

Views from the Pews: Does science undermine the Christian theology of creation?

No, quite the opposite. If the world is not rational, science is not possible; if the world is not free to be itself, science is not necessary to understand it. The Christian theology of creation claimed that it is both rational *and* free.

The three most basic assumptions of science are: (1) If the universe is good, it is worthy of careful study. (2) If it is rational, it is predictable and reliable, although not so hard-wired as to make universe fixed and uninteresting. (3) If it is contingent, it has freedom to be otherwise than it is, although not so much as to make the universe incoherent and unpredictable. If all these three assumptions are true, which Hebrew creation theology claims and science confirms, the state of things can be and has to be studied by experiment, not deduced from pure reasoning. Hence the three basic premises of ancient Hebrew philosophy, that the world is intelligible, good and contingent, provide the foundations of rational thought today. Contemporary science is possible only because it ultimately relies on all these statements as true.

The modern misunderstandings between science and religion are the real but sad and unnecessary consequences of centuries of mutual suspicion and misinformation between students of theology versus science, with complicated historical roots. They continue a long-held and very serious category mistake, that of confusing science and religion as *competing explanations of reality*.

The tragedy is that there is in fact no need for any such conflict. To see why, we need to appreciate the history of this hoary old debate, and the value and importance of respectful engagement with both sides. We need to get people to consider that science and religion offer *complementary, not competitive views of life*. They advocate separate and different interpretations of the same world we all look at. If we learn to understand the philosophical confusions underlying their opposite world views, we can minimise the uninformed polemics of both sides. Science cannot reject classical metaphysics without cutting off the branch it sits on.

Scientists who always work within the rational limitations of science offer no challenge to religion. Likewise, believers with no experience of science need not worry that scientists think religious belief is irrational. They need only point out that scientists also depend on reasoned trust beyond current data, because science and religion have ancient common roots.

Kim King