

Mini-Story #1



On The Battle between Science and Religion

Scientist and philosopher Mark Friesel claims that a defining principle of science is that any conflict between observation and religious belief is resolved in favor of repeated observations (82). His position, in my opinion, is rather straightforward: believe only in what you observe; especially if you observe the same thing multiple times. This of course completely rejects the fundamental aspects of religion, where you are asked to believe in things you cannot observe. It also further suggests, albeit implicitly, that if we cannot observe it, it does not exist. An opposing view, from one of the generally acknowledged greatest minds of the modern era claims "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts. (Albert Einstein)". Einstein, in this brilliant statement, clearly speaks of the *limits* of science, which is precisely one of the things I hope to show in this paper. Furthermore, I also maintain that these opposing viewpoints have existed since the earliest moments in human history in the form of an intellectual battle. One of the more recent and recognizable forms of this battle is that between the Darwinists, or evolutionists, and those who believe in Intelligent Design or creationists. This paper analyzes this age old battle between science and religion and concludes that we all go terribly wrong *in the very beginning of the discourse* by thinking in terms of a battle.

My theory says that there is no battle at all. I maintain that science and religion are much closer to *dancing partners* than combatants. I will support my position by showing that both science and religion (not faith) have very serious limits, even though their characteristics are quite different.

We will begin with a challenge to the centuries old belief that the very concept of science represents rock solid truth.

The most fascinating thing about the concept of science is that its conclusions, or what we refer to as its *facts*, appear, at least to me, to be an intentional function of time itself. Who can deny that a scientific fact that was true yesterday may not be true today, and that a scientific fact that is true today, may not be true tomorrow?

Science once told us that the earth was the center of the universe. Recent breakthroughs in particle physics have shown that particles smaller than the atom actually exist; a notion thought inconceivable not too long ago. After learning about some of the new thoughts and theories in neuroscience that attempt to explain how our minds work, there is no doubt, at least in my mind, that radical departures from our current electrical-chemical models on the mechanics of thinking are not that far away. I cannot see any truly credible rebuttal to these statements. Who knows what we will discover in the next hundred years that will make what we know today not only obsolete, but outright wrong?

By definition, science is a branch of knowledge or study dealing with a body of facts or truths systematically arranged and showing the operation of general laws (dictionary.com). This definition, in my opinion, fails to recognize that the *facts* they speak of change over time. To include that truth would be tantamount to altering the most fundamental aspect of their definition; which is that scientific discovery is something that can be counted on. Just think of

the completely different understanding and level of confidence one would get if the dictionary definition of science also included that the *facts* were temporary. It is quite easy to see someone immediately asking themselves: how long will this be true? a few years? maybe less? why should I believe it?

We all recognize and have no issues with the fact that people change almost daily, if not hourly; and we understand that as simply the nature of humans. An individual can feel agreeable one minute and adamant the next. Science, for the most part, is supposed to be the exact opposite; which is why we call it science in the first place. Unlike humans, what science says is true today, will by its nature, be true tomorrow. Unfortunately, or fortunately, time has taught us something different. This is not to say that science has no value and hence should not be used; Heaven forbid such thinking! Science has tremendous value and its conclusions, though temporary, improve life for the vast majority of people on this planet each and every day. The intent here is to highlight the *limits* of science, thus giving it a new perspective, and to look deeply into its conceptual essence to see if that reveals something to us.

Let's now take a look at the so-called scientific method. Authors Robert D. Storey and Jack Carter claim that the fundamental five step structure that all new science students adhere to has its limitations (18): These steps are as follows:

1. State your hypothesis
2. Design the experiment to test this hypothesis
3. Collect the data
4. Analyze the data
5. Draw conclusions

They further state that students should not be bogged down by memorizing these dogmatic steps, but should instead learn by asking appropriate questions and designing tests around them. More importantly, and this goes to the heart of my argument, the authors state that “students should realize that there are questions that science simply cannot answer”.

According to Stephen Hawkins, from early recorded history, scientists have, over the years, come up with discovery after discovery refuting those discoveries of earlier scientists (13). The point Hawkins makes here is that the findings of scientists will always change as long as man exists. I take his insightful thinking a step further and extrapolate that all findings of science seem to have a mysterious purpose tied directly into time. In other words, they are *supposed* to be discovered precisely *when* they are discovered. For example, Aristotle’s claim that the earth was the center of the universe may have been the necessary spark for the start of the first serious thinking on the divine nature of man as being the most important component of the universe. Another example is the more recent and well accepted Big Bang Theory, which was theorized *after* the invention of the two great new tools that examine the infinitely small and the infinitely large, i.e., the electron microscope and the Hubble telescope. This may have been *timed* so that man may begin to believe, as ridiculous as this sounds, that he can now explain literally everything by science. Yet, when you look into the details of the Big Bang Theory, the *source* of that super hot, super dense matter that they claim exploded some thirteen billion years ago that created the universe, is not even mentioned. I suppose that today’s great minds simply assume that matter has always existed; a gigantic presumption neatly swept aside and overlooked to aid in the coherency of their theory.

In Geneva, on October 21, 2008, Swiss President Pascal Couchepin and French Prime Minister François Fillon were joined by scientists from around the world to inaugurate the Large

Hadron Collider, or LHC; the world's largest and most complex scientific instrument ever created. There is already a lot of speculation that they will discover new particles only thought to exist. I can only imagine some of the more exotic new theories on life that will come out of this colossal experiment that will refute many of those that we now hold true today.

