

Dissertation Title: Whitehead's Process Philosophy and the Integration of Religion and Science

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Abstract

Scientific discoveries and methods have fundamentally altered the way that we conceive ourselves, our world, and the cosmos which encloses us, even as the growth of technology continues to restructure the patterns of our lives, individually, socially, and globally. Meanwhile religion, in spite of often opposing scientific theories which are later found, to religion's embarrassment, to be true, remains a vital and no less fundamental force in human existence at all levels. Religion and science would seem to be locked in an uneasy, ambiguous relationship, in which neither can discard the other, no matter how much advocates of each may attempt to do so.

That both religion and science are deeply intertwined in our actual lives at every level, suggests the urgency of coming to an understanding of the relationship between them. But not only is there controversy between religion and science, there also is controversy over what the relation between them is and should be. The present thesis explores three typical models of that relation: conflict, independence, and dialogue. While each of these express some truth of what the relationship is (or should be), none are adequate. There has indeed been significant conflict between them; but by no means do religion and science always conflict, and indeed scientists and

religious persons are often the same persons. Religion and science do have a degree of independence in their fundamentally different concerns, roughly, meaning and fact respectively; yet those different concerns intersect at essential points, the meaning of life, for example, may not be fully independent of the origins of life. Finally while there is and should be dialogue between science and religion, this model, like the others, treats them as distinct self-contained social institutions that only secondarily have a relation. Their long history of mutual involvement including much more than conflict, independence, and dialogue, and the fundamental urgency of their concerns, suggests a depth of relationship that these models fail to capture.

As A. N. Whitehead insisted, an understanding of the relation between religion and science requires an understanding of each. But since their concerns and activities run through every aspect of our lives, and indeed of existence itself, understanding them and their relationship may require a deeper, more inclusive understanding of existence. Whitehead developed such an understanding, known as Process Philosophy, in which the cosmos is understood as a process of processes. Each individual thing, including God, is a process, termed an “actual entity”, which, in turn is composed of actual entities (i.e. distinct processes) and participates in “larger” actual entities. Using this conceptual framework, science and religion are here interpreted as actual entities, processes of comprehension and response to the fundamental and ultimate realities of the cosmos. Science is interpreted here as the act of research aimed at uncovering the fundamental laws of the cosmos. Religion is interpreted as the act of worship, the response to the vision of the whole and the possibility of a harmony of the whole. But natural law and the possibility of harmony are both integral to what Whitehead calls the primordial nature of God. Religion responds to that nature, aiming for the world which it implies as possibility. Science

examines that nature and describes its structure, revealing possibilities and instrumental means of achieving the possibilities. Seen in this way, science and religion appear as elements in the same human project, of bringing the primordial nature of God, the inherent possibilities of existence, to fruition. The difference between them is the social-historical expression of their different roles within that project leading them to elaborate different aspects, structure and possibility, of the primordial nature of God. Contemporary relations of conflict, independence, and dialog are then seen as ways in which they are moving towards a higher level of integration whose precise form we cannot yet know.

