

Notes for PHIL 2330 – Science and Society  
Jan 25 – Spring 2022

First assignment – due before class on Tuesday, Feb 1.

-- This is an argumentative essay – a reasoned defense of a particular claim. In this case, you should describe and evaluation Stephen Jay Gould's view about the relationship between science and religion.

The obvious way to do this:

- 1) Describe Gould's view (NOMA)
- 2) Look at some particular complicated cases such as those that Dawkins brings up (like miracles).
- 3) Now either criticize Gould's view here or defend Gould.

Back to Clark – there are three types of views about the relationship between science and religion:

- 1) C – Conflict (example is Peter Atkins)
- 2) S – Separation (example is Stephen Jay Gould)
- 3) I – Integration. Maybe Bacon, Boyle, and Newton from Clark chapter 3 are supposed to be examples of this but it isn't clear

Gould's view: Science and religion can't possibly conflict because they never try to answer the same questions. Science is the authority (magesterium) over the realm of description fact. Questions like: How old is the earth? Are humans genealogically related to other animals? How many protons does an atom of carbon have? Science has NO authority over normative questions ('ought' questions). Religion belongs solely in this normative realm (the realm of value and meaning and purpose). So questions like 'is abortion morally permissible'? Should I get married? Is it okay to drive a species to extinction?

If you look at a complex question like 'why are we here' Gould might say it is sort of ambiguous. There is the 'causal explanation' (giving a scientific answer) and there is the 'purpose' reading. But these aren't really the same question.

Dawkins agrees with Gould that science can't help us answer normative questions. But he disagrees with Gould about religion. Dawkins says that religion makes descriptive claims all the time: the earth is 6,000 years old, Jesus didn't have a biological father, Jesus rose from the dead, etc. These are descriptive claims and so subject to science but these are also religious claims. With regard to things like the creation story in Genesis or the flood or various miracles, Gould thinks that religion (properly understood) is not committed to the literal truth of these claims. They are really just stories meant to tell us something about values or purpose or ... But is that really the case with the resurrection of Jesus? It is not meant literally??

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Back to Clark's view. Clark thinks that conflict is just historically wrong. Lots of scientists historically were religious (and still are today) and there is no obvious conflict. In fact, modern science rose out of Christianity. As for separation, Clark doesn't think that is right either (not exactly – though he does support methodological naturalism). What exactly is integration?

Joel's analogy – think of physics and biology. Both are important sources of knowledge. Usually they are just about different things. But they are importantly related (think of a question like how your eyes work) and it is possible for them to conflict. But at the end of the day the true physics and the true biology must agree – because they are just both about the way the world is. An integrationist about religion should think the same thing – they do overlap and must work together. But they are both sources of knowledge of the world.

Clark's heroes here are Bacon, Boyle, and Newton. All very good respectable scientists. All Christians who thought that their faith was related to their scientific work.

The end of chapter 3 talks about methodological naturalism (the view that when practicing science it is important to set aside your religious beliefs and act 'as if' there is no God). Clark says that this is the dominant view in science today and it is a good view. It has allowed science to progress. – We will talk more about this on Thursday.

-- Finally on Peter Atkins: this is an example of conflict:

Atkins says science is 'omnicompetent' – it is about everything. In fact religion is also trying to do the same thing. It is also about everything. That is why they conflict – they give different answers to the same questions (like how old is the earth, why are we here, etc.) Science is just better. Religion is just bad science – it is only still around because of cultural tradition. People are raised a certain way and it is hard to give it up.