



CONTACT: Donald Lehr – The Nolan/Lehr Group  
+1 (212) 967-8200 / mob +1 (917) 304-4058  
[dblehr@cs.com](mailto:dblehr@cs.com) / [www.templetonprize.org](http://www.templetonprize.org)

**Remarks by Dr. Hamza Yusuf at the 2017 Templeton Prize Ceremony  
The Field Museum, Chicago, September 24, 2017**

It is a great honor for me to participate in tonight's celebration of one of our civilization's intellectual giants. So let me begin by thanking the John Templeton Foundation for the opportunity, and by recognizing the vision of Sir John that made it possible.

Given the suspicion, even disdain, among so many educated people for the sacred that permeates our societies, I am sometimes hesitant to tell people that I teach theology because, for many, it's like saying, "I practice alchemy."

I want to share an anecdote that I heard from a friend of mine in the UK who insisted it actually happened:

His friend, a well-known theologian and an avid gardener, was out tending to his garden when a new neighbor approached his hedge and introduced himself. When the neighbor inquired about his occupation, he said, "I'm a theologian."

The neighbor responded, "Well, I'm an atheist."

The theologian asked, "Have you read St. Augustine?"

"No."

"Have you read St. Thomas Aquinas?"

"No."

"What about Meister Eckhardt or Julian of Norwich?"

"No. I haven't read any of them."

"Perhaps you've read Avicenna or Averroes or Maimonides or al-Ghazali?"

"No. None of them either."

"How about Maritain, Plantinga, Craig, or Kreeft?"

"No. I'm sorry; I haven't read any of them either."

At which point, the theologian said, "Sir, you are not an atheist: you are an ignoramus!"

The anecdote reveals a somewhat common characteristic about people who glibly dismiss belief in God as inherently unreasonable: they are not inclined to read reasonable arguments for God's existence. These same people, however, will believe in the existence of dark matter or quarks or neutrinos without understanding or even questioning the science that postulates them. Scientists have their arguments for believing in such phenomena that they can't see, as do theologians who have their rational arguments for believing in things they can't see. Most people believe scientists without knowing their proofs, and most faithful people believe their scholars or spiritual leaders without knowing their truths. This is something we forget: the epistemology of trust.

In the classical period of Muslim scholasticism, most theologians argued that for belief to be sound, it had to be grounded in reason. Hence, the Kalam Cosmological Argument was taught to adolescents in basic Muslim creeds. Whether we acknowledge it or not, our Age of inductive reason called Science is still an age of faith for most people. We forget too that the Age of Faith was for them an age of deductive reason: they considered faith as reasonable and the lack of it as utterly incomprehensible.

Theologians of the Age of Faith considered their works pursuits of science. They grounded their arguments in logic and argued, not for evidence beyond a reasonable doubt eliminating faith, but for a preponderance of evidence, demanding belief. In other words, they used the standard our civil courts – the preponderance of evidence - for judgment in favor. Atheists prefer a criminal court's standard and demand evidence beyond a reasonable doubt, which would eliminate the element of faith so essential to theistic belief.

The great theologians of the past grounded faith in reason because they believed that we are created in the Imago Dei (the metaphysical image of God), and since the faculty of reason separates us from animals, the God in whose image we are created must be a God of reason. Let us not forget that many of the great theologians of the past were also working scientists and accomplished mathematicians. All of them, without exception, were first rate logicians committed to reason. Avicenna, known in the West for his medical contributions, was revered in the East for his achievements in metaphysics, theology, and logic. The great philosophers and theologians up until Kant sincerely believed that belief was logical and arguable, and metaphysics or first philosophy captivated the best and brightest minds of the time.

Our species has an insatiable desire to know, so evident in children who never tire of asking the greatest philosophical question "why." The question that animates the metaphysician: *Why is there something as opposed to nothing?* And while most children have that innate wonder and quest for knowledge squashed out by mechanized schooling, some retain it throughout their adult life. Dr. Alvin Plantinga is such a one. Philosophers to whom the world never grows old and children new to the world both live with a sense of wonder.

