Paper 3: Science and Religion

Due December 4, 2008

Write a 3-4 page (typed, single- or 1 1/2 - spaced) report on the topic of the relationship between science and religion in today’s society. The paper will be written in two parts, an initial thought and a reaction to others’ thoughts.

For the first part of the paper you will write a short (½ to 1 page) summary of your thoughts on the answer to the question, “Has science made belief in God obsolete?” You may answer the question however you wish (i.e. “yes”, “no”, or some qualified response in between), but you should describe your reasoning. You should use your own reasoning to answer the question, but you should not limit yourself to just your own situation. You should answer for society in general – Has science made belief in God obsolete for today’s society?

For the second part of the paper, to be started only after you’ve completed the first part, you will look at how others have answered the same question. Read through the answers that important thinkers in science, theology and philosophy today have given to the question in the article “Templeton Essays”. This series of essays was produced by the Templeton Foundation, a leading proponent for studies on the relationship between science and religion. Choose one response that you most agree with, summarize it and describe why you agree with it. Then choose one response that you most disagree with, summarize it and describe why you disagree with it. Finally, describe how your thinking on the question fits in with the other answers given, and how your thinking has been impacted by the responses you’ve read.

In any discussion, and particularly one like this where closely held beliefs are discussed, it is important to be respectful. There is no harm in reading and discussing ideas that are different from your own. Anyone with mature beliefs should be able to discuss alternate beliefs in a calm, rational way, without feeling threatened or angry. Your ability to demonstrate that you can understand, summarize and critique views that are either similar to or very different from your own will be a major component of this paper. Please understand that even if you believe certain views to be “obviously wrong” or un-Christian, you are still required to treat those views with respect, and to correctly summarize and critique them. Misrepresenting views that you disagree with is dishonest and will result in a grade near zero for the paper.

Be sure to be clear about which responses you’re referring to within your paper.

You will be graded on the basis of the depth of understanding and thinking displayed in your opinions and your responses to other views, and on the mechanics of the paper (i.e. grammar, references, spelling, etc). You will not be graded on what particular views you hold, who you agree or disagree with. You will, however, be graded on your ability to understand and correctly summarize the opinions of others in the essays you write about. Projecting your own opinions onto others and pretending that their ideas are what you think them to be will result in significant (i.e. 30-50%) reductions to your grade. Late papers will lose 10% off the starting point for the grade for each week that they are late. Remember that you need to achieve an average of 70% for the three papers in order to pass the class.