

"Science & Religion Must Conflict"

Dallas Willard - Stanford Veritas

Scribe's Comments - The session was transcribed from the recording in good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The **bold**, underline and [brackets] offer the scribe's emphasis and commentary.



"Science & Religion Must Conflict"

[Starts @ 00:30]

Stephen J. Gould - *Rocks of Ages*

Concerned about conflict between religion & science.

Stirring call to question the theory of evolution.

Give a blessedly simple resolution to the supposed conflict between science & religion.

Hope to bring to light the general issues about the teaching of religion and teaching of science. Focus on the issue important to all of us.

Science is God's work in history. Advances often come from people who look like they are half asleep. Function under tendencies of thoughts and feelings that are not fully conscious.

The story of human history is the story of the advance of freedom. The advance of knowledge and truth. The connection would be pretty obvious. We could not be here today without the advances of science.

Great challenges since late 1800's - the need of moral development to keep up with the advancement of knowledge. **The more you know, the better you need to be. The more you know, the more dangerous you are.**

Why Religion & Science Must Conflict

[4:50]

Science & Religion deal with the same thing - human life.

They try to explain it with different type of considerations.

One - physical or natural.

The Other - non-physical or spiritual.

That's why they must conflict. They come to the same things from two different points of view. Gould tries to divide them so that they never interfere. You can't do that.

Scientific experiment with human life in the natural science = "Naturalism"

* "God of the gaps" argument - try to use non-natural explanations for natural items we don't understand.

Gould (p. 4)...

"Science tries to document the factual character of the natural of the world and develop theories that try to explain these facts."

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"Religion: Equally important but completely different realm - Human purposes, meaning and values."

He divides these into "Domains of Teaching"

"Respectful non-interference."

"These two do not overlap. To cite the old cliches, science gets the age of rocks and religion the rock of ages. Science studies how the heavens go and religion how to go to heaven." Gould, p. 6

"Nature works by invariant laws subject to scientific confirmation."

"The natural world does not lie. The Word can have many meanings. Allegory. Re-exam scripture in light of science." (Gould)

What happens in conflict? You re-write scripture. You change the meaning of it. If you might get uneasy about the "respectful, non-interference", you would be right. Religion turns out to not be even on the pie. [slice/divide]

Gould, p. 60, *"Suspicion...every person must formulate a moral theory, while religion anchors it, the chosen pathway of ethics and meaning need not invoke religion at all but in other traditions like philosophy."*

He is saying you can do without religion.

Spinoza* *"Dropping religion as traditionally understood and pursue meaning under philosophical thought."*

* [1632-1677 - Spinoza is best known for his *Ethics*, a monumental work that presents an ethical vision unfolding out of a monistic metaphysics in which God and Nature are identified. [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)]

The realm of human purpose, meaning and values into something entirely human - a dimension of our lives that is not reducible to the physical and we're left freely to do that. We don't have to accept religious dogmas to do that. *"True religion is to bring moral contemplation rather than a set of dogmas. In religion, you are not free to desire."*

Religion becomes dispensable.

1.) When you speak of "factual" there is an important ambiguity [16:08]

"Sense perceptible world" and it's theoretical presuppositions.

Gould's "The Magisterium of Science" - Particles, sub-particles, strings, quarks, etc.

Whatever is not sense perceptible is not a "fact".

Morals and religion are not "sense perceptible" so it is not "fact".

Fact (def.) When you have a property that belongs to something.

* 8 is divisible by 2 but it's not a "sense perceptible fact"

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Are there any facts that are not "sense perceptible"?

Gould divides the territory and says no. Feeling, sentiment, etc. are not an area of truth or reality. Not even an area you can theorize about.

Willard - There might be non-natural facts. [18:45]

There is no reason why there should not be a world of non-natural realities.

- * Buddhism teaching of Nirvana
- * God is not a physical fact. God does not have a brain and apparently He does not miss it. That's why everything is a no-brainer for Him.

Religion is committed to a spiritual world. There is a form of interaction between the world that is not natural and the natural world.

"Science tries to document the factual character of the natural world and to develop theories that coordinate and explain these facts." Gould

Willard - I think that is exactly what we need to say about science. That is exactly why religion and science have to conflict. Religion deals with the same world and why things exist and why they happen the way they do. That leaves all kinds of room for natural science to pursue inquiry and come to understand as best we can natural things as natural events. I agree with this view of science but don't agree with the penumbra of philosophical views Gould and others put around it.

