



**WHAT'S IT
ALL ABOUT?**

Answering the biggest
questions of life

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INTRODUCTION

As I write this, the 2012 US presidential election has just finished. Obama has his four more years. The Republicans are licking their wounds and trying to figure out what went wrong. As I watched the *Newsnight* analysis with Jeremy Paxman and his superior-sounding friends I was struck by their breakdown of where the Republicans lost the election. A man with a particularly fine beard boldly proclaimed that it was simply because the Republicans are too religious.

As a Christian church leader, that fascinates me. Implied in his statement is the notion that Republicans are 'religious' and Democrats aren't. Yet the more I think about it, the more I think this cannot be right. All human beings have ways of answering the biggest questions of life; ways of making sense of the world; ways of ordering their lives according to a set of principles and values. It is the answers to such big

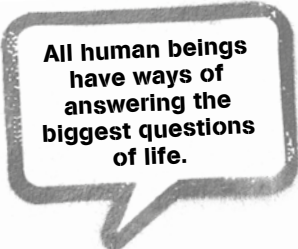
questions as 'Where do I come from?', 'What am I here for?' and 'Where am I going?' which affect our thoughts and behaviours. Many of these things are based on what we *believe*.

Of course, we might not like formal religion as such, but all of us have a way of understanding the world, which shapes our values and actions. It is this perspective which some call faith, others religion, others common sense. It is these commitments which affect each and every one of us, such that it would be bizarre to claim that one political group is 'religious' while the other is not. No, they're both working from ultimate commitments about the meaning and purpose of life.

The revelation of the *Newsnight* post-election analysis is that many people are simply unaware

that they operate under such commitments, and many haven't stopped to seriously think through their own world-view. The six questions that follow are designed to help you

begin to do just that.



**All human beings
have ways of
answering the
biggest questions
of life.**

1

**WHERE
HAVE
WE
COME
FROM?**

**Where
have we
come from?**

**What's the
solution?**

**HOW DO
WE KNOW?**

**Where are
we going?**

**What's
wrong?**

**What are we
here for?**

That's the first great question to wrestle with. Where do the origins of humanity lie? Are we bags of chemicals and atoms sloshing around, the result of billions of years of random collisions and interactions of particles, birthed from some primordial gaseous mess which brought itself into existence, and subsequently birthed us also? Or are we the result of an alien experiment at colonization? Or was there a grand designer – who with intelligence and creativity brought forth a universe with a habitable earth, who created mountains, rivers, animals, stars and finally humans as the pinnacle of creation?


Many today think that modern science has buried God. The Big Bang explains where it all started, and evolution explains how we got here. Therefore, with all explained, there's no need for a creator God any longer. But here's the thing – the missing link, if you will, in the evolution of the argument: It still doesn't really answer the origins question. Bear with me. Let's suppose the Big Bang



theory is correct. You still have to consider where the stuff and energy came from that caused it. And if you could answer that, I'd ask you, 'But where did *that* come from?' We could spend hours doing this, or we could just admit that really, in all honesty, science cannot answer that question.

Think of it this way. My family and I enjoyed a summer holiday a few years ago in a friend's mansion. Buried in deepest Surrey, this house had remote-controlled 10ft

high front gates, stables, a tennis court, ride-on mower, and kitchen to die for. It was wonderful and huge and delightful. I don't know if my friends will ever read this, but I confess I spent a good



I spent a good amount of my time exploring this cavernous dwelling.

amount of my time exploring this cavernous dwelling. There were rooms and cupboards and passageways at every turn, and being more than a little nosy, I explored. I would then excitedly report to the family the amazing new things I'd found.

Without wanting to be patronizing, that is the essence

of science – rooting round in God’s sock drawer and telling the rest of us what’s been found and why it’s cool. Obviously it’s a bit more complicated than that, but in reality science and God aren’t opposed. The scientist explores the universe and discovers, describes and explains all the amazing intricacies of what’s there.

Evolution too only explains so much. While it is possible to demonstrate that a man is 98 per cent chimp, it’s the 2 per cent that’s really interesting. American historian Carl Becker said humans are ‘little more than a chance deposit on the surface of the world, carelessly thrown up between two ice ages by the same forces that rust iron and ripen corn.’¹ American jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes said, ‘When one thinks coldly I see no reason for attributing to man a significance different in kind from that which belongs to a baboon or a grain of sand.’² Professor Stephen Hawking said, ‘the human race is just a chemical scum on a moderate sized planet.’³


Then again C.S. Lewis said, ‘There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – these are mortal, and their

life is to ours as the life of a gnat. It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit...'⁴ And G.K. Chesterton in his book *Orthodoxy* wrote:

If you begin to look at beasts and men . . . you will observe that the startling thing is not how like man is to the brutes, but how unlike he is. It is the monstrous scale of his divergence that requires an explanation . . . That an ape has hands is far less interesting to the philosopher than the fact that having hands he does next to nothing with them; does not play knuckle-bones or the violin; does not carve marble or carve mutton.⁵

Here are some often cited statistics. If our home, earth, was even a tiny bit closer to the sun, we would burn up. Any further away, we would freeze. It is exactly the right distance from the sun at 93 million miles away. The speed at which the earth travels around the sun

is just right too – at about 66,000 miles an hour. Any faster and it would be an icy wasteland. Any slower and it would be pulled towards the sun and we would



If our home, earth, was even a tiny bit closer to the sun, we would burn up.

burn up. If the force of gravity were different by one part in 10,000 billion billion billion, life on earth would be unsustainable. Of course, it could all just be a giant fluke – or it could be designed. You have to decide which you think seems more reasonable to believe.

You might fire back, 'But who made God?', to which I'd reply that it seems easier to believe God has no origin than to conceive of creation and humanity coming from nothing.

This stuff really, really matters because how you answer that question affects how you answer the rest.

NOTES

1. Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955).
2. Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Holmes-Pollock Letters 2* (ed: Mark de Wolfe Howe; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946).
3. Stephen Hawking, 'Reality on the Rocks', *Beyond Our Ken* season 1, episode 3, 1995.
4. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2009).
5. G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York, NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1996).