Pragmatism, Existentialism, and Media Theory As Approaches to Religion and Science

with Larry J. Crockett, "The Serpent's Trail: William James, Object-Oriented Programming, and Critical Realism"; George Karuvelil, "Science of Religion and Theology: An Existentialism Approach"; and Young Bin Moon, "The Mediatized Co-mediatizer: Anthropology in Niklas Luhmann's Universe"

SCIENCE OF RELIGION AND THEOLOGY: AN EXISTENTIAL APPROACH

by George Karuvelil

Abstract. Stephen Jay Gould's NOMA (nonoverlapping magisteria) theory was meant to be an alternative to the traditional "conflict model" regarding the relationship between science and religion. But NOMA has been plagued with problems from the beginning. The problem most acutely felt was that of demarcating the disciplines of science and theology. This paper is an attempt to retain the insights of NOMA and the conflict model, while eliminating their shortcomings. It acknowledges with the conflict model that the conflict is real, but not necessarily a fight unto death. It agrees with the NOMA that the two are different kinds of disciplines, and it goes on to spell out the difference in some detail. They turn out to be so radically different that the two cannot be reconciled by keeping one away from the other's turf, as NOMA suggests, but may be reconciled through a fusion of horizons in the Gadamerian sense.

Keywords: conflict theory; existentialism; Hans-Georg Gadamer; Stephen Jay Gould; Søren Kierkegaard; philosophy; religious studies; secularism; theology and science; Ludwig Wittgenstein

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Let me begin on a personal note by saying that I have not been engaged explicitly with science-religion issues. But I was forced to do so in the course of trying to critically comprehend the position known as "pluralism" in the theology of religions. In the process, I realized the need to clarify the identity of theology as an academic discipline. Science came into the picture because the pluralists were advocating the science based approach to theology as against the traditional approach. Thus, a critique of pluralism led me to an understanding of the relationship between science and theology. I call the

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view that emerged alternative magisteria (AMA) after Stephen Jay Gould's NOMA (nonoverlapping magisteria).[1] AMA, it seems to me, combines the best features of NOMA as well as the older theory that is often called the "conflict model."

The paper is divided into four parts. The first part begins by making a distinction between experience and explanation. Acknowledging the experience of conflict between science and religion as real, it goes on to briefly present two prominent views regarding the conflict—namely, the standard or received view ("conflict model") and the NOMA theory. The second part presents the conclusion of a study I have done elsewhere to the effect that theology is existential by its very nature and briefly explains what this means. The third part extends this argument to the science of religion, with the result that a totally neutral and objective standpoint is shown to be a myth. Besides exposing the "myth of the neutral observer," the third part helps us to understand the existential nature of the scientific study of religions. The fourth part spells out the demarcation between scientific study of religions and theology in a manner that remains faithful to the nature of both the disciplines.

Some terminological clarifications are in order. In advocating a science-based approach to theology, the pluralists do not talk about sciences in general but about only one science, which goes by various names, such as religious studies, science of religion, Comparative religion, and History of religions.[2] Following them, when I speak of "science," my focus will be on this compound discipline.[3] This means that although the word *science* could be used in a variety of ways (as when Aristotle talks of metaphysics as science or when the medieval thinkers talk of theology as science), I will use the term in the more restricted sense to mean empirical science, and one empirical science in particular. Similarly, although the word *theology* is sometimes used very broadly to include natural theology that argues for the existence of God, natural theology is ordinarily taken to be more in the domain of philosophy than theology. Therefore, by theology I shall mean those scholarly endeavors whose starting point is the sacred scriptures and other authoritative texts of a given religious community. A further terminological clarification is that although it is legitimate to distinguish religion and theology, this distinction is hardly relevant for discussing the relationship between science and religion.[4] Talk of science and religion in this article, therefore, boils down to talking about science of religion and theology in this restricted sense. But if the contrast drawn in this article between these two disciplines is correct, then what is said about science here would also apply to various other empirical sciences that deal with religion, such as psychology of religion and sociology of religion. What is more, with necessary modifications this characterization of science would also apply to other sciences that do not deal directly with religion. Therefore, although the focus of my discussion of science will remain on

the compound discipline mentioned above, occasionally I would also talk more generally about the scientific study of religions, as in the preceding paragraph.

Conflict: Experience and Explanations

Richard Olson narrates his frustrating experience of teaching courses in science and religion over 30 years. Invariably, he says, most students come to the course with "some version of the conflict thesis" according to which science and religion are engaged in a mortal combat. He attempts to remedy the inadequacy of this view with an extended critique of the conflict model. At the end of the course, the students are required to write a research paper. Frustration comes when he goes through the papers and finds that a majority of the students had gone back to the conflict model that he had spent so much time controverting. He attributes his failure to convince them to the power of master narratives in our culture, which in this case is the conflict thesis. There are powerful social forces at work, he says, where the "warfare model works too well for both sides"—that is, for the antireligious forces and their fundamentalist opponents (Olson 2011, 69).

Although I have no disagreement with Olson on the power of master narratives, I think his frustrating experience needs to be understood differently. Though I cannot really speak for his students, I want to suggest that the students revert back to the conflict thesis in spite of his scholarly attempts at refuting it because they do not see the conflict as a "thesis," a "theory," or a "model" of the interactions between science and religion. For many, the conflict is a matter of their experience. Consider a student of theology studying the book of Exodus. He or she is typically brought up in a cultural milieu in which films like DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* is watched and admired. In the film, Moses literally parts the Red Sea and the Israelites pass through to the other side, whereas the Egyptians who follow them are destroyed as the waters return to its normal state. In the course of theological studies, our student comes to the realization that the "Red Sea" of the Bible may have been a "Reed Sea," and the parting of the waters may have been an entirely natural event (For examples of such theories, see Segert 1994.) Under such circumstances, it is no surprise that students begin to wonder whether one's transition from a simple pretheological faith to the "adult faith" of theology does not require her to sacrifice a major part of her belief system just as she had to come to terms with accepting there is no Santa Claus. It seems too far-fetched to say that the student experiences the conflict because she or he is a victim of a master narrative called the conflict thesis; one is bound to feel the conflict without even being remotely aware of the warfare model of explanation. To think of the conflict as a theory does not do justice to the experienced nature of the conflict. Nor would we be able to understand the various movements

that arose in the nineteenth century to counter the Enlightenment inspired biblical criticism (Rogerson 2006, 841) unless we pay attention to the sense of threat they felt. The conflict can even be said to predate Christianity (Morowitz 2005, 51).

