

SCIENCE AND RELIGION  
GRADED PAPER 2  
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## The thesis and arguments

Your thesis is clearly state, and your arguments directly and cleanly support your claim. Unfortunately, you fail to consider more compelling objections to your own proposal. There are (see (7), below) far more difficult problems with separating science and religion to non-overlapping domains. The division that you've suggested is a commonly proposed one, and the overlaps are easy to find and (likely) impossible to resolve. Therefore, you tried, but you failed effectively to anticipate a skeptic's most compelling counter-arguments.

## The writing

This paper is well written. The mechanics are sound and the text flows well. Good job.

## Items marked on the paper

(1) Why is this statement unidirectional? Why are we concerned only with science examining religious claims, and not the other way around? More importantly, can you give an example of *science examining a religious claim*? There are instances such as double-blind experiments on the efficacy of prayer on hospitalized people. However, most of the time, science examines natural phenomena, and it just so happens that some religions assert their own explanations of those phenomena. These are **not** cases of science examining religious claims.

(2) Are you describing something like Stephen Jay Gould's *non-overlapping magisteria*? It's not entirely clear what you mean here, and that makes your thesis more difficult to comprehend.

(3) Do you have any evidence to support this claim? The philosophy of science has always acknowledged that sensory perception may be unreliable. However, it also claims that sensory perception is **all that we have**, and if our senses are faulty, then we cannot *know* anything. Moreover, if Gosse's conjecture is correct, then science becomes the means by which to explore the illusory world that we continue to occupy, and that is not so obviously a valueless exercise.

Perhaps the scientific community rejected Gosse's synthesis **because it is not a scientific hypothesis**. It is not empirically testible, and it is not falsifiable. Therefore, the scientific process cannot address it, and so it is of no interest. Science can go marching onward with its assumption that our senses are as good a window into reality as we will ever have.

(4) Either Slifkin presented an absurd argument, or you've failed to capture and communicate some essential feature of that argument here. In particular:

These things are evidence of a past, which Adam did not have. Therefore, Adam's false history will necessarily be incomplete . . .

Why must the history be incomplete? So Adam has evidence of a past that didn't exist, just like the rest of the Earth. Why is that a problem? Is the concern that the Bible reveals that Adam did not really have such a past? If so, that's not much of a concern—I see nothing that prevents God from introducing inconsistencies that would reveal that the Earth is perhaps not as old as many physical indicators would suggest. That's hardly any kind of logical inconsistency.

(5) This objection of Russell's is **not** a *logical* argument. Russell merely suggests that the illusion, if it was performed by god, leaves us unable to distinguish different possible "true" ages of the Earth—they're all equally probable. That does not reveal any failure of logic on Gosse's part; he only eliminates the possibility of ever determining the true age of the Earth.

(6) That's an absurdly strong assertion. Humans and their cultures constantly deal with conflicting views and poorly defined domains. It's what we do. While there may be compelling reasons to **want** these two separated into disjoint domains, I see little reason to expect that are likely to do so.

(7) You are missing the compelling difficulties with this proposal. First, if religions are to have authority over morals and ethics, then it is inevitable that some form of scientific exploration is going to incur moral considerations and objections. Witness research on embryonic stem cells, where the majority of the opposition is motivated by Christian morals. For such problems, in what way could these two be "cleanly separated"?

Similarly, morality, spirituality, faith, belief, and religion itself are already considered by some scientists as natural phenomena to be explored scientifically (e.g., Dennett). For example, there is an ongoing debate about whether morals are provided by religion, or whether they are an evolved trait that we inserted into our man-made religions. There's no good reason for scientists to back away from such a compelling line of research, but to follow it is to intrude on space that you've clearly given to religion.

**Grade:** A-

## Reconciling Science and Religion: From Gosse to the Disparate Synthesis

In 1857, Phillip Gosse published his life's defining work: *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* (Roizen). Unfortunately for Gosse, his controversial attempt at a synthesis between the scientific evidence of the world's age and the assertions of religious texts proved unpopular in both scientific and religious circles. What Gosse perhaps thought would bring the feuding sides together only seemed to unite them in their rejection of his theory. As science continues to examine the claims of religion, it becomes increasingly likely that to reconcile conflicting beliefs their epistemological domains must be separated. If science and religion seek to answer fundamentally different questions, then perhaps this disparate synthesis can find acceptance in both communities.

In *Omphalos*, Gosse hypothesizes that God created the world exactly as is stated in the Bible, but made it look as if it were created millions of years ago, as science suggests. This synthesis creates what some call a "false history," where everything appears (from a scientific standpoint) to have a history that it does not have (Slifkin 164). Gosse's theory was not received well by either the scientific or religious community.

For the scientists, the Gosse synthesis poses an ideological problem by essentially undermining the validity of observations that give science its legitimacy. Since God only made things appear how they are, how can any scientific finding be trusted? If science somehow proved the Big Bang Theory through a compelling piece of evidence, this result would just be delegitimized by the Gosse argument that God made it to seem that way.

