Are Science and Religion in Conflict?

God and Reason
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Martin Ester
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Introduction

• With the great advances of science, there is no more need for religion!?
• Science has become the only valid method to gain knowledge!? 
• Richard Dawkins [Dawkins 2006] “Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.”
What is Science?

• Science is a systematic enterprise that builds and organizes knowledge in the form of testable explanations and predictions about the universe.
  http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science
  [Chalmers 1999]

• Knowledge = law, theory, model.

• Knowledge is based on empirical evidence, gained from observation or experiment.

• Experimentation is especially important to help establish causal relationships (explanations).
What is Science?

- Reproducibility: Experiments or observations can be repeated by any competent person with the same results.

- Clarity: The results of any scientific investigation can be expressed in terms that are unambiguous. [Hutchinson 2011]
What is Science?

• Logic
  Facts A, B, . . . and rules $A \rightarrow B$ that are either true or false.

• Inference rules to derive (predict) new facts from given facts and knowledge.
  Modus ponens: “$(A \rightarrow B)$ and $A$” implies $B$.

• But cannot logically prove new rules (knowledge) from a set of facts!

• There are many alternative rules from which the observed facts could be derived.

• How many facts do you need to observe before you can confidently infer a new rule?
What is Science?

• But a rule can be logically refuted by a single contradicting fact.
  “A and NOT B” implies that “A→B” is false.

• Falsifiability
  Predictions and the underlying knowledge can be refuted if contradicting evidence is presented.

• If a set of rules is falsified, not all the rules may be false, but which one?

• Distinguish “core rules” and “auxiliary rules”. Keep the “core rules”. Specialize rules to accommodate new evidence.

• Scientific theories are refuted only after a lot of contradicting evidence has been obtained.
What is Science?

• Science makes assumptions (presuppositions, axioms) that cannot be empirically justified or falsified.

• Economics
  Humans are greedy.

• Physics
  Natural laws have not changed in the course of time.
Science

• Theories are imaginative human creations and not a mere induction from data.
• The choice and/or generation of data is affected by the scientist’s theoretical “glasses”.
• The process of science is not repeatable and clear, but depends heavily on the creativity and judgement of scientists.
Religion

- Religion is an organized collection of beliefs, cultural systems, and world views that relate humanity to the supernatural, and to spirituality.
  

- Religion is a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith.
  
  http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion

- Economics and physics are religions in the more general sense of the word.
Faith in God

• Many religions include faith in God.
• God reveals knowledge about himself as well as about our world.
  E.g. God is good.
  God answers prayer.
• Many religions have holy books containing knowledge about God, humans, and the world.
  E.g., Bible or Quran.
• Knowledge about the spiritual world sometimes referred to as “spiritual laws.”
Is Religion Falsifiable?

• It has its assumptions that are not falsifiable. E.g. God is good.

• Revealed knowledge allows us to make predictions.

• If prophecy does not come true, prophet will be held accountable.

• E.g., God will raise the Messiah from the dead.

• This was a unique event that had been announced by Biblical prophets for hundreds of years.

• The prediction was fulfilled and observed by many witnesses.

• Does not have repeatability, but this is the same for historical sciences.
Is Religion Falsifiable?

- What about “God answers prayers”?  
- The Great Prayer Experiment [Benson et al., 2006]  
- There was no significant difference in the outcome of the different groups.
- But tested Non-Christian notion of prayer: God promises to answer prayers that are according to his will, and does not tell us the time.
Is Religion Falsifiable?

[Gunther Brown 2012]

• Scientific experiments cannot prove the existence or nonexistence of a supernatural force or whether such an entity answers prayer.

• Similarly, you cannot experimentally prove the love of your friends, parents, . . .

• However, it can be observed how prayer practices affect health:
  - Are healing claims medically documented?
  - Do healing experiences produce lasting effects?
Science and Christianity

- Economics: humans are greedy.
  Christianity: humans are self-centered.
- Physics: natural laws have not changed in the course of time.
  Christianity: God does not change.
  God constantly sustains the world through his word.
Scientism

- Only (natural) science can obtain valid knowledge. Only natural causes are valid explanations of observed facts.
- Reductionism: in the hierarchy of knowledge, every level can be reduced to its next lower level, and it is not more than it.
- These assumptions cannot be proven empirically.
- [Bentley 2013] “Physics explains everything, which we know because anything that physics cannot explain does not exist.”
- [Einstein] “Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.”
Christianity

• Christian religion in conflict with religion of Scientism.
• God also reveals important knowledge about himself and the world.
• God does miracles that cannot be explained by natural causes.
• But miracles are not random, they follow spiritual laws.
• Humans are more than their biology, they are created in God’s image.
• Objective moral values are not just the result of evolution, but their source is God.
Conclusion

• Science is a set of methods. Science is a creative activity that requires creativity and judgement.
• Scientific disciplines are religions with faith into certain assumptions.
• There is no conflict between religion and science in general and scientific disciplines such as economics and physics in particular.
• However, there is a serious conflict between the Christian (and other) religion(s) and Scientism. [Keller 2008, chapter 6]
Integrating Science and Christian Faith

• God has created the universe with its natural laws.
• Science is the discovery of these laws, and Christians are encouraged to do science as a way to serve God.
• Scientists should do their work with a humble attitude.
  “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”
  Proverbs 1:7
• Humans are more than their physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, . . .
• They are created to have relationship with God, which is based on faith.
References


