Paige Carr

Montserrat: Identifying Patterns

Paper 1: October 26, 2009

*Faith in Religion and Science of the Natural World*

Humanity is always in search of the greater meaning of life and how everything works. Among several topics that influence us every day, religion and science are the most prominent in aiding this desired understanding of life. In the book *Everyday Practice of Science,* Frederick Grinnell asks the big questions that many of us struggle with every day regarding the relationship between science and religion and how faith is incorporated into these two different and conflicting matters. In evaluating these broad, difficult questions, one can see that faith is a necessary element in the everyday practice of science, that both science and religion require the other, as well that the complementary aspects of science and religion can better lead to a knowledge of the individual and the natural world.

One may ponder how faith relates to the everyday practice of science, but the fact is science would be no where without faith. Faith is a driving force that encourages one forward in joyous and desperate times, which is especially necessary in the trial and error of the everyday practice of science. Grinnell mentions in his book, that his scientific friends argue that science requires no faith, rather it involves assumptions. They say, “Assumptions can be changed; faith cannot.” (Grinnell, 166) However, I am in agreement with Grinnell that when assumptions in science are so profound and full of passion, they certainly tend to take the form of faith. One needs to have a certain level of faith in their work to find success. Researchers in search of cures for cancer and other degenerative diseases certainly need faith in what they are doing or they would not survive working long nights, searching for funding necessary to continue research, or failing at experiments when they thought they were on to something amazing. A great example that Grinnell uses to support the idea that science requires faith is from his childhood. Young Grinnell enjoyed visiting the Franklin Institute Science where he became close with college students tending to the exhibits. One day a student asked him to prove he existed. Unable to explain something he was absolutely sure of, Grinnell began to realize that science has faith in an “Order of Nature”, or intelligible design, the idea that that “nature’s patterns and structures can be understood.” (Grinnell, 168)

Believing that all aspects of the world are comprehensible relates science to religion. Simply thinking of the two, one might say science has nothing to do with religion; however this is not the case. The two are very much a part of each other, even though they seem to concern opposite aspects of life. They are related because both are different ways of looking at the world. Grinnell gives an example of coming into contact with a rock on a beach. One way of looking at the situation is to ask: “What kind of rock is this? How did it get here? What can be done with it?” (Grinnell, 164) The other way of thinking through the situation is to make a personal connection with the rock, asking questions like, “What does it mean that this rock and I are sharing this beach together at this very moment? What can this moment (or rock) teach me about the meaning of life” (Grinnell, 164) Religion deals with the larger “meaning of life”, while science calls to learn how and why certain aspects of life work. Grinnell describes how “science is weak without the religious belief that the world is comprehensible to reason.” (Grinnell, 168) Without religion, there would no point in discovering the reason why things in life work. There would be no point in finding cures for illnesses to help others. Another way in understanding the difference between religion and science that Grinnell mentions is through the two Adam stories in the book of Genesis. In the first creation story of Adam, God made man, male and female, in His image and told them to have control over the world. The second Creation story of Adam says, “God formed man of dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul.” (Genesis 2:7) One can already see that the second creation story is more personal, as God breathed himself into the nostrils of Adam, while Adam I is said to be made in the image of God by God. Grinnell calls Adam I the” mathematical scientist whose life work is to postulate and control the natural world”. The two stories are quite similar and different at the same time, representative of the relation between science and religion.

One way in which Grinnell describes the relationship between religion and science is through the word complementarity. By complementarity, Grinnell means religion and science are separate but cannot be separated. The interactions between the two are inevitable and always occurring because they are so alike and different. Their conflicting views provide different ways to experience and perceive the world. One way that the National Academies described religion and science is that the “two occupy two separate realms”, but to Grinnell, these realms are constantly overlapping. An example to describe the complementarity of religion and science is through the bicycle metaphor. Grinnell describes that “that having a bike makes riding possible”, but “other factors influence the direction in which the rider chooses to go.” (Grinnell, 177) In other words, “Science provides the technology for doing things”, while “religion provides the values to determine what things should be done”. This is especially true in the medical field, in cases like abortion. Science has provided us the technology to perform such procedures, but just because we know how to do it, doesn’t always make it right. Another complementarity viewpoint that Grinnell mentions is the duality of light. Bohr discovered the two ways to understand light, as a wave as well as a particle. The two views are complementarity because they cannot be contradictive of each other and neither can be disproved by the other. Similarly, religion and science cannot disprove or contradict the other. In figure 6.1 of Grinnell’s book, the diagram shows how life experience splits into the two categories of “religious attitude” and “scientific attitude”, which ultimately meet at a yin-yang. The two come into conflict, but when it everything boils down, the two are different ways to experience the world around us and to gain “knowledge of the Self”.

Science and religion are complementarity, existing together as a separated unit, “constantly bouncing off each other”, aiding in the personal discovery of the answers to the difficult questions we ask ourselves every day. Faith in science gets the wheels rolling, while religion directs the way. Faith in interactions of religion and science combines to produce further knowledge of the Self and the world. In conclusion, Grinnell’s view seems to be a reasonable way to reconcile human thought. All humans experience situations differently. We either see the rock scientifically, in search of how it got here, or we see the rock personally as we share the beach with it. In addition, the battles between science and religion urge us to ask ourselves the hard questions and to evaluate our faith in both. If we didn’t have a faith that there were reasons we were here on earth, life would be mayhem and more difficult than it is already is for us. Ultimately, we have to have faith in science to discover great opportunities, but have faith in religion to listen to our conscience and make the right decisions regarding scientific discoveries.