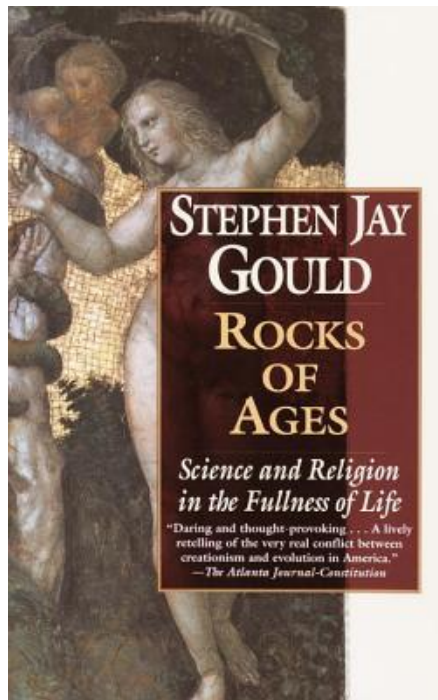




Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life

Stephen Jay Gould

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Writing with bracing intelligence and clarity, internationally renowned evolutionist and bestselling author Stephen Jay Gould sheds new light on a dilemma that has plagued thinking people since the Renaissance: the rift between science and religion. Instead of choosing them, Gould asks, why not opt for a golden mean that accords dignity and distinction to each realm?

In his distinctively elegant style, Gould offers a lucid, contemporary principle that allows science and religion to coexist peacefully in a position of respectful noninterference. Science defines the natural world; religion our moral world in recognition of their separate spheres of influence. In exploring this thought-provoking concept, Gould delves into the history of science, sketching affecting portraits of scientists and moral leaders wrestling with matters of faith and reason. Stories of seminal figures such as Galileo, Darwin, and Thomas Henry Huxley make vivid his argument that individuals and cultures must cultivate both a life of the spirit and a life of rational inquiry in order to experience the fullness of being human.

In *Rocks of Ages*, Gould's passionate humanism, ethical discernment, and erudition are fused to create a dazzling gem of contemporary cultural philosophy.

Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life Details

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From Reader Review Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life for online ebook

Karl-O says

Goodreads must really consider adopting ratings with 0.5 increments. I would really rate this book 2.5 stars or even 3 on a good day (which after a second thought is what today seems to be, hence the change from 2 to 3 stars). It was an interesting read especially when you consider the low expectations I had when I started reading it. In atheistic circles, this book is nearly seen as a betrayal of everything good and beautiful about science and I assure you it is nothing as such, at least not how it is often described to be. I would however, really criticize Gould for not being so consistent throughout his analysis. Like for example, he seriously thinks that Thomas shouldn't have questioned about Jesus being resurrected. I mean, really? Is there a real scientist (let alone someone like Gould who is clearly passionate and caring about science) who cannot applaud Thomas for his disinterest? Anyway, one gets the feeling that Gould has changed his mind a little between the beginning and end of writing the book, especially when he finishes by showing his derision of those who really think the Big Bang is consistent with Genesis or the notorious Templeton foundation that year after year violates his much beloved NOMA by awarding bigger-than-the-nobel-prize sums to scientists who show that science and religion are actually two things of explaining the same thing, whatever that is supposed to mean.

To come to NOMA, it is really not as bad as it is pictured to be. It is, in fact, a much more limiting factor for religion than science. Like the idea that if Science finds a fact about nature which contradicts religion, then religion must be wrong and science right. How can you disagree with such a thing? It is also an important limitation on science, which guarantees that scientific discoveries will conform more to the basic principles of science.

However, there are signs of the usual cowardice when he tries to define what religion actually is. He seems (like many of those who like to be nice to religious folks) to see all religions as more or less the same phenomenon which is something I really disagree with. We really need to acknowledge that some religions are more harmful than the others. Also, he views religion as something as broad as to include the whole of morality in it. So basically when a scientist tries to talk about morality, he is actually violating NOMA which is something I am not so sure about.

