

Science and religion reconciled by the Information concept

In general, evolution is the process by which complexity arises from relative simplicity, and science sees no need to start the process with complexity, which religious people translate as “God.” However, science is increasingly recognizing an abstract entity, information, as playing an important role in the evolutionary process. Information, such as that which you are reading at this moment, is often recognized as a set of symbols – in the present case, the letters of the alphabet.



Fig. 1. George Romanes

But these are just carriers (vehicles) of the information, which is itself abstract. While information is often held to be a twentieth century concept, the Victorians explored its relationship to human minds and some were able to reconcile religious and scientific viewpoints in a way that many modern commentators – historians, philosophers, psychologists, scientists, theologians – appear unaware of.

Religion addresses deep questions about our existence that date back to ancient times. Science also addresses these questions. The hypotheses that religion and science advance are often portrayed as so greatly opposed that no reconciliation is possible. Yet both agree that something fundamental that relates to these questions has an eternal existence. Science proclaims that fundamental to be relatively simple – matter and/or energy. Religion proclaims that fundamental to be highly complex – best approximated to a phenomenon that we witness in ourselves and in others, to which we attach the word “mind.”

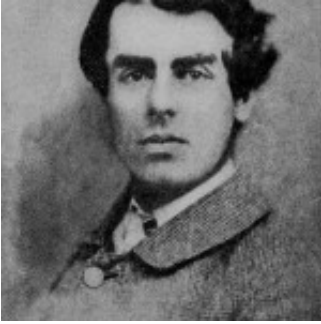


Fig. 2. Samuel Butler

To this higher 'mind,' religion attaches the word "God" and, at the very least, supposes that a 'lazy God' could have brought matter/energy into existence and then have let evolution take its course.

The Victorian viewpoint relates well to a relatively new school of psychology concerned with what has been called "theory of mind." In a nutshell, the theory that other individual human minds are similar to one's own, was extended by Darwin's research associate, George Romanes, to the idea that a group of individuals might have a collective mind, and, beyond this, to the idea of mind in the universe. The latter is a completely scientific hypothesis, free of religious trappings, which bears on the deepest questions of our existence. Science and religion can both embrace this hypothesis. To this extent they are reconciled.

Publication

['A vehicle of symbols and nothing more'. George Romanes, theory of mind, information, and Samuel Butler.](#)

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