

Alvin Plantinga's book Where the Conflict Really Lies begins with the premise that the conflict between science and religion is actually a conflict between science and naturalism. In making this claim, Plantinga defines naturalism as the belief that there are no supernatural beings. In order to make his argument he first attempts to show that many of the alleged conflicts between classical science and theism are not actual conflicts, or that the conflict is superficial conflict, or that science and theism sometimes support each other. He then attempts to show that a naturalist cannot trust his or her own neurophysiologic "faculties" (to use his word) and therefore, apparently, should just admit that none of his or her assertions are reliable.

Where the Conflict Really Lies is a functionally usable concise summary of the perceived conflicts between science and religion in the present day. Plantinga begins with evolution. He presents a competent discourse on the lack of any real conflict between evolution and theism: noting that science does not assert that evolution is not guided by a divine hand, but rather that science cannot assert that it is guided by such a supernatural force. He includes mention of Dawkins, Dennett and Draper in his treatment of the evolution-religion discussion.

Plantinga then turns to physics and offers a competent summation of the history of physics and its relationship with theism. He includes the categories of Newtonian physics and the "new" physics of quantum mechanics and notes that there is a bit of a scientific conflict between quantum mechanics and relativity theory. Again he presents the assertion that classical science is comfortable with the concept that God might be guiding some of the processes, it is just that classical science cannot prove that God is actually involved in the processes. The real naysayers, he continues to assert, are those naturalists that don't believe in anything supernatural.

In Part II, he admits that there is some real conflict between naturalists and theists, but asserts that the conflict is superficial. In these arguments he presents evolutionary psychology and historical scripture study. Basically, the idea is that it is possible that if religion evolved to meet group behavior and social needs as the naturalists assert, those reasons could be valid reasons for religion to exist, although the theists would assert that there is also a supernatural reason. Still, the fact that religion is useful in those areas as the naturalists claim helps to validate religion and theism has no motivation to invalidate them. Instead, theists can simply agree that religion meets these "natural" needs and thus the conflict is superficial because neither group is claiming that religion is not useful, that is, there is no immediate threat to religious institutions from believing that there is no supernatural basis for their existence as long as both parties agree that the religious institution serve a purpose.

The same basic acceptance is asserted for historical Biblical scholarship that is based on the premise that there is no supernatural realm: it is possible simply to accept the truths they offer, such as there was a man that lived in Nazareth called Jesus and he

was a healer and got in some political trouble, and say "thank you" for the validations they provide without squabbling about whether or not miracles did in fact occur. In these superficial conflicts, the naturalists are at least affirming the basics necessary for religion to continue in a naturalist path, and like the chaff and the wheat we'll sort it out at the end of the book.

Part III of the book concerns what Plantinga classifies as concord between science and religion. Here he includes the anthropic coincidences: mathematical assertions that the world is so fine tuned for life, especially human life, to exist that there surely must be intelligence behind creation. He dutifully presents the anthropic, infinite universe and infinite probability disagreements to his assertion. He then states that although the existence of such an intelligent creator is not proven mathematically, the mathematics still lends some sort of support to this line of thought. He treats Behe's Intelligent Design arguments in the same way. Whether there is concord or not upon unproven and/or invalid mathematics would seem to be a matter of opinion at best, so his points of concord must be taken with a bit of salt. Whether or not a person would grant him that although there is not a Design Hypothesis, but this sort of thought does qualify as Design Discourse would seem to be a matter of opinion, and although cold mathematical science cannot yield to his wishes, what he is stating is simply that a good many people are impressed with the order and mechanical design of living organisms and the mathematical precision of the universe and that this provides fodder for discourse.

Part IV of Where the Conflict Really Lies is labeled Deep Conflict and is the crowning glory of Plantinga's book. The line of thought goes something like this: naturalists believe in evolution without supernatural influence. By his or her own understanding, then, any concept the naturalist would have must have questionable value, because the concept is not chosen by natural selection, instead natural selection selects at the level of behavior. This is a valid line of thought, granted, but the same is true of the theist UNLESS the theist always states his or her thoughts: thereby bringing them to light for truth validation. So the obvious problem, the naturalist could say, is that both theists and naturalists have been selected on the basis of behavior and not truth claims: and furthermore if the theist must assert that there is a God to be selected by society for a job, say, then he/she is again selected at the level of behavior and he/she may secretly think otherwise. Could it be that affirming theism is an adaptive behavior without a sound concept? Here we are back to the basic science and religion conflict with the added problem that perhaps no one can trust their faculties.

There is a lot of good information throughout the book: the discussion of intentions comes to mind as one example, and the concise presentation of the conflicts are well done. And although I can't agree with all of the conclusions drawn, many arguments, for example that natural selection chooses not truth but behaviors, are points worth consideration. I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the subject,

with the cautionary statement that there is more philosophical logic symbolism in the book than most people would want or find useful.