Anyway, much more interesting were the bits about how those opposed to religion have their own myths when it comes to the Dark Ages or Galileo and the like. The stories which are often told about the clergy believing that the earth was flat or of Galileo being more or less a martyr in the "holy" war between science and religion, are questioned and sometimes exposed to be frauds, just like many religious traditions are filled with them. So one can't help but feel the irony here, of all the places.

One last idea to end my rambling with, which is about agnosticism. Agnostics really think that they are more honest intellectually and not as "fundamentalist" as atheists or religious people are, but I'm afraid their case cannot be sustained. When Gould (who is an agnostic) talks about how Darwin's idea of Evolution by Natural Selection cannot refute God's existence, I cannot avoid disagreeing with that. For one thing, God's existence (at least before the near relativism of the 20th century religions) was a response to the fascination of humans with nature (including stars, planets, fear, dreams...etc. etc.), so when science explains it, it is really cowardly to say that it doesn't mean anything about God's existence. It makes it, at least, less likely for a God to exist and which is why I consider agnosticism a lame and not more than a politically correct idea and skeptical atheism a much more sustainable position.

Aaron says

A very interesting book. For those who don't know (which appears to include most of the reviewers), Gould is the world's foremost evolutionist. He is the one responsible for the theory of punctuated equilibrium -- required reading in any anthropology or biology 101 course worth its salt.

Gould suggests that things would go smoother if everyone realized that religion looks toward the moral sphere, and science towards the factual sphere, and each simply stayed off of the other one's turf. I have to wonder if some of the reviewers have actually read the book, which accurately claims that this was never the historical case.

For my part, I think he's exactly right, and I think this book ought to be required reading for all those religionists who create "biblically accurate" museums and for all the scientists who criticize religion in general. However, I don't think it would work, since it seems that most have already made up their minds and won't be persuaded otherwise no matter how impressive the credentials of the person who suggests otherwise.

Judy says

Stephen Jay Gould is an elegant writer who loved science and didn't understand the fuss between science and religion. In simple words, he saw science as a study of facts and religion the study of meaning and purpose. In other words, don't mix them up together. He died in the early 2000's suspecting that the fanatics/extremists on both sides would rise to the surface again. And they have. Oh well.

Domhnall says

This book sets out a case for the notion of "non overlapping magisteria" or NOMA, to insist that religion should stay out of science, science stay out of religion, but both engage in constructive interactions. There is no reason not to give full respect to both, each in their proper domain or "magisterium." He emphasises the folly of religion getting trapped into making factual claims that can be disproved by science. He also makes an interesting case that scientists get into trouble when they think they are competent to make claims about matters in the domain of religion. NOMA is not an easy option, he argues, but a discipline which both religious and scientific thinkers would do well to observe.

In support of this proposition, Gould supplies some interesting observations about the history of conflicts between science and religion. These remarks have the reasonable effect of challenging not only some of the stories used to disparage religion, but also some of the claims made by scientists and some of the political claims made in the name of science. I always enjoy revisionist history and the puncturing of well established myths. For example, he argues that Christians and the Catholic Church have never insisted that the world is flat.

His most interesting material (presumably because it is close to home) concerns the Creationist controversies in the USA. He gives helpful detail about the American court actions over teaching evolution and creationism in state schools. He stoutly defends Charles Darwin against uninformed and unfounded attacks.

