

The Proper Relationship of Science and Theology: A Defense of the Convergence Model

Chester J. DeLagneau
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Dr. Garry Deweese
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Introduction

As far back as the classic Greek period, philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle believed that whether truth is represented by universals or particulars, all truth emanates from God. Christian theologians and philosophers from early to late Medieval periods, such as St. Augustine and St. Aquinas, believed that even pagan truths have their source in the Lord.¹ And from the late medieval period through the scientific revolution, philosophers and scientists agreed that God was the author of two books—“the book of nature” and “the book of scripture.”² In other words, “all truth is God’s truth,”³ which is supported epistemically by science (“nature”) and theology (“scripture”). Thus, truth embraces all forms of knowledge. (This view will be referred to as the convergence model.) It was not until the Darwinian revolution that science and theology were pitted against each other as being inherently inexorable enterprises. Analogously, science and theology are perpetually at war, according to atheists, such as Francisco Ayala, Daniel Dennett, and Richard Dawkins. (This view will be referred to as the conflict model.) But not all scientists imbibe from the “warfare” water fountain. World-renowned evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould held to his conviction that science and theology are “absolutely inseparable but utterly different.”⁴ That is, science and theology are necessary parallel enterprises that cannot substantively interact. (This view will be referred to as the compartmentalization model.) However, scientists, such as Howard Van Till, disagree. Modern science and theology not only dialogue, they mutually influence one another *on every core issue*.

¹ See Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.75.

² See Stephen C. Meyer, “Qualified Agreement,” in *Science and Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Richard F. Carlson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 131.

³ In 1977, Christian philosopher Arthur Holmes gave this classic interpretation of truth the terse title (named after his book) it deserved—*All Truth is God’s Truth*.

⁴ Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 67.

In other words, these enterprises are incapable of conflict. (This view will be referred to as the complementary model.) So what model corresponds best with reality?

In this paper, I argue that the convergence model best explains the scope of the relationship between science and theology. Assuming the validity of general and special revelation as well as the correspondence theory of truth, it allows for “mutual epistemic support”⁵ of overlapping issues like intelligent design via, say, “irreducible complexity.” And when dealing with unique scientific and theological issues like the age of the universe and the resurrection of Jesus,⁶ I argue that this model analyzes the evidence of each issue on a case-by-case-basis without demanding that science blindly trump theology, or vice versa.⁷

Four Models of the Relationship Between Science and Theology

Before I begin, I would like to distinguish science from scientism and creation from creationism. Without getting tangled up in the demarcation problem of science, I define science generally as a method of observing natural phenomena, which makes experiments and forms testable conclusions, while scientism starts with methodological naturalism, which presupposes that nature is all that is knowable. If these explanations are accurate, science makes no a priori assumptions, while scientism confines itself to a limited knowledge of reality. I define creation as the study of the observable world. (I am using the term “creation” to be interchangeable with “science”.) However, unlike creation, creationism presupposes a biblical account of the world and forces its conclusions to fit a procrustean bed. Now that these terms are defined and put in their proper place, I can continue my discussion.

⁵ Coined by Stephen C. Meyer.

⁶ Assuming the probability of genuine miracles, as well as mind-body dualism.

⁷ Another advantage of this model is that it can take an “eclectic view” of realism and antirealism of both scientific *and* theological issues.

The conflict model affirms that both science (really scientism) and theology (really creationism) will perpetually remain in their respective recalcitrant realms with a priori predispositions to their epistemological claims. Simply put, the conclusions of “science” and “theology” are “intrinsically doomed to conflict with one another.”⁸ An example of their internal conflict is the age of the earth controversy, where theology, spearheaded by militant creationism, says that God formed and filled the world in six literal days no more than 10,000 years ago, and where science, spearheaded by dogmatic scientism, says the world evolved by natural means over four billion years ago. The problem here is that there can be no *genuine* dialogue and no *attempt* at a definitive resolution. This “warfare” model, thus, has an inherently defective explanatory purview, which debilitates an accurate representation of the world.

