

## The God of the (Rapidly Closing) Gaps

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Earlier this week it was reported that the ALMA (Atacama Large Millimeter/sub-millimeter Array) radio telescope in Chile caught an image of planets coming into existence in the disk of gas and dust surrounding a very young star. According to the latest scientific theory, the disk gradually increases in size and planets eventually form. And again, just like photos from the Hubble telescope capturing the formation of stars, there is not a God to be seen. (And yet again, Genesis got it all wrong. Planets do not come into existence *before* stars are formed. Furthermore, stars and planets are the products of natural – not supernatural – forces. For more information about ALMA finding, see “Planet formation captured in photo,” by Jonathan Webb, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-29932609>).

For those with the intellectual courage to pay attention and to understand the implications and consequences of these kinds of scientific findings, the God of the gaps is still shrinking. The natural formation of stars and planets leaves nothing for God do, as is the case in evolution by natural selection, the Big Bang, etc.

History is filled with examples of religion getting it wrong only to have science fill in the gaps in our knowledge with naturalistic explanations. For example, Bible believers claim that God created the rainbow as a promise to humanity to never destroy the Earth again with water. Theists continue to assert that only God can create a rainbow. However, we have long known that rainbows are formed by the reflection, refraction and dispersion of sunlight during rainfall. This might not be very poetic, but that’s the way it is. And who says the truth always has to be poetic?

The Bible teaches that God is responsible for earthquakes and other natural disasters or “acts of God.” For example, the Old (First) Testament prophet Amos raises the rhetorical question, “Does evil befall a city unless the Lord has done it?” (Amos 3:6.) Aside from the fact that a perfectly good God cannot by definition create evil, we have long known that earthquakes are caused by volcanic activity underground or by the shifting of tectonic plates. Still, theists throughout the world believe that God punishes people (and innocent animals) with earthquakes, or that an all-powerful, all-loving God refuses to prevent earthquakes for some ostensibly mysterious reason.

Whenever a tsunami strikes, people wonder why God allows it. Yet, we know that a tsunami is caused by an earthquake or volcanic eruption beneath an ocean. It is as though theists believe that science is superfluous. They are so afraid of having their deeply cherished worldview challenged that they prefer to wallow in ignorance rather than understand how the natural world actually works.

This problem is especially disturbing among creationists and Intelligent Design theorists. In the November-December 2014 issue of the NYC Atheists Newsletter (in PDF), Tyson Gill discusses the fact that ID proponents often quietly retreat away from their thoroughly discredited arguments after they have been exposed, pretending that they never took those arguments seriously in the first place.

ID theorists love to focus on what they see as intelligent design throughout the universe, fine tuning, etc. However, what they actually see is evidence of *order*, rather than actual design. Moreover, they do not realize that order is often generated from disorder. Indeed, there have been numerous computer simulations demonstrating this fact.

Proponents of ID focus obsessively on order, and downplay or altogether ignore the disorder throughout the universe. The late, great Paul Kurtz discussed this fact beautifully in his last book, *The Turbulent Universe*, which was excerpted in the December 2011/January 2012, Volume 1, Number 3 issue of *The Human Prospect: A Neohumanist Perspective*. As Kurtz wrote on pp. 6-7 of the excerpt:

As contemporary astronomy advanced it postulated new worlds, the birth and death of stars, the collision of galaxies, dark matter, worm holes and black holes, supernovae, dwarfs, quasars, pulsars, and the discovery of new planets in other solar systems. All of this boggles the human imagination and has deflated the special status of the human species in the universe and the historic conceit that humankind was at the center of things and had a privileged place in the universe. Indeed, God was fashioned in the image of man. Alas, we have discovered that we are only one species among innumerable others on a minor planet in a modest solar system on the edge of one galaxy of the billions that exist.

It is only fitting that I end this piece with an excellent quotation from atheist writer and debater Richard Carrier:

Every generation of theologians who made careers predicting that science could never explain something had impressive stances right up until the time when science did explain it. Examples over the last ten centuries are assertions that science would never explain non-linear motion, the nature of the stars, magnetism, light, how organisms use air, the age of the earth, the diversity of life, and the transmission of life in reproduction. Upon these mysteries and many more, believers constructed elaborate philosophical and theological systems to do what they thought science could never do. But in time physics, astronomy, chemistry, geology, biology and genetics have satisfactorily explained all these things. The history of such metaphysical speculations trying to outmatch science is littered with exploded and abandoned systems of thought....It has always been a bad bet to bet against science. (*The God Debates: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Guide for Atheists and Believers (And Everyone in Between)*, p. 95.)