Agnosticism would allow that there is conflict but we don't understand it. That's why I don't think [Gould] is agnostic.

Saving religion in this way is not going to be very promising to anyone who believes in anything in religion.

Some concede that religion has nothing to do with fact. Others who believe that their religion makes truth claims will feel like they have been cheated. Avoiding the conflict this way is to give up the game entirely.

When Gould talks about some kind of knowledge, he is slipping because what he really means to say is that the Magisterium of Religion has no truth but just a way to manage our feelings and sentiment to deal with our life.

Willard - In science, we don't look for supernatural or non-natural explanations. Limit the extent of the claims we are prepared to make but not a claim about two radically different realms of being.

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[28:30] **What we have to say is that there is an inherent tendency in the scientific attitude towards conflict with religion in so far as religion involves any beliefs about what is the case.** ["case" = true]

[\[Willard's main point in this message - see 1:02:14\]](#)

The solution proposed by Gould and many others:

Religion is a kind of poetry, allegorical, non-factual ways of expressing ethical truths about the meaning of life that could be much better expressed by moral understanding we could develop independent of religion.

That view invites religion to cease to exist or to transform itself in something one who believes nothing but only has certain feelings could claim to practice.

[30:25] - Can the natural world be fully explained in natural terms?

If it is viable, then it is possible.

Areas of Problems [\[explaining everything in "natural terms"\]](#)

1.) The Dependent Nature of the Phenomenal World of Nature

Everything we find in nature is dependent upon something else. Either it has a beginning or it doesn't. If it is infinite, it will never get to this one. If it is finite in one direction, it is finite in another.

Something underpinning it that is not dependent upon something else opens up religious ideas of treating that problem.

Why do we have the laws of nature to begin with?

The laws of mechanics don't explain the laws of mechanics.

To arrive at a law that is not explained by another law.

2.) Awareness or Consciousness & Awareness of Consciousness

When you consider the nature of the mind closely and the properties the mind has - choice, character formation, logical relations between thoughts - are areas where we don't have the beginnings of explanation in terms of natural science.

People want to talk about all the things we know about the brain. If all you had to look at is the brain, you'd never know there is such a thing as like lemon pie, "Yankee Doodle Dandy", etc.

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If you're locked into natural sciences as the only body of knowledge, you can not have knowledge of the mind.

You didn't come here by the laws of nature. You came here by choice.

3.) Great Events and People in History

We don't have a beginning or explanation of these things in terms of natural science. I mention Jesus Christ because he is the greatest enigma. Understanding what Napoleon did is nothing compared to understanding what Jesus did. This is a standing invitation about people who wish to know about reality will look at that.

4.) The Power of Beauty = "Sense manifest goodness"

When you see a flower or something beautiful, you experience joy and you want to give thanks.

"The most embarrassing moment for the atheist is when he wants to give thanks, and there is no one to give thanks to." G.K. Chesterton

Beauty does that. Your heart expands.

5.) The Experience of Co-working with God

[39:30]

You're doing something and what comes out of it is something you could not have accomplished. This is a constant reality that is an experiential reality as you venture on it. You act on faith, trust and move into it. Prayer, worship, or setting out to accomplish something that is humanly impossible and, lo and behold, it is accomplished. There is always the details to work through to see if it is actually happening. Alright to exercise the free spirit of inquiry.

* "Doubting Thomas", according to Gould, was mistaking the Magisterium of Science when he was in the Magisterium of Religion.

[41:20] Religion is not opposed to inquiry. Ask any question. We don't have anything to hide. If we do, perhaps we have not understood what our religion is about.

Religion as an authoritative cultural form, does try to shut down free inquiry. When we're thinking about religion world-wide, we must remember not to assign the results of raw humanity to religion as such. Religion gets taken over by the human side and because it is such an incredibly powerful force, it is dragooned into serving sometimes very awful ends.

The things I am suggesting are not new or settled.

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David Hume - *"No philosopher who is rational and modest has ever pretended to assign the ultimate causes of any natural operation or show distinctly the action of that power which produces any single effect in the universe."*

Science is not in the business of ultimate explanations. It works on specific things to refine them. It never makes a claim about everything.

The theory "Only natural facts exist" you will never find in a science book.

Never find an ontological conclusion in a peer reviewed science book.

