



DIVERSITY, SCIENCE, AND RELIGION

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I argue against the prevalent tendency in theological discourse to frame the relationship between science and religion in monist terms. I define this approach and present evidence supporting a pluralist perspective, which emerges as a serious alternative. Importantly, a pluralist framing offers a robust rebuttal to critics of religion who leverage the remarkable progress made in the natural sciences to depict theology as stagnant.

KEYWORDS: science-religion interaction, scientific monism, scientific pluralism, religious diversity, Christian theology, Jewish-Christian relations, biblical theology

Introduction

In this paper, I am concerned with diversity at the interface of science and theology. My main thesis is that both friends and foes of religion alike overstate the transitory character of diversity in the natural sciences. With the intention of establishing a sharp contrast to theology, critics of religion often portray the natural sciences as progressing linearly through ever greater theory unification, arguing that such progress indicates their unique truth-tracking ability. In the hands of theologians, diversity fares no better; diversity in the religious realm is downplayed in its resistance to a monistic framing. In the first section, I will turn to the camp of the foes of religion, who argue that religious diversity is insurmountable, while scientific diversity isn't, and insofar as this is true, theology is deemed cognitively void because insurmountable diversity is seen as indicative of cognitive vacuity. In a second step, I will briefly examine discussions about diversity in the natural sciences. I will stress that in recent years, philosophy of science has taken a pluralist turn. It is important not to lose sight of the complications that have arisen from this turn for our understanding of the enormous cognitive power and success of the natural sciences. Nevertheless, the view that diversity is to be cultivated for the sake of various benefits, including cognitive, moral,

and political benefits, has gained considerable plausibility. The third section aims to confront the results of my cursory discussion of scientific pluralism with theological discourse about religious diversity. In this paper, I do not intend to argue in favor of what is commonly called “theological pluralism,” as it has emerged as an alternative to “exclusivism,” “inclusivism,” and other “isms” in treatments of religious diversity over the past five decades. My objective here is much more modest, as I am interested in making a strong case for the necessity of moving theology away from monist framings of diversity. My assessment of diversity in science and religion is intended to extend to models of the relationship between science and religion.¹

Diversity as a Problem

In this section, I will reconstruct a challenge to theology concerning the nature of religious diversity. Unlike diversity in the natural sciences, religious diversity is considered insurmountable, the argument goes, and such insurmountable diversity indicates persistent cognitive deficiency and thus vacuity. It is often assumed in arguments of this kind that there is one world and one truth about it, and unlike theology, the natural sciences have the capacity to capture that one truth about the one world. The history of science purportedly attests to this. Insofar as theories explain a domain of phenomena, a theory is deemed better the more domains of phenomena it can unite under its explanation. This quality of explanatory scope, the argument goes, indicates that the theory is true. If a theory competes with others that are inferior in their explanatory scope, then it is to be selected at the expense of those other theories. If not explanatory scope, then other unique qualities of the theory compel its selection. The theory might be simpler in its mathematics, for example, or has greater predictive power.

According to Chang (2012, p. 87), there is a “closure obsession” at work in such models of theory selection. At the beginning of corresponding historical reconstructions, there exists a diversity of theories that compete with one another. Then one is selected as true, and the others are rejected as false. The matter is closed. Overall, then, progress in the natural sciences becomes a function of diversity reduction. Of course, I am brushing with broad strokes here, as I will need to do throughout this paper, given the constraints of space and the nature of my considerations.

It is against the indisputably breathtaking progress in the natural sciences that critics of religion dismiss theology on grounds of lack of progress. The objection is that theology hasn’t made any progress measured by the advancements achieved in the natural sciences. Insofar as theology seeks to assert itself as a science even today, lack of progress indicates that it is an outdated science at best. Murphy (1990) struggles a

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great deal in this respect. Even her generous definition of the *scientific* character of the natural sciences in terms of “Lakatosian research programmes” requires novelty from theology if it wants to continue to be regarded as a science proper. Her characterization of Catholic Modernism as a theology that satisfies the criterion of novelty is probably the weakest element in the case of Murphy (1990) for theology as a science comparable to the natural sciences. But that is not my point in the present context. Rather it is the fact that Murphy (1990, p. 99) is acutely aware of a challenge presented to theology by a certain philosophy of modern science that pertains to progress at its core. If theology were “degenerative, since it allows for no novel” outcomes, then it ceases to be a science.

