Assignment for Essay 1

Due date: Wednesday, January 19 -- four copies.

Length: Approximately 500 words – 2-3 word-processed double-spaced pages. (Don’t be too concerned about length; 600 words is okay; 400 brilliant words could do.)

Format: MLA (will be explained and illustrated in class).

Topic

This essay is to be based on material drawn from both the science and the religion parts of the course; it should include references to both. In the most general terms, your assignment is to compare or contrast scientific and religious thinking and writing. More specifically, it is to find, in the course material so far, some limited topic within which you think similarities or differences can be found that help illuminate similarities or differences between the larger areas of thought – scientific and religious. Having found such a topic – some are suggested below – you are to write an analytical essay demonstrating that the similarities or differences are there and that they do help illuminate scientific and religious thinking in relation to each other.

Your essay should grow out of some close, thoughtful reading and re-reading in the course material assigned so far. From this reading you should draw the “evidence” for what you say – specific examples and references. It should not be necessary to consult additional sources. Your challenge is to take this reading that we’ve all done and shine a light on some aspect of it that you find worth looking at and that might have escaped the casual reader.

By the way, the books by Paul Davies and Ward and Brownlee do not represent real scientific writing; they are accounts of scientific ideas for the general reader. (So why can’t I figure out entropy from what Davies tells me about it? Maybe some readers are more general than others!) Real scientific writing is usually found in journal articles. For our purposes and for efficiency’s sake, however, we’ll refer to them as scientific writing.

Some specific topic possibilities:

1. The theme of human responsibility for what happens to a planet or a society. Do we find this theme in both the scientific and the non-scientific reading we have done so far? (This question should be asked after each of the topic ideas below.)

2. The course of the future as something that is determined by events in the past.

3. The idea of there being a goal or direction toward which things are headed.
4. The force or forces that drive or control events in the universe. What do science and religion say on this topic?

5. Scientific ways of knowing compared with religious ways of knowing. This is the biggee – a sub-theme of our course, in fact – and will probably need to be broken down to one or more sub-topics (the list that follows is random and repetitious; do not attempt to answer any or all of the questions in the abstract – they are just mental conversation starters, and your main concern should be to locate places in the reading we’ve done where you might find material you could use as “evidence” in discussing a question):

- what (specifically) do scientists seek to know? what do religious thinkers seek to know?
- how is scientific knowledge gained? how is religious knowledge gained?
- how is scientific knowledge validated? how is religious knowledge validated?
- how do scientists and religious thinkers know that they know something?
- who tends to feel more certain of things – the scientist or the religious thinker?
- who tends to speculate more – the scientist or the religious thinker?
- in science and in religion, what is the relation of current knowledge to older knowledge? is the idea of “new” knowledge as an advance over “old” knowledge found in both?
- what similarities or differences are there in the mean scientists and religious thinkers use to communicate their knowledge?

Questions to ask about your essay:

Topic and treatment: Did you address the assignment? Did you develop a limited topic that sheds some light on similarities and/or differences between scientific and religious thinking and writing? Did you use close analysis of portions of the course reading to develop your topic and support and illustrate the points you make?

Evidence and support: Do you bring in enough information and examples from course reading (and other course materials – handouts, lecture notes) to help the reader see what you see?

Main idea: Is the main idea of your essay clear?

Essay organization and cohesiveness: By the end of the first or second paragraph, will the reader have encountered the main idea. Does the essay stick to its main idea? In the body of your essay, was each paragraph clearly related to it, developing and supporting it? Does the body fulfill expectations set up in the beginning?

Paragraph organization: Does each paragraph have its own main idea or its own clear function within the overall plan of the essay? Does everything within the paragraph belong with the paragraph’s main idea?
Transitions: Are there clear transitions from paragraph to paragraph, so that the reader can see the relation of one paragraph to the one before? Does sentence follow sentence smoothly?

Title and opening: Does your essay have a helpful title that suggests what the essay will be about? Early in the essay, do you give in full the name of the author and the title of the book you’re writing about?

Sentence structure and punctuation: Were basic sentence structure and punctuation under sufficient control for college writing? Was the tone and level of language appropriate for academic writing?

Format: Do you properly introduce and integrate quotations and specific references into your writing, and do you make correct use of MLA format for your citations?

Due date and group process: Were you present in class with four copies of your essay at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, January 19? Did you participate fully in the group process for giving and receiving feedback? (For an essay to receive credit, the answer to this question must be “Yes.”)

Ways of introducing and integrating quotations:

An essay of this sort almost necessarily requires quoting from the Bible. Document your use of the Biblical text in the following manner(s):

• Quotation incorporated into your own text (note three different ways, three ways of punctuating):

  When God sees the people building the tower of Babel, he decides to stop them because “from now on nothing will be beyond their reach” (Gen. 11.5).
  (Quotation integrated into your own sentence; no punctuation.)
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  Jacob seems to make his vow to God conditional: “If God will be with me, if he will protect me on my journey. . . then the LORD shall be my God. . .”
  (Gen.28.20-21). (Colon – not semi-colon!)

  Jacob seems to make his vow to God conditional. He says, “If God will be with me, if he will protect me on my journey. . . then the LORD shall be my God. . .”
  (Gen.28.20-21). (Tag phrase – “he says” – with comma.)
“Block” quotation (usually for longer quotations; no quotation marks are used, the quotation is indented ten spaces from the left, and the citation of Genesis comes after the period):

In Exodus, it is not just that the Israelites seem not to be Yahwists. Yahweh himself is presented as having temporarily forgotten about his chosen people:

Years passed, during which time the king Of Egypt died, but the Israelites still groaned in slavery. They cried out, and their plea for rescue from slavery ascended to God. He heard their groaning and called to mind his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; he observed the plight of Israel and took heed of it. (Exod. 2.23-25.)

Of course, if there are quotations within the quotation, you do use quotation marks:

Moses is shown as having a lot of natural curiosity:

[On Horeb] an angel of the Lord appears to him as a fire blazing out of from a bush. Although the bush is on fire, it is not being burnt up, and Moses says to himself, “I must go across and see this remarkable sight. Why ever does the bush not burn away?” (Exod. 3.2-3.)