

# SCIENCE-AND-RELIGION AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

by Philip Hefner

*Abstract.* A survey and interpretation is offered of the broad range of contemporary thinking that concerns itself with the relationships between religion and science. The survey consists of a spectrum of six types of thought: (1) The modern option: translating religious wisdom into scientific concepts; (2) the post-modern/new-age option: constructing new science-based myths; (3) the critical post-Enlightenment option: expressing the truth at the obscure margin of science; (4) the postmodern constructivist option: fashioning a new metaphysics for scientific knowledge; (5) the constructivist traditional option: interpreting science in dynamic traditional concepts; (6) the Christian evangelical option: reaffirming the rationality of traditional belief. The interpretive effort considers these options under the rubric of the contemporary search for meaning and takes note of controversy and convergence within this search. Thinking on the religion/science interface is representative of much contemporary thinking that deals with the question of meaning in the present intellectual and cultural situation.

*Keywords:* credible understandings; meaning; postmodern religion-science; tradition; ultimacy.

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In the fall of 1962, just a few weeks after I had received my doctorate and moved into my first teaching position, I was asked by a college in upstate New York to deliver a series of lectures on religion and science. I was not particularly prepared to lecture on the theme; my acquaintance with any of the sciences consisted of barely passing the mini-

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mum requirements in high school and college (in the pre-Sputnik era). The idea of devoting concentrated attention to the relationships between religion and science had never entered my mind. In the two decades following that early attempt, I entered into conversations with scientists who were available and read what they recommended. Periodically, additional invitations would come my way, principally, I believe, because religion-and-science was known to be my hobby, and the company of hobbyists was very small. Today, the situation is much different. Even though the field is still small and hardly to the point of being an academic discipline, there are dozens of scholars in the United States alone who consider religion-and-science to be a major part of their concern. The European Society for the Study of Science and Theology draws several hundred scholars to its biennial meetings; the field is recognized as a programmatic grouping by the American Academy of Religion and is from time to time included in the annual meetings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. There are at least two centers in the United States—the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley and the Chicago Center for Religion and Science—devoted to research, degree programs, and public discussion in this area. The journals and other periodicals in the field receive many more submissions than they can accept.

Historians will tell us that the interface between religion and the sciences has been a busy one for at least the last century, but it seems to be experiencing a particularly vigorous show of attention just now, particularly in academic circles. My presentation here is an exercise in mapping the terrain of the current intellectual and scholarly concern for religion and science. I carry on this mapping of the interest in religion and science as *a search for meaning*. Under this rubric, I will identify several different trajectories of reflection on religion and science, and in the process of describing each of these, together with their points of convergence and controversy, I will elaborate what I see as the shape of the interface today.

## I. THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

When we place the religion-science element within the human search for meaning, we thereby also suggest both its psychological and historical location. The two are related. Historically, over the past four centuries in the West, the large, overarching frameworks of meaning, comprising religious myth and metaphysic, have been destabilized to a very large degree because of the emergence of modern natural science. The worldviews suggested by the sciences not only do not accord in every respect with those of the received myth and metaphysics but appear even to disprove them. This development has been described

many times. Sociologist Peter Berger has been influential in his discussion of these historical developments in terms of the deterioration of structures of plausibility that provided earlier ages with a "sacred canopy" of meaning. This destabilization had far-reaching consequences, because, as Berger also clarifies, myth and metaphysics not only propose images and concepts of reality but also suggest and ground behavior that is appropriate to reality thus conceptualized. A deterioration of the depictions of reality is also, therefore, likely to impact systems of values and morality.

