Summer 2017

Are There Philosophical Conflicts Between Science & Religion? (Participant's Guide)

Lydia Marcus
Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faith_science

Part of the Adult and Continuing Education Commons, Life Sciences Commons, and the Practical Theology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faith_science/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Study Guides for Faith & Science Integration by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.
A Participant’s Guide to

Are There Philosophical Conflicts Between Science & Religion?

A Study of Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, & Naturalism

Lydia Marcus

Summer 2017

Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa
How to Use This Material?

This study of evolutionary psychology using Alvin Plantinga’s *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, & Naturalism* consists of 4 modules. Each module contains two sections. The first section presents a set of Reading and Reflection questions that are to be completed before each meeting and are meant to help the participant wrestle with the concepts introduced in that week’s chapters. The second section consists of two (or more) Discussion questions, which will be written by the participants and the leader as they read. Both sets of questions are meant to foster discussion, but your group should by no means limit itself to the questions contained in these sections.

This study is intended for informal, small group discussion, such as that of a Bible study or small group. The themes presented in each submodule may be unpacked on its own, but it is the hope of the authors that the entire study may be useful to the interested reader (leader and participant alike). The study is also aimed toward high school students, college students, and post-college adults with an interest in how science and the Christian faith interact.

As you read, it is our hope that you will come across (and come up with) questions which challenge you, both in understanding your personal faith and in understanding science. In these questions, you will have the opportunity to grow through asking and answering these questions: Why has the church historically believed in this answer or that answer? How might you be challenged to defend your answer?
Who Wrote *Where the Conflict Really Lies*?

Alvin Plantinga is an analytical philosopher (hence the fairly analytically philosophical writing in *Where the Conflict Really Lies*) who is most known for his work in epistemology, metaphysics, Christian apologetics, and the philosophy of religion. Plantinga attended Calvin College and Harvard University as an undergraduate, and received his Ph.D. from Yale University in 1958. He is an emeritus philosophy professor at the University of Notre Dame. In 2017 Plantinga was given the Templeton Prize, an annual award from the Templeton Foundation that recognizes individuals who have made “exceptional contributions to affirming life’s spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works.”

*Where the Conflict Really Lies* is a philosophical book, but it is accessible to people with no background in philosophy. Plantinga has conveniently put the more intensely analytical philosophy parts of his book in smaller font, so readers may choose to skip over those parts if they would like. That said, this book is probably not for people who are not open to philosophical conversations.
# Table of Contents

How to Use This Material.................................................................................................................. 2

Who Wrote Where the Conflict Really Lies? ....................................................................................... 3

Module 1: Alleged Conflict................................................................................................................... 5

  Reading and Reflection ...................................................................................................................... 5

  “Preface” ........................................................................................................................................ 5

  “Evolution and Christian Belief (1)” ............................................................................................... 5

  “Evolution and Christian Belief (2)” ............................................................................................... 6

  “Divine Action in the World: The Old Picture” ................................................................................ 6

  “The New Picture” ........................................................................................................................... 7

  Discussion Questions ....................................................................................................................... 7

Module 2: Superficial Conflict ............................................................................................................. 8

  Reading and Reflection ...................................................................................................................... 8

  “Evolutionary Psychology and Scripture Scholarship” .................................................................... 8

  “Defeaters?” ................................................................................................................................. 9

  Discussion Questions ....................................................................................................................... 9

Module 3: Concord ............................................................................................................................... 10

  Reading and Reflection ...................................................................................................................... 10

  “Fine-Tuning” ............................................................................................................................... 10

  “Design Discourse” ....................................................................................................................... 10

  “Deep Concord: Christian Theism and the Deep Roots of Science” .............................................. 11

  Discussion Questions ....................................................................................................................... 11

Module 4: Deep Conflict ..................................................................................................................... 12

  Reading and Reflection ...................................................................................................................... 12

  “The Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism” .......................................................................... 12

  Discussion Questions ....................................................................................................................... 13

Bibliography ....................................................................................................................................... 14
Module 1: Alleged Conflict

Reading and Reflection

“Preface”

1. What relationship do you perceive between science and faith? Why? What has influenced your perception?

2. What do you know of naturalism? Can you think of anyone who could be considered an adherent of naturalism?

“Evolution and Christian Belief (1)”

1. What do you think of Plantinga’s suggestion that knowing and understanding are a way in which we resemble God (or bear His image) (4)? Does doing science play a role in helping us resemble God better? Why or why not?

