

September 29, 2008  
Paper 2, Round 1

### **The Harmony and Discord of Religion, Science, and Determinism**

Human beings study religion and science as methods of explaining reasons for existence, the meaning of life, and the physical and metaphysical world. Several choose to explain their world solely through scientific theories and investigation, some solely through faith and theology, but many find a middle ground between the two. As long as one does not interpret science or religion too narrow-mindedly, the two seemingly opposite viewpoints can be consistent and logically fit together. One hypothesis of science that is not compatible with religious views is Determinism. It is not possible to be a Determinist and religious, as the scientific hypothesis of Determinism is the direct opposite of free will, a principal pillar of religion. Not all scientists accept Determinism as true, however, so it is still possible to accept religion and science without accepting Determinism.

One example of scientific and religious beliefs coinciding is found in the beliefs of Francis Collins. He is an evangelical Christian and head of the Humane Genome Project, which mapped the human genome. He explains to us that science is a way of understanding how nature works, but is unable to answer questions about the existence of God and the meaning of life. For Collins, science and religion go hand in hand, not clashing, but together being able to make sense of the physical and metaphysical world. Collins says that approximately forty percent of scientists are believers and that science allows us to view a "hint of God's mind." President Clinton backed up Collins in this belief in a speech in 2000. He said that the human

genome project is “the first glimpse of the instruction book formerly known only to God.”

The reason many scientists turn to religion as well as science for explanation is because science falls short of explaining the metaphysical. Dawkins argues that science can establish a probability value to the existence of God, but science cannot actually disprove the existence of a God. In *Religion and Science*, Russell argues that God can be proven by human reason alone. Collins also argues that science has no net to catch God in, and that science has no way of explaining human’s free will and sense of morality. He also discusses the reason so many Christians find science and religion incompatible. Many devout Christians fear that if they begin to learn about evolution they could end up completely losing their faith. A number of the most devout Christians were ones who were not born into their faith but found it themselves, such as Collins. And hand in hand with that idea, many scientists who would not even consider a religious interpretation of the world are those that were raised religious and shied away from the beliefs they were raised in, such as Dawkins. Too narrow of an interpretation of science or religion can cause them to appear disjunctive, but if one remains open-minded to all ideas and understands that Genesis shouldn’t be taken as a literal reading, Collins believes that science and religion can be complementary.

One of the fundamental beliefs of religion is the doctrine of free will, which is contradictory to the scientific hypothesis of Determinism. In *Religion and Science*, Russell talks of three doctrines of religion which science can neither prove nor disprove: God immortality, and freedom. According to Thomas Aquinas and other

philosophers these three ideas can be proved true by human reason and are part of “natural religion.” Under the doctrine of free will, Christians believe that humans have the ability to choose the course of their lives, between right and wrong, which determines whether they go to heaven or hell. This conflicts with the scientific hypothesis of determinism, which is the opposite of free will. Determinism is a scientific hypothesis that says that with the knowledge of causal laws and the happenings in a certain sphere, humans can predict what will happen in the center of this sphere within the time it takes light to get from the exterior of the sphere to the center. Basically, the doctrine of determinism suggests that all actions and thoughts by every human being have been predetermined by the events in one’s life and surroundings, and that every action could be predicted, it would just take more than a lifetime of calculations to achieve this prediction. As belief in determinism gives people no reason or motivation to act morally good or bad, it undermines basic religious principles.

Since its origin, Determinism has been challenged by religious folk, but now is also being challenged by scientists on scientific grounds. According to quantum physics, there are causal laws to predict the probability of what an atom will do in certain circumstances, but no law to determine how a single atom will act in certain circumstances and to determine how a single atom behaves and why it behaves how it does. As Russell said, “We do not know any law determining the choice in an individual instance.” This principle seems to hold true for humans as well: we can predict the probability of what groups of human beings will do, but no reason for what one person will do in a situation or why they do what they do. Russell also

tells us that we do not have “any strong reason to believe in determinism.” It has been discovered that laws that determine how bodies move may be “merely statistical” and have an appearance of regularity, but these laws cannot tell you what a single body will do. People cannot be both a Determinist and religious, because Determinism goes against both Christianity and “natural religion.”

With non-literal reading of the scripture and want for a more metaphysical explanation of the universe, belief in both religion and science can be consistent with each other. Determinism, on the other hand, can not be consistent with religious views.