

Many people think that science and religion are incompatible. They consider the former as truth, and the latter as superstition. Indeed there are a great variety of religions in the world and we cannot generalize, but we can be sure that there is no conflict between Christianity and science. Those presumed conflicts between them are usually due to misunderstandings about their premises and applicable scopes. Actually, science is not absolute truth, and faith based on the Bible is not foolish superstition. Generally speaking, the applicable scope of science is within the space-time of this universe, and its premises are laws of nature cumulatively understood by humans. On the other hand, the premises of Christianity are that this universe has a creator, and the revelation from this creator to mankind is the Bible. The scope of biblical revelations is not limited to this universe, because this creator is not limited by the universe, just as the builder of a house is not confined to the house. The main points of biblical revelation is first about the creator per se, and then about mankind and how man can have interaction and relationship with this creator. Since the Bible is revelation, there should not be any contradiction or error in it. Otherwise the Bible is not trustworthy. Therefore even though the theme of the Bible is not natural science, there should not be any error in the Bible in its description about the nature, and there is no conflict between the Bible and natural science.

The professor in Modern History said to us proud and arrogant EE freshmen: “Mediocre students study engineering, better ones study physics, and top ones mathematics (philosophy?).” I didn’t know how his words affected my classmates, but they brought me to a journey of “seeking the truth,” from EE to physics, and to some math. Later I found that the laws of physics, even mathematics <sup>[2]</sup>, weren’t absolute truth, so I got into religion and theology. Actually, what this professor said was not some new theory, but the famous old saying from the Analects of Confucius: “The Gentleman concerns himself with the fundamentals. Once the fundamentals are established, the proper ways appear.” Concerning many things we need to pursue the fundamentals and the premises. When premises are clear, the conclusions can be useful. When premises are unclear or inaccurate, then no matter how rigorous and precise the logic deductions are, results would be nothing but “Garbage in, garbage out.”

Many topics may be viewed from the angle of systems analysis: First, one needs to be clear about the scope of the system. Secondly, one needs to be clear about the premises of the system, which provide the foundations, i.e., the “fundamentals,” of the theory. Finally, the inferences or conclusions from the system are the “ways.” Therefore, once the “fundamentals” are established, the proper “ways” appear.

Therefore there exist similarities between religion and science, i.e., they can both be analyzed as systems, each with its own premises and conclusions. However, there are also differences between them, and their differences are not mainly in their logic deductions, but rather in their scopes and premises. In the following we can systematically look at some examples:

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<sup>[1]</sup> This article may be found at <http://www.sbecc.org/BeyondUniverse.pdf>. It may be freely used, quoted, redistributed, or linked to, provided the author’s name and the location of this article are noted. Please send any comments or corrections to author’s e-mail address at [lsli@alumni.upenn.edu](mailto:lsli@alumni.upenn.edu). Last revision: 2013-09-14

<sup>[2]</sup> Morris Kline, *Mathematics – The Loss of Certainty*, Oxford University Press, New York (1980)

- The premises of a mathematical system are man-defined axioms. Axioms cannot be proved. However, if there are more than one axiom, then there cannot be any inconsistency among the set of axioms. Otherwise the entire system will collapse. Therefore if there is no inconsistency among the axioms, then the system will be quite rigorous and reliable. Different mathematical systems have different premises and scopes. For example, Boolean Algebra has its own axioms and scopes, and topology has a different set of axioms and scopes.
- Premises of a physical system are the laws of physics, e.g., relativity, Maxwell's Equations, etc. These premises are quite reliable. Though not 100% reliable, they're perhaps 99.9...% reliable, as their reliability may be continually verified. However, their applicable scope is basically within this universe, and may not even be the entire universe. For example, these laws may not apply in the vicinity of a black hole.
- From physics to chemistry, from chemistry to biology, to physiology, etc., when the system gets more complex, the applications and predictions of these laws become more difficult due to our limited abilities in comprehension and in computations; even though we can believe that the basic premises (laws of physics) are still correct.
- If we go further to the level of psychology, then we do not have the assurance that all phenomena may be interpreted in theory by laws of physics alone. This is because there is the issue of free will. Consequently, psychology, sociology, economics, political science, etc., all have a variety of doctrines and theories with different qualities. Each of them has its own premises and scopes.