When I speak of the search for meaning, I am referring to the effort by men and women to reinstate some sort of congruence between their overarching images of reality, embodying the bases for values and moral behavior, and contemporary knowledge, preeminently scientific knowledge. Anthropologist Charles Laughlin speaks helpfully of both science and traditional worldviews in their relation to that characteristic of our life-world in which "we experience events that require comprehension. Without comprehension, death remains a terrifying enigma and planning a meal forever beyond our capacity" (1994, 252). We assume, the phenomenologists remind us, that our life-world is meaningful, and in the West we mostly have assumed that this meaningfulness is dependent upon hidden forces that we understand and to which we must relate successfully if our lives are to flourish. Both traditional worldviews, including myth and ritual, and modern science focus upon these hidden forces. Laughlin calls attention to the fact that science tends to produce models explaining the causation that is pertinent to these forces, but it "usually does not secure an integrated, meaningful life-world for most people" who are influenced by it (1994, 252). If we may contrast causation with meaning, we may also say that science is able "to produce models of the former without enriching the life-world of people by enhancing the latter in any deep or integrating way" (1994, 253). Religion is a central element of the traditional worldviews that gives top priority to the meaningfulness of our life-world. When I place my discussion of religion and science in the context of the search for meaning as I have just described it, I speak of religion's place in ways that are in contrast to the recent discussion of religion and science in the July 1995 issue of *American Psychologist*, in which several commentators, who were responding to an earlier article by S. L. Jones, tend to depict religion as a body of knowledge either comparable to or quite different from the body of knowledge that belongs to scientific psychology. I speak rather of religion as the enterprise of framing the scientific knowledge of causation within larger structures of thought and intuition that can provide the integrated, meaningful life-world that Laughlin speaks of.

The historical cultural situation that is described by the deterioration of plausibility structures translates also into psychological dynamics.

Individuals and groups constitute the interface between human life and the breakdown of large frameworks of meaning, because it is individuals and groups that seek to comprehend the events of their experience who must decide (1) how to conduct their lives and (2) how to reconcile what they know and what they know society expects them to know with the traditional mythic and metaphysical frameworks that constitute their cultural and religious legacy.

I will discuss the relation of science and religion in terms of what I see as a bundle of responses to the destabilization I have just referred to. The controversy and convergence within the science and religion relationship is described, in my view, by the tensions and the consensus between the various trajectories of interpretation contained in this bundle.

## II. SIX TRAJECTORIES ON THE RELIGION/SCIENCE INTERFACE

### *1. The Modern Option: Translating Religious Wisdom into Scientific Concepts.*

I call this a modern option, because it accepts the methodology of the mainstream natural sciences as well as the claims that science is the normative arbiter of knowledge. The key representative of this trajectory is Ralph Wendell Burhoe, whose ongoing reference group was a circle of scientists who were leaders in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in the 1950s and 1960s—physicists, biologists, anthropologists, and experimental psychologists. He founded *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* as a vehicle for a well-defined program that epitomizes what I have called the search for meaning. Burhoe and his group believed that since science and scientific culture had destabilized traditional religious frameworks of meaning and since these frameworks are essential for any wholesome society, the challenge is clear: To persuade scientists and other intellectual leaders of society that the same evolutionary processes that underlie the natural world described by science also have produced religion and selected its wisdom for the survival of the world and its human community. The goal is nothing less than the salvation of society in the face of anomie and destruction at the hands of scientific explanations lacking a sense of ultimacy and technology that is insensitive to the values necessary for survival.

Burhoe contributed a creative conceptuality that proposed hypotheses concerning the evolutionary emergence of religion and the significance of religion's transmission of traditions of transkin altruism for the emergence of the human species and the conduct of human culture (Burhoe 1981, chaps. 6, 7). In his presidential address to the American Psychological Association in 1975, Donald T. Campbell, then a tenured professor at Northwestern University, elaborated a thesis grounded in his own research that gave substantial support to Burhoe's conceptuality. In a presentation that generated a great deal of commentary in the

association's journal, he argued that the "well-winnowed wisdom" of religious traditions emphasizing the virtues of discipline and restraint that are necessary if complex societies are to flourish are a more reliable guide for human living than the tenets of contemporary psychotherapy (Campbell 1975).

2. *The Postmodern/New-Age Option: Constructing New Science-Based Myths.* Whereas Burhoe and Campbell hold that traditional religion possesses wisdom that is much needed for society's health today, the postmodern perspective is impressed with the inadequacy of traditional religion to play its role as provider of a meaningful life-world. Loyal Rue has cogently described this situation as one of *a-mythia*, the absence of functioning frameworks of large meaning. Amythia is marked by a culture's inability to distinguish between orthodoxy and heresy, between ideas and values that the society can authorize and those that it must, for its own health, reject (Rue 1989, chap. 3). For a society languishing in this malaise, constructing new myth is a matter of urgency.