* $E=MC^2$ - That's not a statement about all energy, that's a statement about all matter. That does not say all energy is related to matter. It states all matter is relate to energy.

There is a great difference between religious teaching and science teaching because religion does try to make all inclusive claims. It's does not make that at the fundamental theory, it is stories.

* *"Once upon a time...and they lived happily ever after."*

Beginning, middle and end. In science you never have that.

The attempts of Gould, Dawkins, Hawkings to try to give total theories always wind up with mathematical fictions, pleasing images, but something short of what they are intending.

Spirituality for All

[46:30]

What we have coming down the road in our culture is "spirituality". It is going to get us all. The reason for this is because we have such desperate need for spirituality. But it is going to be a spirituality that has no restriction in terms of truth and reason that will say all spiritualities are equal because they d not deal in the realm of fact.

Issues of purpose, meaning, values, self-worth - all are spiritual values. We have people getting excited about this in the academies.

* David Scott, University of MA (NY Times),

"We have ghettoized religion in the academy and we need to bring it back. We have to have a spiritual dimension to the campus."

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[48:10 - Willard's response]

I believe that is right. But which one is it going to be? The recommendation that Gould is making is designed to allow us to say in the realm of spirituality, anything goes. Spirituality is good because it meets a deep human need. There is no question to be asked about, "*Spirituality of what?*" The reason is because the area of religion, morals, spirituality, meaning and purpose has been cut loose from reality and left to run on its own. That is going to undermine the rationality of the rest of the campus. Because eventually the University enterprise is a moral enterprise. It has to be able to answer the question - "*What is the moral basis of science itself and the academic and intellectual life?*"

If that is not a domain of fact, then it is going to be merely the domain of feeling and will invariably come under the sway of political forces.

~ ~ ~ **End of Teaching [49:40]** ~ ~ ~

Q & A

Q - Intelligent Design Movement?

A - MIT just published a big book for and against Intelligent Design.

For a person who wishes to approach this as a rational matter, it has a lot to say. For a person who has already decided it is not rational, it has nothing to say. From a point of pure logic, it has something to say. If you bought the idea that anything can be produced by a long enough time of variation, you'll buy non-intelligent design.

* *The Blind Watchmaker*, Dawkins

No matter how much you refine the design that is there... Talk of a designer is merely meaningless. People will not be moved by it. Where we have to fight the battle a little down lower on the pole

—> **Are there facts that can be not sense-perceptible facts?**

[see 28:30 & 1:02:14]

If you have not already bought the agnostic or "meaningless" thesis.

Q - Darwin's theory can account for survival of the fittest but not the arrival of the fittest. They call on the "random" chance as the God of the gaps or the "God of craps."

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A - Chance never explains anything. Chance is our way of talking about things we don't understand.

* Roulette is not a game of chance. We don't know where the ball is going to turn up so we call it a game of chance and waste our money on it.

* By the mere logic of the case, Evolution can not explain creation - "Arrival". It presupposes an environment that will select from that progeny.

Evolution always requires an environment therefore it can not account for creation or the origination or arrival of things.

The Origin of the Species is not a discussion of where species come from, it is a discussion of the present species. He never discusses where species came from, but the present ones and how they got from there to here.

There is a need, a hunger to reach out and explain everything. We need that as human beings. Things have to make sense. If you have set aside a God who is capable of self-existence and producing a world, then you'll say the universe evolved out of nothing. Nothing evolves out of nothing. You have to have something before evolution can happen. That's why biological evolution is irrelevant to the argument from design. If life never originated and everything was in place, you'll still have order to explain. It would apply if all there was was atoms & galaxies.

Q - Gould - "Stasis is data". If the goal of Science is to explain things without recourse to God, it could explain why things don't change.

Macro-Status and Natural Science

A - It can be if it can be subsumed under higher laws. We all start from little regularities and we want to know why that, and we find a higher, more inclusive law.

Natural selection was always opposed to artificial selection.

* Farmers selecting animals to choose what to pass on.

I would not conclude it is impossible for God to intervene at some point.

* CS Lewis - What happens with miracles is a matter of a higher process taking over.

* Iron can not float but if you shape it right it can float.

Lewis tries to present intervention on that same model.

Q - Gould resolve...?? Francis Schaffer reference.

A - Gould glories in the asceticism of religion that was set aside.

"If you've made this dichotomy, you've abandoned rationality."