According to Harrison (2015, p. 116), the three most important conditions that made complaints about theology’s lack of progress possible are “a distinctly modern idea of progress” and related “changes to *scientia* and *religio*,” which he argues are the predecessors to today’s “science” and “religion.” Harrison (2015, p. 120) clarifies that “the idea of progress is relocated from the sphere of the individual into the historical realm.” At the same time, Harrison (2015, p. 141) argues, *scientia* and *religio* ceased to be “a kind of training of the mind or soul that moved the person in the direction of their natural fulfillment.” They became “reified in a way that” a “science” emerged that is exclusively defined by its theories, while “religion” makes an appearance as defined mostly by its doctrines (which render rituals meaningful at the theoretical level). As progress begins to mean the accumulation of *propositional* knowledge, scientific and religious inquiries into the world enter into an *asymmetrical* relationship by conceptual necessity.

The asymmetry between the two is a function of the modern constellation of science and religion, according to Harrison (2015, p. 141), “since there is a degree of finality and sufficiency in the original deposit of revealed truth” on the part of the Christian religion. In the religious realm, there is a limit to progress defined as the accumulation of truths, unlike in the scientific domain, insofar as divine revelation is conceptualized in terms of an original deposit of truths that are spelled out by a tradition of insights resulting from faithful reflection on that deposit. In short, it is impossible for theology to produce new true propositions of revelatory quality. This explains the urge to find evidence of the doctrine of the Trinity in the original deposit of truths. It is right there; theology just needs to try to bring it to light.

Harrison (2015) is primarily concerned with Christianity due to his views regarding its unique role in the rise of modern science (see Harrison 1998; 2007). I tend to agree with Brown (1999; 2000) in his assertion of the untenability of the conceptual distinction between an original deposit of truths and a tradition of insights resulting from faithful reflection on that deposit. Still, given its prominent place in the history of Christian thought, it is certainly not implausible to assume that Christianity asserts that all true propositions meant to be conveyed to humanity by means of special revelation (in addition to what is conveyed through God’s creation as a means of general revelation) were indeed conveyed. There is no true proposition that could be added to that. Thus, Christian theology couldn’t be expected to make progress in the sense of adding further divine truths. It is not meant to make progress in this sense. Its

task is to clarify the truth contained in the original revelation and to translate it for different times and cultures.

Christian theology is necessary insofar as its divine revelation requires substantial interpretative work. It brings to the fore the universal truths of divine revelation that occurred at a particular time and in a specific cultural context. Theology helps to universalize what is not meant to be true only relative to a specific culture at any given time. In other words, the development of a tradition of theological insights becomes an essential element of divine revelation. While all true propositions were deposited at one point in history, their universal meaning requires constant theological work to address the conditioned character of all apprehensions of that deposit throughout the ages. Tradition could be said to progress in the sense of an increased *understanding* of divine truths. But there are no truths to be added. Christian theology is stagnant in this respect by definition.

Of course, Christian denominations vary significantly in their approach to developed tradition. Some prioritize tradition above original revelation as a matter of principle, while others insist that tradition must always be subordinate to original revelation. In any case, original revelation and tradition are intricately linked in Christianity, shaping religious practice and theology. The exact relationship between them depends on what is considered to constitute "original revelation." Some equate it with the text of Scripture, either in part or in its entirety, while others focus on the life, deeds, and words of Jesus of Nazareth. There are also notable differences in ecclesiology and pneumatology among the various Christian denominations regarding the development of tradition. Some view the Pope as the preserver of original revelation, while others look to a council. The Holy Spirit is often seen as the guarantor that both the Pope and the council succeed in their divinely sanctioned tasks.

All of these very important qualifications cannot be fully addressed at this point for present purposes. My main concern is that Harrison (2015) has a valid point regarding the asymmetry between science and religion under the premises of modernity. To frame it in the terminology of Murphy (1990, pp. 184–185), Christianity has a "hard core": a single synoptic, imaginative judgment regarding what Christianity is all about, which was reached based on the New Testament texts. Additionally, there are "dogmas" that are "normative statements officially adopted" to restrict interpretation of that "hard core." To put it simply, by conceptual necessity, Christianity experiences a retardation, if we follow the categories employed by Harrison (2015) in his study of the genealogy of the constellation of science and religion today. The conclusion drawn from my discussion of Harrison (2015) is that an objection to the cognitive merits of theology based on its lack of progress is ineffective. It is essentially a conceptual triviality that there is no progress in Christian theology. Progress and Christianity do not inherently align, unless "progress" is understood to denote growth in fellowship with "Christ," or a deeper understanding of the revealed truths that were deposited.