Something that is felt deeply at the gut level cannot be refuted. Theories can be refuted; facts and experiences call for explanation, not refutation. It is the task of theories of science-religion relations to explain such irrefutable facts and experiences. Theories can be better or worse, capable or incapable of adequately explaining experiences and historical events; facts and experiences are neither adequate nor inadequate; they just are.

But I should not get stuck with words. Perhaps those who use words like "thesis," "theory," and "model" along with "conflict" really mean a theory for explaining experiences. In Olson's case this is really the case, as shown by his quote from T. H. Huxley's graphic presentation of the science-theology battle: "Extinguished theologians lie about the cradle of every science as the strangled snakes beside that of Hercules; and history records that whenever science and orthodoxy have been fairly opposed, the latter has been forced to retire from the lists, bleeding and crushed, if not annihilated; scotched, if not slain" (66). But it is important to maintain the distinction, because a scholarly refutation of the "conflict thesis" only exposes the inadequacy of that theory. It does nothing to explain the experience of conflict that many undergo. If the task of a theory is to explain, that task would still remain after the refutation. It seems to me that this offers a better explanation for Olson's frustrating experience with his students than the assumed power of master narratives. Therefore, to maintain the distinction between experience and explanation, I shall call the theory that goes by the name "conflict thesis" the received or the standard view.

Strictly speaking there are two versions of the standard view. One is a historiographical version according to which religion and science have been always in conflict. Because it was originally articulated by William Draper and Andrew White, this version also goes by the name "Draper-White thesis." This is an empirical claim that can be refuted either by showing cases where no conflict was present or by giving instances where the two disciplines were in collaboration. This task has already been done by historians. The second version of the standard view is an epistemological claim about the conflicting methods of science and theology. It is this epistemological version that I shall be concerned with.

As an epistemological thesis, the standard view tells us that the conflict between the empirical sciences and theology is built into methodological genes of these disciplines. As "faith seeking understanding" theology begins with faith. It is a committed inquiry; its approach is *a priori* and dogmatic, whereas science is an objective, open-ended inquiry that proceeds on the basis of evidence. The only commitment of science is to truth and

therefore it goes wherever the evidence leads. Bertrand Russell, one of the best spokesmen of the received view, put the contrast this way: "The conflict between theology and science was quite as much a conflict between authority and observation. The men of science did not ask that propositions should be believed because some important authority had said they were true; on the contrary they appealed to the evidence of the senses, and maintained such doctrines as they believed to be based on facts which were patent to all who chose to make the necessary observations" (1935, 16). It is this view that led Russell to dismiss the monumental work of Thomas Aquinas as an instance of "special pleading" and his appeal to reason as insincere (1946, 484–85). Given such different genes, conflict between science and theology is inevitable. They are engaged in a mortal combat from which only one can (or should) emerge alive.[5]

Gould's NOMA theory provides an alternative to the standard view. Gould does not see anything in the genes of either discipline to suggest that they are necessarily at war with each other. In principle, they are distinct and nonoverlapping domains of inquiry. "Science covers the empirical realm: what the universe is made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The magisterium of religion extends over questions of ultimate meaning and moral value . . . .Science gets the age of rocks, and religion the rock of ages; science studies how the heavens go, religion how to go to heaven" (1997, 6). Being "logically distinct and fully separate" domains of inquiry (59, 65), they "do not glower at each other" (65). There can be no battle between science and religion as long as "they stay on their turf, develop their best solutions to designated parts of life's totality . . . " (211). Therefore, NOMA recommends dialogue between them. Beyond the denial of any built-in warfare between the two, Gould succeeds in giving alternative explanations for some actual cases of conflict. He traces them to contingent "artifacts of history or consequences of psychology" (104).

But NOMA, as it stands, cannot replace the epistemological version because it suffers from a number of conceptual difficulties. Most of these difficulties are related to Gould's manner of demarcating the domains of science and religion. On the one hand he seems to say that they deal with different subjects: one with the empirical world and the other with meaning and morality. Seen in such terms, it would seem that just as Australia and Asia are different continents of the same planet Earth, so too are science and theology two different disciplines dealing with different parts of human life; just as these continents do not overlap with one another, these disciplines do not either. Gould's own analogies of oil and water, oranges and apples, chalk and cheese support this construal. So does the leading imagery of nonoverlapping magisteria. On the other hand, he says the difference is logical. Understood as a logical difference, these are not two continents that remain apart. On the contrary, "the contact between magisteria could not be more intimate and pressing over every square

micrometer (or upon every jot and tittle . . .)" (65). It is not obvious that these two ways of demarcating the two can be easily reconciled, and this has led to accusations of self-contradiction (Goodenough 1999, 267).

These different ways of construing the realms of science and religion lead to different sets of problems. If we consider them as dealing with different subject matter, there is no evidence to suggest that science and religion are anything like two sovereign kingdoms. Ursula Goodenough rightly points out that "if there is a membrane separating the magisteria of science and religion, it is decidedly semipermeable" (1999, 267). Although there are serious difficulties in assigning morality to the domain of religion, I shall not go into it. If Gould's demarcation between science and religion is not material but logical, it leads to puzzlement: How is it possible for two separate domains to be so close as to press over every square micrometer of each other's domain? Gould does not explain. All that we are given are metaphorical allusions like Mutt and Jeff, and yin and yang. Although these metaphors may point to something that is insightful, the intellectual puzzle regarding the relationship between the two remains.

From the perspective of one who experiences the conflict, the most serious shortcoming of NOMA theory is that it fails to recognize the force of the conflict; it is considered "false conflict" (6), a "nonproblem of supposed conflict" (175). Such downplaying of the conflict does not do justice to the experience. For this reason, although Gould can be credited with showing the inadequacy of the received view, his NOMA cannot replace it. The received view may be wrong in the explanation it gives, but at least it tried an explanation. By making the conflict only a "supposed conflict" NOMA dissolves the problem rather than solve it. Once we are convinced that the problem is real and the available solution wrongheaded, we need to look elsewhere for a better answer. Intimations of a better explanation are found among those who do theology, especially those who have tried to critique what is known as "pluralism" in theology of religions.