He helpfully clarifies the specific errors made by Creationists. However, he also performs a useful service by clarifying the thinking that motivated much of the hostility to teaching evolution in state schools early in the 20th Century, pointing out quite firmly some of the intolerable assertions included in American texts about race and heredity based on a perverse misreading of Darwin. Early 20th Century America was a deeply racist nation, strongly committed also to ideas of eugenics, and the "science" textbooks in question were poisoned by racist ideology; it was by no means illiberal to protest, even if the specific arguments used proved erroneous. This is not a defence of creationism (quite the opposite - it attacks it) but it is a defence of the people involved and their motives at the time. The teaching of "evolution" was open to serious moral objections unless its presentation was radically changed. [It would have helped had Gould pointed out the huge influence of Herbert Spencer's writing about evolution, which were very much at odds with Darwin's thinking despite the label of "Social Darwinism" which Wiki describes as *"a politically motivated metaphysic very different in both form and motivation from Darwinist science"*; frequently, the ideas attacked by Americans when debating evolution are Spencer's and not Darwin's. The distinction is of major importance.]

Gould writes very well and has a big audience. What he has to say is interesting and thought provoking but I would suggest this book fails for the reason so much writing by scientists about religion fails, and that is the lack of philosophical training and the belief that common sense is an adequate substitute. Gould is a scientist breaking his own rule by trying to enter debate outside the "magisterium" of science without sufficient preparation.

If we are to debate the conflict of science and religion then we need some clarity about our definitions. He defines religion as follows: *"I will .. construe as fundamentally religious (literally binding us together) all moral discourse on principles that might activate the ideal of universal fellowship among people."* (p62). Conversely, he argues that fundamentalists, and notably Creationists in the USA, are not motivated by religion but engaged in politics and should be confronted politically without that affecting our view of religion itself. This is a concept of religion that may appeal to many people but it is not a valid account of what religion is.

In general terms, he argues that all concern with ethics, the meaning of life, our purpose and motivation for living, belongs to the realm of religion primarily on the grounds that humans have historically always embraced such topics within a religious framework. I certainly agree that we must respect the history of ideas for what it is and not discard or disparage the thinking of our predecessors because they were primarily religious. Nor should we allow religious differences, including atheism, to permit a slide into advocating hatred and hostility on the grounds of religious belief. There is much for an atheist to admire and respect in most religions and in any case, it will be a cold day in hell before religion vanishes from our social world. So hostility to religion is not helpful. My problem is that, historically, humans have overwhelmingly considered matters of science in religious terms too, so this is not a coherent basis to separate what Gould calls religion and what Gould calls science. Probably everything has at some time been considered "religious".

Science, on the other hand, he seems to regard as the realm of "facts" or facticity, the state of affairs, the way things really are. Matters of fact must be determined through the methods of science and disputes adjudicated on scientific criteria. It is not acceptable that religion is used to evade the factual evidence of science. When this does happen, the use of religious argument is typically spurious and conceals a political agenda unrelated to religion. Conversely, it is not possible to make moral or ethical or existential claims based on the facts exposed by science. This is of course the age old gap between what is and what ought to be.

However, it is also a false dichotomy. In order to divide the universe of ideas into two camps, religion and science, arbitrary and unconvincing definitions have to be accepted. I do not accept the Positivist notion that science is restricted to making factual statements about the natural world and at a minimum I want recognition of the methods and findings of the social sciences. But however science is defined (and Gould does not define it as far as I can see) that does not entitle religion to claim the residue of rational (or even just

human) thought, since there are so many other categories that can be deployed, including philosophy, politics and the humanities. I just cannot go along with the idea that ethics or aesthetics are religious and, for example, can cite Bishop Holloway arguing for "Godless Morality: Keeping Religion Out of Ethics", or Viktor Frankl's "Man's Search for Meaning" as a serious and effective discussion that does not require an appeal to religion; neither book is anti religion.

I am happy to conclude that Gould has written an interesting book and provided some very constructive historical information that may correct a number of myths. I disagree with his main argument for many reasons but that is not a reason to ignore the contribution this book still does make to the wider debate. We need to hear from scientists and Gould writes better than most; we just don't have to suspend our critical faculties when they speak.

Tim Pendry says

This is not one of Stephen Jay Gould's best books and should be seen as a polemic about the relationship between science and religion peculiar to its time and place - the struggle against creationism in the US in the last years of the last century.

