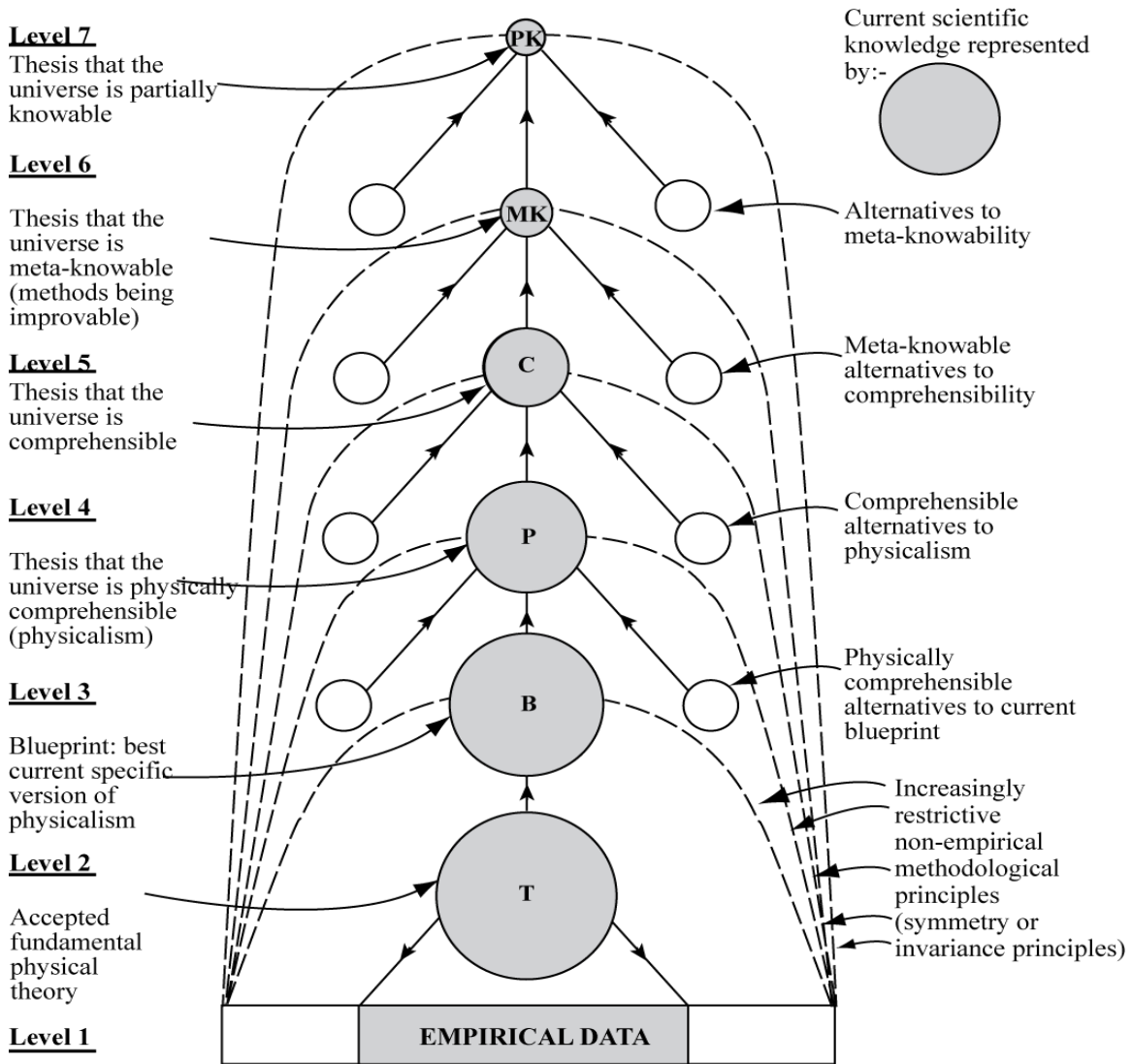


Figure 1: Aim-Oriented Empiricism

made by physics concerning unity in nature, science needs to represent this assumption in the form of a hierarchy of assumptions, each assumption in the hierarchy becoming less

substantial, and more nearly such that its truth is required for science, or the acquisition of knowledge, to be possible at all: see figure 1. In this way, a framework of relatively stable assumptions and associated methods (aims and methods), high up in the hierarchy, is created within which much more substantial and problematic assumptions and associated methods can be proposed, revised, and improved. We need, in short, to adopt and put into practice a new conception of science, a new kind of science, which improves its aims and methods (low down in the hierarchy) as it proceeds. As we improve our scientific knowledge, we improve our knowledge about how to improve knowledge, the nub of