Rue aligns himself with such thinkers as Thomas Berry (Berry 1987) and Brian Swimme (Swimme and Berry 1992) in suggesting that a viable new myth must be constructed on the basis of contemporary evolutionary thought. He has elaborated in detail how such a myth can guide personal life and social policy. Rue also is aware that the relativizing consequences of postmodern modes of analysis are not congenial to large metaphysical frames of meaning. To counter this phenomenon, he has constructed an ingenious hypothesis of "the noble lie" (Rue 1994). The point is not whether an evolution-based new myth can be demonstrated as true in the modern, Enlightenment, scientific sense, as Burhoe suggests, but rather that it is of survival value in ways that reasonable persons believe are sound. Evolution itself operates by a process of deception, in which organisms are favored when they govern their behavior in adaptive ways that have the appearance of truth, even when that truth is unprovable, counterintuitive, or even irrational in some respects. The Berry-Swimme version of this evolutionary myth incorporates contemporary scientific insights from Big Bang cosmology, biochemical theories of the emergence of life, and ecological sciences. They focus largely on the adaptive function of this myth in the face of environmental crises. Rue also argues that since the science-based myth qualifies as the possession of no specific ethnic, racial, or gender grouping, it can claim to be "everybody's story" and thus also provide resources to integrate the pluralism of the global human community.

3. *The Critical Post-Enlightenment Option: Expressing the Truth at the Obscure Margin of Science.* The postmodern perspective, as held by the representatives I have just mentioned, is committed to constructing new

overarching frameworks that function very much like myths and metaphysics in former times. They are postmodern in the sense that old frameworks are awash and are oppressive to the extent that they are identified with particular groups, thus not available to everybody who is now a citizen of the global village. A contrasting angle of approach, which considers itself to be a self-critical Enlightenment methodology, challenges the adequacy of all overarching constructs on the grounds that they become reified, authorized public readings of human experience and therefore are inadequate both for what they leave out of their authorized purview and for their totalitarian propensities. Vitor Westhelle recently has articulated this point of view, but he has done so in a polemic against those who, like Foucault, argue that religion and theology are inevitably co-opted into the establishment of authorized metaphysics (Westhelle 1995). The relationship between science and religion comes immediately into play here, because science is by its very nature, its methods, and its claims a claimant to public, overarching, authorized knowledge. Westhelle argues that religion/theology is not like science nor is it opposed to science, since it neither claims univocal knowledge of what transcends human experience nor denies such transcendence and the importance of knowledge about it. Rather, in the human search for meaning, religion is committed to articulating knowledges that emerge at the "obscure margin" that inevitably exists between what we can know and the transcendent reality that we seek to know. Religion is thus always on the side of the "subjugated and embodied" knowledges that do not show up on the screens of authorized public knowledge, but religion does not deny that there is an "Other" to be known. As Westhelle puts it, "It is because of the relative presence of disturbing otherness that the God-talk, the Other-discourse can be practiced. This is what can be properly called a transgressional knowledge, a knowledge that intersects with science at the obscure margin of the accepted inscriptions. At this obscure limit there are other knowledges ajar" (1995, 358).

4. *The Postmodern Constructivist Option: Fashioning a New Metaphysics for Scientific Knowledge.* One of the boldest and most challenging trajectories within the contemporary search for meaning on the interface between the sciences and destabilized worldviews is that which seeks to construct a new metaphysical loom on which scientific knowledge can be woven. Even though this trajectory encompasses Feminist, New Age, and other thinkers who can be fitted under the postmodern umbrella, and even though they share the concern for new metaphysical concepts, they should not be identified beyond this common concern, since there are important differences among these thinkers. This option differs from the effort to frame new myths from science in that

it has little desire to move so directly from science to an overarching framework of meaning. Following the argument of E. A. Burt in his 1950s classic *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, these thinkers are convinced that because the sciences have developed mainly in the West, certain assumptions of worldview or metaphysics have become so intertwined with scientific knowledge that the two have become confused.

