

SCIENCE AND RELIGION  
GRADED PAPER 2 REVIEWS  
CATHERINE ROTHACKER

## Paper 1

Overall, this review was thorough, well organized and structured, and well written. Nice work.

(1) Too much. Your role is a reviewer, not a teacher. Point out what's wrong, but refrain from giving advice on *how* to go about fixing those problems.

**Grade:** A

## Paper 2

A well-structured, well-written review. You provided a good deal of helpful criticism on many levels, and organized the feedback in a way that is helpful to the original author.

(1) One benefit of citation is that the author need not re-explain what some other author already has. The burden is on the reader, if she is unsure, to go look up what is cited and match it to the original text.

(2) I have no idea who taught you not to put a citation in the middle of the sentence, but frankly, that's nuts. You want the citation to be as close as possible to the text that invoked whatever is being cited. Leaving the citation to the end provides room for ample ambiguity as to what part of your text is related to the cited text. Clarity is the point, and moving all citations to the ends of sentences doesn't help.

(3) Nope, I disagree with this one, too. By virtue of inserting the quote into the middle of a sentence, it is understood that the quoted text has some previous context that is not being show. Elipses should only be used when text in the **middle** of a quoted sentence is being eliminated within the quotation.

(4) One more time, no. If the reader is uncertain about the credentials of the author being cited, then the reader can go look it up. It is not part of the argument itself, so telling me who the cited author is does not help me follow the argument. Moreover, I don't want **your** impression of why this author is persuasive—I want to evaluate for myself whether this author is credible and qualified.

**Grade:** A

## Paper 1 Review

### Overview/General Comments:

#### 1. Ideas/Quality of Arguments:

- ✓ a) The first thing I noticed when glancing over your paper was that it lacked a bibliography. Every assertion you make in your body paragraphs should be backed up by evidence from a text we have read in class or from a credible outside source. Set up the context of a piece of evidence, quote that evidence, and then analyze it. Many of your claims are factually incorrect or simply not convincing because you have no sources with which to support them. Ground your arguments in the text, and your ideas will be far more persuasive and credible.
- ✓ b) The second biggest thing I think you can do to improve the arguments of your essay is to develop a clear, precise, assertive thesis. I honestly do not know what exactly you are trying to prove. Craft a thesis that asserts the claim of which you are trying to persuade readers and demonstrates the methodology with which you will do so. The ideas in every paragraph should connect directly back to proving your thesis. It helps me to make an outline of my paper before I start writing so I know what exactly I am trying to prove and how (with what quotes and arguments) I am going to prove it.
- ✓ c) When reconsidering your thesis, go back to the original prompt. You don't have to answer every question, but I think your essay would benefit from looking beyond just Gosse and considering if, based on the history we have been discussing in class, a synthesis between science and religion is possible, necessary, or even desirable. This would make your central idea more meaningful and supportable than trying to draw a parallel between politics and the conflict between science and religion.

#### 2. Organization:

- a) Again, making an outline could greatly help you organize your thoughts and make it easier to see how best to present them. As a reader, I often became confused— guide me through your essay with a strong, assertive thesis, clear topic sentences, and smooth transitions. ①
- b) Follow the context, quote, analysis model (described above) in your body paragraphs.
- c) Your conclusion should be the link between your thesis, the claim you made at the beginning of your paper, and your body paragraphs, the evidence through which you proved that claim. It should not merely summarize the content of your essay or, on the other extreme, present an entirely new idea. This is one of the most difficult parts of an essay to do well, but if you take the time to refine your conclusion, you leave your reader (or professor) with a much stronger impression of your paper as a whole.

#### 3. Sentence Structure:

- a) Eliminate the passive voice (The dog was walked instead of I walked the dog) and linking verbs (is, was, were, to be, could be, etc.) as much as possible. Because

they are so pervasive, they weaken your writing. It can be tricky, but go through your paper and highlight them, and then revise to get rid of them. ①

- b) You do a good job of varying your sentence beginnings with clauses, prepositions and so on. Keep this up. Reading your paper out loud can help you determine if your sentences flow well.

4. Tone/Word Choice:

- a) There are places in your essay that are a little too informal. For instance, you should avoid using contractions (won't, don't, etc.) in formal writing. Also, "him/her" or "he/she" should be written out as "him or her" or "he or she."
- b) There should not be political commentary in your thesis statement, especially political commentary wholly unrelated to your argument.
- c) Use "must have," "seemed," and "appeared" and other noncommittal words sparingly. Assert statements clearly and directly in order to be persuasive.

