

Cutting God in Half

Nicholas Maxwell

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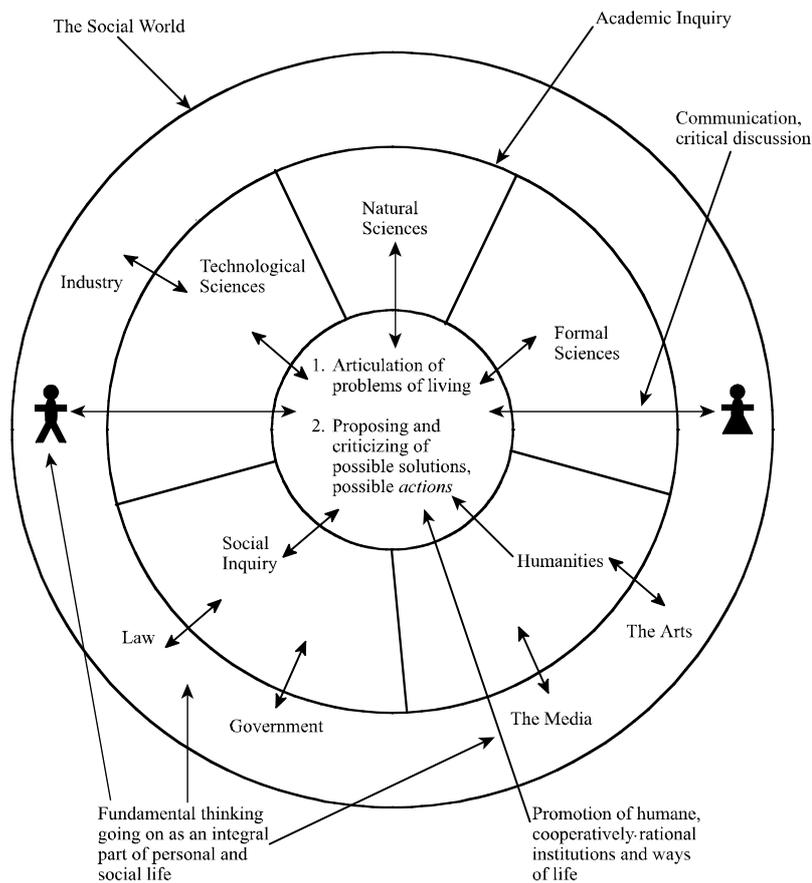
God, according to Christianity, Islam and Judaism, is a Being who is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving. Such a God is knowingly responsible for all human suffering and death brought about by natural causes (and even brought about by people since natural causes are always implicated). How can such a God be all-loving? In order to solve this problem, I claim, we need to sever the God-of-Cosmic-Power from the God-of-Cosmic-Value. The former is Einstein's God, the underlying dynamic unity in the physical universe responsible for all that occurs. Because it is impersonal, it can be forgiven the terrible things it does. The latter is what is of most value associated with conscious human life – and sentient life more generally.

Having cut God in half in this way, the problem then becomes to put the two halves together again – to see how the God-of-Cosmic-Value can exist and flourish embedded in the God-of-Cosmic-Power. This is our fundamental problem – our fundamental *philosophical* problem, our fundamental *theoretical* problem of knowledge and understanding, and our fundamental *practical* problem of living (personal, social and global). It is, at root, a *religious* problem, and ought to be the central concern of academic inquiry and education, and indeed of all of life. Unfortunately, at present, it is not, in part because of our long-standing failure to cut God decisively in half, and thus appreciate the fundamental character of the problem that results.

Here, in outline, is how this fundamental religious problem can be solved. Theoretical physics, properly understood, seeks to depict the nature of the God-of-Cosmic-Power. But physics depicts only a highly selected aspect of all that exists. It leaves out of account the world we see, hear, touch and are a part of, the experiential world imbued with meaning and value – the God-of-Cosmic-Value, in other words. We can, in this way, see how the God-of-Cosmic-Value can exist embedded in the physical universe, the God-of-Cosmic-Power. Furthermore, we can see how *we* can exist, conscious beings of value, embedded in the physical universe. We can see how we can act with some measure of free will embedded as we are in the physical universe. Darwinian evolution can be re-interpreted to make intelligible the process of the gradual evolution of life of value in the impersonal physical universe.

But if we are to do better than at present at helping the God-of-Cosmic-Value to *flourish* within the God-of-Cosmic-Power, we need to *learn* how to do it, which means in turn that we have in our possession institutions of inquiry and learning rationally devoted to this task. It is just this that we do not have at present. For both intellectual and humanitarian reasons, we need to bring about a revolution in science, and in academic inquiry more generally, so that the basic task becomes to help life of value to flourish in the physical universe. The basic intellectual aim of academia needs to be, not knowledge, but rather *wisdom* – wisdom being the capacity to realize what is of value in life for oneself and others, thus including knowledge and technological know-how, but much else besides. At the heart of academic inquiry we need to put the tasks of articulating, and improving the articulation of, our problems of living (individual, social and global), and proposing and critically assessing possible and actual solutions –