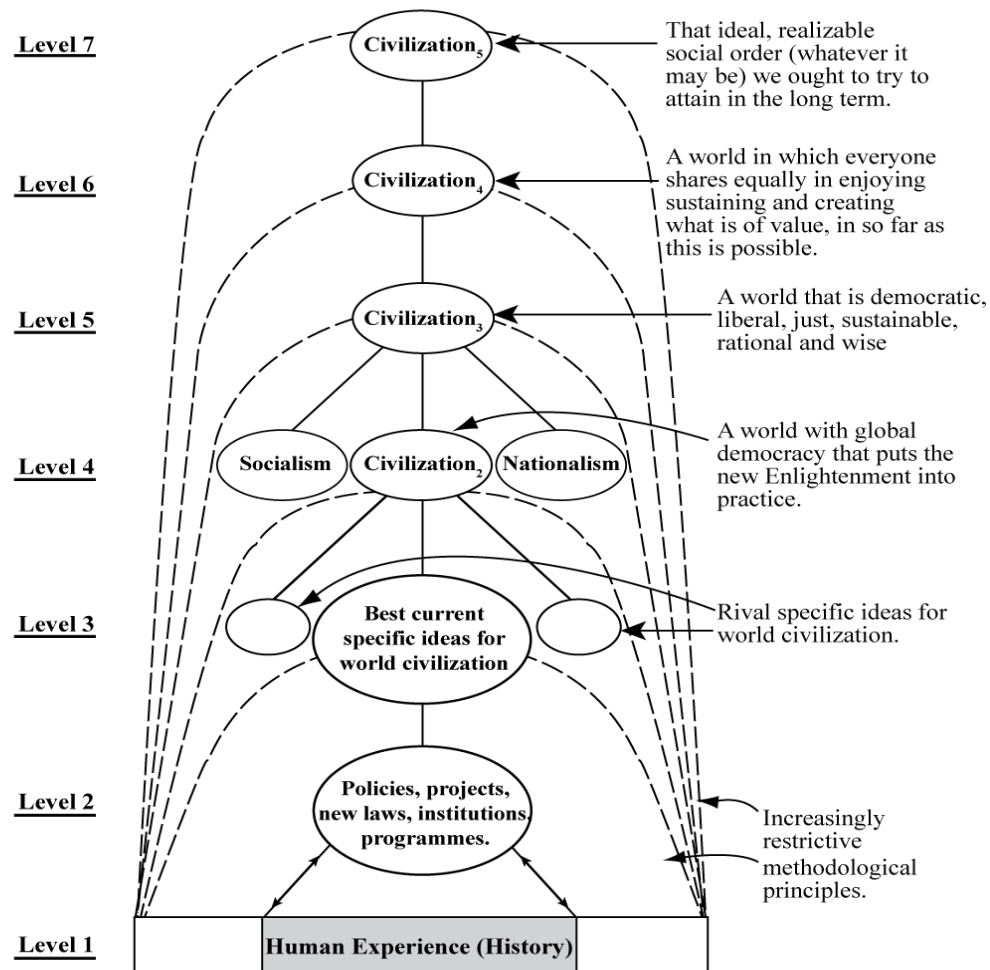


Figure 2: Hierarchical Social Methodology Generalized from Science

scientific rationality, and the key to the immense intellectual success of science. I have called this view, depicted in figure 1, *aim-oriented empiricism*.¹⁴

Aim-oriented empiricism has one startling implication for the bisected God conjecture I have put forward above. Not only does theoretical physics seek to discover the nature of the God-of-power. According to aim-oriented empiricism, physics has already

obtained knowledge of the nature of the God-of-power. It is that underlying unity in nature, which determines (along with variable instantaneous states of affairs) how phenomena occur in space and time. Science has already established that the God-of-power exists, when construed in this way, insofar as science can establish anything theoretical at all.¹⁵

This new conception of science has profound implications – I have argued – for all that we do, for all areas of life.¹⁶ For it is not just in physics that the aim (of discovering in what precise way the universe is comprehensible) is profoundly problematic. In life too, all too often, our aims are problematic, either because they are not realizable, or because they are not desirable, or both. Above all, the aim of creating a better world is profoundly problematic, for all sorts of obvious reasons. Here, above all, we need to put into practice an aim-improving methodology generalized from the aim-improving meta-methods of science. In seeking to make progress towards as good a world as possible we need to put into practice the hierarchical *methodology* depicted in figure 2, arrived at by generalizing aim-oriented empiricism, depicted in figure 1. The proper, basic task of social inquiry and the humanities, I have argued, is to help humanity build something like this aim-improving methodology into all our other institutions besides science, into the fabric of personal, social and global life. We might, as a result, get into social, economic and political life something of the progressive success which is such a striking feature of natural science. Social inquiry, properly construed, on this view, is social *methodology* or social *philosophy* not, primarily, social *science*.

The upshot, I argue, is a new kind of academic inquiry which gives intellectual priority to tackling problems of living, problems of knowledge and technological know-how emerging out of and feeding back into, problems of living (individual, social, global). The basic intellectual aim becomes, not just knowledge, but rather *wisdom* – wisdom being the capacity to realize what is of value in life for oneself and others (thus including knowledge). *Wisdom-inquiry* (as I have called this new kind of inquiry) would be rationally devoted to helping us realize what is of value in life in a way in which knowledge-inquiry (what we have at present) is not.