Francis Schaffer

Q - [inaudible]

[1:01:00]

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A - I don't like the natural/non-natural distinction.

See - "Knowledge & Naturalism" paper on dwillard.org

—> This is the most important point I have to say to you: [1:02:14]

[see 28:30]

What is a fact?

A matter of a property belonging to something.

A "property" is a respect in which things differ or resemble.

That lays a foundation for truth.

A belief is true if what it is about is as that belief holds it to be.

* If I believe there's gas in my tank, that is true if there is gas in my tank

* If I believe there are atoms, that is true if there are atoms.

* If I believe God created the world, it is true if God created the world.

One of the keys in philosophy is to do your general ontology in a way that doesn't beg any important questions. That's important and very hard to do.

I teach more in Ontology and Metaphysics than any other area because I think that is crucial.

"Fact" (def.) A matter of a property belonging to something or a relation belonging to something.

?) What's the difference between natural & non-natural?

Use sense perception as a criteria.

* For example: I know I am seeing you now. My "seeing" of you now exists but it is not sense-perceptible. "You" are sense perceptible, but not my "seeing" of you. My "seeing" you is a property of my mind.

The direction on you is a property of the seeing.

I see you clearly - that's a property of the seeing.

[Takes his glasses off]. I see you fuzzily. That's a property of the seeing.

In recent research, it appears our experiences do a great deal to shape our brain and not just the other way around. [1:04:37]

You're free to explore beauty, goodness, truth.

You don't want to settle that by a definition at the outset.

Q - Engagement with objectivity is a way to freedom. [1:05:20]

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A - The mind is capable of grasping stuff that isn't a part of it. It's capacity to do that is foundational for the growth of the self and the will. The self and the will only grow by incorporating others.

That's fundamental to community and all the morals that have traditionally guided community from **families** on up.

The "will" is not a physical reality. The properties are not physical. That "will" has to reach out to a world which includes what is not just physical reality but non-physical realities.

* When I see you, I see a person. I get to know you.

"What's your name? Nice to meet you."

That's the way you get to know a person. Your "will" and another's "will", which is not just my imagination, that is real.

* Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (1961)

- To reach out to an objective world that calls to us.

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7CBr4sFsIs>]

- Interiority, Exteriority and Coincidence - "The face of the other"

All this is a matter of properties and properties belonging to things. What Gould is saying is that you have the area of facts & reality and then you have this other area. We're going to reconcile religion and science by letting religion have nothing.

Let's explore what reality there is to religion without saying what it has to offer.

Q - Spiritual implications of...?? [1:08:30]

A - The individual "will" taken in the Nietzschean sense abandons community. History is always communal and community is always historical. When you find an absence of community, you will find a broken history. That happens over and over especially when there is change. We are time bound creatures that carry a past within us. Modernism has disowned its past.

Inherent in Modernism - mode, style, now, Now-ism - breaks the historical connection, dissolves the community and leaves them floundering within themselves.

Q - Was Nietzsche a monster? [1:10:00]

A - Nietzsche should be treated kindly. He is a pathetic figure raised in a very devout Christian home. By the time he was 4, he read the Bible with such a pathos, his family wept. He went into the institutions including the University and he found so much disappointment in the quality of life that was there. He devoted the rest of his life tearing them down. Here is a man

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who was captured by the culture of his time turned in on him. He was more a symbol than originator. Almost everything he had to say was borrowed from someone else. I don't think he was a monster. I think he was a very sad human being.

Q - How do you talk to people who want to leave nothing to science?

[1:11:15]

A - There are attacks on science. **Postmodernism** stands in the rejection of science. The operative terms are "Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Rain Forest."

Willard - I think a primary work of God is science. Gould does not know where his friends are. He is too worried about people who are questioning evolution and the intelligent design people. I don't think he knows where the enemy is.

Q - Does there have to be conflict between religion & science? [1:13:00]

A - There would not be a conflict if scientists were capable of suppressing their natural drive to not explain totalities but that would require humility. Both religion and science has a problem with humility. It is not a necessary logical conflict but psychologically it is inevitable given how human beings are.

Q - Religion committed to non-physical facts?

[1:14:00]

A - Give an explanation of God.

Every religion involves two things:

- 1.) It involves an Other Realm - out of the physical**
- 2.) It involves a claim that we can interact with that realm and it can make a difference in our lives.**

The alternative would be to give another explication of the other realm that is not in non-physical terms. Give in terms of a physical world. To take that route is to abandon religion.