To most Europeans, the core proposition is self-evident - science is a description of the world, 'religion' is the ascription by humans of value or meaning to the world. The two exist in separate spheres of understanding, each is an independent 'magisterium'.

From this point of view, the book might be interesting to Americans but less so to the rest of the world. His account of science is, as one would expect from him, unimpeachable. His account of religion less so. His desire to accord respect to religion equalises it and concedes too much ground.

In fact religion is simply a matter of power relations, the imposition of value by some on others, and value and meaning exist as much outside religion as within it. Gould's defensive posture, designed to win a local cultural debate, lets down those struggling for freedom elsewhere.

As a result, I am not sure anyone on the materialist side of the debate is going to get very much from it except concessionary arguments in debate with a room full of holy types. The book seems to buttress the religious establishment in order to shore up its support for science.

However, the old Stephen Jay Gould, a rational and incisive historian of science shines through with the best and most humane account of the Scopes trial and William Jennings Bryan that I have read to date. He is also good on his pet subject, the malignity and bad science of social Darwinism.

The passages on Jennings show how liberal East Coast readings of the Scopes trial have utterly misread the situation and that Bryan's critique at the time was more complex and nuanced than they allow themselves to admit - and the 'Darwinist' side more self-serving and less honest.

Gould is right that, in the context of the use of Darwinism in the interwar period ('bad science'), Bryan was trying to reindulcate some sense of value. He also accepted 'bad science' but his 'good value' was still superior in many ways to the misuse of science by his opponents.

Gould's conclusion is a sound one - science should be value-free in its exercise and presentation to the world but that means having strong values in deciding what must be done with the knowledge. Social Darwinism is

the type-case of bad social policies arising from an over-reading of science.

If there is a take home message of this book that I would want to emphasise, it is that value is entirely separate from science (though not to be assumed to be a matter of religion alone) and that religious language is often a means of establishing value against complete absence of value.

But the use of religion to establish value is always second best because value and meaning stand outside not only science but also outside religion itself. 'Religio' is simply the inculcation of chosen value in society, ritual, dogma, custom and text. It is not value in and of itself.

If a person needs religion to bring value to the world shown to us by science, then he or she has not mastered the independence of value from the world. Value and meaning are *intrinsic* to the human condition, found from within not imposed from without.

The book is, overall, a distraction. The defence of science here is excellent and certainly it needs saying over and over again, especially against those fluff merchants trying to merge science and 'spirituality' (whatever that is), that science can tell us nothing about value.

However, the transfer of value to religion is conservative and anti-progressive and far too much of a compromise by a writer known to have been at the leading edge of progressive thinking in the scientific community, unravelling conservative mythologies embedded in past scientific ideologies.

In short, he defends religion at the expense of philosophy to shore up a political position. Not impressed!

John Martindale says

Gould seems to relegate religion to issues of morality, and argues they need to accept scientific claims that miracles don't and cannot happen and that they violate NOMA (non overlapping magisteria) by seeking to get creationism taught in schools. But NOMA cuts both ways though, scientist (which deals with all facts and reality) have no right to use Darwinism as a means to establish moral truth, Gould gave an example of such misapplications of Darwinism finding their way into science textbooks. Gould wrote how Darwinism was used by social-Darwinist in their eugenics programs, by the Nazis to justify "Might makes right" and by many scientist who sought to use science to give weight to their racist prejudices. Later generations saw all of these things to be morally repugnant and also based upon bad science—as Gould argued in "The Mismeasure of Man." Morality is the domain of religion (It seems one could as well say philosophy), and science, though it indeed informs us on what IS, can never show us what we morally ought or ought not to do.