The problem to be addressed must lie hidden somewhere else in the comparison between the fast-progressing natural sciences, on the one hand, and a stagnant theology, on the other. Of course, from an atheistic point of view, there can't be any progress in theology, as there is nothing that theology could make progress about. "I

have yet to see any good reason to suppose that theology (as opposed to biblical history, literature, etc.) is a subject at all,” advises Dawkins (2006, p. 57). If the assumption is that there is no God, then theology amounts to speculation about the inner life of a superman or about his transformation from human to superhero, as suggested by the late Daniel C. Dennett (see Dennett & Plantinga, 2010). According to Atkins (2018, p. 159), theology is “the scholarly version of the Cheshire cat.” Again, the religious critic seems to make a trivial point. Assuming the non-existence of God, theology cannot progress because there is nothing it can make progress about. However, the lack of progress in theology is not what carries the case against theology.

My point is not to dismiss the complaint about the perceived lack of progress in theology. On the contrary, I believe the objection touches on a pivotal matter for our understanding of the relationship between science and religion. What the critic of theology misses, however, is that a proper appreciation of the matter has important consequences with respect to some of the assumptions about the nature of the natural sciences that the critic makes. One of those assumptions concerns the role that diversity plays in assessments of theology’s progress (or better: lack thereof) in comparison to the progress made in the natural sciences, which ultimately leads to the verdict that theology is cognitively vacuous. “Indeed, if this planet requires anything,” Atkins (2000, p. 26) tells us, “it is the universality of pursuit and achievement that science represents, not the sectionalization so typical of religion.”

What I am striving to articulate in this paper is a clear expression of uneasiness regarding the view articulated by Atkins (2000, p. 26). It is the view that the natural sciences possess a unique ability to reduce diversity of all sorts (national, ethnic, geographical, linguistic, cognitive, doxastic, etc.), while religion propagates diversity of all sorts (many religions, various denominations, contradictory beliefs, etc.). Moreover, religion’s unique flaw in propagating diversity is perceived to weaken humanity’s overall cognitive abilities. “How ironic it is that religion, which purports to be the spiritual ally of humanity, denigrates its potential,” reasons Atkins (2000, p. 27), “whereas science, which opponents claim cannot tread in the spiritual dimension, respects, encourages, and exposes the awesome power of human comprehension.” Where religions overlap, there is conflict, but when science overlaps, there is mutual support. In essence, then, theology’s stagnation is deemed to hinder otherwise achievable cognitive progress due to the purported uniqueness of religion in perpetuating diversity beyond the religious realm.

To clarify this important point, the British mathematician and science icon Jacob Bronowski propagated the notion that the natural sciences provided humanity with all the values it needed in the shadow of the atrocities of Auschwitz and Nagasaki-Hiroshima. He argued that the natural sciences contributed to the remarkable moral progress humanity has made of late, embodying all the “human values” necessary. In contrast, Bronowski (1972, pp. 45–46) contends that religion offers only superstition and causes harm both morally and cognitively. He emphasized the unique cognitive power of the scientific ethos, asserting that while scientific methods, beliefs, and theories may change over time, the essence of modern science is defined by an ethos. This ethos guides good practice and establishes communities infused with human values, making the scientific community the best model of society at large.

Bronowski (1972) aims to elucidate the unprecedented progress modern science has enabled humanity to achieve beyond the scientific realm. The progress in the scientific domain is indeed remarkable enough to undermine the credibility of theology. "Look how far we have come," rejoices Atkins (2000, p. 28), "in under a hundred years of scientific effort (in contrast, I might add, to the total lack of progress after several thousand years of religious effort)." Science and theology have engaged in a competition in which theology has emerged as the loser. "Today, thanks to the relentless advance of the sciences," explains Wilson (1978, p. 171), "God's immanence has been pushed to somewhere below the subatomic particles or beyond the farthest visible galaxy."

Theology finds itself in retreat as the diversity-reducing natural sciences have absorbed its domain. Theology's only hope lies in finding a niche far removed from where the hard cognitive labor happens. The history of science is cited as evidence to support the notion that "we have been steadily moving toward a satisfying picture of the world. We hope that in the future we will have achieved an understanding of all the regularities that we see in nature, based on a few simple principles, laws of nature, from which all other regularities can be deduced" (Steven Weinberg quoted in McLeish 2014, p. 217).

What I find expressed in Weinberg's vision is a commitment to the metaphysics of scientific monism, as defined by Kellert, Longino, and Waters (2006, p. x), which revolves around four key assumptions. Firstly, science has an ultimate aim, which is "to establish a single, complete, and comprehensive account of the natural world (or the part of the world investigated by a particular science) based on a single set of fundamental principles." Henceforth, I will refer to this assumption as *Axiological Monism*. Secondly, "the nature of the world is such that it can, at least in principle, be completely described or explained by such an account." Henceforth, I will refer to this assumption as *Ontological Monism*. Thirdly, "there exist, at least in principle, methods of inquiry that if correctly pursued will yield such an account." Henceforth, I will refer to this assumption as *Epistemological Optimism*. Fourthly, "methods of inquiry are to be accepted on the basis of whether they can yield such an account; and individual theories and models in science are to be evaluated in large part on the basis of whether they provide (or come close to providing) a comprehensive and complete account based on fundamental principles." Henceforth, I will refer to this assumption as *Elitism about Methods and Theories*.

