Science and Religion
Are They Compatible?

Gaze at it; there is nothing to see.
It is called the formless.
Heed it; there is nothing to hear.
It is called the soundless.
Grasp it; there is nothing to hold on to.
It is called the immaterial.
Invisible, it cannot be called by any name.

*(Tao Te Ching, Ch 14)*
Is there purpose in the universe?

- Purpose = bringing about something of value
- Is anything of *lasting* value going on in the universe?
- Why bother about the question of cosmic purpose?

W. T. Stace: if the whole “scheme of things” is pointless, then so are our individual lives

Vaclav Havel: “The crisis of the much-needed global responsibility is due to the fact that we have lost the sense that the Universe has a purpose.”

Religions: the universe is here for a reason

But doesn’t science rule out cosmic purpose—and all hints of a divine personal presence?
Is there purpose in the universe?

“the more [scientifically] comprehensible the universe has become, the more pointless it also seems.”

Steven Weinberg
Is there purpose in the universe?

“The great accumulation of understanding as to how the physical world behaves only convinces one that this behavior has a kind of meaninglessness about it.”

Richard Feynman
1919-1988
Is there purpose in the universe?

“What point? It’s just a physical system.”

Margaret Geller
The “hierarchical principle”

Understanding a lower level not enough to grasp a higher --- need for *transformation*

The more important, the more elusive

Ultimate meaning beyond comprehension

Classical theologies

---

ULTIMATE REALITY AND MEANING

“Personal God”

The need for silence

HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

ANIMAL LIFE

PLANT LIFE

MATTER

Faith

Symbolic expression
The new cosmology

What’s going on here?

Is this a coherent story?

Hasn’t Darwin destroyed theology?

Earth Story

life begins

Big Bang

13.7 billion year cosmic story

Can we map the classic sense of purpose onto the new cosmic story?

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Does the idea of God make sense?
What do I mean by “God”?  

Don’t think about God without thinking about the man Jesus

Philippians 2: Jesus as self-emptying love (kenosis)

“The prime commitment of [Christian] theology is . . . the understanding of God’s kenosis, a grand and mysterious truth for the human mind, which finds it inconceivable that suffering and death can express a love which gives itself and seeks nothing in return.” (Fides et Ratio)

This is the idea of God that Christian theology must place in conversation with science
Transformation is cosmic in scope

The Infinite

Revelation as God’s Self-gift

The finite world

self-transcendence

evolution

Theology and science are distinct and compatible ways of talking about the same process.
Reconciling faith with contemporary science

God: invites whole universe toward unity from “up ahead”

The classic religious hierarchy is transformed, not destroyed

The world rests on the Future as its sole support

Teilhard de Chardin
1955-1981

emergent evolution