Towards the beginning of the book, Gould, while creating the setting for his case of NOMA, shared the biblical story about doubting Thomas and Jesus' response to him, and yes, I must agree that on the face of it, it seems like Jesus was telling the more scientific-minded Thomas "Blessed are the credulous who believe I rose from the dead, though they have not seen me, for those who have blind faith are better than you who demanded proof. Yes, I say that the more blind, baseless and contrary to the evidence faith is, the more virtuous it is" and thus Jesus shows us how religion is about obstinately believing in pure speculations, despite or contrary to the evidence, and how science alone can inform us on fact and reality. It seems Gould's concept of the nature of faith is similar Richard Dawkins caricature of it, but I think they both misunderstand what it is. Faith ultimately is trust, and it is unreasonable to place our trust in someone or something which we do not have reasons to believe is reliable. If we are justified in believing the gospel accounts (some

scholars and historians have given us many good reasons to do so) then we know that Thomas saw the miracles of Jesus, he heard his teachings, he heard Jesus tell him he would be crucified and be raised from the dead three days later, and yet still after Jesus was killed and after the other disciples told him they saw the risen Lord, Thomas refused believe the other disciples nor did he trust Jesus (though he had GOOD REASONS to do so), it was not that Thomas was reluctant to take a leap of faith, but instead he doubted three years of profound evidence of a Divine Man sent from God. He experienced Jesus to be trust-worthy and he didn't trust him, this was insulting.

It is within a relationship that giving someone the benefit of the doubt and trusting someones character, in uncertain times, becomes virtuous. No one treats a relationship with a woman in a highly critical, skeptical and scientific way and remains in that relationship for long! In a good relationship, we form reasoned conclusions about the other people, though we lack scientific certainty. Indeed our experience of the other, our observations of their character and actions inform us and gives us reason to trust them, even when mysterious and dark circumstances later on makes us look like the fool for doing so.

Now I do have one more bone to pick with Gould, who doesn't think the religious are justified in their belief in miracles for science has shown us they cannot happen. Gould is perfectly comfortable with Deist and liberal theologians and seems to think science has made this the only intellectual and reasonable position those of faith can take. I think Gould's understanding of a miracle is that it's a violation of the law of nature and since science has shown the reliability of natural laws, NOMA doesn't permit the religious person to think God actually does or could do anything in our world. I think Gould has a complete misunderstanding of the actual nature of a miracle if they do indeed occur. It is obvious that man manipulates nature and her laws and uses them to his own advantage, but in doing this he is not breaking the laws of nature! If we could go back several 100 years, much of our current technology would all seem miraculous, it would even seem as if we were violating the laws of nature. Now we merely need to suppose that if there is a God, just as man can act in the natural world—molding it to his own advantage, so God can likewise act, and just as man doesn't violate the laws of nature by doing so, God acting in the world doesn't violate the laws either, it's just that what he does seems like it to us, just like our technology and medicine would seem like magic to people in the past. Just because we can't see God doesn't rule out his activity, there are plenty of things in the natural world that are invisible to us that effect and alter the normal way of things. We can't see the wind, but we can feel the effects of the wind... wind can cause a feather to be swept up into air, is wind causing the feather to violate the law of gravity? Heck, we can reach down and pick up the feather ourselves, are we violating the laws of nature? I don't see why the idea of God raising up a feather is anathema and for God to do so would be for him to “break the laws of nature” in the mind of scientist and liberal Christians.

If I was in a Texas hotel and I left five 20 dollar bills in the dresser and left for the day, only to come back that evening and pulling open the drawer, to find only three 20 dollar bills in the drawer, I wouldn't proclaim “THE LAWS OF ARITHMETIC HAVE BEEN BROKEN!!!” But instead that “the laws of Texas have been broken!!!”

If there is a God, I think it absolutely absurd, that people think God can't do what humans do. Doctors work hard so not to allow nature to take it's course, are they violating the laws of nature in doing so? What if God acted like a doctor and brought healing in ways we've yet to figure out? Well, these cases would seem miraculous (there are countless cases of such mysterious healings and not all are easily explained-away by placebos) of course science cannot prove God did it, and thus NOMA does come into play here, but also science CANNOT say God didn't have part in it, which Gould is suggesting—and thus I think Gould is actually violating the vary principle of NOMA when making this ridiculous claim that it's a scientific fact that miracles don't and cannot happen.