In the hands of the foes of religion, scientific monism as defined pushes religion out of the realm of cognitively meaningful perspectives on reality. The comprehensive and complete account based on fundamental principles explains religion away. Darwinian evolutionary theory can not only explain the features of the world that gave religious explanations some traction in the past but can even explain religion itself. Such bold claims are not the focus of my current inquiry. More intriguing is the adoption of scientific monism by apologists. Some tread carefully in doing so, such as McGrath (2019), while others are bolder, such as Polkinghorne (2007). Then there are those who seem to have lost all restraint, such as Swinburne (2007).

In conclusion of this section, it seems warranted to interpret complaints about the lack of progress in theology as follows: Religious diversity is insurmountable, while

scientific diversity isn't, and insofar as this is true, theology is cognitively void because insurmountable diversity is an indication of cognitive vacuity. Moreover, the cultivation of cognitive vacuity is harmful to the cognitive progress humanity can make.

Diversity as a Value

According to McGrath (2019), the various types of diversity in the sciences support the case against the notion of universal rationality. McGrath (2019) insists on the existence of "multiple rationalities" to make room for theology vis-à-vis the natural sciences. This approach coheres with the fact that all elements of scientific monism previously listed have come under enormous pressure in recent decades. *Axiological Monism* has been challenged on historical (see Laudan, 1984) and philosophical grounds (see Rowbottom, 2014). There are not one, but many aims of science, and none could count as overarching. *Ontological Monism* has been confronted with "The Dappled World" (see Cartwright, 1999) and "The Disorder of Things" (see Dupré, 1993). *Epistemological Optimism* has been thrown into doubt by "counter-induction" (see Feyerabend, 2010[1975]). And *Elitism about Methods and Theories* faces persistent cases of epistemological diversity. What this means is that the same phenomenon elicits a variety of explanations, each of which exhibits exemplary explanatory power. However, when taken together, they resist integration in a manner that would satisfy the standards of scientific monism.

Longino (2013) argues that human sexuality exemplifies such a phenomenon. The available theories and explanations span a range from quantitative behavioral genetics to social-environmental approaches and neurobiological frameworks. Longino (2013, p. 16) explains that her "social epistemological stance supports a pluralist response to the existence of multiple scientific approaches to a given phenomenon or range of phenomena." She clarifies that a monist response views this multiplicity as a sign that either critical evaluation or further empirical work is necessary to narrow down the options to a single correct approach.

That seems the position of McGrath (2019, pp. 224–226), who commits to a kind of theologically enhanced scientific monism advanced by Polkinghorne (2007). Both find a "Trinitarian 'big picture'" approach to diversity plausible. McGrath (2019, p. 145) explains that the "doctrine of the Trinity functions as a *theoria*, a way of holding things, allowing us to see our world in a new way, and also to understand our experience in a new way." Moreover, McGrath (2019, p. 144) asserts, "Trinitarianism is a good example of the kind of self-evidencing explanations noted by Carl Hempel, in which the quality of what is explained constitutes a ground for believing that the explanation itself is correct."

Polkinghorne (2007, p. 99) expresses hope for a "Grand Unified Theory." Theology has a "dual role" in accomplishing such a theory, Polkinghorne (1996, p. 46) clarifies, serving both as the specialist investigation of particular types of religious experience and insight and as the great integrating discipline that incorporates the results of all specialist investigations.

The hope for a “Grand Unified Theory” is fueled by the successes of theory incorporation and unification observed in the sciences, particularly in physics. “One could write the history of modern physics in terms of its being a continuing quest for greater generality and deeper unity in our conceptual understanding of the physical world,” according to Polkinghorne (2007, p. 97). Historical achievements, such as those of Galileo and Newton overcoming the dichotomy of celestial and terrestrial physics, and the contributions of Ørstedt, Faraday, and Maxwell in the formulation of electromagnetism, are notable. Additionally, Steven Weinberg and Abdus Salam are commended for their advancements in unifying electromagnetism and the weak nuclear forces. Although producing a theory that encompasses all fundamental forces, including gravitation and the strong nuclear forces, remains challenging, the history of physics provides sufficient grounds for hope, according to Polkinghorne (2007).

There can be absolutely no doubt that unifications of the kinds listed did occur. But it is an entirely different matter what they mean. Do they evidence progress in the approximation to the one single truth of the world by means of significant additions to accumulated true propositions about the world? Do they reflect the ontological unity of nature? Are they essential pieces of the one true account of the world?

