

Religion, Philosophy and Science

Philosophy, religion and science all exist for the same reason, which is to provide meaning and understanding to this thing we call life. Each discipline has its own methodology and rubric for working towards this goal. It is interesting that so many similarities exist among the three, while there are also disagreements and inconsistencies among them. Differentiation between one of these fields and either of the others is very important distinction to make. Understanding the basics of each subject enables us to see the capabilities and limits of each, and thereby which field is more appealing as a lifelong pursuit. This understanding also helps us see why different words exist for each, and why proponents of each don't necessarily subscribe to the ideals of the others.

Comment [dp1]: Can you think of far more important reasons for getting clear on these?

Greek science, the predecessor to modern science, dealt largely with using intellectual means to produce theories that explained the world around us. In this way, Greek science was more like philosophy than modern science as we know it. In fact, science and philosophy were indistinguishable from each other until Parmenides and Plato came along and raised purely logical, metaphysical, and epistemological questions about the nature of being, knowledge, and truth (Religion, Philosophy and Science).

Modern science is a framework or methodology that is used to produce knowledge in the form of theories, or a simplification and unity of knowledge. At the heart of modern science is the process of taking an abstract idea followed by the formulating and rigorous testing of hypotheses. Two of the earliest examples of this type of modern science are Newtonian physics and Copernican astronomy. This differs from ancient or Greek science in that knowledge is created by testing observable, tangible things rather than an intellectual and theoretical thought process involving abstract ideas. This use of tangible, repeatable processes to produce knowledge is also one of the characteristics of science that sets it apart from religion and philosophy.

Comment [dp2]: These are both modern but there is a difference. The first is an experimental controlled science where variables can be manipulated, the second is a science of measurement also, but without controlling the variables (cannot manipulate the stars and planets.)

Comment [dp3]: Say something about how this is done: manipulating and mathematizing phenomena. What is a theory versus an hypothesis and how do these function?

Comment [dp4]: What are the limits of science? What can philosophy and religion do that science cannot? (See the last comment)

Philosophy, like science, involves testing ideas. However, these two disciplines have different ultimate goals. While science attempts to produce knowledge about the world around us, philosophy attempts to provide insight to and better understanding of established knowledge. Many times, this established knowledge has been provided by utilizing the scientific method. Several main areas of philosophy are practiced today. Some of these are metaphysics, or theories of reality; epistemology, theories of knowledge and truth; axiology, theories of value; and logic, which is the study of the rules of

Comment [dp5]: And in many cases can show that what we took for granted cannot be reasonably sustained either because it is logically inconsistent with other beliefs or is internally inconsistent. Or it can support what we thought we knew but for different reasons. Think, for example, of what we take for granted about the basis of human rights, justice, etc..

consistent thought. In addition to these, there are other specific special topics, such as art, sport, and others (Religion, Philosophy, and Science).

Religion, at its core, is not theoretical. All major religions can be viewed as a response to human need to explain both the world around us, as well as why we exist. Most religions can be categorized into the categories of naturalistic and super naturalistic. Naturalistic religions such as Buddhism and Taoism focus on “immediate phenomena with a philosophical non-anthropomorphic (man-like god or gods) underpinning” (Religion, Philosophy and Science). Super naturalistic religions like Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism are heavily based on an anthropomorphic God or gods that are not directly observable.

At first glance, it might seem as though the lack of metaphysical realities and entities associated with the idea of religion would allow it to jive with both science and philosophy. After all, don't science and philosophy both deal heavily in abstract ideas? While this is the case, one needs to remember that the abstract ideas that science and philosophy deal with are extensively analyzed in an attempt to rationalize them in our minds. Religious theologies, especially those that are super naturalistic, tend to not be able to stand up to this type of analysis. This is due largely to the fact that much of religion is based on faith, or “belief that is not based on proof” (<http://www.dictionary.com>).

Religion cannot be considered philosophy due to its inability to be rationalized with logic, philosophy cannot be considered science due to its lack of a structured, tangible testing procedure, and science cannot be considered religion due to its rigorous testing methodology.

Comment [dp6]: Certainly not in the same way science and philosophy are in testing their ideas and claims. But theories are ways of explaining that unify and simplify phenomena. Religious stories do explain. So depending on how we draw the boundaries of “theory” religion might be included but as a different species of theorizing. But if theory means ways of explaining that are tested through reason either by experimental logical means or via logical consistency and thought experiments as in philosophy, then religion is not theoretical.

Comment [dp7]: Science also uses non observable entities to explain, but as we said, tests these and is willing to give them up in favor of other theories that explain better (more range of phenomena and logical consistency).

Comment [dp8]: Most religions are full of metaphysical entities, such as God, angels, devils, heaven, etc..

Comment [dp9]: There is a difference between the large category of abstract ideas and metaphysical entities. One could say the latter is a specie of the former. Numbers, for example, are abstract entities, but it is controversial whether they are metaphysical entities and are real or not. God is both abstract and metaphysical. Justice is certainly abstract, but whether it is metaphysically real, is controversial, Plato would say yes, Hobbes would say no.

Comment [dp10]: Theology is a very special case of what is involved in religion and does involve extensive and careful rational thought in an attempt to make a particular religion rationally coherent. But theology is not at the core of religion as rational testing is at the core of both science and philosophy

Comment [dp11]: Religion when it theologizes does use logic. Even myths have a kind of logical consistency about them.

Comment [dp12]: Science cannot and does not try to provide any guidance in how to live a human life, where as both philosophy and religion can or attempt to do this. Science is descriptive, religion is prescriptive and deals with “ought.” Some philosophy does this, as well. It is controversial among philosophers the extent that philosophy can or “should” attempt this. But much of the history of philosophy is certainly a guide in what we should do, such as Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism, Kant, utilitarianism, etc. Science never attempts this because it cannot approach such issues. If it did, it would cease to be science with all its power (which depends on its narrowness).

GRADE: B