Tonight, we celebrate a theologian even as we know that designation, for so many, feels quaint at best. But thoughts about God continue to haunt our species; either we choose to dwell and deliberate upon them, or they thrust themselves upon us in moments of weakness by momentous life experiences: a death in the

family, a devastating earthquake, a horrid hurricane, witnessing the birth of a child, a sublime starlit Saharan sky, or a sunset painted from the palette of a thousand shades of red and orange. Such experiences make us ponder about what cannot be seen. It must be so for a simple reason: we will always have to grapple with the *why* questions that our material sciences are unable to answer. So it is fitting that we honor Dr. Plantinga for his singular contributions to addressing the *whys*, and for harnessing his extraordinary powers of intellect and directing them to the pursuit of theology's handmaiden philosophy, still, for some, in service of her queen. We are all the beneficiaries of his enduring work that has helped put theism back on the philosophical agenda. Without a resurgence of philosophy as the rubric that governs our great human pursuits, we deprive our species of a holistic understanding of knowledge.

In the past, philosophy meant love of wisdom, but with modern skepticism we should call much of its practice today "misosophy," an antipathy toward wisdom. Philosophy traditionally embraced all knowledge, but began with speculative philosophy that further divided into physics, metaphysics, and mathematics, based upon the three stages that intelligence negotiates in its pursuit of a holistic understanding of the world – abstracting from movement, intelligible quantity, and being itself. With moral philosophy came ethics, economics, and politics, and finally natural philosophy that pursued the empirical sciences that today have totally eclipsed all the other branches of philosophy.

Jacques Maritain argued that every scientific question presents a double aspect: a mystery and a problem. Science, especially with its extraordinary tools of late, can answer many of the problems that confront us, but it knows not how to explicate the mysteries. Science excels in explaining how a thing works, its mechanisms, and its uses, and it has done much to make our lives amazingly livable. But in its crevices lurks a dark side that envelops us in a Faustian bargain. The other branches of philosophy can temper the negative capabilities of science, but science cannot grapple with the *why* questions.

The *whys* are arguably more important than the *hows*: Why are our minds so perfectly adapted to understanding the universe, with all its intelligible mysteries? As Maritain said, "Mystery is not the implacable adversary of understanding." Rather, mystery is precisely what compels us to understand. And the men and women of understanding must be honored, not simply those who mine the fields of natural philosophy but also the metaphysicians, the theologians, the poets. All civilizations have three main classes of individuals: those who *do*, those who *make*, and those who *know* enabling some of them to see beyond this mundane realm, the visionaries. Men of action and industry abound, but men of knowledge less so, and the visionaries among them even rarer: the poets and prophets who propel us forward. All three strands are essential to civilizations, but modern culture honors the doers and makers but too often depreciates the men of knowledge especially the visionaries.

Dr. Alvin Plantinga who represents at least two of the strands of this rope that elevates and edifies our collective humanity. Sir Richard Livingstone argued that in every age the strongest force of these three strands "fills the common eye and distorts the common judgment." In the past, religion very often was guilty of this, not giving science its proper due. Currently, science is the offender, who, "like Bottom the Weaver in A

*Midsummer Night's Dream*, wants to play every part.” We now have scientists pontificating about God, or more precisely, about why He an illusion.

If we are to restore balance in our societies and foster healing, we must respect and revere the spiritual, the intellectual, the political, and the industrial: the visionary, the knower, the doer, and the maker. Each is necessary for societies to flourish. It is a tribute to Sir John Templeton that he addressed this gross neglect of our times and devoted resources that are supporting excellent work being done by individuals and institutions.

I want to conclude by offering something that is part of the Islamic tradition: a poem in praise of the man we are honoring tonight. So if you will indulge me, I would like to tender my poetical offering. I want to preface this by apologizing to Dr. Alvin Plantinga for my informal use of “Alvin,” but “Dr. Plantinga” does not easily fit into an iambic tetrameter.

Here goes:

We face so much in this our world  
It's hard to take it in  
In reality, the truth be told  
We only face our sin  
A battle rages in our souls  
And each must play his part  
Some will use the head to fight  
While others use their heart  
The belligerence in every soul  
Will end when we find peace  
But fight we must with heart and head  
For this plague to ever cease  
The heart, the head, so must we choose?  
Might there be another way?  
In Alvin's books it's clear to see  
That both are on display  
On every page he rules the day  
And does so with such ease  
But a stumbling block for lesser minds  
Is that daunting Plantinganese  
May God bless this heart-filled heady man  
May his pen overcome their sword  
May his truth live on in the books he wrote  
In defense of a guiltless Lord  
And for those who deem his thought unsound  
Or that his beliefs are odd  
They'll have to wait till Judgment Day  
To have it explained by God.

# # #