Over all, I did enjoy this book, so I will go ahead and end on a good note, I am really thankful for Gould setting the records straight about the very popular myth that the ancients and the church during the middle ages believed in a flat-earth. It's amusing how so many of the atheist “Brights” are so credulous when it comes to embracing anti-religious propaganda, misinformation and memes that confirm their bias, and though calling themselves skeptics are so little discernment. It is refreshing that someone who atheist would consider their own, took some time to dispel some of the nonsense that spreads like a virus among secularist.

I liked how Gould gave a more reasoned coverage of Galileo, the Catholic church and the Scopes trial, among other things, and that he can acknowledge the reality that religion isn't pure evil and that it doesn't poison everything.

Michael says

SJG is clearly delusional to believe that science and religion occupy separate areas of knowledge, or NOMA.

This book will reassure those who want to feel warm and cuddly by giving science and religion equal respect.

It's a shame that a field based on empirical evidence and the testing of theories is considered an equally valid way of knowing as a field based on 2,000 year old assumptions and hearsay.

Science and religion overlap.

Sorry.

It's obvious that the field of science and its new findings are replacing the previously interpreted roles of our former gods.

"Non-overlapping"

Yeah, right.

Omar Essawi says

Although this was a great read in which Gould takes a very liberal position in his consideration of a very sensitive issue, I can't agree with the best part of it. In fact, I don't agree with the underlying premises. However, much respect to Gould and his attempt to reconcile this matter. I'd have rather given it 5 stars for enjoyability, and 1 star for validity.

Mike says

I understand the wide acclaim for Professor Gould. I can't speak to his scientific achievements, but he is a fabulous writer--a kind of Carl Sagan for biology, a man whose breadth of interests is matched by the felicity of his pen. So I enjoy reading his stuff, and this book was great.

My complaint with the New Atheists (decidedly not Gould's team) is that they define religion as the Fundamentalists do because they need the Fundamentalists' wacky literalism as a straw man to then destroy religion. We attack religion because religion IS fundamentalism and fundamentalism is ignorant and stupid. You consider yourself both religious and a non-fundamentalist? That's because, say the New Atheists, you're actually an intellectual wuss--you want the benefits of religion without actually committing to it. You're a sell out. Come back to us when you're a fundamentalist so we can attack you properly. Atheism may be more attractive than fundamentalism (perhaps....even probably), but it's got a more difficult opponent in liberal

religion. The solution? Deny that liberal religion is religion.

Gould wants to save the liberal religious folks. Ostensibly he's not against the fundamentalists, either, insofar they keep their fundamentalism to themselves. His principle of NOMA suggests that religion and science each have their own subject respective subject matter and competencies. And were this true, his philosophy would solve us from all the messiness of real life. But here's the thing. Gould defines science in a way most people would recognize, but he defines religion so narrowly that defenders of religion are left to wonder why there's remaining worth defending. Gould claims that religion, and religion alone (or, presumably, philosophy) can tell us about meaning and values. But as soon as it begins to involve itself in the world of factuality (not his word; his word was cooler, though I can't remember it. Maybe something like factuity) religion ceases to speak in its proper domain; it has entered the world of science. Which would be just fine if that's how religious folks understood the claims of their religions. But they don't. Of the world religions, I know Christianity best so that's all I can speak about. But Christianity turns on a historical event, the resurrection of a person. And it purports to describe all manner of past events, some involving humans and others involving God and nature.

So it's a little like this. Gould says that nation A and nation B are not at war because he says to nation A (science) behave yourself and don't be so arrogant! And to nation B (religion) he takes away their weapons and declarations of war and says "isn't peace grand?" Come over here you guys, time for a big group hug!!!

