The Truth About Physics And Religion Essay, Research Paper

The Truth About Physics and Religion

Many people believe that physics and religion are separate entities.

They claim that physics deals only with the objective, material world, while

religion deals only with the world of values. It is obvious, from these, and

from many other comparisons, that conflicts have arisen between physics and

religion. Many are convinced that the two fields completely oppose each other,

and are not related in any ways. Many people, who follow a particular religion,

feel offended by the claims that physicists have made, while physicists believe

that religion has no basis in reality. I will show, however, that these

conflicts are founded on a misunderstanding, and that there is no division

between physics and religion. I will also prove that the misunderstanding lies

in the parables of religion and in the statements made by physicists.

Furthermore, I will show that only physicists can really know the truth of

physics, and only religious followers can know the truth of that religion;

everyone else has to take it on faith.

Many people believe that physics and religion are entirely separate.

They claim that physics is only concerned with discovering what is true or false,

while religion is concerned with what is good or evil. Scientists appear to

agree that ?physics is the manner in which we argue about the objective side of

reality.? Religious followers, on the other hand, agree that ?religion is the

way we express the subjective decisions that help us choose the standards by

which we live.? Although these definitions seem to be contrasting, an important

element remains absent, an element that must first be considered before religion

and physics can be compared.

Those who think that religion has no basis in reality also believe that

there is an ?obvious? separation between the two fields. They think that

religion is a jumble of false assertions, with no basis in reality. Paul Dirac,

a physicist, once said:

The very idea of God is a product of the human

imagination. It is quite understandable why primitive

people, who were so much more exposed to the

overpowering forces of nature than we are today,

should have personified these forces in fear and

trembling. But nowadays, when we understand so

many natural processes, we have no need for such

solutions.

Dirac, and those who think the same way, however, fails to consider the

essential element that has caused many to misunderstand the relationship between

physics and religion. What they fail to realize is that religion uses language

in quite a different way from science. The language of religion is more closely

related to the language of poetry than to the language of science. The fact

that religions have, throughout the ages, spoken in parables and images, simply

means that there is no other way of understanding the reality to which they

refer. But I strongly believe, however, that religion is a genuine reality.

Neils Bohr once said:

The relationship between critical thought about the

spiritual content of a given religion and action based

on the deliberate acceptance of that content is

complementary. And such acceptance fills the

individual with strength of purpose, helps him to

overcome doubts and, if he has to suffer, provides him

with the kind of solace that only a sense of being

sheltered under an all-embracing roof can grant.

In this sense, religion helps to make social life more harmonious; its most

important task is to remind us, in the language of parables and images, of the

wider picture that we live our lives.

Dirac, like many others who share his thoughts, thinks that religion is

entirely based on faith. But, because of his ignorance to the meaning of the

word ?faith?, he has developed many incorrect beliefs and assumptions. Faith is

defined as ?the belief in something, with strong conviction and confidence.?

What many fail to realize, however, is that faith is just as essential an

element of physics as it is of religion. The reason why many fail to realize

this, is because of the common misconception that physics is a self-regulating

machine which automatically produces information when the crank of scientific

method is turned. Very little faith would be required, of course, for the

operation of such a machine. But physics, as many of us have experienced

through experiments, is not at all like that. The experimenter usually finds

nothing resembling the smooth, ordered, lawful behavior depicted by the

textbooks. What he finds instead are error-filled and highly questionable

results. William Pollard, a physicist, once wrote:

Scientific research is a tough and unrelenting business.

Only those who enjoy a firm and unshakable faith that

the universal principles will always hold true can

become successful. Without such an abiding faith, it is

simply not possible to become a part of the physics

community.

Consider. for example, this common claim: ?anyone can demonstrate the truths of

physics for himself, but the tenets of religion have to be accepted blindly on

faith.? How many people, for example, can demonstrate to their own satisfaction

that the mass of the earth is 5.98 x 1024 kilograms, or that the charge on a

proton is + 1.60 x 10-19 coulombs. A long, hard educational process is required

during which a person must freely submit himself to a rigorous discipline, and

strongly desire and believe in its outcome. Consequently, the truth follows

that only by becoming a physicist can he possess the capacity to demonstrate the

truths of physics to his own satisfaction. Likewise, only those who become

serious followers of a religion can know the truths of that religion. In both

cases, everyone else must take it all on faith.

Another way in which science and religion are frequently contrasted is

in terms of the personal and impersonal. This contrast is based on the belief

that science is a dispassionate, completely detached activity in which the

process of knowing is independent of the involvement or participation of the

knower. In contrast to this, religious knowledge is thought to be deeply

personal, since it comes only through the passionate involvement and commitment

of the believer in that which he knows. Many believe that religion affects both,

our actions and our emotions, as opposed to physics, which does not. The fact

is, none of these statements can be validated unless the person saying it has

endured and committed himself to both physics and religion. A sincere and hard-

working physicist will feel the personal affects of physics on him, whereas

others will not. Similarly, a dedicated and determined follower of a religion

will feel the personal affects of that religion on him. Others, again, will not.

A number of the contrasts which are frequently made between physics and

religion are seen to be either wrong or irrelevant through careful analysis.

Einstein, himself, believed that God was somehow involved in the immutable laws

of nature, and that there is no split between physics and religion. What is and

always has been our mainspring is faith. To have faith always means: ?I decide

to do it, I stake my existence on it.? When Columbus started on his first

voyage into the West, he believed that the earth was round and small enough to

be circumnavigated. He did not merely think this was right in theory?he staked

his whole existence on it. There’s an old saying: “I believe in order that I

may act; I act in order that I may understand.” This saying is relevant not

only to the concepts of physics and religion, but also to the entire life we

live.