Looking in New Directions

When we consider that Russell was a self-proclaimed anti-Christian, it may seem paradoxical that a contemporary manifestation of the same view should come from respected Christian thinkers like John Hick and Paul Knitter, who advocate a "Copernican revolution" in theology (Hick 1977, 120ff; 1980, 36). When they seek to rely on "empirical or experiential data available to all" (Hick and Knitter 1987, 15) and contrast it with the *a priori* dogmatic procedure of traditional theology (Hick 2001, 180 ff.) one cannot but be reminded of Russell's contrast between evidence that is "patent to all" and proceeding "deductively from premises formerly accepted" on authority (Russell 1935, 12). Not only do the pluralists contrast the two methods but also see them as opposed to each other. A

dogmatic approach puts one's own religion at the center and considers it superior to other religions, whereas an objective approach teaches us that one's own religion is just "one among many" (Hick 1989, 3, 2001, 179). It is this incompatibility of methods, together with their adoption of the objective approach that forms the basis of their "Copernican revolution." The basis of this revolution, then, is clearly the epistemological version of the standard view. Irrespective of whether one accepts Hick's approach to theology, it is commonplace to think of Religious Studies as an objective and neutral enterprise.[6] Therefore, if we succeed in showing that their view of the objectivity of the scientific approach is a myth, then we would have undermined the epistemological version of the received view of the science-religion relationship.

At the heart of their "Copernican revolution" is the contention that the source of claims to superiority is the dogmatic procedure that ignores other religions and proceeds from prior commitment to one's religion as against the objective approach of the scientific study. Hick phrases this claim in different ways, but the important point is that it is a falsifiable empirical claim. It can be falsified by showing that theologies in traditionally multireligious contexts that do not ignore other religious traditions (as in India) still maintain what the pluralists claim to be superiority. Once their contention is falsified and we begin to realize that the so-called superiority claims do not come from ignorance or neglect of other religions, then we can search for its real source. This source is traced to the existential character of theology. Because I have done this dual task of falsifying the pluralists' claim and finding the positive source of the alleged superiority elsewhere (Karuvelil 2012), I shall not repeat it here. Let me merely explicate what is meant by saying that theology is existential, as it is required for the present argument.

"Existential" in this context, means a style of thinking that has four features. First, existential thinking is not merely a theoretical or intellectual exercise, as with the alleged medieval discussions about the number of angels who can dance on the head of a pin or with most modern Western philosophy beginning with Descartes. An excellent example of such purely theoretical thinking is David Hume's analysis of causality. Let me illustrate his analysis. When we strike a match and fire appears, ordinarily we tend to believe that the appearance of fire (the consequent) is caused by the antecedent action of striking the match. But Hume would say that no such connection can be found because although the match-striking event and the fire-appearing event have been found to come together in the past, we cannot be sure if nature would continue to behave in the same way in the future. This is his theoretical life. But when he relaxes after his theoretical exertions by playing a game of backgammon, he has no choice but to take for granted the very principle that he denied in his theoretical life. It is this kind of thinking that is cut off from one's lived conditions, attempting to look at the world from the outside, that Kierkegaard called "objective"

thinking although the adjectives "objective" and "subjective" can be quite misleading (Kierkegaard 1944; Matthis 2006).

Second, existential thinking is guided by an inward passion, a nudging personal quest that gives a sense of urgency to one's thinking. It is such thinking that Kierkegaard called "subjective." Subjective thinking is the kind of thinking we find in ancient Greek philosophy where even the most abstract thinking like that of Platonic forms is rooted in concerns arising from the concrete, lived conditions of the time (which, in this case is the ethical elasticity of the sophists and the danger it posed to society). The inward passion of existential thinking is the energizing source that gives dynamism to human living.

Third, the inward passion of existential thinking imparts not only dynamism but also a unity to life, like the lover who finds his or her entire life (waking and sleeping, dreaming and hoping, working and relaxing) being guided by one's love. Existential thinking, therefore, comes to have an encompassing character that is very different from the kind of theoretical unity achieved by Hegelian philosophy. Existential thinking provides unity to one's whole life (thinking, feeling, and willing) and not merely to thinking.

Fourth, the kind of unity achieved in existential thinking is not a static unity, but a dynamic one; it changes as one moves along in life. It is like two old lovers who do not remain the same as they were when they first fell in love; to the extent they remain in love, there is a deepening of their relationship and they have changed in the process. It is a process that Kierkegaard called appropriation of truth rather than approximating to truth (1944, see part II in particular). Approximation is a purely intellectual process, whereas appropriation is a process of self-transformation where *being the truth* is more important than *knowing* the truth (1947, 201).

Although the idea of self-transformation is not prominent in Hans Georg Gadamer, his idea of horizon brings together the dimensions of unity and dynamism (Gadamer 1975). His understanding of horizon has the following features: (1) it is not an object, but the background ("range of vision," 269) in which objects come into view (looking "beyond what is close at hand" 272); (2) objects exist independently of the perceiver, but a horizon has no existence apart from perceiver. (270); (3) it is the basis on which objects are judged (knowing the "relative significance of everything" 269); and (4) it is dynamic and not static ("moves with us" 271). It can move with us because it is inescapably linked to the perceiver. The dynamic character of a horizon, however, should not lead us to forget its unity. Objects are many, but a horizon is always singular. No one can be in two different horizons at the same time. It encompasses all objects. There is an added advantage in using Gadamer's notion of horizon. Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity is often misunderstood as the privatizing of the philosophical realm and criticized on that basis.[7] Although this can be said

of some forms of existentialism, this is not intrinsic to the idea of lived thought that is at the core of Kierkegaardian subjectivity. Gadamer's notion of horizon is both historical and linguistic and not private to the individual.

