

The Impossible Reconciliation of Observable Evidence and Blind Faith

Because science and religion have never gone hand in hand, one might expect a theory that logically combines the two to be widely appealing – especially to Christians, who constantly defend their religion against the attack of scientists. Nevertheless, Philip Henry Gosse’s Omphalos hypothesis, which did just that, received only meager support from either side. He attempted to synthesize geological evidence suggesting Earth’s old age (billions of years) with Biblical texts that depict a more youthful Earth (thousands of years) by suggesting that God planted Earth to look as if it had been created billions of years ago. This reconciliation of religious and scientific beliefs, however, sacrifices integral aspects of both science and religion. On the one hand, those who believe that truth only derives from that which can be observed scientifically tend to believe all that science observes (for example, a person would unlikely testify to Darwin’s theory of evolution but refute Mendel’s theory of genetics). Christian faith, on the other hand, requires believing in that which cannot be observed. Gosse attaches thin threads of the two opposing belief systems and claims they hang together, but in abandoning core aspects of both science and Christianity, Gosse inevitably lost followers from both sides. Neither science nor Christianity can be reconciled. There is no sense, therefore, in synthesizing the belief in observable evidence with the belief in blind faith.

Gosse’s theory was so widely rejected that it need not be evaluated for validity. Instead, it can be used as a model the possibility of reconciling science and religion. Let us look at the situation of two starving men who have been walking for many weeks through a desert; one of the men is blind. The blind man reassures his companion that they will be rescued soon. “I have faith that salvation is near,” he proclaims. The seeing man refuses to

believe this claim without any hard evidence but then sees an automobile in the distance and finally believes his friend. This example shows nothing about which man was right, and a metaphorical reading of this situation says nothing about either science or religion. Perhaps the blind man (representing “blind faith”) was better off, for he had hope all along, while the seeing man waited for observable proof. Yet perhaps, the blind man had no idea whether or not a car would come and merely chose to believe it for his own comfort. Just as possibly, the vision of a vehicle could have been a mirage, as human the senses are not always trustworthy (just as science cannot produce “proofs”). This story merely suggests that a man cannot be both blind and seeing, and therefore the same man could not have these two experiences. Both men ascertained the arrival of help, but neither had the ability to understand the other’s means. In this sense, science and religion cannot be combined. To reconcile either is to contradict its definition: we can explain the world through observable science *or* blind faith.

In his book Religion and Science, Bertrand Russell mentions “three central doctrines—God, immortality, and freedom—which are felt to constitute what is of most importance to Christianity” (144). Russell states that his “own belief is that science cannot either prove or disprove them at present, and that no method outside science exists for proving or disproving anything” (145). For the purpose of this argument, we will assume the same point of view, that science is in fact the only method to have the potential power to either prove or disprove the Christian doctrines. Currently, science has not proven anything one way or another, and the battle between science and religion is at a standstill. Gosse’s hypothesis, notwithstanding its lack of support, was a futile attempt to settle the conflict because even in the case that scientists harness the power to either prove or disprove the religious doctrines, we arrive upon a lose-lose situation.

Let's say science somehow disproves the existence of God, immortality, or freedom. While scientists may see this as victory in the battle of science and religion, believers will see this as a false proof. Many Christians, like vocal Evangelist Francis Collins, believe that God reigns over science. Science is "forced to remain silent on the topic" (Collins interview) of God because God is outside nature, Collins states. The same reasoning could be applied to immortality or free will. According to Christians, science is a child of religion and has no right or power to create rules or boundaries embodying these greater forces. Therefore, science cannot win this battle, for any proofs it could ever obtain are obsolete in the context of religion.

Now let's presume that science *proves* the existence of God, immortality, or free will (still, we are assuming that science is the other method able to assess the validity of the Christian doctrines). With this proof, instead of validating religion, a paradox is created. Now, science has proved one of the pillars of religion while destroying another: blind faith. Such scientific proof would turn religion into a science, something that those who only acknowledge the observable would believe. In this case (scientific evidence of God, for example), perhaps the ironic situation would arise where Christians stay loyal to the belief that science has no power to comment on God, and would deny the scientific proof that God exists in order to preserve their faith.

Given these two situations (science either proving or disproving Christian doctrines), Christians should not want a reconciliation of science and religion; they cannot win. The only desired outcome is a draw in which the two sides agree to disagree. Similarly, scientists have no desire for a synthesis. They strictly believe in the natural, not the supernatural and have no drive to compromise their beliefs. The only circumstance is which scientists may need to

reconcile their beliefs with religious ideas would be if they find proof of the supernatural. However, if scientific evidence that supports the existence of the supernatural arises, no reconciliation is necessary, as there would be scientific proof and the existence of the supernatural would not conflict with the scientists' belief system.

Neither side can win. Science has no power to convince Christians that it has sole power while abiding by religious guidelines, and religion has no power to convince scientists that it has sole power while abiding by scientific guidelines. In my opinion, the reconciliation of the science and Christianity is only possible by individuals who are unsure of what they believe. By definition, blind faith and observable proof cannot coexist. Their simultaneous existence is paradoxical. Gosse's synthesis is an attempt to convince people who may not understand the principle concepts of science or the purpose of religion that the two systems of belief can work together (which is perhaps why his support was limited). Science, in a sense, is a religion, one that explains the creation and framework of the Earth as well as Christianity does. Different eras yield advantageous circumstances to different sides, but in the end, the individual battles are futile: the best each side can do is draw. Gosse's claim that God made Earth to look billions of years old disgraces both sides, deeming the almighty God manipulative and science deceiving. Inevitably, the battles between science and religion will continue into the far future, but until someone discovers how it is possible to be blind and seeing simultaneously, both sides fight a losing battle.