His world is a beautiful world in some respects, but it's effectually an atheistic world, a world in which there may or may not be a god, but that god is not allowed to intervene in the world or inspire His or Her followers to better understand factual reality.

Ci says

Stephen Jay Gould was an iconic figure in the evolutionary biology, as well as being a prolific popular science writer. He died in 2002 but his scientific writing in the area of evolution is still much admired. He was evidently an avid reader in addition to a highly successful scientific career.

However this slim book, with both a heart-felt sincerity and astonishing naiveté, demonstrated the author's tenuous grasp of both science and religion as something can be safely compartmentalized. His main idea is a peaceful co-existence with no cognitive contamination. Specifically, he proposed a "non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA) principle therefore divides the magisterium of science to cover the empirical realm: what the Universe is made of (fact) and why does it work in this way (theory). The magisterium of religion extends over questions of ultimate meaning and moral value. These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry."

At the first glance, this idea is wonderfully simple and clean. However, just like anything with such neat simplicity, it does not meet the messy reality of human reality. Science does not have its intrinsic ability to question its moral boundary, and religion of any use must be relevant to the "factual world" we live. In addition, religion is not just about ethics or morality, but something beyond (see Kierkegaard's theology). Yet even in Gould's own definition of religion as ethics and world-views are problematic. Taking stem cell research, cryonics, or legalization of cannabis, the demarcating boundary of science and religion is often illusory. If religion is about "what we ought or ought not to do" and science "what we can or can not do", then the pitting of the battles are more likely to be presence than a polite acquiesce from either sides. The moving of time and history changes these boundaries like the tide washing away lines in the sand.

Gary Beauregard Bottomley says

The book's theme is Science and Religion have non overlapping domains, Science can't give ethical and moral truths and that religion should be respected when it stays within it's own domain.

I'm glad this book is not influential today. When it was written (in 1998 according to the book itself) marriage equality was completely being shot down by the imprimatur of religion. Science actually refuted each of the arguments used by religion ("it's not natural", "people aren't born that way", "it's Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve who were in the Garden of Eden", and other statements which Religions defined as moral truths), and Science showed their statements to be false thus changing the dialog. Science didn't need to go into the ethical or moral sphere directly, but rather provided arguments to refute statements based on authority only. This book would have allowed the science but seems like it would have suggested it remain silent instead of challenging the religious dogma which was based on authority alone.

Another example, a current senator from Oklahoma has written a book on how climate change is impossible because his revealed religion tells him so based on his moral beliefs and his interpretation of his bible. That argument by itself deserves no respect. The science is speaking loud and clear and global warming is real and is man made. Once again, on strict reading of Gould's book he would have allowed the science to proceed, but he would have required respect in challenging the assertions. I would suggest the arguments put forth in that book should be attacked and shown no respect whatsoever.

He did say a couple things in the book that highlight its anachronistic nature. He says, what happened before the big bang is best left to religion since nobody can say what happened before. The overwhelming majority of today's physicist ignore that statement and give reasonable theories and speculate what happened before the big bang. Also, he thinks ID (intelligence design) is not significant (as he was writing in 1998). It is very relevant today. We even had a president since that time who thought Russia was Gog (or Magog) and is part of the 'end times' as prophesied in Daniel and Revelations.

Morality and ethics are complex. Reason, rational thought, experience and our empathy and concepts of reciprocity are good starting points. People who pretend to know things they don't know and thus have no doubt do not make for good starting points and are best ignored if possible, but unfortunately anti-Marriage Equality, Climate Denialism, Intelligence Design, and other such items have real world consequences and must be considered for what they are: absurd positions not worthy of respect.

Overall, the book is silly and is best ignored.

Lisa Kelsey says

This excellent book outlines how and why science and religion should coexist without any violation to either body. This has been my intuition for a long time and reading this book has helped clarify it in my mind.