This confusion is undesirable, because these metaphysical assumptions often are so out of touch with our actual scientific, personal, and social experience that scientific knowledge seems to be disconnected from "the cultural, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of human life" (Zajonc 1994, 333). Feminist thinkers point to metaphysical concepts of hierarchy, teleology, and power that are rooted more in patriarchal biases than in physical reality. They and others also suggest that the assumption that the scientist is subject and nature is object distorts the actual relationship between humans and the rest of nature, just as the assumption that phenomena are constituted by the assemblage of individual parts or units contains a reductionist bias that overlooks the significance and function of wholes and organic processes of unfolding. Scientific experience, such as that contained in quantum physics, chaos dynamics, developmental biology, and the neurosciences, is said to render false the assumptions just mentioned and others like them. Our experience of environmental deterioration, of our relatedness to other forms of life, and of the way we actually gain knowledge also is said to contradict the common metaphysical assumptions that underlie the presentation of mainstream scientific knowledge.

Although the thinkers who follow this trajectory have produced more critique than actual new metaphysical construction, some proposals are available for scrutiny. The so-called "process" metaphysics, building on the work of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, is highly regarded in some quarters as a viable postmodern metaphysical structure (Barbour 1990; Griffin 1988). Critics argue that even process metaphysics is rendered obsolete by contemporary physics, biology, and neurobiology. Feminist thinkers and some others have proposed a metaphysics of wholism and "body" to serve as the vehicle of scientific knowledge (McFague 1993; Moore 1995). The celebrated "Gaia" theory of the interrelatedness of Earth's planetary systems is an example of such a proposal (Lovelock 1988; Ruether 1992). Physicist David Bohm's suggestion of an "implicate order" in nature is another form of postmodern metaphysics for science (Bohm 1980). Considerable attention also has been given to the development of so-called "top-down" or "downward" causality, asserting a metaphysics in which wholes exercise causality over parts (Sperry 1987; Campbell 1974).

5. *The Constructivist Traditional Option: Interpreting Science in Dynamic Traditional Concepts.* Among those who identify their work with the discipline of Christian theology, there is a veritable subdiscipline entitled "religion-and-science" or "theology-and-science." Although this subdiscipline covers a broad range of theologians, including those who also have pursued careers in science, it can be characterized by the attempt to interpret scientific knowledge by means of traditional Christian theological concepts that have themselves been reinterpreted imaginatively in the light of scientific understandings. These two foci, interpreting science and reinterpreting Christian theology, are weighted differently according to the thinker. The greatest emphasis in this trajectory is on physics and cosmology (Drees 1990; Peters 1990; Polkinghorne 1988; Russell 1988; Pannenberg 1993), and the effort is most often directed at the goal of demonstrating that theological concepts can be interpreted in ways that are consistent with scientific cosmology. One representative argument of this type asserts that both the theories of the Big Bang and of creation-out-of-nothing describe a universe that is contingent. Theology's task is to probe the ultimate character of this contingency (Russell 1988; Peters 1990). Another example is the argument that chaos dynamics and quantum physics point to a "gappiness" in the very nature of things that is consistent with the theological assertion of freedom, miracles, and God's action in nature and history (Polkinghorne 1988).

Other thinkers appear to be more concerned to reinterpret Christian faith and theology so as to render its interpretive significance for scientific knowledge more forcefully. They often focus on the biological and neurosciences in addition to physics and cosmology. A representative argument in this line is that God's creative work should be conceptualized as a tendency toward bringing forth ever more complex structures from simpler phases of evolution (Peacocke 1993; Schmitz-Moormann 1992; Teilhard 1965). Another example is the suggestion that the evolution of life has tended toward a creature who can freely direct evolution from biological structures to cultural forms that are responsible for the future of planet Earth. This being so, God can be said to have brought forth the human being as the "created co-creator" whose destiny, in the "image of God," is to carry on its own evolution and that of the planet according to the will of God as set forth in Christ (Hefner 1993).

The distinctive thrust of this option lies in its conviction that the traditional destabilized worldviews (in this case, those embodied in the Christian tradition) are not exhausted, that their substance can be reinterpreted so as to take the intellectual and spiritual measure of the scientific knowledge that has remade our worldviews in the past century or more.

