

Review – essay beginning “The exploration of nature and the careful observations of the earth hundreds of years ago have forever changed the boundaries of science and discovery.”

Thesis

The thesis is that science once operated within a religious structure and that the two could have coexisted peacefully had the church viewed scientific advance in a different way. This is an excellent thesis: it is original, addresses a specific topic, and is neither obvious nor impossible to support. The author generally describes but does not concisely state the thesis in the introductory paragraph. An additional point related to the thesis is that the church is substantially different now than it was before its split with science.

Arguments

The author supports the thesis first by showing that scientists originally held no hostility towards religious thought, then by explaining the process by which they were forced to work outside of the church structure. He or she then moves on to prove the corollary point that the church has fundamentally changed.

The arguments presented in the essay are generally convincing and do a good job of supporting the thesis. However, more evidence is necessary to show conclusively that scientists at one time saw their work as a means to better understand God. Also, the author should consider anticipating the following objection: although science existed within the church structure for hundreds of years, little progress was made during the middle ages. Scholarship consisted mostly of reading the works of classical authors, with comparatively little new research. Did the two truly coexist during that time, or was science simply so repressed that it hardly existed at all?

The author should be careful to avoid emotional appeals. By describing scientists as visionary and the church as foolish, he or she risks alienating readers whose prior inclination is to side with religion. In the first paragraph, the sentence “Few dared to say anything against the church’s claims for fear of severe punishment, but some brave men studied the world around them...” is intended to emphasize the scientists’ courage but undermines the point that those same scientists could have worked within the religious establishment. Similar judgments in the closing paragraph should also be eliminated.

The final quotation seems to serve no clear purpose. If it is to be retained, it should be introduced and developed more fully.

Structure

The structure of the essay is for the most part clear and logical, flowing chronologically through an explanation of how the church created the current situation of conflict. The first paragraph, however, contains a great deal of historical information that probably belongs somewhere else, and the final paragraph should be reorganized in order to better summarize both the primary thesis and the additional point about change in the church without intermingling the two. Internal structure within several of the body paragraphs could also be improved. The sentence that begins “Many years ago, the church started to admit,” near the end of paragraph four, is unrelated to the surrounding ideas, and a similar problem exists at the end of paragraph five. The point about the fracturing of the Roman Catholic Church into various denominations should either be eliminated or consolidated into its own paragraph.

Language and Mechanics

Phrases such as “ventures in religious understanding” and “the mysterious perfections of God’s creation” demonstrate that the author is capable of clear, vibrant expression. That ability, however, has not been expressed to its full potential. For example, rather than search for a synonym, the author uses the word “church” thirteen times in the first paragraph. Weak, commonplace verbs such as “make” and “say” should also be avoided when a more vivid alternative is available.

The power of the argument is also lessened by the presence of various superfluous qualifiers such as “one can deduce that.” These invite the reader to dismiss the following statement as the opinion of an unspecified hypothetical person.

In several cases, the author has used words awkwardly or in an idiomatically incorrect way. For example:

- The word “aspects” generally does not stand alone without an explanation as to aspects *of what* are being considered.
- Likewise, “contradicting” claims must contradict something in particular.
- There is an importance difference in meaning between “persecuted” and “prosecuted.”
- Science and religion may no longer *overlap*, but it is clearly false to say that they do not *coexist*.
- People are “well-intentioned,” not “good-intentioned.”
- There are several spelling errors: “phenomenons” instead of “phenomena” and “ferverent” instead of “fervent.”

The author should also avoid the passive voice when possible, as it weakens the impact of his or her statements. In particular, the author’s passive reference to himself or herself in the fifth paragraph (“the Roman Catholic Church will be examined”) is confusing and unnecessary.