

SCIENCE AND RELIGION
GRADED PAPER 2 REVIEWS
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Paper 1

Overall, a good review with both useful high-level comments and low-level corrections. Good.

(1) Not true. There **are** assertions that are, *in principle*, unfalsifiable. Russell’s Teapot is designed to be an example, where the item in question is essentially defined as being unperceivable, and therefore any experiment that attempts to disprove its existence will be inconclusive. Arguing that “there is still the possibility that proof of God will *one day* be found” is a failure to understand the concept of falsifiability. The hypothesis that God exists *is demonstrable*—if we were to see and meet God, that would be the end of the debate—but that is not at all the same as claiming that there is some empirical observation that will *disprove* that God exists.

Grade: A-

Paper 2

A good review. The only comment with which I disagreed was your suggestion that the blue-sky example be kept. When asking, *Why is the sky blue*, the scientific answer is actually somewhat complex (and the description given in the paper is flatly incorrect). Worse, the question being asked from the religious point of view is, *Why was the sky made to be blue?*, while the scientific question is *By what mechanisms does blueness appear to humans when looking at the sky?* They’re not at all the same question.

Grade: A

Review of Paper 1

Faith and Epistemic Principles: Why Religious Belief Should Seem Unreasonable to Scientists

- I. Thesis
 - The thesis is very clear and easily understandable.
 - From what I understand, the thesis states that a scientist cannot hold religious views because the scientific principles with which he was inculcated with will not allow him to acknowledge the existence of a God since God is not a scientifically provable entity.
- II. Quality of Argument/Logic
 - In the first paragraph of the last page, the argument that there are certain things that are principally unfalsifiable is not an acceptable statement since there is always the possibility that certain things are simply just waiting to be proven. In the course of time, there are numerous theories and concepts that will gain scientific approval. For example, years ago, a cure for cancer was seen as an impossibility. Although it may seem unlikely that God is not scientifically provable, there is still the possibility that proof of God will *one day* be found. That possibility shouldn't be ruled out.
 - The concluding paragraph touches on the fact that a scientist is not required to hold these scientific principles in their private as well as professional lives but then dismisses this point. Just because a scientist's professional life requires him or her to hold certain principles in esteem does not mean that they need to carry this part of their job into their private lives as well.
- III. Acknowledgement of Speculation
 - The paper does a good job on acknowledging speculation. For example, in the introductory paragraph, stating that it is "not reasonable" rather than saying "unreasonable." This is a subtle, but effective, distinction.
- IV. Flow
 - The paper is well-organized, easy to follow, and has a simple and clear structure.
- V. Terms & concepts defined
 - Terms and concepts are well defined, such as the word 'epistemic' and 'parsimony.' These definitions are fairly easy for the reader to comprehend and are a great aid to a comprehensive reading of the paper.
- VI. Language
 - I would delete the comma in the first sentence of the paper so that it reads: "Many scientists believe in God and some are even practicing Christians." If you included the comma for dramatic effect, you could always replace 'and' with a semicolon or with the word 'while.'

- In the second sentence of the introductory paragraph, the word 'scientists' should be changed to the singular 'scientist.'
- In then concluding paragraph, the word "intuitions" should really be changed to the singular "intuition."
- Second paragraph of the first page: Although the principle is referred to as Occam's Razor, it is named after William of Ockham and not Occam. ✓
- The last word of the paper, 'absurd,' creates an emotionally charged tone that casts doubt on the rest of your conclusion so I might consider revision of that choice of diction. ✓

VII. Tone

- The tone of paper concerns me in that it is repellant to the average reader. Your paper seems to emulate Kuhn's style of writing in some ways. The tone is condescending and that is never good because it gives the impression that you are talking down to the reader, which will cause him or her to immediately disregard many of arguments, even if they are well-crafted and logical. ✓

