

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.

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.
 - 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).*

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.
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.
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!