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Dear Rabbi Lamm,

Well, after nearly a year of computerized typesetting - and computerized mistake-making -- the BOOK is all set up in type and should be printed in a couple of weeks and published within a couple of months. The name is now: CHALLENGE : TORAH VIEWS ON SCIENCE AND ITS PROBLEMS (can one detect a very faint echo of Civilization and its Discontents?). In the end I had to abridge your article slightly. I (reluctantly) left out most of Abarbanel's pshat on Uzziah and some of the more recondite parts of your dissertation on the Nefesh Hachayim. As a result 55 pages became some 48. I am sure you will be very happy with the result. We have lavished great care on the book and it will be a first-rate quality production. There are 34 articles by some 23 authors and it will run to 538 pages. The page facing the commencement of each article features linking material, biography of author and first appearance of article .

In spite of the apparent comprehensiveness of your article it seems to me that there are still important questions that need discussion. There is one aspect you do not touch on but which looms large in the imaginative literature on this subject. This is the prospect that the civilization we eventually succeed in contacting may be immeasurably in advance of our own, and thus in a position to reveal to us the "secrets of the universe" and to direct life on this planet into different and happier channels. It is usually implied that in the light of this vast new knowledge our present ideas about everything, including of course religion, will be shown to be the immature fumbblings of unevolved minds. How would Torah fare in such a hypothetical situation? It seems to me that to attempt to answer this question is a worthwhile exercise, since it must lay bare the epistemological and existential bases of our emuna.

We must assume, if meaningful communication is to be at all possible, that the beings forming the exocivilization are in some essential respects analogous to ourselves. This implies that they must have:

1. Consciousness and mind.
2. A physical substratum of some sort.
3. An environment.
4. Goals.
5. Goal-achieving mechanisms.
6. The mind must presumably control a cybernetic servo-feedback system interacting with the environment and of sufficient complexity for it to be able to set and change its own goals.
7. Multiplicity of beings with disparate consciousness.

Problem areas are likely to be: (a) interactions of the beings with the environment and with each other; (b) uncontrolled goal-seeking in a finite physical environment.

Solutions will no doubt fall into one or other of the following two categories:

(1) Achievement of stable equilibrium in all problem areas by automated control of all goal-seeking, resulting in a soul-less, thoughtless, ant-like community.

(2) Development of the dimension of mind to establish contact with a universal mind-force, with consequent shifting of goals from the finite physical environment to the infinite mind-environment.


If the exocivilization came up with solution (2), this would confirm Torah, for this is essentially what Torah is. If with solution (1) we would have to challenge the suggestion that this is an "advanced" civilization. On the contrary, we would maintain, this is an infinitely retarded civilization. Of course we know of such a possibility, but we maintain that this would mean a stultifying of the true human potential.

I think a discussion along these lines would be fruitful. It would help us to see Torah in less "parochial" terms and to envisage its universal relevance. The concept of the "universe of mind" has been developed by me in sections 4 and 5 of my article on Evolution (in the book) (written for personal reasons under a pseudonym) and also in my article on Free Will.

I have a plot mapped out for a futurist novel on these lines. Can you put me in touch with a talented writer who would be prepared to co-operate with me on this? I will supply the ideas; he (or she) the detail, characterization and finesse.

Also in the embryonic stage: a radio or television series (primarily for Israeli consumption) based on the everyday lives of two neighbouring families, one Ashkenazi and one of Oriental origin (ie Edot Hamizrach). It will be designed to show, in the most natural way, the relevance of Torah faith and practice to the everyday trials, triumphs and tragedies of life in Israel in the late 1970's., and how only Torah can bridge the gulf between the "two Israels". Again, I have the ideas, but need someone conversant with the technique. Any suggestions?

Sincerely yours,

  
ARYEH CARMELL.