The compartmentalization model affirms that science and theology are non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA), where a magisterium represents a domain of authority in teaching.⁹ The magisterium of science (really scientism) manages objective truth (i.e., fact), while the magisterium of religion is relegated to subjective truth (i.e., meaning and morality). And there is the rub. The NOMA principle¹⁰ maintains peace at “the cost of removing theology from any productive conversation with science.”¹¹ Since science has usurped the role from theology of demarcating the boundaries of science, it has conveniently monopolized claims to any factual *is*, dismissing any ethical *ought* as superfluous. But appealing to a state of peace as the basis for grounding the NOMA principle is clearly an arbitrary and blind assertion void of any logical argument. Thus, why is this model warranted over any other? Furthermore, I argue that its sole

⁸ Timothy Bayless, “On Models for Integrating Science and Theology” (The Theology and Philosophy of Science Term Paper, Talbot School of Theology, Spring 2008), 2.

⁹ See Gould, *Rocks of Ages*, 5.

¹⁰ Derived by Gould.

¹¹ William Dembski, *Intelligent Design* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 190.

support undermines its initial intent. That is, to appeal to “peace,”¹² and not “fact,” as a justification for the compartmentalization model, is to deputize *subjective* value as the harbinger to truth.

The complementary model affirms that science and theology offer different descriptions of the same reality. Whether describing the origin of the universe or the origin of man, complementarists maintains that science and theology *must* complement one another, or to put it colloquially—they always have each other’s back. Similar to the compartmentalization model, the complementary model seeks to harmonize mutual interaction. But where science and theology, on the compartmentalization model, press the epistemological envelop to the boundary of “interdigitation,” the complementary model tears through the “envelop” to claim mutual influence and interaction, no matter what the cost. Van Till, a theistic evolutionist, presupposes that since science (scientism) inexorably supports the evidence of biological evolution, then the literalist’s interpretation of Genesis must be reinterpreted. I argue that this move is too costly. Van Till’s anthropology seriously diminishes the doctrine of sin. Romans 5 makes clear that just as through the first Adam sin entered the world, and thus death through sin, life and righteousness came through the second Adam. So if God did not literally create the first Adam from the dust of the earth to be the first *Homo sapien*, then a literal reading of the second Adam is left to vain speculation. In other words, without the inherited guilt and corruption of the sin imputed to every *H. sapien*, God’s vicarious atonement is unnecessary. Unequivocally, this is an exegetically insurmountable problem, which, to borrow a Heideggarian term, does “hermeneutical violence” to the biblical text. Therefore, this model, which presupposes

¹² “Science and religion stand watch over different aspects of all our major flashpoints. May they do so in peace and reinforcement...” Gould, *Rocks of Ages*, 110.

naturalism and fails to take Scripture seriously, weakens its explanatory scope. But can the convergence model do any better? I believe so.

Like the complementary model, the convergence model affirms that science and theology mutually support one another; however, unlike the complementary model, they do not epistemically support one another on *every* core issue, evidenced by the creation-evolution controversy. Put differently, these enterprises (while in principle they are partners) are also capable of conflict (since in practice they overlap in meaning). And when they seemingly conflict the model intrinsically allows the evidence to speak for itself, which necessarily converge in their conclusion.¹³ Moreover, “[t]here are uniquely scientific issues and uniquely theological issues, but there are also issues where one can provide justification [epistemic support] for the claims of the other”¹⁴ like the argument for intelligent design, which I have decided to represent. I have also chosen “uniquely scientific issues and uniquely theological issues,” such as the age of the universe and the (bodily) resurrection of Jesus, to show that, depending on the issue, science and theology will alternate in authority as to which one temporarily “trumps” the other. Indispensably, “[b]oth kinds of explanations are necessary to fully account for the features of the world.”¹⁵ It is to these unique issues that I now turn.

A Defense of the Convergence Model

Theology can provide the origin and fate of the universe; however, it cannot furnish any solid evidence for its age. Determining the birthday of the universe, then, is left to scientists. Since the universe is dynamically evolving, astrophysicists can study the distribution and motion

¹³ Assuming “all truth is God’s truth.”