possible and actual *actions*, political programmes, policies, philosophies of life. These tasks need to be taken up by social inquiry and the humanities. Pursued in this way, social and inquiry and the humanities are intellectually more fundamental than natural science. The task of tackling problems of living is fundamental; and problems of knowledge and technological know-how emerge out of and feed back into, problems of living, at the heart of academia: see diagram. The natural sciences need to be transformed so that contributions are made at *three* levels: (1) evidence, (2) theory, and (3) *aims*, the third level including discussion of problematic assumptions concerning metaphysics, values and politics. The fundamental task of academia becomes to help humanity learn how to create a better world – how to tackle problems of living in rather more cooperatively rational ways than at present. If we are to create a better world – a world in which the God-of-Cosmic-Value can flourish more joyfully, less painfully, than at present, we need to *learn* how to do it, which in turn means that we have institutions of learning rationally designed for, and devoted to, the task. What we have at present is a kind of academic inquiry devoted to acquiring specialized knowledge, but not a kind of inquiry rationally devoted to helping life of value to flourish in the physical universe.



Academic Inquiry Rationally Devoted to Helping People Realize What is of Value in Life

Believers, especially believers in Christianity, Islam and Judaism, need to improve their ideas about the nature of God if they are to acquire a little more intellectual and moral integrity – *religious* integrity one might say. But even more important, perhaps, non-believers, agnostics and atheists, need to retrace the steps along the path that has led to their current position, to recover and develop much of value discarded by too hasty a past jettisoning of belief in God. I am not merely echoing Nietzsche in declaring God to be dead. My concern is to show how we can improve our ideas about the nature of God. Believers and non-believers alike ought to pay attention. Both Richard Dawkins (author of *The God Delusion*) and Alister McGrath (author of *The Dawkins Delusion?*) should take note.

European culture – and thus, in a sense, world culture – has suffered a past gigantic rupture. Once upon a time everyone believed in God. Then we had, in succession, the Renaissance, the seventeenth century scientific revolution, the eighteenth century Enlightenment, the industrial revolution and the Darwinian revolution. Belief in God decayed; ceremonies associated with belief in God dwindled. The rupture took the form: “Once we believed in God; now we don’t, but in some circumstances we observe ancient rituals and pretend that we do”. Many, of course, resist this general decay of belief in God. Religious fundamentalists even try to turn their back on the modern secular world. But for many others, especially in those parts of the world most influenced by European culture, belief in God has been replaced by belief in science, in humanism, in liberalism, in democracy, socialism, freedom, progress, or the market – although, it has to be said, these latter beliefs are all looking, these days, a bit tarnished.

This rupture in European and world culture – from a God-dominated to a multi-faceted secular world (containing pockets of religious fanaticism) – vital and tremendous as it is in all sorts of ways, has nevertheless failed to develop ideas and values in the best possible way. As a result of rejecting God, instead of performing the surgical operation recommended here of cutting God in half, we have failed to develop properly what we have inherited from the rupture, and this inheritance has failed to come to full fruition. Science, education, humanism, liberalism, democracy, the arts, the market: all these suffer. Our culture, our whole modern world, is damaged. Above all, we fail to get into proper focus our fundamental problem: How to put the pieces together again once God has been sliced into two. How to help that which is of most value to flourish embedded as it is in the physical universe.

What we need to do, in short, is not *lose* our faith, but *improve* our faith, develop a rational faith, and above all try to put our rational faith into that which does really exist or can exist, and is genuinely of value. When we discover that God, in the traditional sense, does not and cannot exist, we need to work out carefully and delicately how our deepest aspirations, previously associated with the non-existent traditional God, can be developed in the best possible way, doing justice to the new universe we find ourselves in, and the new possibilities for what is of most value in that universe. The discovery of the non-existence of the traditional God impacts on our deepest, most personal desires, hopes and fears; and it impacts on the broadest, most public aspects and structures of our culture and society. Great care and sensitivity are needed to keep these threads in touch with one another, so that we may see how the deeply personal and the objectively social may be kept in touch with one another, so that both can develop in the best ways possible.

If our current ideals – science, humanism, liberalism, democracy, socialism, freedom, progress and the market – all seem these days somewhat tarnished, here is the reason: we have failed to perform the delicate operation of cutting God into two halves properly, and consequently have failed to get into focus properly what needs to be done to try to put the two halves together again. The secular “gods” that we have acquired as a result of the great rupture – science, humanism, etc. – have all emerged in crippled, distorted forms, in forms which fail to help what is of most value in life to flourish.

We need a religious revival – a religious revolution. We need to acknowledge and do justice to a religious dimension inherent in all our endeavours – political, educational, scientific, academic, even agricultural, industrial and commercial. But this needs to take the form of religious faith which meets elementary requirements of intellectual integrity and rationality, religious faith which sees the need to cut God in half, and which seeks to come to grips with the fundamental problem that results of putting the pieces together again, so that the God-of-Cosmic-Value is helped to flourish within the God-of-Cosmic-Power. Traditional religions and our current secular world fail to meet this challenge.