



SHERBORNE

INAUGRAL SOUTH WEST RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY SYMPOSIUM:

On 11th June Kings Taunton played host to the first of potentially many Religion and Philosophy Symposiums.

In the most literal sense a symposium must entail coming together to drink but with quantum physics and causality on the agenda sobriety was more conducive to the nature of the occasion. This enticing subject matter was delivered expertly by the Reverend Professor Keith Ward. His given topic, *The Interface between Religion and Science*, provided the opportunity for frank discussion. Pleasingly, this was not confined to the somewhat weary area of whether religion has a place in modern society but rather focused on whether the fundamental concepts of science and religion are co-dependent or even different at all.

In a provocative mood, Professor Ward argued his case as a religious scientist by claiming that theories of the Multiverse lend themselves to an idea of a unifying creator. In fact, he argued they could not exist without such a concept. He disputed the absolute assertion of many scientists that in controlled environments outcomes can be predicted. Throughout history there are clearly observable "random" phenomena which have affected our perceptions of the world. He claimed that if we take the attitude that we can specifically control outcomes of experiments we are essentially practising ignorance and negating what is presently unknown.

Professor Ward was not concerned with impressing his own theory of the universe upon his audience and as such he managed to walk the line between theist and physicist without sounding evangelistic. His passion for the subject was astounding nonetheless, and his legitimate worry that religion was being dismissed as a superstitious folly by an increasingly cynical society was heartfelt. He defined a philosopher's job as not answering questions but more outlining possible answers. It is straightforward to place restraints on possibilities if we succumb to the solipsistic view that life no longer contains mystery. To understand consciousness as a neurological phenomenon is an extension of this narrow-mindedness; he claimed that there is "no evidence" to suggest that we should understand existence in terms of the brain which is essentially an interpretative device rather than a creative one.

His ideas and delivery were intended to incite, several derogatory remarks concerning Richard Dawkins (who was continually referred to as merely "the zoologist") and Aristotle (whose every theory has been apparently disproved) drew knowing nods of approval but there were signs of dissent from others. Dawkins, he claimed, was foolish to create a theory of the universe from a Darwinian standpoint as the existence of the universe encompasses so much more than just the survival instincts of animals. The merits of this criticism, like all other subjects he covered, were happily left open to debate for the symposium and although there was a slight air of uncertainty (especially in the wake of such an erudite soliloquy) a healthy discussion followed the presentation.

The objective of the symposium remains, much like life itself, uncertain. However, if such an event can be made available to a greater number of people and an inquisitive audience can be assembled again then the possibilities for discovery can be as endless as Professor Ward suggested.

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