All these four features of existential thinking are found in theology. First of all, theology is not a matter of mere intellectual speculation, but lived thought, intimately linked to the life of the theologian. Charles Taylor rightly observes that religious faith (the basis of theology) must be understood as "lived conditions, not just theories or set of beliefs subscribed to" (2007, 8). Second, theology is driven by an inward passion for which Paul Tillich gave the name "ultimate concern" (1953, 14–15). There are many things we are concerned about but only one ultimate concern. Ultimate concern is that which takes hold of a person at the deepest level in an unconditional way and thereby functions as the energizing source of that person's life and actions. Third, as the energizing source of one's life, this inward passion gives a sense of unity to life. The result is an encompassing horizon within which everything the person lives and encounters either finds meaning or is rejected as meaningless. In the words of Mark Heim, "my religious convictions and experience condition my *approach to virtually every question*" in life (1995, 1; italics added). Finally, the unity of theological thinking is not a matter of coming to have a static philosophical system but a dynamic transforming process where one's head and heart, intellectual output (theology), and spiritual input go hand in hand (see, Balthasar 1989, 206; Mctavish 2010). Not having one static system also implies that there is always room for variations in theology.

If theology is, thus, existential by its very nature, to the extent that existential thinking is rooted in an inward passion that forms the ultimate concern of the thinker, anyone can see that the so-called superiority that the pluralists disparage is a manifestation of ultimacy of one's concern. In as much as one's concern is ultimate, it cannot but be treated as having primacy over all others. In other words, theology cannot be the kind of neutral study that the pluralists seek to make it. This has implications for understanding the relationship between science and theology. If it can be shown that existential thinking is not a luxury reserved for theologians, an option that nontheologians can ignore but an inescapable human condition, then it would undermine the fundamental assumption regarding the neutrality of scientific study. This, in fact, happens to be the thrust of contemporary philosophy that has critically looked at modern thinking.

"Myth of the Neutral Observer" and the Reality of Faith

The idea of the neutral observer[8] who can look around the world from somewhere outside the world entered Western philosophy when Descartes decided to question all the prior beliefs he held (the reliability

of sense experience, traditions, etc.) until he could find something that was absolutely indubitable. Hume's analysis of causality we saw earlier is a continuation of this Cartesian project. What is forgotten in the process is that the one who does such inquiry is not only a theoretician but also an existing individual. As an existing individual, the thinker must take for granted those very beliefs that are put into doubt in one's theoretical life. When Descartes wrote his *Meditations* in which he laid claim to doubting all he had learned, he forgot that he was using a word (meditations) that he learned from his Jesuit teachers (Caputo 2006, 45). The same Hume who found no necessary connection between the antecedent and consequent in his analysis of causality has to assume that connection in his extratheoretical life. In other words, there is no Archimedean point that is available to us where we can get rid of all prior beliefs and look at the world from a neutral vantage point; we are always within a web of beliefs and practices.

Lack of an Archimedean point is a recurring theme that runs through most contemporary philosophy—through Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* (the moment we come to be, we find that we are already there in the world), Gadamer's understanding of horizon, Wittgenstein's concept of language-game (the linguistic counterpart of a lived horizon), and Thomas Kuhn's paradigms, to mention a few. In the light of these, any talk of "pure" or uninterpreted, neutral and "objective" data must be considered a myth.

But can this be right? Is not the emergence of the scientific study of religions the best disproof of this claim? Everyone knows that there was a time when Christianity was the only socially available existential horizon in medieval Europe. Christianity was not "a religion within the more general context of western culture" but that culture as a whole was Christian (Hanegraaff 2000, 303). But with secularization—that is, that "process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols"—this "sacred canopy" was torn asunder (Berger [1967] 1973, 113). In its place we have many canopies—both sacred and secular. Some live under a Hindu horizon, some under an Islamic one, some under a naturalistic horizon, and so on. Is not the very fact of being able to see clearly that different groups of people have different lived horizons a sure indication that we can stand apart from all religions and look at them objectively? Is this not what scientific study of religion is all about? Can anything be more neutral than that? Upon this view, the emergence of multiple canopies during the modern period would look like Figure 1.

If Figure 1 is right, we are in a privileged position of being able to look at the existential horizons of different groups of people from a neutral standpoint. But this picture is misleading because it gives the impression that the scientific study of religion has no horizon of its own; standing outside of all lived horizons it observes them all. It forgets that secularism that gave birth to the scientific study of religion is itself an existential

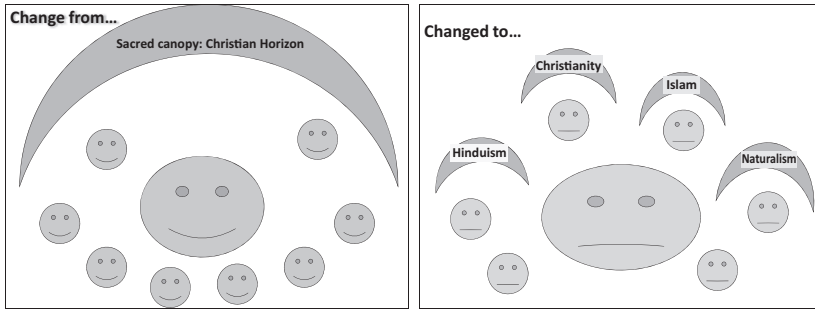

Figure 1.

horizon. Consider the features of modern thinking whose byproduct is secularism.

Secularism was not the result of theoretical speculation that was cut off from the lived conditions. Rather, it was a response to the lived conditions of the time. It was a time when the morale of Europe was at its lowest ebb. Natural calamities like earthquakes and plagues had taken their horrendous human toll. Wars between Protestants and Catholics in the name of God had extracted their pound of flesh. It is a matter of dispute as to whether the villain of these wars was indeed religion or the newly emerging nation states (D'Costa 2009, 57–102). Either way, religion provided the fig leaf at least for covering the nakedness of the bloodshed. And religion was seen as the villain by the intellectuals who played a dominant role in the emergence of the secular culture. Thus, the stage was set for freeing sectors of society from religious dominance. If such freeing is what secularization is about, as Berger tells us, then it was rooted in the lived conditions of the time.

