

Which Way to God?

The Road of Science and the Ways to God, by Stanley L. Jaki, *Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, 478pp. \$21.00 (paper \$8.95).*

STANLEY L. JAKI, distinguished university professor at Seton Hall University, is a Hungarian-born scientist (with the history of science his special field of interest) and a Benedictine priest—a combination extraordinarily rare in our age of fragmented specialists. He is thus uniquely equipped to view both the physical and the metaphysical questions with a balanced vision; normally, the scientist sees the world through the lens of a microscope (or telescope) only; and the metaphysician-theologian looks at the universe through the non-empirical instrument of language alone. Either view tends to be myopic.

What we have here essentially are the twenty Gifford lectures that Jaki delivered in 1975 and 1976 at the University of Edinburgh, following such distinguished American Gifford lecturers as William James, Josiah Royce, John Dewey, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr. His basic purpose is clearly stated at the very beginning:

The aim of these lectures is to demonstrate what is intimated in their title, namely, the existence of a single intellectual avenue forming both the road of science and the ways to God. Science found its only viable birth within a cultural matrix permeated by a firm conviction about the mind's ability to find in the realm of things and persons a pointer to their Creator. All great creative advances of science have been made in terms of an epistemology germane to that conviction, and whenever

that epistemology was resisted with vigorous consistency, the pursuit of science invariably appears to have been deprived of its solid foundation.

Before evaluating the effectiveness of Jaki's presentation, I should like first to summarize the definitions of some key terms and some of the basic assumptions and conclusions made. By *theism* Jaki means a monotheism and a natural theology, the core of which "consists in tracing out the ways along which reason can ascertain what Lord Gifford called 'the knowledge of God, that is, of the All, of the First and Only Cause.'" By *science* Jaki means not merely technology but the search for objective truth that is predicated on the assumption of a teleological, monotheistic metaphysic. He also believes that individuals have free will and that a meaningful existence must include pain and a sense of guilt as preconditions. Perhaps the quintessence of Jaki's thesis can be found in the following excerpt:

Although it is not for science to answer the question about the reason for the existence of a unique or singular universe, this is a question that must be asked and answered if one aims at completeness in the way of understanding. The answer, which only metaphysics, or rather natural theology, can give, will not, of course, "profit" the scientist in a narrowly "scientific" sense. But the answer which is God, will greatly strengthen the scientist's trust in the existence of an objectively existing, rationally ordered universe which can be investigated by the human mind, a pursuit which is man's exclusive privilege and responsibility. This trust, privilege, and responsibility constitute the backbone of the scientific enterprise. Science arose when these three factors became a cultural matrix.

Those who do not share this vision of the world emerge as enemies not only of truth but also of society. Like the devil, their

name is legion: positivism, Darwinism, Marxism, utilitarianism, existentialism, etc.; although they parade under a variety of names and boast a diversity of progenitors (A. Comte, E. Mach, T.H. Huxley, G.F.W. Hegel, K. Marx, etc.), they have two common denominators: first, they deny the validity and supremacy of non-sensory, transcendental, biblically revealed truths and therefore close the path to God; second, since they reject the eternally valid truths of biblical revelation, their ethics (if they can be called that) have led to increased cruelties and the apotheosis of ethical relativism and consequential moral and cultural barbarism.

Clearly Jaki's book has many virtues. It is indeed invigorating and rare to read a book by an individual equally erudite in science, philosophy, and religion (his fascinating end-notes number over a hundred pages). It is also true that much of what Jaki says about the twentieth century is valid: we have indeed excluded God from our lives, except in a most perfunctory way. Who also can deny the slothful degeneration of our concerns from serious study of philosophy, literature, and the theoretical bases of science into a preoccupation with sensory and trivial gratification? Only the most unperceiving observer will fail to see the threat of both the physical and spiritual apocalypse to today's "me" (rather than the "Thee") generation.

But inevitably there arise some questions prompted by a book so filled with thought-provoking judgments: Are we to assume because one common denominator exists in those cultures where science has failed to thrive (that one common denominator being the absence of a Judeo-Christian theism), it is therefore that common denominator which caused the failure? Is a cultural ambience more significant for the development of a scientific luminary than a person's home and school environment—not to mention whatever genius he might have been born with? How account for the fact that such eminently successful scientists like Albert Einstein (whose science and metaphysics Jaki quotes often and favorably) were raised in a non-

theistic home? Success, like failure, it seems to me, has more than one cause.

Is there an automatic link between belief in Christian theism and an enhanced practice of ethics, and, conversely, between non-theistic scientists and increased amorality, or even immorality? For example, is it fair to use J.R. Oppenheimer's declaration "that when something is found to be 'technically sweet,' scientists just go ahead with it regardless of the consequences," while ignoring Oppenheimer's (and other scientists') anguished reflections on the moral consequences of nuclear development? And is it revealing the total picture of the links between ethics and theistic and non-theistic cultures when the author overlooks the moral complexities of the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the various religious wars? Jaki prefers seeing the world not in gray but rather in starkly black and white colors. Our culture, he

claims, is suffering from an inability to differentiate black from white. This may be true, but some of history's most debilitating cruelties were perpetrated by those in power who tended to see the world in only starkly black and white terms. I am not for fusing black and white into a confusion of gray; I am for distinguishing black from white—and gray from either one. There is, after all, a difference between mortal and venial sins.

Towards the end of his book Jaki notes that "like other historians, the historian of science is apt to mistake 'his story' for history." Remarkably erudite and stimulating as the book is, one is tempted, at times, to make the same observation of Jaki. If only he had followed the plural noun of his title—*The Road of Science and the WAYS to God!*

Reviewed by MILTON BIRNBAUM