¹⁴ Bayless, “On Models for Integrating Science and Theology,” 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

of matter and energy. They also collect light from remote objects and analyze the rate of cosmic expansion to construct an approximate age of the universe, which has been calculated to circa 14 billion years (since the time of the Big Bang). So what are these specific scientific lines of evidence for an old universe? Any exhaustive list will necessary include cosmic expansion, red shifts, microwave background radiation, Hubble's Law, and theories of stellar and planetary formation, not to mention observational evidence, such as gamma ray bursts. Due to limited space, however, I will only be able to discuss cosmic expansion.

The Age of the Universe¹⁶

Living in the 21st century has its perks like knowing that time and space (and matter) are finite. However, this was not always the case. Ancient Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, believed that matter was necessary and uncreated, and, thus, eternal. Even Newton postulated that time and space were both infinite. It would take hundreds, even thousands, of years of theoretical and observational evidence to contradict the beliefs of some of the greatest minds that have ever lived. The cosmological expansion of the universe led scientists to conclude that the universe had a beginning in a cosmic explosion (the "Big Bang").¹⁷ So what exactly is cosmic expansion?

A uniform universe (where the microwave background radiation is detectable everywhere in the sky) is

expanding away from an initial state of infinite density. At a given time after the birth of the universe, every observer in the universe sees the objects in the universe rushing away

¹⁶ Assuming the reliability of the scientific data.

¹⁷ Sir Fred Hoyle sarcastically coined the phrase during a 1949 radio broadcast.

at the same rate as for every other observer. So, at a given time, every observer also sees the same local density of matter.¹⁸

This phenomenon is not atypical to human observers. When I look out into the night sky at distant objects, they appear to recede from me. And, possibly even more fascinating, the further away the objects are the faster they move away. This “moving away” phenomenon is the universe *intrinsically* expanding, since there is nothing for it to expand “into.” So what is the connection between cosmic expansion and the age of the universe? Scientists extrapolate the current size and rate of expansion backward to a single state of infinite density (and temperature) compacted into the volume of less than the period at the end of this sentence. The fiery cataclysm of this “singularity” is what is commonly referred to as the Big Bang.

Since theology contributes no concrete evidence about the age of the universe,¹⁹ it defers to its partner, science, to be its epistemological guide. But this is not a mark of weakness for the convergence model; on the contrary, it inherently allows for unique scientific issues like the age of the universe to trump any theological interpretation(s) to the contrary. I will now demonstrate a unique theological issue that trumps science—the resurrection of Jesus.

The Literal Resurrection of Jesus²⁰

The resurrection as recorded in Matthew 28:1-11:

1 Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. 2 And behold, a severe

¹⁸ Jerome James Brainerd, “Cosmology: The Basic Theory of Cosmic Expansion,” Issue 1.7, entry posted November 17, 2004, The Astrophysics Spectator website, <http://www.astrophysicsspectator.com/topics/cosmology/BasicTheory.html> (accessed December 11, 2010).

¹⁹ I am aware of some of the different biblical creation models, such as “gap”, “initial chaos”, and “pre-creation chaos”, as well as some of the different interpretations of the Hebrew word for “day” (*yom*), such as “day-age”, “revelatory days”, “24-hour days”, and “literary framework.” However, I do not believe that they directly contribute to the discussion of the age of the *universe*. With that said, however, I do think that the scientific evidence directly compliments the theological (biblical) text.

²⁰ Assuming the reliability of Scripture.

earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. 3 And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4 The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for *Jesus who has been crucified*. 6 He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. 7 *Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead*; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.” 8 And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. 9 And behold, *Jesus met them and greeted them*. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. 10 *Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.”* 11 Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened.²¹ (Italics added)

According to Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. But Matthew also records that Christ physically interacted with his disciples after the resurrection. Thus, it cannot be the case, as critics claim, that the resurrection of Jesus was merely spiritual.

Further evidence for Christ’s bodily resurrection is recorded in John 20:24-28:

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 *Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.”* 28 *Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”* (Italics added)

After a brief flirtation with skepticism, Thomas came to believe the literal resurrection of Jesus (verse 27) and the deity of his Lord (verse 28). In the face of physical and personal evidence, “Doubting Thomas” became “Thomas the Believer.”