The lived conditions that gave birth to secularism do not end there. It was a time when Europeans took to traveling widely beyond their continent. New lands were discovered; strange customs and religious observances of these newly found people were noted. Combined with the antipathy many felt toward the religion they knew (versions of European Christianity) discovery of these new religions brought home the possibility of other religious options. If the secular age is defined as having options regarding one's lived horizon, as Charles Taylor does (2007, 3), then this was rooted in the lived conditions of Europe at the dawn of the modern era.

The second feature of existential thinking is an inward passion that functions as the energizing source of the thinker's life and actions. Was there an inward passion that guided the architects of modernity and functioned as their energizing source? This very thought would have been heretical at that time, but when the critics of modernity began to probe this question they found its passion. The energizing source of modern thinking was an unbounded confidence in the human ability to bring about unlimited

progress and well being with the help of modern science. The confidence that has hitherto been put in God alone was now transferred to human beings (Farrell 1996, 1). Human control and the remaking of one's entire environment to subserve human ends was the goal (see Karuvelil 2006, 12–13; Childs 2008, 17–18). The newly emerging sciences would be the means for achieving this goal. This should cause no surprise when we recall that modern science makes its entry at a time when European morale was very low. Into their existential turmoil enters modern science as an enterprise on which intellectuals could engage in rational discussions without violence. It offered the much needed hope that the new sciences would enable human beings to take control of the natural and the social worlds and direct them in a way that was beneficial to our species. "Have the courage to use your *own* understanding" became the war cry of the emerging new culture (Kant [1784] 1996, 58).

The third feature of existentialist thinking is the inward passion functioning as the unifying factor around which the rest of life comes to be organized. If the remaking of one's environment to subserve human ends was the energizing passion of modern thinking, an important part of the sociocultural environment that needed remaking was the realm of religion. All-out attempts were made to achieve this. In politics it led to the separation of church and state; in education religion was to be kept away from schools; in economics religious injunctions against usury, greed and avarice gave way to a profit orientation, and so on. The most important manifestation of this secularizing process, for our purpose, is the emergence of the scientific study of religions. The discovery of religious diversity by the European explorers and missionaries helped the process. It helped the process of changing the perspective where religion functioned as the singular horizon that unified everything else under its canopy, to religion being one of the many objects. Rather than being a singular horizon, religion now becomes a type with many tokens or instances (Griffiths 2001, 4). Just as euros and dollars and rupees are tokens of a type called currency, religion becomes a type that has many instances. Combined with the aforementioned antipathy toward it, religion now becomes more an object of curiosity than a lived reality, an object like other objects such as stars and plants, mountains and oceans. Just as the other objects were studied, religion too now becomes an object to be studied. Thus is born the various scientific studies of religions, including science of religion that forms the basis of pluralistic thinking. What is important is to note that this was part of a process of organizing all dimensions of life in accordance with the energizing passion that guided modern thinking. Secularization, then, was not merely the negative process of removing religion as the principle of social and cultural organization but replacing it with a new principle; not merely the removal of the Christian canopy, but putting another canopy in its place. A correct picture of the secular change, then, would be the

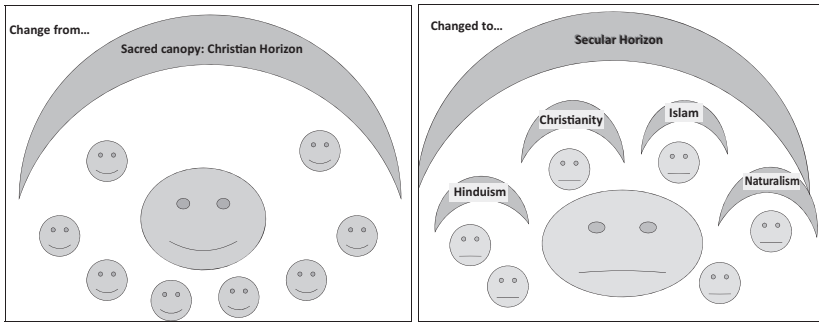

Figure 2.

one in Figure 2, which has an overarching horizon, and not the one in Figure 1.

We can conclude, therefore, that the birth of the scientific study of religion does not undermine the claim about the impossibility of purely objective, uninterpreted data. Anything becomes objective data—that is, something that has any significance to the inquirer, only within a larger horizon within which it is seen. If there were to be any purely uninterpreted data, it could not be *data* because it would be meaningless. To use a homely analogy of John Caputo, without a horizon that forms the background to the objects perceived, we would be as lost as those students who come to their professors to discuss a topic for their research "with that deer-caught-in-the-headlights look on their faces" because although they have read the material, they lack a perspective, a stance that enables them to make sense of what they have read (2006, 45). Like those students who have read the material, the moderns saw the objects before their eyes but the implicit horizon within which these objects gain significance was forgotten (Childs 2008, 18). The modern myth of objectivity coming from Descartes, then, is the forgetfulness of its own subjectivity. There is neutrality to the extent one's lived horizon remains hidden from consciousness. It is like the story of the young fish swimming in the sea complaining that although it can see other fish and crabs and weeds, there is no water anywhere to be seen!

Incidentally, Terrence Tilley uses this story of the fish to illustrate that everyone lives by some kind of faith. While a Christian lives by the Christian faith, a secular humanist lives by faith in the goodness of humanity, a scientific materialist lives by faith in science as the ultimate source of all truth (2011, 60–63). Though one must be wary of reducing the contents of religious faith to this kind of generic faith, there are at least two factors that qualify the lived beliefs of the secular humanist and the scientific materialist to be on a par with religious faith. The first is what Tilley calls "final fact parity." By this he means that what each considers as the final

or ultimate fact is not decided on rational grounds. For example, although a theist traces all facts in the universe ultimately to God as the source, a materialist considers the universe itself as the final fact. According to Tilley, it would make no sense to ask a theist about the source of God, or the materialist about the source of the material universe. As far as their respective adherents are concerned, these are just there as the final facts that need no further explanation.