5. Mechanics:

- a) There are several noticeable spelling and grammar errors. No one is perfect, but take the time to read your essay out loud or carefully proofread or ask a friend to look your paper over to avoid problems with mechanics, which make readers feel as though you did not put very much time or effort into your essay.
- b) Make sure to use the appropriate tense, and try to avoid using first person ("we") in formal writing.

Specific Commentary:

1. Title, Introduction, and Thesis:

- a) Your title is nice and specific, but again, I would hesitate to involve politics in your essay as more than a passing comparison. While religion and science may be battling for influence, they are not governing bodies. Keep the exactness, but make your title relate directly to your thesis.
- b) The Roman Catholic Church was not the only religious group that came into conflict with science. Unless you want your essay to focus just on the relationship of the RCC to science, do not single out this single branch of Christianity.
- ✓ c) Has "whether God exists" divided "these two sides in history?" Galileo and others were strong believers, like Collins is today. I do not know if it is accurate to assert that all scientists do not believe in a higher power.
- d) Was Gosse's explanation "completely logical?" Go back to Russell. He makes an interesting point about this. He also describes how scientists and religious groups disregarded Gosse's theory. Based on the evidence from Russell, is it fair to assert that the reception of Gosse's theory was "a classic example of fearing what one does not understand?"
- ✓ e) Was Gosse attempting to explain the "origin of the earth" or the earth's age? Go back to the text.
- f) Based on the evidence from Russell, I would also argue that Gosse was attempting to reconcile science and religion, not challenge either entity. Maybe his effort would, in your analogy, be a bipartisan effort rather than a third party challenging the status quo.

↳ interesting! A good point.

- g) See above notes on your thesis. What are you trying to prove? How are you going to prove it? Why does it matter? Why should a reader care?

2. Body Paragraph 1:

- a) Follow context, quote, analysis structure in all body paragraphs.
- b) Eliminate linking verbs as much as possible throughout essay.
- c) This is more of a subtle point, but the Supreme Court usually only rules on whether something is constitutional or unconstitutional. It does not have the power to imprison anyone, though its verdict could result in someone's imprisonment. The Supreme Court upheld Debs' conviction and sentence by a lower court as constitutional because he interfered with the distribution of mail during a strike, not because "...his political views were far deviated from the two-part opinion gap." That, to me at least, is an opinion, not a fact.
- d) How does the example of Debs relate to your thesis? You say "...his ideas did in fact resonate with some people," yet, according to Russell, Gosse's idea was dismissed by almost everyone. You say it was "impossible for Debs to express his ideas," yet Gosse was free to propose and advocate for his theory. How did Debs' ideas "...resonate with some people" if it was impossible for him to express them? Gosse's idea was not "explosive," it was an attempt at reconciling science and religion. Nor did his theory "...scare...the church and the scientific community," since, at least according to Russell, both groups basically ignored it. Where is the parallel between Gosse and Debs? What are you trying to prove by establishing it? How does that relate to the prompt?
- e) To what exactly would you have "...swing voters...change their belief systems?" Should they turn away from science and religion like turning away from a political party? What do you mean? Why does it matter?

3. Body Paragraph 2:

- a) Make sure your topic sentences guide the reader by letting him or her know what you are about to talk about. This one seems more like context. What are you trying to prove in this paragraph, and how does it relate to your thesis?
- b) Again, when you say the Church, you are singling out Catholicism. Using "menacing" might be overly-negative.
- c) Go back to the text. If you do not present your readers with any evidence, they have no reason to believe your claims. I would argue that Gosse's theory was not "...very threatening to church doctrine at the time" because no one believed it. How do you know that "...people were becoming more likely to accept new scientific ideas?" Would religious groups of the time really have described God as "amicable?" Why would an attempt at reconciling science and religion be "...catastrophic for Christians to hear?"
- d) Check your grammar ("could creates" and "be also be"). Try to stick with third person (no "we").

4. Body Paragraph 3:

- a) What is the greater significance of why scientists rejected Gosse's claims? How does this paragraph relate to your thesis?