One of the things Gould idolizes in his book is the standard treatment of Deism. He tells of the story of where God exists but what's going on now makes no difference because God never intervenes.

So, that would raise questions such as, "*What do you make of prayer? Does that realm have an effect on you or is it just mood adjustment?*"

The question is how would you describe this "Other Realm" if you had to do it in physical terms?

Q - How do you avoid describing just another "God in the gaps" explanation?

A - It's an open question any time there is a gap.

Is it God or something else?

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* Lightning? Thought it was God, but it wasn't.

* Disease? Thought it was God, but it wasn't.

It's a reverse of "The boy who cried wolf" and finally the wolf came. You still have to answer the question in any case. Is that God?

That would be different from a dogmatic attitude that it can't be God because all there is is the physical world.

Many people believe there is a great big world with a little god.

Another view is a great big God in a little world.

Q - [German talking about Nietzsche and killing of German Jews] [1:17:55]

Worst part about Nietzsche was the "super human being" lays a foundation for Hitler to send 6 million Jews to the gas chamber because they were considered inferior.

A - I would submit as a historical claim that not one less Jew would had died had Nietzsche never existed. Hitler used him as a rationalization but he was going to do what he was going to do. I would criticize Nietzsche for not saying things that would have prevented Hitler from doing that. I think he was duped by his own philosophical sources into being something that would actually foster a cultural atmosphere because he laid aside Christianity. Hitler was a relentless foe of Christianity. He was an anti-Christ. Nietzsche was the "in-between man".

Nietzsche has done more harm to young people on University campuses in America than he did to anyone else.

Q - Specific conflict with Science & Gould's views? [1:21:00]

A - Topic of **prayer**. Many experience the conflict in their prayer life. They have been taught in a system of knowledge that everything is causal and there is nothing that effects things other than the causation in the natural course of events. That makes it very difficult to pray.

Frank Laubach, *Prayer - The Mightiest Force on Earth*

He meant prayer touches the force that controls all forces.

Read the Bible to see where nuclear power may have shown up. That's one of the places where we come into shape conflict.

Other issues:

- Resurrection of Christ, Inspiration of Scriptures, Apostles Creed

The idea that this can not be taken as a statement of fact because we know that science does not permit it is extremely conflicted.

* USC Colleague in Religion Department talking to a student.

"Resurrection of Christ is a contrary to the laws of physics."

Willard - I don't know which law it is contrary to.

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* If you take a larger view, it is like saying it is contrary to the laws of physics for iron to float in water. It depends on how they are applied. If you hollow it out, it will float.

It can't happen because it is opposed to the laws of physics. Certainly, if it did happen, you can't explain it within the laws of physics as we know them.

You have to stay out of the "God of the gaps". If you're a scientist you don't look for a miracle, you look for the natural process. But that's where humility comes in. We have to be prepared to not...

Religion has the same problem. We have to stay out of arrogance.

Q - With the resurrection, Higher Law over Natural Law. [1:25:15]

How do you resolve the lower law that say you can't have it?

A - Then lower law says that it can't happen within the range of consideration that the law covers.

* Witches

Logical consistency and interpretation of scripture.

"Witches should be burned. Disobedient children should be stoned."

Gives way to irrational thinking. There is no substitute for careful thinking about things. In most cases then criteria will emerge. Mob psychology is notorious for overwhelming rationality. Those are things we need to respect. We've seen a lot of it in the scriptures we sight as normative for how we think and feel. I think a good reading of the scriptures would have saved us from most of the things that are now rightly embarrassing in the past of Christian culture.

I don't think there is a simple answer. Generally speaking, criteria emerged from working the data, from the subject matter. Method must conform to the subject matter. You have to inquire the meanings of words, how things are taken, logical relations, and what might be moving people that are caught up in it.

Same thing in the discussion of evolution today. We have to be careful, watch our thinking.

Respect the laws of logic.

Respect truth.

Not be stamped into things.

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Unfortunately, Christians are not notorious for those things. That's where humanity takes over.

Nietzsche, "*Human, all too human*"

and that's where most of our problems come from.

~ ~ ~ End of Session @ 1:29:15 ~ ~ ~

For information & resources about Dallas Willard Ministries — dwillard.org.

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For a "Willard Teaching Toolbox" with dozens of teachings with A/V links & transcribed notes — JesusCollege.com