How do you understand the relationship(s) between science and your religious or secular tradition? – Dr. Randy Isaac

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Randy Isaac: 00:19

Well, I see science and faith as being complementary ways of understanding our universe. Science is a way of observing the universe through our senses. Sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. We can use some fairly sophisticated instruments, but nevertheless, we take a set of observations and we put that together in a structure that helps us understand it in a consistent, coherent way with which we call the laws of nature. Faith enables us to go beyond that. We go beyond what we can see with a census. It opens the door to things that transcends the census, the possibility of the supernatural. But more than that, it provides a framework of value and meaning for the things that we observe. When we do science, we cannot really claim to know everything, we can claim only that we can observe certain things that are available to us through our senses. But with faith, we can see another entire dimension. (01:31) Well, I think the science of human origins is a particularly good example of how science and faith relate. Now, some people like Stephen Jay Gould would advocate a non-overlapping magisterial approach. Now, if by that he means that there's no interaction and there's no relationship between faith and science, then I would disagree with him. On the other hand, if what he really means is that there are different domains of questions that they're asking, but yet have a strong interaction with each other, because each of them are describing the same universe, then I think there is some merit to thinking about this. And the human origins is a particularly good
example. (02:16) The science that we have allows us to understand the biological history of humans. It allows us to understand our human relationship to our environment, the relationship of humans to other species. It describes that physical and biological relationship. Now, faith brings in a whole new dimension here. It adds that spiritual dimension. It adds a dimension of value and meaning that you cannot observe with our senses. Now the two are definitely related. And so it's hard to claim that these would be a non-overlapping because they definitely play on each other. The science provides a calibration, if you will. A leveling field saying, "This is the biological history and the faith needs to recognize that and incorporate that in its understanding." At the same time, faith provides that perspective that helps science to understand the meaning of what it observes. (03:22) So in this case, our faith helps us understand the science and how it feeds into our perspectives of each other. It leads to our cultural perspective of our worth, of how we treat each other. And if you look at our history of the last 200 years, the ideas of human nature have played a major role in our perspective. Some good and some very bad, there are some notorious examples of how racial prejudice was justified and rationalized by a particular view of human origins. Today I think an appropriate of view biologically is that we really are a united human race. We have a human race that is very tightly linked. We're all very close relatives. Our most distant relative species is quite distant from us. And so there is a perspective of unity that is biological. Faith brings us another whole dimension in terms of our common creation in the image of God, which compliments that particular biological view. So we have different angles here that are in harmony that shows us the unity of the human race. And all too often, we have seen various times in our
history where subpopulations have been described as having different origins, and that has been used to justify a highly inappropriate treatment of different humans. (05:02) There are indeed a lot of challenges in harmonizing science and faith, simply because our understanding both of science and of faith is incomplete, and we continue to learn. Some of the faith traditions indicate that we have a common ancestry of a single couple. Scientifically, the genetic sequencing indicates that our ancestral population was really never significantly less than a few thousand. We have a big challenge in integrating these. And to my way of thinking, there's no easy way of doing that. This continues to be a challenge that we need to put together. There are also those who advocate the evolutionary origin of humans, indicating that humans are here by accident and not on purpose. This is a challenge because it's quite a specific contradiction to the faith perspective that God planned and intended humans to being on earth. So a huge challenge is how do we find compatibility between this, "Unguided, evolutionary history, together with a purposeful and an intentional creation by God.  (06:35) These are just some of the challenges. Also in the Christian community, we have the perspective of Paul in Romans, where he views the unity of the human race as deriving from Adam and Eve, and that this is a central part of the theology. We need to struggle with that. Those aren't easy questions to answer. So there are plenty of challenges that are still remaining for us. It is not an obvious and easy one that comes together. In the whole, however, I believe that the core foundation of God's creation and of our unity as a human race are still basic bedrock pillars that I think we can build upon.
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