A second feature of all forms of genuine faith is that they are lived conditions, in the same way that Taylor describes religious faith. Wittgenstein makes the more general point that all our activities are done within a system of unquestioned beliefs. He says, "If I make an experiment, I do not doubt the existence of the apparatus before my eyes. I have plenty of doubts, but not *that.* If I do a calculation I believe, without any doubts, that the figures on the paper will not change places on their own; and I also trust my memory the whole time, and trust it without any reservation" (1969, 337).[9]

The point of drawing attention to these universal dimensions of faith is twofold. First, it makes us aware that the ordinary way of contrasting faith and reason, subjectivity and objectivity is too naive. Reason functions within the ocean of faith and not in a vacuum. Objectivity is a matter of unacknowledged subjectivity, the horizon of faith in which objects appear. Horizon itself is never an object; when a horizon becomes an object, it appears as an object within another horizon of faith. Such is the case with religion when it becomes an object of scientific study; it is secular faith that makes it into an object.

Second, by focusing on the generic features of faith, we become aware that there are various faith horizons that are available in the contemporary world. It could be a secular one where religion becomes one option among others, or it could be a naturalistic one where the religious option is ruled out, or it could be a religious one like the Christian or Islamic horizon. It is the realization of this deep-rooted similarity between religious faiths and other ideologies that prompted Ninian Smart to advocate replacing the philosophy of religion with a philosophy of worldviews (Smart 1995).

The diverse existential horizons that are available in the contemporary world can be understood better if we pay attention to the fourth feature of existential thinking—that is, its dynamic character. As a dynamic, on-going process, secularization is never complete. The emergence of the secular horizon did not make secularism the only available horizon in the modern world. Except for a few thinkers who had adopted a naturalistic or a humanistic outlook, Christianity (and increasingly, some other religion like Buddhism), continued to function as lived horizons for people. For this reason, historians have begun to claim that the so-called "Age of Reason" was really an "Age of Faiths"—in the plural (Gregory 2009, 287–305). All that the arrival of the secular horizon did was to make it the dominant

principle of sociocultural organization in place of Christianity. It is the structure of modern society that became secular and not necessarily the population (Wilson 1976, 259). This explains why sociologists like Martin (1969) and Greely (1989) can question whether it is correct to characterize our age as secular. All of these confirm the point that there are diverse faith horizons available in the contemporary world.

Science of Religion and Theology: A Third View

The recognition that there are diverse faith horizons available in the contemporary world enables us to see that religion could be understood in two different ways: as an object that appears in a secular horizon, or as a lived horizon. In accordance with these two ways of understanding religion, there also comes about two different ways of studying religion—the sciences of religion and theologies. They are linked to very different horizons. The horizon of former is the secular faith, whereas the horizon of the latter is that of a particular religious tradition. Irrespective of which horizon is adopted, the other horizons that are not adopted appear as objects within the chosen horizon. For the one who has adopted the secular horizon, different religions appear as objects within that horizon (see Figure 2); for the theologian who has made one's religious faith as the encompassing horizon, all other religions as well as naturalism and secularism appear as objects within that faith horizon.

This realization helps us explain the conflict between the scientific study of religion and theology. To the extent that these lived horizons determine the meaning of whatever is within the horizon, and one cannot be in more than one horizon at any given time, scientific study of religions and theology are bound to conflict with each other. But nothing can be said in advance about how fatal any specific conflict is. Let us examine this point in greater detail.

The strength of the received view, we recall, is its acknowledgment that the conflict between science and religion is real. It goes on to explain the conflict in terms of the conflicting approaches of these disciplines: the neutrality of objective study as against the prior commitment demanded by theology. But this explanation is no longer viable when objectivity is seen to be merely unacknowledged subjectivity. In its place another explanation suggests itself: the conflicting horizons of faith that guide these disciplines. They function as AMA or alternative teaching authorities that offer guidance to life.

For Gould, science and religion are nonoverlapping but not AMA. He cannot see them as alternatives because his perspective is normative. Because he is convinced that both are valuable, they should not be seen as alternatives. In saying that they are alternatives, we are not making a normative judgment but making an empirical statement about the

diverse existential horizons available in the contemporary world. These diverse horizons may be guided by different and conflicting passions and commitments, as is apparently the case with theism and atheism, if Dawkins's version of atheism is accepted. If so, they are indeed engaged in a mortal combat. On the other hand, the conflict may be rooted in complementary passions; if so, the conflict need not lead to the death of either combatant. The very title of one of John Haugt's books—*Is Nature Enough?* (2006)—hints at their complementarity. It is in the process of dialogue that we discover whether the empirically available alternatives provide real alternative maps to human living or whether they are complementary. AMA does not rule out either possibility. Successful dialogue leads to a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 273). But any dialogue between science and religion can succeed only if we identify these disciplines correctly. AMA goes far beyond NOMA in this respect.

One of the difficulties with the NOMA theory, we noted, is the lack of clarity surrounding the demarcation of science and religion. Upon one construal of NOMA, we saw that the difference between science and religion consists in their nonoverlapping subject matter. By treating it as a difference of subject matter we are misled into thinking that the two are on par; both are objects within a larger horizon. It is as if the two are different kinds of trees (say, teak and sandalwood) within the same forest. Upon a logical construal of the difference, we were left with a puzzle as to how two "nonoverlapping" and "separate" domains could be pressing on each other at every "jot and tittle." AMA accepts the logical construal and solves the puzzle by spelling out the difference. These disciplines are logically as different as the woods are from the trees. Not to make this logical distinction would be to commit a "category mistake" as Gilbert Ryle has taught us (Ryle, [1949] 2009).[10] On the other hand, this logical difference does not amount to a material difference. There can be no woods without the trees. This explains why science and religion are so completely different and yet cannot be separated from one another.

Though the analogy of wood and trees helps to make the logical distinction clear, it is also misleading. Trees make woods, but objects do not make a horizon; it is a horizon that makes objects (significant). The horizon-object relationship is best seen in terms of Wittgenstein's grammatical-empirical distinction. To say "This table is one meter" is entirely different from saying "100 centimeters is one meter." The first is empirical; the second is grammatical. The first tells us about the length of this table (that it is one meter); the second tells us *what it means* for anything to be one meter. Although it is not Wittgenstein's terminology, we could say that the empirical belongs to the first order inquiry, whereas the grammatical belongs to the second order inquiry. For Wittgenstein, "Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is" (1958, I, 373); it expresses the essence of a thing (1958, I, 371). It is completely different, logically different, from

any particular use of grammar. Wittgenstein does not tire of telling us that "grammar . . . has somewhat the same relation to the language as . . . the rules of a game have to the game" (1974, I, 23). It must be noted that this grammatical-empirical or horizon-object distinction applies across the board to all objects and all horizons. It applies to all objects irrespective of whether the objects concerned are atoms, galaxies, social hierarchy, or mental depression. Similarly the distinction applies across the board to all horizons irrespective of whether the concerned horizon is Christian, Islamic, secular, or naturalistic. In other words, the distinction applies to both natural sciences and human sciences on the one hand, and to all philosophies, theologies, and ideological formations on the other.