- b) Repeating the types of scientists in sentence two is a little repetitive— try to revise for simplicity.
- c) Avoid vague, informal phrases like “...or the like.”
- d) Check spelling (“physisists”).
- e) Why would it matter if scientists or religious groups lost influence?

5. Body Paragraph 4:

- a) What are “...all the right ingredients for success?” Did Gosse’s theory really have them? Was his assertion logical? Why or why not? Again, how does that relate to your thesis and how will you support it?
- b) Try not to use “very” in formal essays. More precise language will strengthen your writing.
- c) Careful with tense (for instance, “Darwin proves”).
- d) Did people readily accept Darwin’s ideas, or did it cause debate in the scientific as well as the large community? Either way, back up this assertion with evidence.
- e) Avoid “seemed.” Be assertive in a persuasive essay.
- f) Was Gosse talking about “The origin of humans?” Check with Russell. Is there really “no room for middle ground,” or do societal conditions force people to pick a side?
- g) Maybe use “supporters” instead of “bases” at the bottom of page three.
- h) Avoid contractions and slashes.
- i) Is this your central idea, that synthesis between science and religion is impossible? Or is it that because the general public would never support a synthesis between the two, even a good synthesis would not be accepted? You could expand on and support an idea like one of these for a more meaningful essay.
- j) The last sentence of this paragraph was a bit confusing. Try to trim it down for clarity and directness.

6. Conclusion:

- a) See note above about conclusions. What have you proved? What is the link between the claim in your thesis and the evidence you presented in your body paragraphs?
- b) If Gosse’s idea was truly “not inferior,” even if scientists and theologians rejected his claim, why did the general public also dismiss it?
- c) They are always tempting, but try to avoid clichés like “...got out of the gates.”

A Final Word:

I would strongly recommend revising your paper and then scheduling an appointment online with the Writing Center to make sure you’re on the right track. I struggled a lot with this paper when I was writing my draft, and they were incredibly helpful.

I hope I have been constructive and helpful rather than overly harsh. I can tell that if you put in the time and effort, you have the ability to make this a great paper. Good luck!

## Paper 2 Review

### Overview/General Comments:

#### 1. Ideas/Quality of Arguments:

- a) On the whole, I thought your paper was thoughtfully written. I felt, though, that your thesis could have been clearer. Are you trying to prove that religion is a limiting factor for scientific potential? Why is a breach between science and religion something to avoid? What exactly is the central claim of your paper? Tell me that in your thesis, not just in your title or in a vague way in your introduction.
  - b) I especially liked your last paragraph— it felt like you were finally getting to the heart of the matter you had been setting up during the rest of your paper. I would shorten the slightly meandering setup and dive into the meat of the last paragraph. How could science disprove one of the fundamental truths of religion? What are some concrete examples of religion truly limiting scientific potential? I would recommend expanding these ideas (if they are the heart of your paper and I am not misinterpreting it) to make them more convincing. Trim the setup, even though it is perceptive, because it is almost informative rather than persuasive.
  - c) Examples and quotes from the text are incredibly important to back up your arguments. I would like to know, for instance, what you are talking about on the second page when you cite three different pages of White— what are these examples? How do they prove your point? How does your point connect back to your thesis?
  - d) When you say “religious truths,” be very careful to distinguish between those three fundamental truths Russell defined and ~~simply~~ some theologians’ biblical interpretations. I know this is very specific, but I think it will strengthen and clarify your argument. *unclear.*
- #### 2. Organization:
- a) Help your reader out with a thesis including not just a central claim, but a roadmap of how you are going to prove that claim. If you know your methodology of proving your main idea, your paragraphs will also become more focused. Use topic and concluding sentences with clear transitions so your reader doesn’t get lost.
  - b) Again, use examples and analyze how they prove your point. Do not just reference pages in a text and expect your reader to know what you mean.
  - c) Craft a conclusion. I felt like your final paragraph was a body paragraph, not a conclusion. Your conclusion should be the like between the central claim in your thesis and the evidence in your body paragraphs. Avoid bland summary or introducing an entirely new idea.
- #### 3. Sentence Structure:
- a) Your sentences generally flowed well. One thing to work on could be varying the structures you use. Declaratives are clear and direct, but mixing up sentence beginnings can make academic writing less monotonous.

