

Science and Religion Can Co-exist

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Scientists and religious believers sometimes view each other with a measure of caution. For the most part, scientists regard themselves as people who are meticulous in their calculations. Scientists want to have their opinions supported by hard evidence. They look for a body of knowledge and research to build upon, hoping to advance the present scientific knowledge beyond what is presently known, to that which is yet to be discovered. Scientists are comfortable with changes whenever changes are backed up with new evidence. In fact, they expect that new research, if done well, should lead to new information about reality. Scientists generally believe that we live in a cause and effect universe. Events happen as they do, not as chance, but for reasonable causes.

On the other hand, religious believers may look upon scientists in a different way than scientists see themselves. The religious often see scientists as doggedly determined not to change unless they are presented with hard evidence. Religious people may look upon scientists as too regimented, too analytical, and as people who may often overlook the serendipitous moments of joy and excitement that life has to offer. The religious think that scientists may tend to ignore important parts of reality that are not easily measured by scientific criteria. These components of reality may include love, hope, gratitude, friendship, and support and compassion for each other, to name only a few.

The scientists, in turn, sometime worry about where religious believers may go with beliefs that are not supported by hard evidence. There is usually sufficient religious freedom within religious thought so that each individual communicates with his/her God in a personal way. Because of this freedom and individuality, religious thought can take people in a variety of directions. While freedom to think as you choose may be valuable, it can occasionally lead to religious extremism. Nearly all religious supporters may say God wants them to love their neighbor, while a few extremists may say God wants them to harm their neighbor

who has different views than they do. While religion may be multi-directional, the methods of science are usually guided by publically accepted procedures agreed upon within the scientific community. Scientists who do not follow traditional scientific procedures will likely be rejected by their colleagues.

Most thoughtful religious believers and most thoughtful scientists have their own answers to the critics of their opposing positions. For example, the religious believe that while science may provide new information, they think there is need for guidance and ethical direction so that good things result for society in general. For example, nuclear technology can be used for beneficial medical advances, or for terrible destructive purposes in killing our fellow humans. Scientific knowledge about germs can be used to benefit the sick, or it can be used for germ warfare.

Scientists, including social scientists, argue that the overall goals of science take humanity in the direction of good ethical practices. For example, within medicine, nurses, doctors, therapists, dentists, and health care workers are informed through their scientific knowledge. Science is used to offer care to the sick, cures for diseases, hope to deal with anxiety and mental diseases, and medicines to reduce pain and suffering. Scientists argue that there is an over-arching ethical purpose among health care workers to improve the lives of those in need. Scientists would also argue that the good ethical qualities mentioned by religions in paragraph two above can also be accomplished by science. That is, love, hope, gratitude and friendship, support, and compassion for humanity, can be promoted through science. On balance, there are few people who would really want to turn back the clock to pre-scientific times in hopes of making a more ethical world.

Most of us know of scientists who go about their work without much thought concerning religion. But we likely also know of some excellent scientists who may be guided by religion as well as by science. This is an indication that it is not impossible for these two disparate groups, religion and science, to co-exist harmoniously and even supportively. Earlier scientists such as Rene Descartes, Francis Bacon, Johannes Kepler, Blaise Pascal, Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle,

Michael Faraday, and Gregor Mendel, were all religious believers who were active scientists when science was emerging into more modern times.