Foucault (1970) and Kuhn (1962) have challenged positive answers to these questions. Both agree that the world admits a variety of mutually incompatible theories because there is a gap between world and theory, which is bridged by means of what Foucault calls *episteme* and Kuhn calls *paradigm*. Moreover, they agree that in the history of science, transitions occurred that meant the abrupt and total replacement of one episteme or paradigm by another largely incompatible episteme or paradigm. Those are times of scientific revolution. Finally, they agree that a successor episteme or paradigm does not incorporate or absorb the predecessor episteme or paradigm. In effect, a significant problem for scientific monism arises. In the words of Friedman (2002, p. 182), “since there appear to be no generally-agreed-upon constitutive principles governing the transition to a revolutionary new scientific paradigm or” episteme, “there would seem to be no sense left in which such a transition can still be viewed as rational, as based on good reasons.”

In effect, the first foundational pluralist manifesto for the philosophy of science was tabled by Suppes (1978). It directed attention to actual scientific practice for purposes of philosophical analysis. A careful assessment of explanatory practice in 20th-century biology led Fox Keller (2002) to reject a monist framing of the discovered diversity of accepted types of explanation. Fox Keller (2002) found a variety of types of explanations aimed at making sense of life and deemed it impossible to integrate them into one general definition of explanation. The opposite seems desirable because the differences between explanatory strategies pursued with respect to the same phenomenon are, to a good degree, a function of the various interests and values that guide scientists. A population geneticist has unique interests and values compared to a molecular biologist. It is these values and interests that imbue an explanation with cognitive power in the first place. “The need for understanding,” Fox Keller (2002, p. 297) explains, “as for explanation, is a human need, and one that can be satisfied only within the constraints that human inquirers bring with them.” This produces a “multiplicity of explanatory styles in scientific practice,” Fox Keller (2002, p. 300)

clarifies, “reflecting the manifest diversity of epistemological goals which researchers bring to their task.” The resulting, at times mutually incompatible, diversity of types of explanations for the same phenomenon deserves a pluralist framing since it “is now not simply a reflection of differences in epistemological cultures but a positive virtue in itself, representing our best chance of coming to terms with the world around us.” In other words, the greater the consilience in interests and values, the more likely are explanatory unifications, and maybe by extension theory unifications. In the more likely absence of such consilience, disunity prevails. In any case, it is important to stress that the elevation of interests and values to the level of cognitively significant elements of scientific rationality is based on the conviction that value judgments can be subjected to meaningful objective inquiry (see Putnam, 2002). We need to learn to “distinguish pluralism from relativism. The most fundamental difference is,” according to Chang (2012, p. 261), “that relativism involves a renunciation of judgment and commitment at least to a degree which pluralism most definitely does not.”

Among the most powerful examples of a phenomenon that resists a monist framing of the explanations it has solicited is the evolution of sexual reproduction. About twenty accounts exist today as to why sexual reproduction evolved in addition to asexual reproduction. Not even one has commanded wide assent in the scientific community, as Ruse (2012, p. 186) correctly observes, and their integration proves extremely difficult. The diverse interests and values that are at play in the available explanations drive the different descriptions and models of the various relevant aspects of sexual reproduction in different directions – ranging from population genetics (see Roughgarden, 2009) to biochemical mechanisms involved in cell division in the production of gametes (see Bernstein, p. 2007). Each of those aspects is indispensable when accounting for the evolution of sex in its entirety, according to Longino (2013, pp. 19–121) and Fausto-Sterling (2000, pp. 235–255). But they vehemently resist a monist framing.

Unification in terms of scientific monism can only be achieved, it seems, by means of a significant degree of abstraction from the values and interests that guide the various explanations. But it is exactly those values and interests that imbue the accounts of the various individual aspects with explanatory power in the first place. What follows is a significant diversity of scientific explanations with respect to one and the same phenomenon and, increasingly, the diversity solicits acceptance of a pluralist framing (see Meirmans and Strand, 2010). What we have before us has been dubbed the “Queen of Problems in Evolutionary Biology” because of the important role that sexual reproduction plays in evolutionary biology.

Stengers (2018, p. 100) urges scientists to face up to “the challenge of developing a collective awareness of the particularity and selective character of their own thought-style.” This is “a matter of collective learning through the test of an encounter with dissenting voices around issues of common interest.” This would slow the sciences down in a good way because it means “civilizing scientists, civilization being equated here with the ability of members of a particular collective to present themselves in a non-insulting way to members of other collectives, that is, in a way that enables a process of relation-making.” This is an important step towards reintegrating the natural sciences into democratic discourse.

