

Finding God with biocomplexity

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After centuries of trying to uncover the fundamental laws of the universe, science is still no closer to answering some of humanity's biggest questions about the meaning of life, the existence of God and the evolution of the human mind and societies. Is that because science is not sufficiently advanced to tackle such problems? Or is it because the traditional approach to science is incapable of answering humanity's deepest wonders?

It is the latter, according to University of Calgary physicist, biologist and philosopher Stuart Kauffman, who argues in his forthcoming book that nature's infinite creativity should become the basis for a new worldview and a global spiritual awakening.

“We are at the point where we are realizing that there are some things we are never going to fully understand because there are no natural laws that can fully explain the evolution of a species, the biosphere or the human economy,” says Kauffman, a pioneer of complexity theory and founder of the U of C's Institute for Biocomplexity and Informatics. “This means that reason alone is an insufficient guide for living our lives. I believe we can reinvent what we hold sacred as a view of God that is not a supernatural Creator, but the ceaseless and unforeseeable creativity of the universe that surrounds us.”

Kauffman's newest book *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason, and Religion* (Basic Books, New York) will be released in Canada on May 19. “Radical,” “brilliant,” and “comprehensive,” are words being used by colleagues and reviewers to describe the book,

which Kauffman hopes will provide a middle-ground between the destructive tendencies of religious fundamentalism and the anti-spiritual attitudes presented recently in popular books such as Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* “ and journalist Christopher Hitchens' *God Is Not Great*.

“Words like ‘God’ and ‘sacred’ are scary to many of us who live in modern, secular society because they have been used to start wars and kill millions of people, and we just don’t need any more of that,” Kauffman says. “What we do need is for humanity to become reunited under a common global ethic based on the idea that we are all part of nature, and we will never be the master of it because it is not entirely knowable.”

Reinventing the Sacred argues that Reductionism – the philosophy based on the work of Galileo, Descartes, Newton and their followers that everything can ultimately be understood by reducing it to laws of chemistry and physics – has been the basis of our scientific worldview for nearly 400 years and is the foundation of modern secular society. Using arguments grounded in complexity theory, he argues that it is time to break this “Galilean spell,” since the reductionist approach is inadequate to explain the infinite possibilities of evolution and human history. Instead, Kauffman argues that the highest levels of organization are the result of the unpredictable process of emergence.

“It’s not that we lack sufficient knowledge or wisdom to predict the future evolution of the biosphere or human culture. It’s that these things are inherently unpredictable because we can never prestate what all the possibilities might be,” he says. “Can a couple walking in love along the banks of the Siene really be reduced to the interactions of fundamental particles? No, they cannot.”

The book then argues that the process of emergence can provide the

platform for reinventing what humankind considers most sacred. It also discusses why arguments for intelligent design fail in the scientific realm and how complexity theory can build a bridge between the traditionally opposed views of science and religion.

“God is the most powerful symbol we have and it has always been up to us to choose what we deem to be sacred,” Kauffman said. “To me, the idea that we are the product of 3.8 billion years of unpredictable evolution is more awe-inspiring than the idea than the idea that everything was created in six days by an all-knowing Creator.”

An essay outlining Kauffman’s Reinventing the Sacred thesis is contained in a new series of 13 essays by distinguished thinkers on the topic “Does science make belief in God obsolete?” currently published on the John Templeton Foundation website at:

<http://templeton.org/belief/>. The preface and first chapter of the book are currently published as an essay titled “Breaking the Galilean Spell” on Edge.org at:

http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/kauffman08/kauffman08_index.html

An essay by Kauffman titled “Reinventing the Sacred” is also scheduled to be published in the May 10 issue of New Scientist magazine.

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