

Religion and Science: A Failed Emulsification

Using observation and experimentation, science provides explanations of the natural world. With that as its purpose, science can never be static, as it must always be ready to change due to new discoveries from additional observation and experimentation. Contrastingly, religion, using scripture and faith as support, develop explanations about the natural world that are not nearly as yielding as scientific explanations. Because religious, in particular Christian, explanations of the natural world are based in a metaphysical entity, they cannot be disproved or proved, as science has no way to assess their validity. Therefore, by attempting to explain the same worldly phenomena, the inevitable conflicting of perspectives prohibits science and religion to coexist.

Occurring prior to the origin of Christianity, the idea that the Earth was created below a firmament that rested on pillars was developed by Ancient Egyptians. However, as time progressed, Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle challenged this idea by suggesting that Earth was round. During this same time period, Christianity was established and their unfledged hypothesis was incapable of persuading the masses, especially fathers of the Church. In accordance with his interpretation of the New Testament, Eusebius argued that because the end of world was imminent their argument was ““useless labour,”” and that as a result, it is necessary to turn ““our souls to better things””.¹ This example of using interpretation as a means of denying the validity of a hypothesis illustrates a significant reason why religion and science are irreconcilable. By asserting his interpretation as nearly as equally valid as biblical text, Eusebius circumvented obtaining empirical evidence to support his claim. In science, empirical evidence cannot be omitted if a hypothesis is to be deemed valid. Consequently, that religion allowed the omission to

occur established a distinct difference in the methods in which religion and science support their claims.

However, religion uses more than just interpretation to produce explanations of the natural world. In combination with Scripture and interpretation, faith and logical reasoning made it difficult for science to persuade the Church to accept scientific explanations of the natural world. Defined by geneticist Francis Collins as “evidence of things not seen,” faith, in conjunction with logic and biblical text, was used by the Church against the scientific idea of antipodes. Lactantius raised the following logical questions: “Is there any one so senseless as to believe that there are men whose footsteps are higher than their heads...[and] that the rains and snow and hail fall upward toward the earth?”² Prior to the conception of gravity, as was the case in this situation, these were reasonable questions that hindered the acceptance of antipodes. The Church’s argument was furthered with biblical support. In the sixth century, Procopius of Gaza argued that if antipodes with people existed, Christ would have had to go to the other side of the Earth to die for their salvation and by extrapolation, an additional Adam and Eve must have existed prior to his coming. Because the antipodes had not been seen, the Church’s faith resided in Scripture and logical reasoning. Centuries would pass before observations of people at the antipodes would be made. Yet even with the discoveries of Columbus and Magellan, both of which were non-scientific expeditions, the Church still failed to be persuaded.

The Church’s tendency to resist change, even with the presentation of new evidence, provides another reason for the inability of religion and science to coexist. Because the results of scientific experiments are predictive models, science must be

willing to change these models if an outcome occurs that goes against the prediction. By rejecting or modifying the model, science can adapt to the phenomena that occur in the natural world. Unlike science, religion cannot change by simply re-writing the bible. Furthermore, as the Church was a source of power for many aspects—access to printing presses, persecution and the Inquisition, owner of large amounts of land—to admit that its beliefs were wrong on the basis of scientific empirical evidence ran the risk of losing its power and followers; as was the case with Galileo and evolutionist Richard Dawkins. The latter will be discussed first, as it is an example of how religion alone can prove to be incompatible with science.

Raised in a Christian household, Dawkins began to question the validity of religion when at age 9 he learned that multiple religions existed. He concluded that they cannot all be right, thus they cannot be trusted. This idea can be applied more directly to Christianity if one considers the multitude of denominations, each attempting to explain the natural world. Furthermore, the Bible itself contains discrepancies in trying to describe the same events. This can be seen in the records of the creation of the Earth in Genesis and in the accounts of the life of Christ written by the Apostles. If such divisions and discrepancies exist, Dawkins argues that the bible should not be interpreted literally but rather as a work of literature to understand our culture. If presented with the aforementioned issues and the support of experimental evidence, religion finds difficulty in maintaining their explanations. Galileo's discoveries are a prime example of this struggle.

With observations made from his telescope, Galileo disproved the heliocentric theory that the earth was the center of the universe. Evidence gained from the telescopic

observations prevented the Church from forming a legitimate counterargument.

Consequently, the Church made to Galileo to recant his discoveries. Despite their efforts, that Galileo's discoveries supported the predictive models made by science forced the Church to accept geocentrism.

Because science relies on observation and experiments to gain empirical evidence to support its explanations it is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile the views of religion and science, as religion requires nothing but faith to uphold a belief.

¹ Eusebius of Caesarea as quoted in White, p.107

² Lactantius as quoted in White, p. 116