

FORWARD

In Search of Understanding

Much of this book pertains to the search for understanding. There seems to be a curiosity gene that runs through all living creatures. What parent has not been frustrated by a young child's persistent, and seemingly endless, string of whys? It is often dismissed as a ploy to drive their parents insane, rather than the instinctive search for meaning. Unfortunately, these question and answer periods are too often ended when the parent's frustration limit is reached and the child senses extreme irritation and realizes the consequences of continuing. Pity!

The question and search for an answer may be a primary function of all life. For example, a fundamental question that must be processed by even the simplest of creatures is "Is this food?" The search for the answer and ways of improving the accuracy of that answer led to the survival of the individual and ultimately survival of the species. It seems that once a question and answer structure is created, it develops a life of its own. All answers produce more questions, and curiosity grows with the complexity of the species until the creature ponders, where did the universe come from? What existed before the beginning? How does it work? Where is it going? Why? Always, why? Maybe the ultimate question is "Why ask why?"

The problem with understanding is that as it advances it gains a power of its own. The unbridled mind is often a threat to social order. The belief that the forbidden fruit grew on the tree of "truth and knowledge" was no coincidence. I remember being admonished as a small child that I shouldn't think certain thoughts or I would lose my faith. Recalling the trouble I got into for losing my coat in post depression years, my imagination could hardly contain the level of retribution meted out for the loss of a gift from God. Further inquiry revealed that the punishment for my loss of faith would be the loss

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of heaven. Having never experienced heaven, it was described to me as a place, where I would be in the presence of god and my every need would be met instantaneously. As a young child, I failed to see the value of being in the presence of god. It seemed like watching a one-channel television without a remote control or even audio. Boring! So, I hung my hat on "the filling of my needs" and stayed in line. A small mind controlled.

Whereas, my mind chafed occasionally at the boundaries, for the most part it stayed under control for nearly 35 years. This was a good thing, for I had neither the wisdom nor the knowledge to face life without the structure provided by organized religion. As I matured it became more apparent that having my every need instantaneously filled would also be boring. The prospects of losing boredom for eternity didn't seem that disheartening. So I decided to take a chance that this all knowing and loving god would not be that upset about my quest for understanding, for after all, truth should be impervious to scrutiny. So, I explored those forbidden thoughts and sure

enough as promised -- I did lose my faith, however, a stronger one that is based more on facts than mythology, replaced it and serves me better.

This book is essentially scientific philosophy based on my training and background in scientific thought. The book is an outgrowth of my wandering mind over the last 40 years. These mental wanderings have provided me a more understandable and comforting universe in which to live. A great deal of that comfort and understanding comes not only from the thoughts but my path through life as well. I have refrained from sharing many of these thoughts in the past because I am aware of the danger contained in them, especially taken out of context or given to an unsophisticated mind. A little bit of knowledge has been proven a dangerous thing many times in the course of recorded history. However, the consequences of repression may be greater than expression. A thought lost or delayed may alter the development of the universe. Without Copernicus's thoughts, we may not be where we are today. My thoughts may not be as revolutionary as Copernicus's thoughts but they are valid and it is not for Copernicus or I to determine the path of evolution.

You will find religion drifting in and out of this discussion. History shows a direct connection between god and understanding. If the human mind cannot comprehend a natural process, it attributes it to superhuman intervention. This provides a measure of comfort until understanding has developed to the point where the thought makes sense and fits comfortably into what is known. Thus, god evolves as understanding grows. For example, early in human existence there were many things more powerful than humans. Thus, early cultures treated large predators as superhuman creatures and in some ways they were. They certainly were stronger, faster, and had better sense of smell and hearing. As understanding grew, and humans developed methods to control various animals the creatures lost their divinity and more remote items, like the sun or the moon became gods to fill the need for answering the unanswerable. Eventually as humans became more powerful, god took on human characteristics.

The relationship between god and understanding is so direct that a good definition of god may be, "that which explains the unexplainable." In other words, where human understanding ends, god begins. For example, the presence of the rainbow was attributed to god's promise to Noah until Isaac Newton showed 500 years ago that white light consisted of a mixture of colored light, which could be split into its individual components by using a prism. This explained the rainbow without the intervention of god, increased understanding and changed how many individuals perceived god.

Understandably, the process of explaining natural phenomenon based on science rather than religion is accompanied by great social and personal upheaval; for example, Galileo's persecution by the Catholic church for teaching that the earth was not the center of the universe. It also implies that since each individual has a different level of understanding, each individual then must have a different god. However, it is not the only function of god to explain the unexplainable. God and religion also is needed to enforce social order. This function of religion is extremely important and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

In one sense, this book is like a mental journey. The mind is a wonderful development that if allowed to wander unfettered can take a curious person to many interesting and sometimes dangerous places. Places where they have never been, maybe

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places where no one has ever been. A mental expedition can be just as exciting and maybe even more dangerous than an actual spatial journey. It can lead into places that challenge core beliefs, and may leave the individual confused and defenseless. Corners will be turned and consequences faced that will strike at the foundations constructed by humans over the eons to comfort and protect them.

A mental expedition is a matter of focus, a goal. We travel to our goal by asking questions, more specifically, unanswered questions. What is over the next hill? If we know, we will not go over the hill. If we don't know, we can walk over and look. If we can't walk that far, we can go there mentally by applying what we know about here and seeing if it makes sense there. In a sense, we are building a model of the universe. In order to guide our steps we make assumptions about what we do not understand, and draw logical conclusion from our assumptions and what we do understand about the universe. The better our assumptions, logic and understanding, the closer our mental journey and our model will be to the reality.