

Can purely scientific and religious views of the world be reconciled?

Scientific and Christian beliefs often contradict each other. Genesis is still used to argue against evolution and the Bible is invoked to oppose, for example, stem cell research and abortion. By contrast, many scientists refuse to accept the existence of a divinity that cannot be proven with the methods of scientific inquiry. Because of this opposition in views, many scientists are Atheists and many Christians refuse to accept the impact of scientific progress. Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist and Atheist claimed that, “it is trite to replace evolution with ‘God did it.’” Pope John Paul II said that, “theories of evolution which... regard the spirit as... emerging from the forces of living matter... are incompatible with the truth about man.” However, some scientists set aside the dichotomy to embrace both science and religion, claiming that they do not contradict each other, but instead complement each other. Francis Collins, an Evangelical Christian who headed the human genome project, sees science and religion as complementary. He offers the question of what happens after we die, saying that while science cannot answer this question, religion provides possible answers. Moreover, Collins believes that the human genome is God’s “instruction book of life” or the “language of God” that was made for us to decipher. While there are many arguments that place science and religion at odds, a religious scientist is not a contradiction. Instead a religious scientist is an explorer of the natural world presented in God’s universe in a way that reconciles scientific and religious views to attain a more complete view of life.

The idea that scientific thinking can be reconciled with a belief in God raises the question of whether scientists who believe in God are abdicating their dedication to scientific analysis. Science and religion both search for answers to many of the same questions. Where do we come from? Where are we going? Why do humans develop cancer? What do weather patterns mean? Why are we moral or immoral? The conflict between science and religion arises in the different ways science and religion try to answer these questions. A scientist develops a hypothesis and

tests a theory through experimentation and observation of the natural world in the hope of developing enough evidence provide answers to important questions. For many questions, this scientific process works in providing answers. We wonder why the sky is blue. Through analysis of the visible light spectrum and the atmosphere, we can explain that longer wavelengths that are blue continue straight through the atmosphere, while shorter red colored wavelengths cannot. This explanation has been observed and we can show it is valid through experiments with the visible light spectrum. By contrast, arguing that the sky is blue because God made it that way is impossible to prove. It is conjecture. It may be correct but we cannot employ scientific analysis to establish that God is the creator of the blue sky. Therefore, it follows that a scientist who believes in God is failing to apply scientific thinking to some parts of his analysis of the natural world.

A question that follows from understanding that a scientist who believes in God is failing to apply scientific thinking on this subject is whether this is important. Does it matter? Does this understanding discredit science? The answer to both questions ought to be no. This is because there are certain questions, beyond the source of the blue sky, that defy scientific analysis. For example, morality. Can the issue of morality inform our view of whether scientific and religious beliefs can be reconciled? Why do humans act morally or immorally? Richard Dawkins argued that our sense of morality was a sort of genetic mistake, a gene that separates us from other less moral animals. But is this really a scientific explanation of human morality based on observable behavior? Is it sufficient for a scientist to answer a question with the assertion that nature has made a “mistake”? Does nature really make mistakes? If so, then how do we know what parts of nature are “correct” and what parts are “mistakes”? And how do we prove with scientific reasoning what is a mistake in nature and what is not?

Attempting to use religion to explain morality is equally unsatisfactory. Did God create people to be moral? In Genesis, the serpent tempts Eve to eat the forbidden apple, and she did. Thus, we seem innately neither moral nor immoral, but instead easily influenced by external

forces. So, what makes these forces moral or immoral and why? Christianity portrays God as the ultimate figure of morality, an example and leader for mankind. But according to the Bible, even God makes mistakes, feels threatened by mankind's power, "blots out" human life with the great flood, and then continues to create fear in men to control their behavior. Are these examples of morality? Christianity teaches us to be moral but still does not provide a persuasive explanation for immoral behavior.

Perhaps the explanation for morality is based upon a mixture of scientific analysis and religious belief. Without science, we would not understand genetic traits of behavior or the fact that certain actions, including criminal conduct, may be observed in brain activity. Yet, without religion, humans would not have the examples of right and wrong that the Bible and other religious texts have provided for millennia. A religious scientist may be a contradiction because believing in God is an unscientific idea that cannot be explained through observation or experimentation. We cannot prove that God exists, nor can we say that God does not exist. Why then, do some scientists believe in God? The answer is that scientific analysis leaves important questions unanswered. For example, when we attempt to explain moral behavior in scientific terms the explanation falls short (Dawkins' evolutionary mistake). Even Einstein expressed dissatisfaction with the ability of science to explain the universe when he refused to accept the consequences of his own scientific inquiries into relativity in stating that, "God does not play dice with the universe." Neither science nor religion in isolation provides satisfactory answers to the vexing question of morality.

A combination of science and religion is offered by Francis Collins who argues that spirit is a tool that complements the marvels of science and allows us to glimpse God's creations and our genetic code, the language in which God created life. While this argument does not explain God's existence, it does show science enhanced by a belief in God. Seeing science as the "language of God" allows us to believe in the validity of scientific inquiry while still appreciating

that there are unexplained mysteries in life. If God did create or at least influence the natural world, it may be that God created what we now call science through the language of nature. This idea leads to a framework through which we can understand the natural world and also human behavior. It starts with God as creator, establishing the framework within which humanity can act freely through the ages. Science, in Collins' vocabulary, is the method by which humans understand the world and God's divine framework and influence the future direction of our lives through scientific discovery.