

## Sermon: The world was intelligently designed and created Trinity XXIII 2006

What did you have for breakfast this morning? This is not the usual thing you might expect to hear from the pulpit. But it's actually a question involving profound issues in philosophical theology and I shall return to it later. Many of you have been talking to me about this argument over whether the world was designed or whether it all came about through accidental processes over a very long period of time.

In modern times there has arisen this notion that religion and science are at odds: as if science were all a matter of hard facts and religion just soft faith. There are a few things to be said against this. First, a great number of scientists are religious. Secondly, it is only very recently that there has seemed to be a conflict between science and religion. If you are looking for evidence of intelligent design – that the world was made by a designer, God – then it is best to go to the modern scientists themselves.

Physicists, for instance, tell us that the whole universe operates according to the workings of four forces: the strong nuclear force; the weak nuclear force; the electromagnetic force; and the force of gravity. If any one of these forces had been minutely stronger or weaker, no material universe – let alone life – could exist. Dr Gerald Schroeder, a leading physicist at the Weizmann Institute, tells us what modern science says about the nature of the physical universe:

*The world we see as solid is made solid not by matter but by ethereal forces carried in photons – themselves a theoretical construct – travelling immense distances between the nuclei and surrounding electron clouds. The world of atoms and molecules consists of wavelike particles separated from each other by voids, held in place by never seen massless photons, travelling at the speed of light among particles that are not only particles but also waves. If you can conceptualise this melee in an intelligible way, I have an urgent suggestion: Publish!*

Modern physics thus reveals to us a world which does not look at all as if it's made of bits and pieces of matter, but is really rather ethereal. Less as if it's material stuff. More as if it's mind stuff. Moreover, it looks overwhelmingly as if the universe was made with us in mind, for, if it had been ever so minutely different, we wouldn't be here. The odds against the universe happening by accident to be so accommodating to us are so astronomical as to be virtually impossible. And, note, it is not theologians who are making this point, but scientists. They have even coined a phrase to refer to the hospitableness of the universe: they call it *The Anthropic Principle* – because the world seems to have been constructed with man in mind

In a vivid sentence, Professor Fred Hoyle said, "Life evolving by chance has the same likelihood as a tornado blowing through a scrap yard and leaving behind it a fully-formed jumbo jet".

Well, what do determined atheists make of all this? They reply by suggesting that there is not one universe but an infinite number of universes. And given an infinite number of universes, there was always going to be one just right for us. What an improbable conjecture to fall back on! It's as if I should play a game of heads or tails with you and every time you won demand we toss the coin again. And it is not a new

device. St Augustine came across it 1600 years ago and dismissed it as: *the Epicurean fantasy of innumerable worlds*.

Why do we always imagine our controversies are so original? William of Occam, writing in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, warned *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem* – in other words *Don't artificially imagine more things than you need*.

The Neo-Darwinian fundamentalist Richard Dawkins says, *Just because something looks as if it was designed doesn't mean it was in fact designed*. I would turn this dogma the other way round and say, *We know there is design in the world – because we ourselves design things. And it is entirely implausible that our idea of design could have arisen in a world that was chaos, undesignated*

Dawkins believes that all we are is genetic information glued on to bits of protein. Really, is that *all* we are? Let me prove here and now that this is false. And let me do so by returning to that deep philosophical question, *What did you have for breakfast this morning?* Suppose you answer, *I had protein, carbohydrate and fat*. And I say, *Oh come off it, what did you really have?* And you admit, *Oh all right – I had eggs, bacon and fried bread*.

Dawkins – with his *We are nothing but our genes* – is like the man who won't believe we had eggs, bacon and fried bread but insists all we had were protein, carbohydrates and fat. Or to give another example, Dawkins is like a man who went to a symphony concert and you asked him what he heard. And he replied, *Oh sound waves in different frequencies*. When you tell him that's a damn silly answer, he is of course shamed into admitting that what he really heard were *Beethoven's Fifth* and *Shostakovich's Tenth*.

Neo-Darwinian fundamentalists, materialists and bad logicians such as Dawkins actually refute their own argument. Dawkins says *We are only our genes*. I tell him he's wrong. He himself is not only his genes. He is his interest in biology, his relationship with his wife Lalla Ward who was once Dr Who's companion. He is all his hobbies and pastimes – perhaps his love of music and painting, his enjoyment of a game of chess and his irrational hatred of religion.

The world cannot be reduced to mechanism and materials. And the sane man never does describe the world in purely mechanistic terms. If you do describe the world only in terms of genes and molecules, of material bits and pieces, you are not describing the real world. For you are leaving out the whole realm and variety of human experience – including incidentally the study of science.

But there is a deeper issue here. When we come to ponder these great matters about the origin and purpose of the world, what is our perspective? Where do we stand? The philosopher Rene Descartes famously asked *Is there any knowledge so certain that no reasonable man can doubt it?* And his answer – his absolute presupposition – was his own existence: *I think, therefore I am*. He thought his own existence more certain than the existence of God.

Wittgenstein said that in order for Descartes' proposition *I think, therefore I am* to be basic, Descartes would have to own the language in which he spoke the words. It

would, after all, be a bit of a giveaway to insist on the primacy of your own existence but then to make the claim in language you admitted you'd learnt from other people! What other people? The philosopher Antony Flew tells a nice anecdote featuring Wittgenstein at the Moral Science Club in Cambridge in 1949 for a lecture on Descartes. The speaker stood up and said, *Cogito ergo sum* whereupon Wittgenstein said in a loud stage whisper, *That's a bloody stupid place to start!*

The idea that my existence is more certain than the existence of God is so preposterous that only an atheist could believe it! And once again there is nothing new in this nonsense. Six hundred years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Jeremiah satirised the hubris of man's supposed self-sufficiency. Jeremiah said that the clay is in no position to question the being of the potter. *Saith the Lord, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand.*

When *Genesis* and *St John's Gospel* tell us that in the beginning was the Word of God, they are telling us the truth that our words – including our scientific words - have meaning only because they are derived from the Eternal Word. We cannot stand, as it were, alone in empty space and ask *Does anything mean anything?* If the question about meaning is itself meaningful, it must be because there is meaning already. This is not unscientific. It is why theology was called *The Queen of sciences*. In God we live and move and have our being.

*The spacious firmament on high with all the blue ethereal sky  
And spangled heavens, a shining frame, their great Original proclaim*