Thus, any attempt by science to examine the history of the earth would be made obsolete.

Furthermore, the Gosse hypothesis creates two logical contradictions. First, Gosse's synthesis asserts an artificial history for the world. If this premise is applied to the specific

example of God's creation of Adam, the argument becomes inconsistent. Gosse contends that Adam, although not naturally born, would still have a navel to appear as though he had experienced regular past growth. But to what extent would this false history be complete? <sup>?</sup> 4  
 Would Adam have memories? What about scars? These things are evidence of a past, which Adam did not have. Therefore, Adam's false history will necessarily be incomplete, making it questionable why God created it at all (Slifkin 164).

The second of these logical contradictions is that raised by Bertrand Russell. Russell contends that if we accept Gosse's hypothesis, a world created 6,000 years ago could not be differentiated from one created 20 minutes ago. The idea that one's life experiences may be false was a concept that people viscerally rejected; this reaction hindered the acceptance of Gosse's theory (Russell 70). Ultimately, these logical weaknesses, combined with the inability to empirically test the Gosse synthesis, led science to reject the theory. 5

The scientific community was not alone in opposing *Omphalos*. The Church, too, was not receptive to Gosse's ideas. Much of the religious community took Gosse's synthesis as implying a manipulative and deceptive God (Roizen). Why, if God created the world in 4,004 B.C., would he trick humanity into thinking it was older? For the Church it was not just that God's deception was logically problematic, but that the image Gosse's synthesis painted of God was inconsistent with the <sup>that</sup> God Christianity conceived. ~~Certainly~~, the benevolent God of scripture would not deliberately deceive humans to such an extent.

Perhaps most compelling reason that the Church rejected the Gosse synthesis is that it too radically changed current beliefs. Although consistent with the Bible, Gosse's ideas were far from the accepted Christian beliefs of the time. Like major scientific discoveries

Like what?

How so?

(such as the heliocentric universe), Gosse's theory required a revision of Christian thought to a degree that Christians were unwilling to accept.

The rejection of the Gosse hypothesis is simple; creating a more acceptable one (especially to both sides) is more complicated. Historically, science and religion have overlapped in the phenomena they attempt to explain: the shape and age of the earth, the beginning of humanity, the nature of stars, ~~just to name a few~~. As science has progressed and evidence has been accumulated for scientific answers to these questions, religion has been forced to adapt. In light of overwhelming scientific evidence, modern religion has retreated from these areas of historically theological domain (White). Even with ever-progressing science, religion will not likely be eradicated; for many people, religion speaks to them in ways that science cannot. It is this key distinction that might allow science and religion to coexist. Though science will continue to advance and discover new truths, religion may be able to assert authority where its greatest strength lies: spirituality. Thus, in order for a synthesis to be made, science and religion must be kept separate – science dealing with testable theories, religion dealing with spiritual and moral matters.

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Not new.

To address this new "disparate synthesis," the idea of a synthesis must first be defined. Where Gosse sought to meld science and religion, the disparate synthesis merely seeks to allow them to coexist. In that sense, to "synthesize" science and religion is not necessarily to bring them together, but instead to make them compatible – more similar to Collins' synthesis than Gosse's. Since a synthesis will break down upon holding conflicting beliefs, science and religion must not be employed to answer the same questions. For science, questions such as the world's history, the evolution of humans, and the greater universe will all be left for discovery. Religion will have sovereignty over questions like

undefined here.

Huh?

morality, the path through life, and God. This approach specifically eliminates employing a of "God in the gaps" philosophy, for that seeks to put God into areas of scientific domain.

~~Certainly~~ <sup>I would</sup> there will be pitfalls. The Church will be reluctant to relinquish ground and power to science, people will ~~still~~ cling to their ~~current~~ beliefs, and some questions may fall uncertainly between scientific and religious domains. Though difficult and slow, acceptance of the disparate synthesis may be inevitable. Just as the Church accepted the idea of antipodes, it might eventually have to accept all other theories science proves beyond a reasonable doubt (White). Ultimately, when science and religion are completely separated, one may believe in God, or not, without sacrificing scientific truths. A religious person, therefore, becomes no different than an atheist on questions of science and only differs in her source of spiritual guidance. By allowing both sides complete authority over a certain set of questions, the disparate synthesis could, over time, gain popular acceptance.

The Gosse synthesis struggled gaining acceptance for a number of reasons. Perhaps the biggest, for both the religions and scientific communities, was that Gosse failed to draw a clear line between the two. Instead of proclaiming certain questions a matter of science (like the age of the earth) and others as a matter of religion (like moral guidance), Gosse attempted to slightly alter the beliefs of both to try to make them fit together. The fact that science and religion were trying to answer the same questions with different answers created a conflict that could only be solved by one side being wrong. If the realms of science and religion are isolated, they can coexist not only in the same world, but also in the same mind, for neither undermines the holdings of the other. The disparate synthesis may tear science and religion apart, but in the end it might be the only way to bring them together.

## Bibliography

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