

SCIENCE & RELIGION

PAPER 2, ROUND 1

1 The topics

You must choose one of the following topics. Note that for each possible topic, you do not necessarily need to answer every one of the suggested questions. Your goal is to select a topic, devise an argument, and support it. If you have questions about how to construct your paper and which points you should address, talk with me about it.

Here are the topics:

1. Each of the models of the Earth, universe, etc., with which Christianity began were consistent with “everyday” observations. For each topic about which we’ve read (astronomy, geology, biology), we see that Christianity, after protesting the changes brought about by new observations and models, ultimately accepted and adapted to them when observations became overwhelming. In spite of the strong resistance of some religious leaders to these changes, the adjustments in “world view” were adopted by the church (with few adverse consequences?).

Is the tendency of religious leaders or a church hierarchy to resist such changes a strength? Are there examples outside of those we have read in which religious resistance was appropriate, desirable, or beneficial (to the church or to the society)? Or is this resistance purely wasted effort with detrimental consequences?

2. *Synthesis*—the development of a single perspective or model that coherently accommodates both religious and scientific views—has been tried repeatedly. Philip Henry Gosse, a naturalist and contemporary of Charles Darwin, attempted to reconcile the scriptural and scientific ages of the earth in *Omphalos*. In particular, what is now known as the *Omphalos hypothesis*, he argues, largely through theological reasoning, that God created the Earth with all of the artifacts that we observe, including fossils and geologic formations that seems far older than the Bible indicates. In other words, his hypothesis is that the Earth is indeed only some 6,000 years old, but that God intentionally made it with artifacts that seem much older.

Stephen Jay Gould, a more recent paleontologist and evolutionary biologist, suggested, in his book (with the punny title) *Rock of Ages* the synthesis of non-overlapping magisteria: that science and religion were the proper tools for understanding mutually exclusive elements of our lives and world. Here, conflicts were illusory, occurring only when one incorrectly tried to apply the tools of one the realm of the other.

Both of these syntheses, in spite of seeming consistent with all evidence, both empirical and scriptural, have been roundly rejected. At best, they have been ignored as non-solutions to those vexed by the problems of conflict between science and religion. Why

have the failed? What about Collins' synthesis? Is some synthesis (if not one of these) a goal for which we should aim? Is a good synthesis even possible?

3. Can a scientist be religious? Can a scientist be Christian? Clearly there are instances of both, but are the views consistent? Is a scientist who believes in god failing to apply scientific thinking to some parts of the natural world? Science, in its search for regular rules that describe the natural world, suggests a deterministic universe. However, determinism is contrary to many conceptions of god, and in particular to the freewill necessary for Christian salvation. Can these views be reconciled to be consistent with one another, or are religious scientists somehow supporting contradictory beliefs?

2 Your assignment

Select one of the topics above and develop a position to take regarding that topic. Note that this paper must be no more than 4 double-spaced pages long. You must use 12-point font with 1 inch margins on all sides.

Hold in mind that your paper must will be undergo a double-blind review: your reviewers will not know your identity as the author, and you will not know theirs as reviewers. **It is therefore critical that your name *not* appear on your paper**; don't worry, I will still be able to attribute each paper to its author.

3 How to submit your work

Once again, upload a PDF of your submission to Google Drive and share that PDF with me (at sfkaplan@amherst.edu).

This assignment is due on Thursday, Oct-05, 11:59 pm.