6. *The Christian Evangelical Option: Reaffirming the Rationality of Traditional Belief.* One of the most dynamic and sharp-witted trajectories



within the search for meaning that I am describing is composed of Christian philosophers and theologians whom I term *evangelical*. I chose this term because so many of its proponents are located within the stream of American and British Christianity that historians commonly label as evangelical. I recognize that not every thinker in this group is an adherent of an evangelical ecclesiastical community. One might say that the thinkers in this group constitute an *ideal type* rather than an empirically locatable group of evangelical thinkers. The persons I refer to here are generally marked by high competence in philosophy, and they often focus upon methodological issues. Their goal seems to be that of demonstrating that the rise and dominance of science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has not rendered common Christian belief either untenable or unintelligent. Typical lines of argumentation set forth in this trajectory are the following: (1) Scientists often espouse positions that are as fraught with problematic logical faults or assumptions as religious belief may be. Examples are the argument that evolution proves that there is no God and the assertion that the cosmos itself is an ultimate reality (Plantinga 1991a, 1991b). (2) Both science and religion reveal structures of rationality that are viable and therefore religious belief is not to be considered inherently irrational (Murphy 1990; van Huyssteen 1989).

### III. WHAT IS AT STAKE IN THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

It is worth reflecting for a moment on the issues that are embedded in the six trajectories within the search for meaning that I have set forth, and then interpreting the trajectories in the context of these issues.

1. *The Hermeneutics of Ordinary Experience.* The first of these embedded issues points to what I call the *hermeneutics of ordinary experience*. Historians, philosophers, and journalists speak of the warfare between religion and science as if it were a self-evident dogma. I have found that it is virtually impossible to convince journalists writing in this area that their headline ought not refer to *warfare*. As Laughlin (1994) suggests, however, our instinctive feeling is that our experience has meaning at some level at least, even if that meaning is not clear to us at the moment. In a similar vein, Holmes Rolston has written that causes (the domain of scientific explanation) and meanings (the domain of religious interpretation) are seldom separated in our experience, except in the most sophisticated high-level analysis that has been "only recently accomplished in the intellectual life of humankind" (Rolston 1987, 25). I believe it is more accurate to say that in their experience of the world and in their attempts to understand that experience for their own lives, men and women often hold to a functional, if unsophisticated, union

of science and theology that seems to be required in their search for understanding. It is this functional unity of theology and natural science that pertains to the *hermeneutics of ordinary experience*. Experience, Rolston says, is a "milieu of events with causes and meanings in-mixed, sought and found, made and coming at us, opportunities, a world we have to move through and to evaluate" (Rolston 1987, 25).

2. *Credible Understandings and Ultimacy*. The hermeneutic of ordinary experience interprets this milieu of causes and meanings in-mixed, which in turn is structured by two basic human needs: for credible understandings of the world and our lives in it (what Laughlin calls *comprehension*) and for indicators of the ultimate meaning or significance of these credible understandings. These constitute the second set of embedded issues for our analysis.

*Credible understandings* of the world and our lives within it include understandings that accord with the best knowledge of our time, the knowledge that we hold necessary for the education of our children and young adults. It also includes understandings that will work in the ordinary struggle for life and survival. Credible understandings are the foundations for our engineering practice, our medical practice, our business, and our common life together in the body politic. The *dimension of ultimacy* includes responses to such questions as, Where did we come from? In what sense is the world a hostile environment for me or a friendly place? In what sense is my action important or worth my perseverance? What criteria can I accept as normative for my life? Is there a coherent grounding for the processes of nature and, if so, what is it? How am I to understand the evil and frustration in my life? Credible understandings and ultimacy are fused in this milieu of ordinary experience in which causes and meanings are in-mixed, through which we have to move and which we have to evaluate in the course of our daily lives.

At stake here is what we usually call metaphysics or the construction of myth. The human situation I have just alluded to is one in which persons are challenged to put together frameworks of meaning that can encompass what they know, what they believe they must do, what they must obey, and what strikes awe in their hearts and minds. We may call this a metaphysical task. Some thinkers today would suggest that this is the task of elaborating the grand narratives that encompass our lives and the life of the natural world. I prefer to speak in terms of the search for adequate myths that can give us a picture of how things really are and the behaviors that are commensurate with what really is.

