

Sir Francis Bacon once spoke of those drawn into some powerful circle of thought as “dancing in little rings like persons bewitched.” Our scientific models do simulate a kind of fairy ring or magic circle which, once it has encompassed us, is hard to view objectively. Truth is elusive. Perhaps William James put things most felicitously when he said, “The greatest enemy of any one of our truths may be the rest of our truths.”

-- Loren Eiseley, All the Strange Hours, p.192.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION: SWORN ENEMIES, JUST FRIENDS, OR INTIMATE PARTNERS?

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Primary references: Ian G. Barbour, Religion and Science (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), and Ian Barbour, When Science Meets Religion (NY: HarperCollins, 2000).

They may have been close once, but since the time of Darwin (not to mention Galileo), relations between science and religion have been strained. Today there are those who still believe that if one is right about the origins and nature of life, the other must be wrong—either God or evolution. Other scholars, however, take the view that the centuries-old debate is obsolete and both domains actually have something helpful to say to each other about issues of common interest. And some, cross-trained in evolutionary biology and theology, have even drawn their science and faith together in the intimate partnership of a single explanatory model. Relations are getting very interesting!

1. SWORN ENEMIES (CONFLICT)

(“reductionism” means there is only one acceptable type of explanation)

- Scientific/evolutionary materialism (e.g. Richard Dawkins, The Blind Watchmaker: why the evidence of evolution reveals a universe without design)
- Religious fundamentalism, “creationism” (flood geology or creation science)

2. AMIABLE STRANGERS

(science and religion are separate, autonomous domains with different methods)

- Science explains objective, public, repeatable data; religion asks about order and beauty in the world and the experience of the inner life.
- Science asks objective *how* questions; religion asks personal *why* questions about meaning and purpose, ultimate origin and destiny.
- Authority in science is logical coherence and experimental adequacy; authority in religion is revelation through inspiration validated in experience.
- Science makes quantitative predictions that can be tested experimentally; religion uses symbolic and analogical language because God is transcendent.

(Langdon Gilkey, cited by Barbour p. 86)

Stephen Jay Gould, Rocks of Ages: The magisterium of science covers the material realm: what is the universe made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The magisterium of religion extends over questions of ultimate meaning and moral value.

3. GETTING TO BE FRIENDS

(science and religion interact indirectly on matters of common concern)

- Boundary questions, such as creation, evolution and human nature
- Methodological parallels—science is not as objective nor religion as subjective as sometimes thought, but they form their knowledge in similar ways (Thomas Kuhn; quantum thought relating to uncertainty, Polyani's personal knowledge)
- Conceptual parallels: scientific concepts for which theological analogs have been proposed: complexity and self-organizing systems, information theory, bottom-up and top-down causality through a hierarchy of levels

4. INTIMATE PARTNERS

(systematic synthesis of both contributes to an inclusive view of reality)

- Natural theology—arguments claiming *evolutionary design*, or God as the designer of a self-organizing system in the process of law, chance, and emergence.
- God and continuing creation – Teilhard de Chardin, Sally McFague's "the world as God's body," Arthur Peacocke's *panentheism* (God is like the choreographer of an on-going dance, or the composer of a still-unfinished symphony. *God is experimenting and improvising in an open-ended process of continuing creation.*
- Process theism: God as a creative participant (but not totally controlling) in a cosmic community, an "I-Thou" relationship with the evolving creation (the social model is preferred by Barbour; Hartshorne prefers the world as God's body as an image of "God's infinitely sympathetic and all-embracing (internal) participation in the world process.").

God is the primordial ground of order, seeing the whole and selecting among possibilities in complex, non-linear processes. God is also the ground of novelty, eliciting the self-creation of individual entities, thus allowing for freedom as well as order and direction, and responding to them, acting both responsively and towards the goal of "the harmonious achievement of value." Thus God both influences and is influenced by the world in interdependency and reciprocity, though the relation is asymmetrical for God is transcendent and God's purposes unchanging. This view that God is both eternal and temporal is called dipolar theism. That is: God is creative as the source of the informing order and direction and novelty of the world, the divine Word; and God is responsive to the unfolding of the world and is affected by it in love, embodied in Christ.