The last account I would like to include comes from I Corinthians 15:1-8:

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures*, 4 and that *He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according*

²¹ All biblical passages are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. (Italics added)

The Apostle Paul proclaims that “the gospel” is defined simply as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Like Matthew and John, he includes Christ’s physical interaction with His disciples and other eyewitnesses. But unlike them, Paul adds that the specifics of “the gospel” are contained in “the Scriptures”. The Scriptures he is referring to is the Torah. However, there is no specific reference in the Old Testament that indicates that the expected Messiah would be “raised on the *third* day”. Whether there is a lost text or whether Paul is referencing material from Hosea 6:2 or whether “the third day” should be interpreted symbolically is not the concern of this paper. What I seek to denote is that Paul was compelled to justify the account of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. As it is recorded in the New Testament, Jesus was in fact raised from the dead on “the third day”²² just as He predicted.²³

So what does science (not scientism) have to contribute to this discussion? Because of its limited realm of general revelation, it contributes very little. Again, this is not a mark of weakness for the convergence model, since it intrinsically calculates for unique theological issues like the resurrection of Jesus to “trump” any scientific interpretation(s) to the contrary. I have demonstrated that uniquely scientific and theological issues compliment one another, even though they alternate in authority as to which one temporarily trumps the other. Again, I would like to add that “[b]oth kinds of explanations are necessary to fully account for the features of the world.”²⁴

²² Jesus was crucified on Friday (Passover) and His body was taken down before sundown, Saturday (Sabbath). Then, “on the first day of the week” (Sunday), the two Marys came to the empty tomb.

²³ See Matthew 20:17-19.

Now I would like to conclude this discussion with my final line of evidence, which argues that the convergence model best explains the scope of the relationship between science and theology allowing for mutual epistemic support of overlapping issues like intelligent design.

Intelligent Design

“Many of the founders of early modern science assumed that the natural world was intelligible precisely because they also assumed that it had been designed by a rational mind.”²⁵ A list of these scientific patriarchs includes, but is not limited to, Johannes Kepler, Robert Boyle, and Sir Isaac Newton. Incidentally, these scientists were Christians of some sort. But design arguments are not Christian; they are not even theological (even though they have metaphysical implications). They are scientific. Design arguments go back to Christians and non-Christians alike, such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Maimonides, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Thomas Aquinas, and William Paley. I briefly note some of the key players of the design argument to show that it has enjoyed a rich and long tradition within the history of science. So what does the design argument entail?

According to Stephen C. Meyer, one of the main proponents of intelligent design (ID), the classical design argument starts “by noting certain highly ordered or complex features within nature, such as the configuration of planets or the architecture of the vertebrate eye. It then proceeds to argue that such features could not have arisen without the activity of a preexistent intelligence...”²⁶ As fascinating as the cosmological evidence is for ID, I will have to limit my discussion to biology, specifically the bacterial flagellar motor.

²⁴ Bayless, “On Models for Integrating Science and Theology,” 3.

²⁵ Meyer, “Qualified Agreement,” 133.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

According to biochemist Michael Behe, “there are about 40 different protein parts, which are necessary for this machine to work. And if any of those parts are missing, then either you get a flagellum that doesn’t work because it’s missing the hook or it’s missing the driveshaft . . . or it doesn’t even get built within the cell.”²⁷ Behe has labeled these types of complex features “irreducible complexity” (IC), which is a strong indicator of design in biology. Simply put, something is irreducibly complex if it is composed of two or more necessary parts. But surely natural selection (NS) via unguided gradual process can account for the origin of complexity. Or can it? Behe strongly doubts it. He rightly claims that “[a]n irreducibly complex system cannot be produced directly . . . by slight, successive modifications of a precursor system, because any precursor to an irreducibly complex system that is missing a part is by definition nonfunctional.”²⁸ Therefore, NS cannot explain the genesis of life. It can only work *after* complex organisms have been assembled and begin operating. So the only remaining, viable explanation is that irreducibly complex systems are designed. As to the identity of this Designer that remains purposefully ambiguous, since ID holds no prejudice to any particular theological worldview. The main assumption the ID movement is committed to is “that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an *intelligent* cause...”²⁹ (Italics added) So what do Behe’s interlocutors have to say? They dismiss IC as “religiously motivated,” thus, unscientific.