Jasanoff (2019, pp. 132–138) argues that the natural sciences have developed various strategies to exempt themselves from participation in democratic discourse as far as their scientific work is concerned. One of them is the strategy of discursive narrowing. What this means is that the imagination of possible futures is narrowed down to those futures that scientists themselves can foresee. In consequence, this allows scientists to exercise control and to limit outside interference. Scientific monism seems like an important tool to achieve such discursive narrowing. Not surprisingly, then, Jasanoff (2019) aims to advocate pluralism about theories of life. “Once again,” Jasanoff (2019, p. 175) stresses, her aim is to highlight that the existing multiple theories of life “exist for reasons we prize as human beings, and they rightfully configure our moral and political imaginations. Biology that claims a monopoly on defining life flattens an indescribably layered and complex concept when it contextualizes what life is from eons of reflection on what life is for.”

In conclusion of this section, scientific monism competes increasingly with scientific pluralism. It seems virtuous to retain diversity in the natural sciences for the sake of enhancing both explanatory power over reality and democratic discourse.

Diversity as an Opportunity

In this section, I will present three reasons against a monist framing of religious diversity on theological grounds. The aim is to object to theological enhancements of scientific monism, which contend against the viability of monism solely through a scientific lens. Theology is employed to bolster monism, and it is this aspect that I object to in this section. I will retain Christian theology as my primary example.

The first argument concerns the theological diversity that defines the Christian Scripture. It contains various Christologies, theologies of creation, and notions of covenant, to name a few examples. The biblical scholar Walter Gross (2001) has strongly objected to attempts to frame the texts of the Christian canon in monist terms. I cannot discuss in detail his substantial and highly persuasive critique of such attempts here, nor is it necessary for present purposes. In the current context, it will suffice to note his claim that it is impossible to extract in a methodologically controlled manner a theological unity from the texts that constitute the Christian canon. The canon speaks with many theological voices, and each voice deserves theological recognition and appreciation. In other words, Gross (2001) rejects the notion that biblical scholars would only be engaged in historical-philological analysis of the biblical texts, while genuine theological work is done elsewhere. The biblical scholar encounters theologies and is fully prepared to appreciate them as such, even from the perspective of the historical-critical method of exegesis. Gross (2001) finds that the Bible’s theological heterogeneity permits the Christian faithful access to different theologies at different times. Every era has its theology, and the Christian canon preserves the resulting theological diversity. Of course, as a trinitarian Christian, a biblical scholar reads the Bible as testimony to the revelation of the one triune God in Jesus Christ. However, this does not mean that it would be methodologically permissible for a biblical scholar to project meanings onto texts that, according to the

historical-critical work done on the text, must be deemed foreign to the text. We are dealing here with two different levels of hermeneutics, and it is paramount not to conflate them for the sake of a monistic framing of the Bible's theological diversity.

This brings me to my second argument. The theological heterogeneity of the Bible is largely a result of its long history. Trinitarian Christians, who view the Bible from the endpoint of that history, perceive a development from the beginning of the world to the time of Jesus Christ. Some texts of the Bible support such a reading. In fact, the structure of the canon suggests the legitimacy of reading the Bible from the end backward. While this may not align with the standards of the historical-critical method, some have argued that it is sanctioned by God through Jesus Christ (see Söding, 2005). Jesus established a community that has been endowed with certain powers. The church exercises these powers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. One of these powers involves the interpretation of the Bible in a manner that reveals its theological unity. Whatever the merits of this argument may be, Swinburne (2007, p. 182) is right when he notes that "the Church is divided and cannot function properly." Consequently, the theological heterogeneity that characterizes the Bible is reproduced at the level of its interpretation, with no higher authority in sight to arbitrate disagreement for the sake of a monist framing of the Christian canon.

My *third argument* concerns the exciting developments in Jewish-Christian relations over the past five decades. I have analyzed them elsewhere at length (for a start see Fehige, 2024, pp. 145–153), and thus I can be brief in the present context, although we are dealing with an extremely complicated case of inter-religious relations. It is no exaggeration to say that Christianity took a U-turn in its teaching on Rabbinic Judaism. I distinguish between Biblical Judaism to which Jesus, Paul, and other significant figures of early Christianity belong, and Rabbinic Judaism, which is the Judaism we find practiced in most synagogues today. That distinction might not be the best way to put things from the angle of historical scholarship. But it helps at least to avoid confusion, such as those pertaining to the text *Nostra Aetate*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, during the Second Vatican Council. As I have argued in Fehige (2010; 2012, pp. 64–78; 2016), it is a great mistake to think of that text as the foundational document of the Roman Catholic Church for a dialogue with Rabbinic Judaism. The text speaks about Biblical Judaism but remains silent on Rabbinic Judaism as defined previously. And yet, the text marks the beginning of an end to hundreds of years of extremely tragic relations between Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. Today, Roman Catholics no longer pray on "Good Friday" for the "perfidious Jews." Rabbinic Judaism is no longer seen as a maldevelopment, although it insists that Jesus was not the Messiah of the Jewish people, and that Jewish law continues to be in full effect.