3. *Science: Destabilizing and Restabilizing*. At the outset, I spoke of science as destabilizing traditional worldviews. In the context of the

present argument, we may speak of this destabilization as the mark of an era in which the culturally authorized view held that credible understandings of the world must dominate and displace the human concern for ultimate meaning and moral grounding. Today, that cultural authorization is showing signs of weakening and cracking apart. The kind of scientific worldview that emerged from the Enlightenment is itself being subverted by a different kind of scientific worldview. The destabilization of the traditional worldview is entering a new phase, one in which the destabilizing factors are themselves not only being subjected to destabilization but also assuming the role of forces for restabilization. The signs that we are beginning a transition into a new concern for the interrelation of credible understandings and ultimacy are, of course, not unambiguous, and we must be cautious in our judgments about just how far along this transition has already come.

The popular media are an interesting indicator of this shift. It is clear that what the journalists consider to be most newsworthy is the interest among scientists in the dimensions of ultimacy. Since the cultural stereotype pictures scientists as representatives *par excellence* of the culture's authorized effort to displace ultimacy, their willingness to articulate their own concerns for ultimacy gives them the appearance of subversive agents. When they are placed against the backdrop of the popular view that religion and science are engaged in some sort of warfare with each other, these scientists take on the appearance of fifth column agents, betraying their own community. This situation may be one aspect of the much-heralded emergence of postmodernity.

This cultural shift is of extraordinary importance for what happens along the interface of religion and science. The cultural disfavor with attempts to relate science and religion may be in the process of transformation. This means that the pre-Enlightenment concern to relate credible worldviews to dimensions of ultimacy is now becoming a culturally more respected effort. However, it does not follow that traditional efforts, specifically those of traditional religion, are now considered automatically to be acceptable. After all, the prejudgment of the Enlightenment destabilizing movement held that traditional Christianity and Judaism were inadequate. Even though it is not supported by the historical facts, the received liberal tradition of historical interpretation holds that scientists had to engage in an unambiguously noble struggle against an equally unambiguously tyrannical traditional Christian Church that was utterly opposed to the intellectual enlightenment that science brought in its wake.

We are now in a quite different situation. Christianity no longer is the only resource for imaging the dimension of ultimacy as it was in the pre-Enlightenment period. To a certain extent, the Enlightenment

critique of Christianity has actually discredited all traditional Western religion in the public mind. We now find that there is a marketplace of resources that propose how ultimacy can interact with our credible understandings of the world. One can mention non-Christian traditional religions and their contemporary expressions, New Age spirituality, and various forms of what I would call spiritualized versions of secular humanism, along with contemporary constructive expressions of Christian faith and theology. Finally, all of these resources co-exist in the Western cultures with Jewish and Christian traditions that are rooted more or less literally in the Book of Genesis and related biblical materials. The situation in this marketplace bears the cachet of what is frequently called a posttraditional or postmodern situation in the sense that it witnesses to a de-centering of the resources that held hegemony in previous eras—Christianity in the premodern period and the sciences in the modern period.

#### IV. TRAJECTORIES IN CONVERGENCE AND CONTROVERSY

The simple portrayal of the various options that I have set forth under the rubric of search for meaning goes a long way in clarifying what is at stake in the interface between science and religion and the convergences and controversies among the options. What comes through most vividly is that the interaction between science and religion is a field in which individuals, cultures, and an entire historical epoch wrestle with some of the most fundamental issues of human existence. This is so because the science-religion conversation is a medium for our search for meaning today. All of the options I have described recognize this fact clearly. A synoptic view of the options portrays the range of our cultural situation.

We may summarize the convergences and controversies on the religion-science interface under three rubrics: the assessment of tradition, the assessment of science, and the assessment of the challenge that faces us.