Goodenough has pointed out Gould's failure to describe the magisterium of theology (Goodenough 1999, 264–5). Although we are still not in a position to spell out the magisterium in great detail, the contours of this teaching authority have begun to emerge. The realization that theology is necessarily existential implies that theology must be ruled by the fourfold features of existential thinking—rootedness in lived conditions, driven by an inward passion, this passion functioning as the source of unity, and this unity remaining a dynamic one. Further features of the theological magisterium begin to emerge when we reflect upon the distinction between a *horizon* that gives meaning to objects, and the *objects* themselves. It would enable us to distinguish between science and theology in a manner that retains the insights of NOMA without its pitfalls.

The distinction between horizon and the objects within some horizon or between grammar and the items to which grammar is applied, is indeed a major one. Not to recognize this distinction is to be a victim of an unacknowledged ideology. Wayne Proudfoot's (1985) explanatory reduction of religious experience is a good example. His treatment of religious experience recognizes the objects (the trees of individual religious experience) but does not recognize the larger horizon of religion that gives meaning to these objects (Karuvelil 2009). To miss this difference is to turn the dialogue between the different horizons of science and religion into an in-house conversation within the magisterium of science. To recognize the difference, on the other hand, is to recognize that the sciences (especially Psychology that forms the basis of Proudfoot's reduction) function within a secular horizon, whereas theology functions from a religious horizon. Similarly, the scientific study of religion—that forms the basis of Hick's pluralistic thinking—functions within a secular horizon (as we have seen in the last section), whereas theology is linked to a religious horizon.

Apart from being associated with alternative existential horizons with their different energizing passions, there are other important differences between sciences and theology. They look in different directions and do different things. Science of religion looks at the *objects* or the observable phenomena of religions and not at the horizon within which they appear.

When Hick tells us that Christianity is one religion among many, for example, his gaze is directed not at the Christian horizon but at the object called Christianity as it appears within a secular horizon. The gaze of theology, on the other hand, is directed at the *horizon*. This difference regarding the focus of their attention is also a major one. Wittgenstein's eagle eyes spotted this difference correctly when he characterized theology as grammar (Wittgenstein 1958, I, 373 Also, Brenner 1996). Although science uses a grammar without paying special attention to the nature of the grammar used, theology examines the grammar it uses. It is completely different, logically different, from any particular use of grammar.[11]

Having their eyes fixed in different directions, what they do with their find is also different. Theology looks at the religious horizon that is lived by the theologian's faith-community and attempts to *explicate* it. That is why it is defined as "faith seeking understanding"; its focus is on explicating the horizon. Empirical science looks at the objects or the phenomena and attempts to *explain* them. These tasks are quite different. Explanation looks at the many items or objects (whose horizon may be totally hidden from view) and attempts to bring them under a unifying scheme. These various items are known, but they typically lack a unified understanding. For example, a variety of objects fall to the ground: ripe fruits, dead leaves, thrown stones, and so on. This was a fact known to all, but there was no unified understanding of these falling bodies until Newton came up with the theory of gravitation. Scientific explanation often involves introducing new ideas of this kind. Something similar can be seen in Hick's theory of pluralism where he looks at the different postaxial religions of the world and comes to the conclusion that salvation/liberation is a unifying factor of these religions.

An explication, in contrast, is a matter of making known in detail something already known implicitly and is taken for granted. Theological writings provide us with plenty of examples. I shall cite just one that would provide a contrast to Hick. The example is from Sri Vallabhacharya an Indian theologian of the fifteenth century. The underlying passion of Vallabha's existential horizon was his devotion to Krishna based on that part of the scriptures known as *Bhagavata Purana*. But Vallabha is faced with the problem that this text appears rather late in history and the earlier texts make no reference to Krishna. His solution to this theological problem was the following. He says, "In the early part [i.e., Vedic part of the scriptures] Krishna appears as the sacrifice, in the later [Upanishadic portion] he appears as *brahman*; [in the *Bhagavad Gita*] he is the *avatarin* [god in human form], but in the *Bhagavata Purana* Krishna appears clearly [as himself]" (cited in Mittal and Thursby 2004, 28). This would be an instance of what pluralists like Hick consider a version of superiority they call "inclusivism." But judging it a matter of superiority comes from the failure to distinguish explanation from explication, empirical inquiry from grammatical inquiry. Empirical explanation builds a forest out of trees; grammatical explication

elucidates how objects hang together in a horizon. Pluralists look at the objects called "religions," see a pattern and call it superiority; they are not looking at a lived horizon and attempting to make sense of it. Explication may also be understood as an explanation, but in a different sense than it is understood in science. One of the ordinary meanings of the word explain is to make known in detail, as when we explain the workings of a machine by detailing its components and their functions (Clarke and Byrne 1993, 30). If theological explication is understood as explanation, it would be an explanation in this sense.

As a detailed description of something already taken for granted and implicitly understood, theological explanation is a committed inquiry. Theological use of reason, therefore, remains within that commitment. It is this feature that prompts Christian theologians to speak of "natural reason" and the Indian theologian Shankara to speak of "dry reason" by which they mean reasoning that is not guided by revelation or one's faith commitment. Thus, though a Christian theologian may speculate on whether there are other gods than the Father of Jesus Christ, the conclusion is unlikely to be in the affirmative. But this is not necessarily because of the "fear of undesirable consequences" (Rodrigues and Harding 2009, 10), nor is it because of insincerity as Russell thought about the Aquinas' use of reason. If theological reasoning is done within a commitment, it is because of its existential character, a point that has already been noted. If the explication of one's lived horizon is to be considered insincere, all second order inquiries or philosophies should be considered insincere. And this would apply as much to Russell's philosophy and Aristotle's categories as to Aquinas's philosophy. Being a victim of the modern myth of the neutral observer, Russell did not realize that what he called a "scaffolding of truths" (referring to the futility of human existence in a scientific world) was merely an elucidation of his own scientistic faith[12] (Tilley 79; Midgley 1989, 110–14); nor does Hick seems to realize that what he calls "impartial grounds" (1989, 2) is a space within the secular horizon.