The above-mentioned systems, mathematics, physics, physiology, psychology, sociology, etc., basically study those phenomena within this universe. However, the issues considered by the following systems are not limited to this universe alone:

- From a certain perspective, philosophical systems may be considered as extensions of mathematical systems. They basically draw conclusions from some premises by logical deductions. However, the reliabilities of the premises of philosophical systems are difficult to determine due to their often being unbounded in scope. The premises of mathematical or philosophical systems are not limited by laws within the universe; therefore they may possibly be used to explore issues beyond this universe. Nevertheless, the premises of philosophy usually do not go beyond the so-called "first cause", as they do not explore the existence of "being" beyond this universe. Therefore from this angle, pure Buddhism might be considered as a philosophy.
- The major difference between religion and philosophy is that religion further explores the question of the existence of "being" beyond this universe. Therefore the difference between religion and science is not the difference between psyche and material. Because in a sense both psyche and material are within this universe. Here we deliberately use the term "psyche" and not "spirit". Because "spirit" may have a different meaning. If it is interpreted as "soul", then it may not be limited within this universe.

From the above we may see that human cognizance is basically limited to this universe, but some of the questions we explore are actually beyond the scope of this universe. Those questions are usually explored by philosophy, religion, and theology. One special observation is that even though similarities exist between humans and animals, especially monkeys, as animals may have

intellect, will, and emotions as well; yet it seems that no animal pursues issues of philosophy or religion. In a jungle, primitive humans live a life similar to that of monkeys, but we only see a group of tribal people engaging in some form of worship, but not a group of monkeys worshipping. So it seems that the pursuit of religion (or philosophy) might be what distinguishes humans from other animals.

Consequently, when we explore certain topics, such as supernatural phenomena, sixth sense, soul and spirit, gods, ghosts, incarnation, etc., we need to examine what our premises are. Even if we're only exploring topics within this universe, we should still realize about our limitations. From one point of view, scientists, physicians, and auto mechanics are equally limited, because the targets of their study: universe, human body, and automobiles, are not designed by them. Indeed the auto mechanics may have more advantage than physicians or scientists, because the auto mechanics have the manuals prepared by the car manufacturer's designers, while what physicians and scientists have are only knowledge accumulated from past experiences, which lacks absolute authority. Three hundred years ago, Newton's law was the basis of mechanics, but a hundred years ago Einstein's theory of relativity revised it. Today no physicist can claim that the theory of relativity is without error, because except for the creator of the universe, no other authority can give us the answer. This is analogous to the fact that except for the designer of an automobile, no one else can say why this model of automobile is designed as such.

Therefore as we explore issues beyond this universe, the first question we ask is whether this universe has a creator. If there isn't one, then we will need to derive conclusions based on data and information that we have, just like scientists and physicians. The problem and difficulty will be that most of our data and information are limited to that within this universe. As an example, suppose that we're to explore the existence of soul, but if after the body dies, the soul exists in a place that is beyond this space-time (universe), then we'll have no confidence in having sufficient and dependable data and information to answer this question. On the other hand, if the universe has a creator, and this creator has given mankind information in this area, then our exploration will be much more valuable. Therefore when humans explore issues beyond this universe, the two questions they would ask are: (1) Does the universe have a creator? and (2) If the universe has a creator, did this creator give mankind any important information? This type of information is called revelation in theology. If the answers to both (1) and (2) are affirmative, then we will be like an auto mechanic who has received a car repair manual. Our explorations will then be much more meaningful.

Today among the three major religions in this world (Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism) which explore topics beyond this universe, Buddhism basically does not ask the first question, and both Christianity and Islam affirm (1) and (2). However, when we look at the history of Islam, it is a product in the 7th century, more than 600 years later than Christianity, and the claimed revelations of Islam are incompatible with the Christian Bible. For example, Christianity states that Jesus is God (second person of the triune God), but Islam only accepts Jesus as one of the prophets. Compared to the Bible, the Quran has limited content, and lacks consistency and reliability.

From the above considerations, we can see that the premises of Christianity are: (1) There exists a creator of the universe ("One God"), and (2) The Bible (the autograph of the 66 books) is the revelations that this creator gave to mankind ("One Book"). Therefore "The Journey of Faith"<sup>[3]</sup>

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<sup>[3]</sup> <http://www.sbecc.org/BASICA.pdf>

begins by considering the rationality and reliability of these two premises, as well as the main messages in the Bible.