The developments should certainly be welcomed from a theological point of view on the Christian side of things. For starters, Christianity's very own sources of religious authority strongly suggest that Rabbinic Judaism *continues* to be true and that it is to a considerable degree *independent of* Christianity in its salvific quality. In recent Christian teachings on Judaism, both have been confirmed. This is especially true for Pope John Paul II. This is very important in the present context, because a significant part of the Christian Scripture was addressed to Biblical Judaism, and Christianity has come to

accept that in Rabbinical Judaism these texts find their *primary* addressee that offers a *legitimate* reading of the texts which are irreducible to a Christian reading of the same texts (i.e., the books of the “Old Testament”) (see Zenger, 1996; 2004). To put the matter more dramatically, the same texts solicit two at times *unavoidably* competing and *mutually irreducible* interpretations. The substantial theological challenge that arises from this situation concerns the nature of the relationship of these two types of interpretations.

A rejection of the interpretations of Rabbinic Judaism would hurt the integrity of the Christian interpretations, insofar as they depend on the writings of the “New Testament.” The Christian interpretations rely significantly on the *truth* of numerous texts from the “Old Testament,” as the “New Testament” often seeks to affirm their validity. This in turn informs contemporary Christian interpretations of the “Old Testament” texts, which compete with the interpretations offered by Rabbinic Judaism. If it is true that God did not revoke the covenant with the Jewish people through Jesus Christ, then the interpretations of Rabbinic Judaism of the same “Old Testament” texts hold equal weight to Christian interpretations. Christians should resist the temptation to question this in order to solve the arising theological conundrum, as the expectation of the Parousia (the “Second Coming of Christ”) compels them to view the covenant between God and Rabbinic Judaism as unbreakable. Otherwise, the Christian hope of the “Messiah’s return” may diminish. Why would God honor any covenant if God discards the one that Rabbinic Judaism holds onto as it was given to Biblical Judaism? The alternative approach to argue that God did not revoke but actually fulfilled the covenant that had existed with Biblical Judaism in Jesus Christ is not terribly convincing either. This strategy goes to the heart of the intimate relationship between God and God’s people. Rabbinic Judaism does not agree with the assessment of Christians about their assessment of the covenant established by God with Biblical Judaism and to which they are committed faithfully. How can Christianity question the relationship between God and Rabbinic Judaism without being open to exactly the same scrutiny? Have Christians maybe misunderstood what kind of relationship God intended to establish in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth? It is important to keep in mind that the kind of covenant under consideration is not a contract between two parties, but a sovereign act on God’s part to establish an incorruptible interpersonal relationship. What evidence does Christianity have available that would lend support to its claims about Rabbinic Judaism that would not be available to Rabbinic Judaism itself in assessing the covenantal relationship Rabbinic Judaism claims to be part of in continuity to Biblical Judaism? Considerations like these suggest a pluralist approach to Jewish-Christian relations, despite the challenges it poses regarding truth (see also Kogan, 2008). To be clear, I am not offering here an outlandish theology. Others refer to what I call a pluralist framing, as “two covenant theory.” In my view, this theory is about right, all things considered.

Of course, I am fully aware of the “big elephant in the room,” which concerns truth. I fully acknowledge that a metaphysical theory of truth will be difficult to reconcile with the proposed pluralist framings, unless one is willing to tolerate skepticism in the sense of Nagel (1986). I am not convinced that the invocation of a notion of absolute

truth, even in the sense of a regulative idea, that could satisfy the standards of scientific monism, suffices to render, for example, the contentions plausible that Rabbinic Judaism cannot fully understand the divine revelation it believes to have received, and that its teachings fall short in significant ways by standards that follow from the kind of revelation that is to be expected given the probable truth of theism, as argued by Swinburne (2007, p. 240).

There is a "Jewish God," according to Swinburne (2007, p. 243), who has little to do with the "God of the Christians," as Swinburne (2007, p. 267) explains. According to Swinburne (2007, pp. 128, 136), Biblical Judaism was meant by God to be incorporated into Christianity. He argues that the "Old Testament" was only a preparation for the final revelation in Jesus of Nazareth (Swinburne, 2007, p. 280), and that it could not count as genuine divine revelation (a claim I show to be utterly wrong in Fehige (2012, pp. 106–152), using Swinburne's infamous "tests" for original divine revelation, as outlined in Swinburne (2007, pp. 107–131). And yet, Swinburne (2007, p. 170) contends that only those propositions of the "Old Testament" that were verified by Jesus's authentic divine revelation should be accepted as genuine divine revelation. Additionally, Swinburne (2007, p. 152) claims that the Christian Church has replaced "Old Israel," and he asserts the establishment of a "New Israel," namely the Church. However, he also claims that this very "Church" "is divided and cannot function properly" (Swinburne, 2007, p. 182). These are bizarre statements, I find, as much as I cherish the clarity and precision of thought exhibited in Swinburne (2007). Focus on the one single truth and a concern for a monistic framing of diversity has misguided that thought.