Review of Paper 2

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

I. Thesis

- The thesis of the paper is unclear to me.
- It is clear that the thesis concerns the reconciliation of religious and scientific views. It seems that the thesis is that a religious scientist is not a contradiction but an “explorer of the natural world in God’s universe in a way that reconciles scientific and religious views to attain a more complete view of life.”
- ✓ ○ If that actually is the thesis of the paper, that is fine. The only issue that I would have with this thesis is that you seem to contradict it later on in the paper. For example, in the last line of the second paragraph, you stated, “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.”
- If a religious scientist is unable to apply scientific thinking to some aspects of his analysis of the natural world, doesn’t this mean that scientific and religious views cannot be fully reconciled with one another?
- Furthermore, if these scientific principles cannot be applied by the scientist, doesn’t this also insinuate that he is using mostly his religious views in order to attain “a more complete” view of life?
- Although you acknowledge the contradictory nature of these statements in the following paragraph, that paragraph itself has issues, and fails to fully address the problem with your thesis. I will talk about that in Section II.

II. Quality of Argument/Logic

- The second paragraph starting on the first page that continues onto the second page contains a great example of the different ways in which science and religion seek to explain the natural world. The example of the blue sky should definitely be kept in since it is an exemplary illustration of the differences between science and religion.
- Although you correctly acknowledge in the third paragraph of the paper that there are “certain questions” that defy scientific analysis, the example of morality is not one of these. Since you cite Richard Dawkins, it follows that scientific analysis is applicable to the subject of morality. In his NPR interview, Dawkins asserted that morality is a vestige leftover from our times spent living in tribal groups and as small, tight-knit collective societies. He therefore uses a type of scientific analysis to give his explanation of morality. Also, I am unsure of whether he has stated that morality is a “genetic mistake.” Perhaps you can cite his work so that it will be easier to reference for the reader.
- ✓ ○ This third paragraph is also where you acknowledge the contradictory statement you made concerning your thesis. Since the argument here is a little weak, trying to justify that that contradiction doesn’t really matter is not a wise thing to do, only because your thesis is so important to the rest

Actually a problematic example.

of the paper so you might want to consider reworking the structure of the paper as well.

- Your thesis is again tested later in the paper, within the fifth paragraph, when you state that “a religious scientist may be a contradiction because believing in God is an unscientific idea that cannot be explained through observation or experimentation.” Again, you are purposely contradicting your thesis.

III. Acknowledgement of Speculation

- For the most part, words like “may” and “perhaps” do a great job in this paper of acknowledging speculation and addressing the fact that this subject makes it difficult for absolutes to be spelled out.
- However, one issue can be found in the third paragraph where it is cited that “attempting to use religion to explain morality is equally unsatisfactory.” Does the Christian religion not posit that acting morally, following the Ten Commandments, and following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ is derived in some ways from the will of God? You argue that Christianity does not provide a persuasive explanation for immoral behavior and yet, many people do believe that immorality is caused by people being led astray by the devil. This explanation is persuasive for those people.

IV. Flow

- There are some organizational issues that I have with the paper.
- The structure of the paper is a little bit odd to me. I understand that with your second paragraph you are trying to predict an argument against your thesis; you are trying to head off the critic from the outset. This is fine except for the fact that your defense in the following (third) paragraph falls short. Therefore, I would reconsider contradicting your thesis statement in the paragraph directly following it.
- I have asserted my issue with the example of morality that you use in the previous section so obviously I am perturbed by the large amount of time you spend on the subject. I might consider using another example of fortifying your argument a little bit more.
- Finally, it seems that the reference to Francis Collins and a successful example of a religious scientist comes a little bit late in the paper; your concluding paragraph is the only one that truly coincides with your thesis statement. I would revise that part of your paper as well.

V. Terms & Concepts

- Any terms and concepts used were clearly understood or well defined.

VI. Grammar

- Perhaps it is nitpicking, but I thought it might flow nicer if you used “in contrast” rather than “by contrast” in your introductory paragraph.
- ✓ I don’t believe that the ‘a’ in atheist is commonly capitalized since atheism is not a religion.
- I would, however, capitalize ‘Human Genome Project’ in that same paragraph.

- In the second paragraph, it is better to use the infinitive of the verb 'provide' so that the sentence reads; "...developing enough evidence *to* provide answers..."

VII. Language

- The use of the word "complementary" in your introductory paragraph to describe the relationship between science and religious is ingenious. It does a great job of illustrating your point and is definitely a great example of good diction.