

## Religion and Science

For many people, the growth of science has made the so-called truths of religion increasingly difficult to maintain. However, some have found science not so different from religious belief. Contemporary Christian philosopher Etienne Gilson is a good example.

Gilson argues that contrary to the traditional distinction between science and religion, the language of modern science and the questions it asks are fundamentally nonscientific. For example, Gilson cites the English astronomer Sir James Jeans's description of the emergence of life as "highly improbable," of human existence as "accidental," and of the entire creation as "surprising." In Gilson's view, such descriptions, strictly speaking, are not scientific. Therefore, he suggests that in facing the most basic questions, such as the origin of the universe, science, like religion, must operate on a kind of faith or belief and not on established fact.

He then observes that in its attempt to explain the origin of things, science shows a markedly non-scientific or metaphysical bent. The reason is that such investigations imply a search for the first cause or causes of things, a subject that has traditionally been addressed by metaphysics. More to the point, in attempting to account for things, some scientists appeal to chance. Others, while assuming the operation of

mechanical laws of nature, nonetheless propose a self-made, spontaneously arising universe. Such explanations, says Gilson, are essentially no different from, say, Thomas Aquinas's cosmological argument that premises a cause for every event and concludes with an uncaused cause.

In brief, then, Gilson's view is that the more scientific we become, the more metaphysical we must be—and the more religious. In the end, he sees much of contemporary science as providing a methodological basis for demonstrating the efficacy of religious truths.

### QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that the distinction between science and metaphysics is not clear-cut?
2. Investigation of the microcosmic reality and the astrophysical macrocosm seems to produce in many scientists a humility and sense of reverence that borders on the religious. A long line of scientists, including Einstein, have seen the universe as God's "sensorium." What do you think they mean by this?
3. Are there any facts of science that make you more inclined to religious belief? Less inclined?