- b) Try to eliminate the passive voice and linking verbs (is, was, were, to be, etc.). ✓  
These are fairly common in your paper, and they weaken your writing. Go through your paper, highlight any examples, and try to get rid of them. It can be tricky, but it will make your paper much stronger.
4. Tone/Word Choice:
- a) On the whole, you used an appropriate formal, unemotional tone and the proper perspective. If you decide to follow the suggestions above and make the beginning of your paper a little more persuasive and less informational, retain this tone as you present your reasoned arguments.
  - b) Your word choice was solid as well. Just make sure to be specific when differentiating between biblical interpretations and fundamental religious truths.
5. Mechanics:
- a) In your second paragraph, you include a citation in the middle of a sentence. I was taught never to do that, but this could just be a stylistic difference. If you want to be thorough I would ask Professor Kaplan if he has a preference. | ②
  - b) Another small stylistic difference— I was taught to put ellipses after the first quotation mark of a quote if it began in the middle of a sentence. For instance, I would write: *As Francis Collins describes, science and religion are "...different ways of seeking answers to important questions" (Collins).* | ③

### Specific Commentary

1. Title, Introduction, and Thesis:
- a) Your title is great— short and specific. In your thesis, make a similar specific claim and give readers a roadmap of how you will prove that claim. I got a little lost in your paper because I did not know how each paragraph related to your central idea. Also make sure to somehow communicate in your thesis and introduction not just what you are asserting, but why it matters and what ramifications it could have.
  - b) I would point out that while fundamental religious truths are unchangeable, biblical interpretations are not. So far, I at least would argue, only certain biblical interpretations have come into conflict with science, not any of the fundamentals, and these incorrect biblical interpretations have changed in response to scientific discovery. If so, there need not be the contradiction you describe. Please address this.
2. Body Paragraph 1:
- a) Directly state concrete examples and analyze how they prove your point. This will make your writing much more persuasive and less vague.
  - b) Again I might take issue with the phrase "conclusions offered by the Bible." To me, like the natural world, the Bible offers far more questions than answers, and interpretations of it not only vary by branch of Christianity, but also person to person. I would say people in society are not forced to choose a side, because the issues relating to science and religion have facets rather than black and white divisions.
  - c) Also, how would you respond to Collin's ideas from chapter three of The Language of God? I found his synthesis incredibly convincing, and it might be

interesting to examine why his explanation of the partnership of science and religion would still cause the conflict you describe.

3. Body Paragraph 2:

- a) I do not agree that the truth religion hopes to find is an explanation of natural processes. Framing the conflict in such a way ensures science's victory. Maybe if you phrased it a bit differently—I would agree that science and religion both attempt to learn more about the nature of the universe and man's place in it and improve humanity's quality of life. Natural processes, though, are just one part of that, and science is clearly better suited to explain most natural phenomena.
- b) See general comments.

Good.

4. Body Paragraph 3:

- a) I do not know if I would say "...religion's role in revealing truth ostensibly is lessened." Certainly, science can and has made certain biblical interpretations of how the world works look foolish, but parts of religion, the three fundamental truths are, I would argue, beyond science's scope and beyond the natural world. How could we ever scientifically determine whether Russell's three fundamental religious truths were valid or invalid? These larger and maybe even more important truths are inaccessible to science.
- b) Again, see general comments about examples and the use of the phrase "religious truths."

5. Body Paragraph 4:

- a) What is the "space" mentioned in your first sentence? Be clear with your readers.
- b) Again, I keep thinking of chapter three of Collins. Will science, in the future, be rid of that pesky Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle? Will science ever be able to tell what happened in that tiny fraction of a second right after the big bang? I would argue, like Collins does, that there are limits to science of this sort, leaving room for the presence of God.
- c) This is another stylistic difference, but when I name my source in a sentence (you mention Dawkins and Russell in the text of your paper), I try to briefly establish their credentials, what authority their opinions have, why the reader should believe their claims.

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6. Conclusion/Body Paragraph 5:

- a) See above notes on separating your conclusion from your body paragraphs.
- b) Again, I would argue that trying to scientifically examine the fundamental truths of religion would be as foolish and futile as trying to determine the shape of our planet based on the Bible. God, by definition, is beyond the natural world, even though he can influence the events within it. Science explains the natural world; it cannot study the supernatural. At least addressing this, even if you don't agree, would strengthen your argument.

I hope my feedback has been constructive and useful rather than overly harsh. Happy editing!