Russell's reliance on science as the sole model for all legitimate knowledge leads us to a further difference between theology and the empirical sciences. Empirical sciences are theoretical exercises oriented to intellectual understanding, whereas theology is existential by its very nature, as we have seen. To use the Kierkegaardian terminology, empirical sciences approximate to truth by attempting to build more and more comprehensive theories; a theory of everything (TOE) would be the ultimate triumph of science. As faith seeking understanding, theology, no doubt, has also a theoretical dimension, but a theoretical understanding devoid of existential roots would cease to be theology. Theology aims at unifying knowing and being (of the knower) and not merely at theoretical unification. The kind of unity sought by theology is the unity of the whole human existence in the manner of a lover with the beloved where a deepening

in love is simultaneously a transformation of the lovers. "One who knows Brahman becomes Brahman itself (*Brhamavid Brahmaiva Bhavati*)," says the Mundaka Upanishad (3.2.9).

Although this manner of differentiating science and theology in terms of their theoretical orientation in the one case and existential orientation in the other is correct, it is not adequate to the character of theology because there are alternative existential horizons available in the contemporary world, as we have noted. Russell's or Dawkins' articulation of their naturalistic horizon is as much an explication of a lived horizon as Karl Rahner's or Karl Barth's articulation of their Christian faith. In other words, some forms of philosophy are indistinguishable from theology. Although theology is indeed grammar, not all grammar is theology. Therefore, we need to proceed from seeing the basic features that distinguish science from theology to see how philosophy and theology differ from one another. That would provide further elucidation of the magisterium of theology. But that is a task by itself.

Conclusion

I began by drawing a distinction between the experience of conflict and its explanation. Although the standard explanation for the conflict is known to be empirically inadequate, Gould's NOMA could not replace it because of its inherent conceptual difficulties and its tendency to downplay the experience of conflict. Investigating the neutrality claim of the standard explanation made it possible to overcome these difficulties and propose a view that neither denies the conflict nor makes it into a mortal combat. Not only did this third view enable us to overcome the apparent self-contradiction involved in NOMA but also to spell out the differing identities of science and theology in some detail. Apart from being linked to very different existential horizons, the focus of science is on the items within the horizon, whereas the focus of theology is on explicating a taken for granted horizon. The conflict between science (including its premodern predecessors pointed out by Morowitz) and religion receives its explanation in terms of their employment of different grammars or horizons. And the conflict would disappear only through conscious attempts at the fusion of horizons as done by the great medieval systematizers like Thomas Aquinas and as being attempted by contemporary systematizers like John Haught and Ian Barbour. It is worth noting that neither science nor religion loses its autonomous voice in the works of these thinkers but their autonomy does not amount to insulating the one from the other. We must not forget that achieving a fusion of horizons requires a conscious effort and such fusion would be possible only when the concerned horizons are built on complementary—and not competing—human passions.[13] Thus our

theory retains and carries forward the insight of NOMA theory—that science and religion complement one another—without its shortcomings.

Notes

1. From the Latin *magister* or teacher, *magisterium* stands for a teaching authority that is appropriate to its proper realm (1997, 5).
2. In its early years, the discipline now called Religious Studies was known as Comparative Religion or the Science of Religion. In the United States, this field of study is also known as History of Religions. See, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_studies. For a brief overview of the various approaches to studying religion, see Segal, 2006 part 1.
3. I am aware that it is rather unusual to focus on this discipline because most of those engaged in science-religion dialogue attempt to draw out the implications of some findings of natural sciences to theology or deal with the history of science-religion interactions; sometimes the focus is on the evolution of religion and sometimes on psychology. But it is not easy to find someone focusing on comparative religion as a dialogue partner.
4. Religion is the broader term that includes the four Cs of Creed, Code, Cult (worship) and Community, whereas theology refers to the conscious articulation of the belief system that underlies religious life and activity. This distinction is not of much importance in discussing science-religion relations because it is the belief-component of religion that is at stake in these discussions.
5. Russell's position seems to be that only one should emerge alive so that true wisdom (based on science) becomes possible (1935, 18).
6. Referring to Ninian Smart, who is one of the leading lights of Religious Studies, Hyman has observed that "the quest for neutrality stands at the core of Smart's project" (Hyman 2004, 199).
7. Barbour, although making no reference to Kierkegaard, accuses existentialism of "privatizing and interiorizing religion to the neglect of its communal aspects" (1998, 89).
8. I borrow this phrase from Eric Springsted (1992, 19).
9. The figures on the paper "switching of their own accord" as found in this translation is suitably modified here.
10. One of Ryle's own examples of a category mistake is that of a visitor to a university. After being given an exhaustive tour of the various colleges, libraries, administrative offices, and so on of the university, if the visitor still queries where the university is, he commits a category mistake because he takes university to be one more institution like the ones he has been shown. Such mistake can only be corrected when the visitor realizes that university is a completely different category; it is not one more physical structure to be seen but "the way in which all that he has seen is organized" (Ryle [1949] 2009, 6).
11. It can be questioned whether theology is *purely* a second order grammatical inquiry, but I shall not go into this question, as it would divert attention from the important insight of Wittgenstein.
12. Scientism is an exaggerated trust in the efficacy of the methods of natural science applied to all areas of investigation (to philosophy, social sciences, and humanities).
13. Although interreligious dialogue is not a concern of this article, because the pluralists' concern with interreligious dialogue forms its epistemological background, it is only fair to point out that what is said of science-religion dialogue applies also to interreligious dialogue. In both cases, dialogue takes place when the dialogue partners stand within their respective horizons and attempt a fusion of horizons and not when they stand in the no-man's land of a philosophical abstraction like the "Real" as proposed by Hick. Similarly, a fusion of religious horizons would be possible only if the concerned horizons are of a complementary nature.

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