1. *The Assessment of Tradition.* Much of the dynamic within the six options I have mentioned stems from how traditional worldviews are assessed. The postmodern/New-Age option stands at one end of the continuum in its position that the traditional views are no longer viable and that new, science-based myths are needed, while the evangelical option at the other end seeks to carve out a space in which the traditional religious heritage can be cultivated with integrity and intelligence. The modern option seeks to translate the traditional wisdom into scientific concepts, while the constructivist traditional option considers the riches that still can be mined from the ore of traditional worldviews. Against this backdrop, the critical post-Enlightenment option, while

recognizing the tentativeness of all knowledge, focuses upon traditional wisdom, particularly that of subjugated and peripheral cultures, as the source of indispensable knowledge that neither science nor dominant religion can know or do without. For this option, tradition has a kind of integrity and importance that is not emphasized by the other options, namely, a source of critique and illumination of what authorized knowledge is blind to. The constructivist traditional option also recognizes the power of tradition but seeks a constructive synthesis with scientific knowledge. The evangelical option treasures tradition but more as ethical than as critical knowledge. The postmodern constructivist option focuses upon the metaphysical traditions rather than the religious and seeks to deconstruct these traditions in a thoroughgoing manner.

2. *The Assessment of Science.* Again, the evangelical and critical post-Enlightenment options stand apart from the others in their greater relativizing of the sciences. For the former, science at most reveals methodological contours of rational thinking that religious faith and theology can appropriate as viably as science. The evangelical option gives more attention to the philosophy of science than to scientific discovery and theory as such. For the latter, science is as incapable as official dogma of recognizing knowledge that occurs only at the obscure margins of authorized forms of knowledge and dominant ideas of reality. For the remaining options, science is a source of knowledge that religion and theology must take into account and somehow integrate into their worldviews. For the modern option, scientific concepts are the medium for translating religious wisdom; for the constructivist traditional option, there is a kind of reciprocity, tradition interpreting science, even as it is itself revised under the impact of science. The postmodern/New-Age option views scientific knowledge rather directly as the basis for new myth, while the postmodern constructivist sees science as revealing to us new structures of reality that render previous metaphysics obsolete. Several of the other options share this sense that science is revelatory of larger truths, but they interpret that revelatory character in different ways.

3. *The Assessment of the Challenge We Face.* The evangelical option interprets science as the instigator of new challenges to the intelligence of religious faith, challenges that must be thought through and can be dealt with. The critical post-Enlightenment thinkers are more sensitive than any of the other groups to the relative and vulnerable character of our knowing. In this, they share the spirit of the deconstructionists and other postmodern thinkers, who also wrestle with the possibilities in the face of epistemological relativism. This option also recognizes the challenge of liberation for the oppressed and peripheral groups as integral

to intellectual work today. The postmodern constructivists define the challenge in terms of our overarching picture of reality, our metaphysics, while the constructivist traditionalists think more in terms of the challenge to renew traditional religion and theology. The modern and the postmodern/New-Age thinkers pose the challenge in very public terms as civilizational in character, a matter of the decay or renewal of all human culture. Among these options, there is variation in how our epoch is to be labeled. Evangelicals, postmodern/New-Age, and postmodern constructivists all insist that it is essential to recognize the *postmodern* character of the time. Postfoundationalism and pluralism figure large in their purviews. The critical post-Enlightenment position seems not so interested in whether we are postmodern as that we be critical and engage in the deconstruction of established, authorized knowledge that is inadequate to the human community as it presently exists. In its commitment to mainstream science, the modern position stands aloof from analysis that would relativize both science and traditional wisdom. The constructivist traditionalist view in some ways straddles the fence on such issues in that it is quite postmodern in its sense that new ways of perceiving and conceptualizing are necessary, but it assumes for the most part some form of critical realism in epistemology that takes scientific knowledge seriously as a representation of reality and religion as rooted in more than human projection.

What we see, then, is that the basic questions facing all of us in our present situation are mirrored in the religion/science conversation: How trustworthy are past traditions? How are they to be accessed and utilized today? What is the status and significance of science and scientific knowledge? What is the status of the human mind and its efforts to know reality? How are we to conceive the reality in which we live? Is there more to reality than our projections? Is liberation a basic goal for us today, however that is defined? Is traditional religion viable in any form? Can explanation of causes and meaningfulness of life somehow be unified in our worldviews?

Since these questions are not the private domain of any single discipline of thought, the issues raised at the interface of science and religion epitomize some of the central issues that face all of us today as well as the options open to us for responding to the issues.

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