

## Review for *On Gosse's Good Ideas and Bad Methods*

### **General Comments**

On the whole, this is a very strong start. To begin with a few formatting suggestions: you're using, I believe, 1.5 inch margins, which is actually larger than the default margin size in Word (1.25 inch). Professor Kaplan asked, in the assignment, for 1 inch margins so you might want to change that. Also check your font and size; it doesn't look quite like Times New Roman size 12 to me. I might also suggest using a justified alignment so your text is lined up on the right margin, but of course that's a matter of personal preference.

Your grammatical conventions are accurate. There are, however, many places in which you could convey your point more clearly by working with your syntax. For the most part your meaning is clear, but you should work on cleaning up your style a bit so that you leave the reader in no doubt as to what you are trying to say. A more important point about conventions is that you need to include references. It is considered plagiarism to not cite your sources, and so whatever else of my advice you choose to ignore, I would strongly recommend accepting this piece.

In terms of your content, it is clear that you have thought through your argument thoroughly. You begin by breaking down Gosse's attempted synthesis, and then progress to building up your own notion of how a successful reconciliation should appear. However, I think there are a few holes in your logic that weaken your argument. I'm fairly sure that modifying the conviction with which you make certain statements can remedy this problem without substantially affecting your main point.

### **The Title**

Since the title is the first part of your paper that the reader will see, it's important it conveys exactly what you mean to discuss, and I'm not sure that your title does your paper justice. I'm a bit confused as to what you mean by "good ideas and bad methods." I suspect you intend this to mean that Gosse was justified in his desire to reconcile science and religion, but that his hypothesis was weak. But I interpret "Gosse's ideas" to mean his specific attempt at reconciliation, and I am at a loss as to how to interpret "methods." The word "bad" seems, to me, a bit weak. Also, in the title, you refer only to Gosse's ideas, whereas your paper goes far beyond that to analyze attempts at reconciliation in general, not only Gosse's specific effort. Perhaps you should expand this title to encompass both of the concepts that you examine.

### **The Introduction**

Your first sentence is one of the places where I think you could use a bit of work on the syntax. You refer to Gosse's ideas as a "plausible synthesis," but then go on to discuss how this synthesis is actually far from plausible; I would recommend choosing a different word here. You also mention an "outlandish notion," an "incredulous premise," and at the beginning of the next paragraph, a "skeptical premise," but you don't ever state explicitly what this premise is, and I am entirely unsure of what you mean. Furthermore, I am not sure the word "incredulous" means precisely what you want it to mean. The word means skeptical or disbelieving; I suspect your intent was for it to mean something closer to "unable to be believed" – a slight distinction, but important nonetheless. Given that God exists as a religious figure, is it redundant to say "the persona of God in religion"? I am not sure you can offend a practice itself, though certainly you can offend the practice's followers. You have a discrepancy in the verb tenses of the second to

last sentence – past tense “set” disagrees with present tense “ends up.” Finally we come to your thesis, which I think, like your title, fails to do your paper justice. Here, instead of only referring to Gosse, you only incorporate the second argument of your paper; that is, that both science and religion are necessary. I think your intent with your thesis is to say that while Gosse’s synthesis is implausible, some means of simultaneously accepting both science and religion is necessary. If this is what you mean (or, indeed, if it isn’t) you need to work on your wording in order to convey as such.

## **The Body**

### *Syntax*

- You have a typo at the bottom of the first page – “and if the those laws...”
- There are a few instances in which I think your word choice is a bit weak. On page one, you refer to God as an “icon.” In a religious context, an icon refers to a visual representation of a figure; I think you mean something different here. Also on the first page, you write “Gosse infers that science...” Do you mean that we can make inferences based upon Gosse’s idea, or that Gosse himself has made this inference? A different word might clarify this.
- “Things” is in general a weak word. I think you use it three or four times in your paper, and in each case you can probably find a stronger word.
- In several places you use generalizing words – that is, “inevitably,” “obviously,” etc. Consider whether you want to make such broad claims. In order to prove an “all” argument false, only one counterexample is needed. This means that your argument is actually stronger if you leave room for exceptions.
- Look for places where your language is redundant; for example, “God in religion,” “extraordinarily significant,” etc.