In addition to speaking to the invalidity of attempting to answer questions of factual nature from within the realm of religion, I appreciate Gould's acknowledgement that scientists have also overreached their domain both historically and currently. Scientists must also be held accountable--not to succumb to using science as pretense to put forward their own prejudices or politics.

And I have always found the militant atheists railing against religion as particularly distasteful. Here, Gould puts my exact feelings into words:

"I do get discouraged when some of my colleagues tout their private atheism as a panacea for human progress.... If these colleagues wish to fight superstition, irrationalism, philistinism, ignorance, dogma, and a host of other insults to the human intellect...then God bless them--but don't call this enemy 'religion.'"

The answers to all questions are not to be found in any one "magisteria" (the word Gould uses to describe a domain where one form of teaching holds the appropriate tools for discourse). For a "full life" we must have a dialogue between them.

Noé Ajo caamaño says

Un inteligente tratamiento de las relaciones entre la ciencia y religión. Su propuesta invita al reconocimiento de que ambas instituciones no están abocadas a una guerra que debiera de resultar con un vencedor único, e incluso que la realidad histórica no ha sido en verdad una guerra tal. Por el contrario, pretende que se trata de magisterios que no se superponen: Ni la ciencia puede dictar normas morales o cuestiones de sentido, ni la religión tiene potestad para determinar lo que el mundo empírico puede ser o dejar de ser. Este principio permite además mantener la tensión de una discusión crítica, ya que por más que independientes, ambos magisterios se entretengan constantemente alrededor de temas fundamentales para la vida humana, quizás enriqueciéndolos.

Llama la atención también su reniego de dos tentaciones pretendidamente conciliadoras. En primer lugar, aquella que pretende evitar el conflicto por el expediente de cerrar el diálogo. Esta opción significa cerrar los ojos, ser políticamente correctos y bien-pensantes, evitando un combate al precio del inmovilismo, de no solucionar jamás nada. En segundo lugar, la tentación del secretismo, sencillamente imposible a la luz de la historia y de cualquier razonamiento bien formado; la ciencia y la religión no pueden tratar ambos sobre todos los temas y darse mutuamente la razón; sus magisterios reinan sobre realidades distintas, por más que relacionadas.

Quizás, comete el error de reducir la religión a cuestiones de sentido y moral; aún peor, parece incluir las cuestiones morales dentro del ámbito de la religión. No obstante, refiere también la necesidad de incluir al arte o la filosofía como otros tantos magisterios que habrán de reunirse y discutir, sin confundir sus ámbitos de confluencia, o incluso para aclarar las fronteras de los mismos.

Una obra bien escrita, que enfoca la articulación entre la ciencia y la religión, tratando de comprender como enriquecer la experiencia del mundo, en lugar de borrar del mapa modos de indagación diversos. Muy recomendable.

Ancient Weaver says

An intelligent book full of much common sense. In *Rocks of Ages* the author seeks a better understanding of religion, science, their limits, and their interplay. Gould writes as somebody displaying a well-rounded education and more than a little wisdom as opposed to what you most often find in the narrow, shallow, fanatical tirades of the more current New Atheists. Please read this book instead of Dawkin's *The God Delusion*. And if you read and/or liked *The God Delusion*, please try giving this book a read as a better alternative starting point to approaching the science/religion conflict.

Eric Wurm says

Gould puts forward his idea of non-overlapping magisteria, where science deals with facts and religion with values. What a positively terrible idea! Suggesting that science and religion can mind their boundaries and occupy separate fields of expertise is laughable. Facts inform values, and the fact is that no religion has demonstrated its tenets to have any form of veracity or even an air of verisimilitude. Why would we leave the domain of ethics and morality to people who believe that such things are delivered by a voice in whirlwind? Gould makes an excellent biologist, paleontologist, advocate for science, and author. He makes a terrible apologist for religion. Then again, is there any other kind?