2. What is your view of the theory of evolution? Why?
“Evolution and Christian Belief (2)”

1. Have you read anything by Dawkins or Dennett? What do you think of them? Do Plantinga’s critiques of their arguments make sense to you?

2. How do Dennett’s view of the world and your view of the world differ? What assumptions does Dennett make in his arguments? Why might he make those assumptions?

“Divine Action in the World: The Old Picture”

1. How do miracles fit into your understanding of natural law and “divine action”?

2. Do Plantinga’s proofs (pages 80-81) make sense to you? What is he trying to communicate with them?
“The New Picture”

1. What is the Divine Action Project? What do you think of it?

2. What three problems with divine intervention do the authors who contributed to DAP see? What do you think of Plantinga’s answers to these problems? Are they satisfactory?

Discussion Questions

In addition to answering the Reading and Reflection questions, please write two of your own questions about the readings for today.

1.

2.
Module 2: Superficial Conflict
Chapters covered: “Evolutionary Psychology and Scripture Scholarship” and “Defeaters?”

Reading and Reflection

“Evolutionary Psychology and Scripture Scholarship”

1. What do you think of the field of evolutionary psychology? Do you think that it is reasonable to suggest that certain human behaviours can be accounted for by evolutionary processes? If a behaviour could be described by evolutionary biology, would that make it less significant or special?

2. Is a worldview of naturalism required for the field of evolutionary psychology?

3. The evolutionary psychology description of religion Plantinga cites on page 133 is perhaps not the most widely accepted in the evolutionary psychology community. Evolutionary psychologists often describe religion as an adaptation that allowed for an improved sense of community. Religion strengthened the common identity of a prehistoric tribe, and this improved the tribe’s chance of survival and cohesion. Is it heretical to suppose that religion might be an evolutionary adaptation? Could God have given humankind the capacity for religion via evolutionary biological processes?
“Defeaters?”

1. What do you think of methodological naturalism? Is it valid to refrain from “invoking supernatural causation” in the name of proper science? Can you not invoke supernatural causation while avoiding a worldview of naturalism (in which all phenomena have a natural explanation)?

Discussion Questions

In addition to answering the Reading and Reflection questions, please write two of your own questions about the readings for today.

1.

2.
Module 3: Concord

Reading and Reflection

“Fine-Tuning”

1. Is the “fine-tuning” argument scientific? Is it philosophical? Support your answer.

2. Is it that we were the end goal, so these physical conditions were met? Or is it that these physical conditions were met, so we became a possible outcome?

“Design Discourse”

1. Have you heard of the “irreducible complexity” argument before? Do you believe it is a valid and helpful argument?

2. Watch “Irreducible complexity cut down to size” (which can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=W96AJOChboU) and “Rebuttals: Irreducible Complexity” (which can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=As1HlmYeh7Q) to gain an
alternative perspective on irreducible complexity. Clearly, the video creator has a bias. Do his critiques of irreducible complexity make sense?

“Deep Concord: Christian Theism and the Deep Roots of Science”

1. On page 266, Plantinga says “Modern Western empirical science originated and flourished in the bosom of Christian theism and originated nowhere else.” What do you think of this statement? Do you think it is accurate?

2. What are the implications of this statement for non-Christian scientists?

Discussion Questions

In addition to answering the Reading and Reflection questions, please write two of your own questions about the readings for today.

1.

2.
Module 4: Deep Conflict
Chapter covered: The Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism

Reading and Reflection
“The Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism”

1. Do you agree that theism is more rightly the “scientific worldview” (309)? How might adherents to naturalism respond to this claim?

2. Do you find Plantinga’s description of the self-inconsistency of naturalism’s confidence in the reliability of certain beliefs (such as the theory of evolution or science in general, page 314) to be persuasive?

3. Would you be able to summarize Plantinga’s thesis and support for his thesis for an audience of adherents to naturalism? Do you agree with his thesis? Has this book impacted the way you view the philosophy of science or the conflict (perceived or legitimate) between science and religion?
Discussion Questions

In addition to answering the Reading and Reflection questions, please write two of your own questions about the readings for today.

1.

2.
Bibliography