My point here is that regardless of how advanced our science becomes, it will never be able to answer the **personal**, and hence more important, questions of our existence. For example, questions like WHY the universe was created cannot be answered by science; yet who can deny the underlying inquisitiveness and yearning for an answer? I suppose it's nice to know that quarks exist, but why do **I** exist? What difference does it make how I behave? Why shouldn't I just get as much as I can for as long as I can and forget about the welfare of others? What's wrong with my hating Blacks, Hispanics and Gays; after all, they're not doing anything for me! If someone is prohibiting me from obtaining something, why shouldn't I just get rid of them? It is hard to disagree that science has massive limitations and may appear to many to be completely useless in answering these critical questions. Just imagine a world where questions such as these cannot be answered, and is therefore generally agreed that people might as well do whatever pleases them regardless of any consequences. I firmly state that with our so called intellects at the helm, we would have a society where animals would behave supremely civilized compared to us humans.

Now that we've shown the limits of science, we will now turn our attention to the limits of religion. There should be little argument to say that we get our understanding and meaning of religion by reading and interpreting the great works of faith i.e., The Bible, The Torah, The Qur'an, etc.

Stephen Jay Gould asserts that there are many problems and difficulties with a literal translation of Scripture; regardless of which specific religion one has (16). An additional viewpoint on the limits of religion can be found in the quote “Yet, by reason of a peculiar weakness of human nature, pure faith can never be relied on as much as it deserves” (Immanuel Kant). This brilliant man is, in my opinion, telling us that religion, like science, indeed has its limits.

Let us return for a minute to the currently highly charged battle between science and religion, i.e., creationism vs. evolution. In the words of Gould “ Creationism is a local and parochial movement only powerful in the United States and prevalent only among the few sectors of Protestantism that choose to read the bible as an inerrant document, literally true in every jot and title”. My own interpretation of his words amounts to the same thing; but is far more crude and poignant: Creationism is nothing more than a modern day political power play of the Christian Conservative Right Wing where the intellects of these people have gone astray and are completely out of control. A history of this movement will clearly show you that it changes as the law changes to keep its true political objective active. This specific battle is therefore a real one; as it is engineered for a specific purpose. However it has, in my humble opinion, absolutely nothing to do with religion.

In any event, the point that is relevant here is that reading and interpreting scripture in a literal sense, the way we read other books, has, like science, significant limits. Gould further claims that “the lack of true conflict between science and religion arises from a lack of overlap between their respective domains of professional expertise, i.e., science in the empirical constitution of the universe, and religion in the search for proper ethical values and the spiritual

meaning of our lives (2)”. This is a terrific explanation of why I state that science and religion are indeed *dancing partners* and not combatants; as a full understanding of life requires both.

Finally, let us take a deeper look at this idea and analogy of science and religion being *dancing partners* as opposed to combatants. As you know, whether the dancing partners are male and female, two females or two males, one leads and the other follows: such is the basic structure of the act and art of dancing. This structure also creates the *beauty* in dancing. I am claiming that that same basic structure also applies to the interaction between science and religion. While I of course still maintain that *both* are needed for a complete understanding of life, religion, *or more aptly faith*, in my humble opinion is a far, far superior concept, and as such should act as the *leader* as we dance our way through life. My rationale is that religion relies not only on the mind for answers, but on the *heart*, **even more so**, as well. Since thinking, like science, is by its nature, prone to error and changes over time, as we have shown; feeling, or the heart, on the other hand, is stable over time; and hence superior. There are ample well known examples throughout history in support of this idea. For instance, let’s take a look at some of the classics in literature. The idea and beauty behind the deep love between Romeo and Juliet are as relevant and meaningful today as they were centuries ago when they were written by William Shakespeare. The 1878 through 1891 hatred and feud between the Hatfield’s and Mc Coy’s in the West Virginia and Kentucky backcountry are also as real and meaningful today as they were back then. Illinois politics will attest to this. Who would disagree that the fundamental love that a parent has for their child, has not changed one bit over time. The same sexual perversion of a Marquis de Sade exists today as it did in his day over two centuries ago in France. In other words, what love and hate were in the past, is what love and hate is today and what love and hate

will be in the future. The same cannot be said about science, which I claim is inferior; for we know it will change over time. We can safely bet our lives on that.

My conclusion is that science, by its very nature, will not yield us even a sliver of the truly compelling questions we humans will always seek about ourselves. In other words, science has serious limits. Religion (not to be confused with faith) on the other hand, while it too has its limits, as we have shown, represents an entirely different domain of human understanding. It attempts to answer those questions that science is incapable of. Always remember that the results of science are *'time dependent facts'*, so their real value is only at the time the discoveries are made; which is why they are useful. I therefore say that it is a very good thing to allow science to march forward unimpeded.

The results of science will allow us to enjoy more of the very short lives we have. As a few examples, assistive technology, which creates new high tech devices that allow people with severe handicaps to lead more normal lives, or advances in medicine that allow people to live longer with serious disease, or advances in telecommunications, that allow education to reach millions of poor people around the world, should be strongly encouraged to continue and grow. Religion, on the other hand, addresses the long term questions about our existence that many of us have deep inside. More specifically, religion attempts to answer the most compelling question any human can ask: what happens to us after our time here is up? For whatever the answer, it will surely have the potential to become the modus operandi of how we behave and treat others.

With these points in mind, let us now completely disregard any talk about a battle between science and religion and instead use both to *dance* our way through the rest of our lives. Furthermore, since we now know that religion is the *leader* in this dance, we should feel compelled to treat each other with love and kindness as a fundamental way to live.

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