It seems really difficult to disagree with the thrust of the assessment of the theology of revelation one can find in Swinburne (2007) that was offered by the Biblical scholar Bradley McLean (2013, p. 372), according to which there is a disturbing "circularity" in "Swinburne's theology of revelation." This is said to be true, insofar as the "Church" not only is the exclusive *recipient* "of the true statements" he claims to be entailed in the texts that Jews and Christians share, but it "also has a role in elaborating and correcting them." Swinburne (2007, pp. 136–137) is clear in his claim that the Bible is not the original revelation, but only testimony to the original divine revelation that occurred uniquely and without equal in the life, deeds, and teachings of the historical Jesus! Unfortunately, Swinburne (2007, pp. 102, 277) explains, there was so much ambiguity in that event that the establishment of a "Church" was needed to interpret it truthfully. "It would seem", McLean (2017, pp. 382–383) notes, that "Swinburne admits that Jesus never said that he planned to found a Church," and even "admits that Jesus may not have intended to found an organization separate from Judaism. But this does not alter the facts of his case, since the role of the Church founded by Jesus is to determine the meaning of Scripture, as foreseen by God (the true author of Scripture), the historical testimony of the 'sentences' of Scripture is of little relevance. Once again," McLean (2017, p. 383) concludes, "the circularity of Swinburne's argument is exposed: since the Church's role is to interpret, correct, and expand the 'original revelation,' the Church preserves the right to even change the original revelation, under God's guidance, because God has foreseen that Scripture's final meaning would be different from its original meaning." According to McLean (2017,

p. 383), perhaps the “greatest failure” of Swinburne is his “misunderstanding of the nature of truth.” Swinburne’s approach to “the Christian Scriptures as non-contextual truth sent by God,” McLean (2017, p. 383) reasons, “is to turn hermeneutics into a monologue.” But “‘the primary hermeneutic condition’ can be attained only when we find ourselves personally addressed by the ‘other.’” In contrast to this principle, the force of Swinburne’s argument, in terms of its illocutionary effect, is to close down dialogue with people of other faiths.” It seems that in Swinburne (2007), the “closure obsession” has gone wild. I say this reluctantly, as I do have great respect for Richard Swinburne’s philosophical dedication.

In conclusion, it seems that we encounter diversity in the religious realm wherever we turn. Despite concerted efforts to frame religious diversity in monist terms, it resists in palpable ways. In effect, they afford opportunities for a pluralist framing. Contrary to what critics of religion claim, the diversity we encounter in the religious claim and the intellectual struggles their solicit, are not radically different from those instances of diversity in the natural sciences that resist a monist framing.

Conclusion

Nothing in this paper was meant to argue for scientific pluralism or theological pluralism. The aim of this paper was much more modest. I hope I had some success in raising concerns about invocations of truth to dismiss all diversity as merely transitory as a matter of principle. I have provided reasons why I believe pluralist framings of diversity are perfectly reconcilable with the highest integrity of cognitive work. The equation of pluralism with relativism is common, but that does not make it true. Accepting diversity while remaining committed to the pursuit of truth is not an indication of cognitive deficiency. Rather, it presents new opportunities to situate science and religion in societies operating under the premises of modernity.

In the first section, I demonstrated how diversity within the religious realm is often used to challenge the cognitive integrity of religion. The argument is that science shows how to deal with diversity of cognitive significance, and religion fails in this respect. I captured the commitment this argument exhibits in the notion of scientific monism. This commitment can be characterized by four key assumptions: *Axiological Monism*, *Ontological Monism*, *Epistemological Optimism*, and *Elitism about Methods and Theories*. In the second section, I contended that each of these four assumptions has faced significant challenges in recent decades, leading to the emergence of scientific pluralism as a serious alternative. It is erroneous to view diversity as indicative of cognitive deficiency. In the third section, I examined diversity within the religious realm. Contrary to critics of religion, the diversity encountered there, and the associated struggles are not fundamentally different. However, they do pose challenges to attempts to strengthen scientific monism theologically. In conclusion, there are compelling reasons to embrace the proposition that diversity deserves cultivation to some extent for the pursuit of truth.

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