### *Sentence Structure*

- Your third paragraph presents a very strong argument at its core, but I think your phrasing makes this less evident than it should be. Your second and third sentences are either redundant or ambiguous. I think there is a subtle difference in what you are saying in each; the second sentence comments on the fundamental laws themselves, while the third discusses the conclusions we have drawn from these laws. But this distinction should be clearer.
- In the full paragraph on the second page, and again in your conclusion, you write in first person. I think that generally in a persuasive essay, this is not a good idea. When you say, “I do not believe...” you are presenting this as your opinion, thereby leaving every opportunity for others to disagree. That isn’t the purpose of your paper; you’re trying to convince everyone else that what you are saying is correct.
- Your language becomes more colloquial towards the end of the third page. Phrases such as “back in the olden days” or “all sorts of disease” seem a bit too casual.
- I like your strategy of using rhetorical questions in your conclusion. You aren’t making direct statements, but instead leading the reader to a specific conclusion based on the questions you ask. The one issue I have with these questions is that you mention God: someone who doesn’t believe in God wouldn’t have reason to ask this question.

## *Arguments*

- I am fairly certain that you are a religious person. This isn't something that should come across in your writing. Your argument should be equally persuasive to those who are not religious as to those who are. But you spend a great deal more time on religion than on science, and your "pro-religion" arguments are in general much stronger than your "pro-science" arguments. Try to balance your paper a little more so you are completely objective in your evaluation. (If I am wrong, and you are instead a staunch atheist, the point still stands: you are writing from a Christian perspective.)
- At the bottom of the first page, you write "Science seeks to find truth based on the laws of our world." Does science need to determine these laws first, or do the laws somehow exist already, and science is just a matter of applying them?
- I think you contradict yourself at the end of the third paragraph. You state first that (under Gosse's hypothesis) we shouldn't try to learn about the world (and therefore that we shouldn't practice science), but then that science still has practical application. Are you referring to the difference between theoretical and applied science? You need to clear this up.
- You state, on the second page, that there are too many factual inconsistencies to create a plausible synthesis. I think if you are going to make such an assertion, you need to spend some time backing it up. The existence of people such as Francis Collins provides evidence that people can and do practice both science and religion simultaneously, so why do you think it is impossible?
- The biggest quarrel I have with your argument is that you seem to be making the assumption that all morality comes from religion. I think this is most apparent on the third page, when you discuss the ramifications were religion to be eliminated. You claim that people would no longer act morally, that crime would increase, and, in your conclusion, that people would not question the ethics of certain scientific investigations. This is false. I am not a religious person, but I am ethical. I participate in community service, I am not a criminal, and I question whether cloning is ethical. On the second page, you state that "Even those not so closely associated with religion will watch what they do 'just in case.'" This, too, is entirely false. Certainly I watch what I do to ensure that I behave morally, but this has nothing to do with "just in case" there is a God. I think that once we accept the notion that morality can be derived from sources other than religion, your argument for the chaos resulting from a society lacking religion falls through.
- In the paragraph in which you present your claim for why religion without science is unsuccessful, you only mention science twice: in your opening sentence and in your closing sentence. This argument would be much stronger if you discuss how science has succeeded where religion fails, instead of just an example of one of religion's failures.

## **The Conclusion**

"Checks and balances" is a really interesting way of putting this concept. I think you should soften the word "need" when you state that "we need religion to question..." in order to leave room for ethical atheists. Overall, the problem with this conclusion is that it doesn't add anything to your discussion. You're primarily summarizing the arguments that you have already presented, but the conclusion should be a place for you to expand upon your arguments and draw larger conclusions. I think you're trying to do this in your last sentence, but I am not sure you

have adequately set up this statement. What exactly is “the situation now”? I suspect that if you asked a random sample of people, you would get vastly different answers. So you need to specify what the situation is now, and explain why this is so. As in your thesis, you only discuss half of your paper in your conclusion. The beginning of your paper is devoted to Gosse, but he disappears after the first page or so. You might want to bring him back here, at least for a brief appearance, so that you don’t lose that part of your discussion. Between your thesis and your conclusion, I am a bit lost as to exactly what sort of coexistence you intend. Do you mean that each individual ought to practice both science and religion? That society as a whole should have religious people and scientists? Can an individual maintain both beliefs simultaneously? Finally, what implications does your argument have? Once we arrive at the conclusion that synthesis is implausible but coexistence is necessary (is that what you are getting at?), what does that mean for the state of our lives, or for the future?