What does all this have to do with the bisected God conjecture put forward above? Simply this. Once the bisected God conjecture is accepted, it becomes immediately apparent that our fundamental problem is indeed to discover how what is of value can exist and best flourish in the physical universe. This is our fundamental problem in life, and also the fundamental problem of academic inquiry. But a kind of academic inquiry devoted to the pursuit of *knowledge* (as academia is, by and large, at present) is horribly ill-equipped to tackle this problem. Knowledge-inquiry, of that type, leaves out half of the problem – the half concerned with what is of value and how it is to be realized. If academia is to help us improve our ideas about what is of value in life – if it is to help us improve our aims and methods in life, and thus our lives – it is vital that wisdom-inquiry is put into practice, and the kind of aim-improving methodology depicted in figure 2. Acknowledging that putting the bisected God together *is* our fundamental problem in life gives powerful support to wisdom-inquiry, and thus to the institutional means for humanity to learn how to make progress towards as good a world as possible.

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Notes

¹ This question is explored in much greater detail than I can manage here in Maxwell (2010).

² See Popper (1963) or, at a more technical level, Popper (1959). See also these works and Popper (1966, ch. 24) for his defence of critical rationalism – the doctrine that the task of reason is to try to improve conjectures by means of *criticism*.

³ Strangely enough, Richard Dawkins (2006) is rather dismissive of this decisive reason for rejecting the hypothesis that the traditional God exists. “it is” Dawkins remarks “an argument only against the existence of a good God. Goodness is no part of the *definition* of the God hypothesis, merely a desirable add-on.” And he goes on to remark “it is childishly easy to overcome the problem of evil. Simply postulate a nasty God” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 135). But no Christian or Muslim who believes in the traditional God can conceivably calmly acknowledge that God may not be so good after all, and carry on as before, as Christian or Muslim, believing in a nasty God. Goodness is not an optional add-on: it is an absolutely essential ingredient of the traditional God. The manifest monstrosity, on a cosmic scale, of an all-powerful, all-knowing God (should He exist) is a devastating and lethal objection to the traditional God conjecture. As Stendhal said “The only excuse for God is that he does not exist” (quoted in Hicks, 1985, p. xi).

⁴ The endeavour of attempting to excuse God’s criminality even has a name, coined by Leibniz: *Theodicy*. Rarely does one even find the problem stated correctly. It is usually stated as the problem of understanding how God, being infinitely good, can allow evil to occur, and not as the problem of how an infinitely good God could *himself perform* endlessly many monstrously evil acts, torturing and maiming millions (if not billions in that we all suffer to a greater or lesser extent

from natural causes during our lives) and murdering billions, in that we all die from natural causes, even those killed by their fellow human beings. For exercises in Theodicy see: Hicks (1985); McCord (1999); van Inwagen (2006); Swinburne (2003). For a compilation of writings on “the problem of evil”, from Plato via Medieval times to the 20th century see Larrimore (2001).

⁵ This seems to have been the view of Georges Bernanos, the novelist: see, for example, Bernanos (1948).

⁶ See A. Einstein (1973, pp. 36-52).

⁷ Strictly speaking, it is what corresponds physically to the true unified theory of everything (the God-of-cosmic-power) plus variable physical states of affairs which, together, at any instant, determine (perhaps probabilistically) subsequent physical states of affairs. For more detailed discussion of what it means to assert that the God-of-power exists, in the sense indicated, see my (1998, especially ch. 4).

⁸ For more detailed discussions of the nature of the God-of-value, see my (1984, ch. 10; 2010, ch. 4).

⁹ It may be objected that there is nothing unique about my proposed solution to the so-called “problem of evil”. I have already acknowledged this to be the case. One could imagine God is an all-powerful, all-knowing Being who is utterly monstrous. Or one could imagine God is an all-knowing, all-loving being who has lost control of his creation – the universe – and is thus very far from being omnipotent. What I claim for my proposed solution – the Bisected God – is that it uniquely (a) preserves more of what is of value in the traditional God than any rival proposal, (b) is an intellectually and morally worthy notion, a *religiously* worthy notion – unlike the traditional notion, (c) is such that there are good grounds for holding that God, in this sense, the Bisected God, does exist, and (d) the thesis that God, in this sense, does exist, is potentially extraordinarily fruitful, for both thought and life. A religious view based on accepting the Bisected God is, on these grounds, far more worthy, intellectually, morally and religiously, than the really very disreputable views of traditional Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

¹⁰ Nietzsche (2006), section 125.

¹¹ This option has been devastatingly criticized by Bartley (1962).

¹² See Maxwell (1984; 2010). For a summary of the argument see Maxwell (2007).

¹³ For a detailed exposition and defence of this conception of theoretical unity see Maxwell (1998, ch. 4; 1984, 2nd ed., ch. 14, section 2).

¹⁴ For more detailed formulations of this argument against standard and for aim-oriented empiricism, see my (1984, ch. 9, and especially ch. 14 of the 2007 2nd edition). See also my (1998) and (2010, ch. 5).

¹⁵ See my (2010, ch. 5).

¹⁶ See works referred to in note 12.