Co-Option Theory: A Counter Argument for Intelligent Design

²⁷ Illustra Media, “Unlocking the Mystery of Life,” 2002.

²⁸ Michael Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 39.

²⁹ Stephen C. Meyer, “What is the theory of intelligent design?” Discovery Institute. The Center for Science and Culture website, <http://www.discovery.org/csc/topQuestions.php> (accessed December 12, 2010).

Other critics, however, have lobbied more sophisticated arguments. “Behe’s critics also insisted that he had underestimated the power of natural selection. They argued that the flagellar motor could have been constructed from parts used to build simpler molecular machines like . . . [a] needle-nose cellular pump.”³⁰ Scientists have labeled this theory “co-option.” Scott Minnich, a molecular biologist and flagellar motor expert, has challenged the co-option argument.

Scott Minnich’s Response to the Co-Option Argument

Minnich echoes Behe’s assessment that the bacterial flagellum has 40 structural parts. He concedes that 10 of these proteins “are involved in another molecular machine...”³¹ So what of the other 30? He concludes that they are “unique,” which implies that they cannot have been borrowed to construct the flagellar motor. Minnich adds, “Eventually you’re going to have to account [that] the function of every single part [has] another purpose. So, you can only follow that argument so far until you run into the problem of borrowing parts from nothing!”³² He concludes by saying that “even if you concede that you have all the parts necessary to build one of these machines, that’s only part of the problem. ...[E]ven more complex . . . is the assembly instructions.”³³ These “assembly instructions” are analogous for digital information encoded in the DNA molecule of every living cell. And thus, this information carried by DNA is even more evidence for ID. So how does special revelation (theology, particularly the Bible) epistemically support general revelation (science) on the overlapping issue of design?

³⁰ Illustra Media, “Unlocking the Mystery of Life,” 2002.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

The Scriptures are replete with evidence of God's handiwork in biology. I will start with the Old Testament.

In Genesis 1:24-27, Moses proclaims,

24 Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. 25 God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. 26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

A literalist reading of this text shows that Yahweh created (or philosophically speaking, strongly actualized) every living being to reproduce after its own kind. No doubt—He is their Creator. It goes beyond the scope of this paper, however, to discuss the issue of biological evolution in detail. But I will say that there is strong evidence to suggest that the phrase "after their kind" is referring to micro-evolution (minor changes *within* species) and not macro-evolution (major changes *between* species). Therefore, adaptation within limits is perfectly acceptable with a literalist reading of Genesis 1.

Another proof text of design in biology is found in Psalm 139:13-16:

13 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. 14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; 16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.

Passionately illustrated is the realist account of the Grand Designer designing the body and soul of man. Far from God being absent from the biological process of a sperm fertilizing an egg, God actualizes the blueprints for human DNA. What does the New Testament have to say of design?

In Romans 1:19-20, Paul says, “19 . . . that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made...” In other words, God purposefully left His fingerprints (metaphorically speaking) on His creation. If I may formulate a crude illustration: God is like a clumsy thief who makes it obvious that He is guilty of being at the scene of the crime. This simple forensic analogy carries ubiquitous, profound meaning: No matter where in nature man turns, God graciously provides him every possible opportunity to believe that He is LORD. Whether His creatures believe it goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusion

I have provided four models of the relationship of science and theology (conflict, compartmentalization, complementary, and convergence) arguing for convergence as the best model because it deals with unique scientific and theological issues like the age of the universe and the resurrection of Jesus on a case-by-case-basis without demanding that science blindly or dogmatically trump theology, or vice versa. I have also shown that the convergence model allows for mutual epistemic support via special and general revelation of overlapping issues like intelligent design via irreducible complexity.

I will close with a quote from St. Augustine, which shows the necessity for a convergence model for the proper relationship between science and theology:

Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and other elements of this world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size . . . and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience. Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation... If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions

about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven...?³⁴

³⁴ Saint Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 1:42-43.

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