The Question of Why

How do religions view science and how do scientists view religion?
Scientists on God

• **Atheist**: “chilling impersonality of the universe”, “the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless” – Steven Weinberg.

• **Skeptic**: “no strong opinions on the interpretation of quantum theory”, “the implications of cosmology for these realms of thought may be profound, but diffidence prevents me from venturing into them.” – Martin Rees.

• **Platonist**: “mathematics suggests that there is a world beyond the immediate, material one”, “would one plus one equal two if the universe didn’t exist?” – Roger Penrose.

• **Believer**: “science and religion are intellectual cousins”, “physics is showing the world to be both subtle and subtle, but you need to be careful.” – John Polkinghorne.

• **Pantheist**: “the universe is attempting to be felt”, “the cosmos in its entirety can be called God.” – Thomas Berry.

Source: BBC News Magazine 3-27-09
Survey of Natural Scientists

Findings/Conclusions:

• overall secularization among scientists.
• most dramatic change among biologists.
• significant decrease of protestants, moderate increase of catholics.
• “science is a master identity, mitigated by unwillingness to follow a codified way of doing things even in the face of individual dissent”.

Religions on Science

- Buddhists
- Christians
- Muslims
- Jews
- Hindus
- Taoists

... are inspired by ...
... are indifferent to ...
... are weary of ...

- Stem Cell Research
- Cosmology
- Quantum mechanics
- Theory of Relativity
- Nanoscience
- Gene Manipulation

- can be all of the above
- depends on the case
- doctrine vs. openness
- depends more on individuals & denominations
Spins on the History of Science

• a story of battles between church and science?
  - Extraordinary natural phenomena explained by science.
  - Galileo forced to abdicate heliocentric view.
  - Age of the Earth and creationism vs. evolution.
  - Psychology explained by neuroscience.

... tells of the diminishing realm of religion – its place taken by science.

• or a story of convergence?
  - Areas of applicability of scientific approach become better defined.
  - Scientific Revolutions: new theories and models encompass old ones.
  - Evolving picture of what God is or could be.
  - More enlightened belief: science serves to understand more deeply.

... tells how our notions of both science and religion become more refined.
Religious Inspiration from Science

Symmetry: hierarchy of elementary particles

Vastness: the universe

The Extraordinary: catastrophies

Complexity: the human body
Quantum Mechanics

Accepting multiple perspectives of reality ...
Stale Controversy

• The Age of the Universe
  – Literal bible interpretations vs. scientific evidence.
  – Cosmic time and length scales beyond imagination.
  – Theories such as Big Bang and Parallel Universes are beyond imagination.

• Creationism vs. Evolution
  – Stunning complexity and sophistication of life forms.
  – How should one envision the process of creation?
  – Scientific evidence vs. what we would like to believe in.

• The God Question
  – Arguing about God’s existence vs. experiencing it.
  – A proxy for “who am I”?
  – What is God anyhow?
Religion and Ethics in Research

• Do the ends justify the means – e.g. animal research?
  – Yes, otherwise most of us would be dead by now.
  – No, we need to respect all life forms.

• Do we care what may be done with our findings?
  – Yes, otherwise we’ll have nuclear war & organ farms.
  – No, somebody else will do it anyways.
Realms Beyond Science

• What can we understand with math and science and what not?
  – Are there clear cut boundaries between the physical world and beyond?

• The question of Why: where does it end and what are acceptable answers?
  – Why, why, why ... - are we looking for mechanisms or for consolation?

• Understanding how the brain works: is there room for free thought?
  – Sure, it feels like free thought – but is it?