

Introduction

If you are going to disagree with your adversary in a debate in the public sphere, I want you to disagree with them for the right reason. A democracy ideally requires knowing the views of those you disagree with, so that your true differences can be negotiated. As a sociologist of religion, I often am bothered by seeing debates in the public sphere when people who are misinformed about American religion—typically nowadays these are social and political liberals—make empirical assumptions about their supposed adversaries that are most certainly false. These false assumptions distort the debate about the motives and predicted actions of adversaries in the public sphere, and often mislead these liberals into wasting their precious resources chasing dragons that do not exist, when they could be focused on effectively achieving their goals, like combatting global warming. Perhaps nowhere are these false assumptions more extreme than in discussions of religion and science.

This book is dedicated to trying to dislodge the myth that there is, in the public, a foundational conflict between religion and science, specifically that there is conflict over “ways of knowing” about the natural world. I know that discrediting this myth will not be easy. In popular accounts, “religion” and “science” have always been at war over knowledge, with the first battle being between Galileo and the 17th century Catholic Church. For example, a textbook on the relationship between science and religion identifies historical landmarks in the “debate” at least four centuries old: the “medieval synthesis,” the Copernican and Galilean controversies, debates over Newton’s ideas, and Darwinism.¹ This narrative of conflict is classically indicated in the title of an 1896 book by the former president of Cornell University Andrew Dickson White: *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*.²

My argument is that, with a few limited exceptions, even the most conservative religious people in the U.S. accept science's ability to make factual claims about the world. By the end of this book I hope to disabuse the reader of the idea of fundamental conflict over knowledge about nature, while giving the non-religious a more accurate reason to (potentially) disagree with (some) religious people—namely, that religious people's *moral values* are different from those promulgated by science. There is a moral conflict among the public between religion and science.

This is not the perspective you will get from the theologians, scientists, and historians who currently dominate the discussion of religion and science, as they see the relationship—and thus any potential conflict—as primarily about knowledge. Up until very recently social scientists have also shared the knowledge conflict perspective. There are many reasons why these academics see this debate through this lens, which I will discuss in subsequent chapters. But, if we want to understand the relationship between *contemporary* religious people and science, we need to change our lens, or we will seriously misunderstand the situation, and seriously undermine our ability to have reasonable debates in the public sphere about how to move forward with our most pressing social problems.

To see how assumptions of a knowledge conflict are pervasive in the public sphere, consider global warming, one of the great moral challenges to the world. In global warming debates some liberals have created a dragon of religion to chase, wasting time, instead of focusing on what is really wrong about the public debate about climate change. To see the problem, let's look at some of the discourse in the Huffington Post, which is a major source of information for liberals. I looked at all of the Huffington Post articles categorized under "climate denial" that appeared to discuss religion.³

To anticipate what I will discuss in much more detail below, what has struck me as totally wrong in liberals' conception of religion and science is the presumption that religious people have a different way of knowing facts about the world than scientists, and that therefore if a religious person does not accept *one* scientific claim, this indicates that they will not accept *any* scientific claim. Therefore, the assumption continues, people who do not accept scientists' claims about human evolution will not accept scientists' claims about global warming.

In looking at these articles, a few have little analysis and yet leave the impression that conservative Protestants, if not all religious people, disagree with scientific claims about global warming because they also believe in religious claims. For example, an article titled "Rush Limbaugh: 'If You Believe In God . . . You Cannot Believe In Man-Made Global Warming,'" reports the comments of the prominent right-wing radio personality who said that "if you believe in God then intellectually you cannot believe in man-made global warming." The reason is that "you must be either agnostic or atheistic to believe that man controls something he can't create."⁴ That is, scientific fact claims that climate is a naturalistic process are

wrong because climate is actually controlled by God. This implies there are two opposing versions of how nature works and, consequently, two opposing ways of knowing about nature. The article does not explicitly say that ordinary religious people would agree with Limbaugh, but implies it, giving the impression that religious people would have a nonscientific way of knowing if and why the climate is changing.

More analytic posts by academics similarly reinforce these false assumptions. Philosopher and historian Keith Parsons writes about American reverence for science in the 1950s, stating that “something has been lost. Fifty years ago science was king. Science had respect; it was bigger than ideology. No longer.” He criticizes postmodern skepticism about truth from the left, and concludes that the biggest enemy of science is “big money.”⁵ But in his depiction of the right’s suspicion of science, he focuses on a religiously inspired conflict over knowledge claims. He writes that “the Texas State Board of Education, which is dominated by religious fundamentalists, prefers the propaganda of ax-grinding cranks over the recommendations of hundreds of qualified scientists and scholars.” His example of conflict is evolution: “How, indeed, has it ever come to be thought that there is still a scientific debate over evolution, or that pluperfect nonsense like creationism is worthy of a hearing? How did there come to be a multi-million dollar ‘creation museum’ in Kentucky, with full-scale models of dinosaurs fitted out with saddles? (Why saddles? So Adam and Eve could ride them around Eden. Duh.)” Everything he writes about Texas fundamentalist Protestant beliefs and creationism is probably true, but the implicit conclusion here is that the industry-funded skepticism of *global warming* science is abetted by the same fact-conflict for evangelicals that leads them to believe that dinosaurs needed saddles. This could only be the case if he presumes that conservative Protestants unwillingness to accept scientific claims about evolution means they will not accept any fact claim from science.

It should be no surprise that the most un-nuanced version of these assumptions comes from a prominent atheist scientist who clearly wants to portray religion in a negative way. In a Huffington Post article titled “The Folly of Faith,” the recently deceased physicist and atheist author Victor Stenger starts by writing “religion and science have long been at war with one another.”⁶ He sees a war of facts: “Religion is based on faith. By contrast, science is not based on faith but on objective observations of the world. This makes religion and science fundamentally incompatible.” This is the pure form of the myth: there is a religious way of knowing and a scientific one—and they are mutually exclusive. Moreover, he writes, “nowadays, religious leaders and their political supporters are increasingly, and more stridently, trying to define the real world on their own terms. In the process, they are undermining scientific consensus on issues of great consequence to humans everywhere, such as overpopulation and planetary climate change.”

He then provides two pieces of evidence. One is that the Cornwall Alliance, which appears to be an energy-industry funded group of religious right figures, claims that God created a resilient planet that can withstand changes. Second, that there are conservative Protestant climate change deniers who feel that “it is hubris to think that human beings could disrupt something that God created.” Stenger implies that these religious-right activists represent “religion.”

In a subsequent post titled “Global Warming and Religion,” Stenger provides more justification for his claim of a connection between religion and global warming denial.⁷ He starts with poll results that showed that, while 58 percent of the religiously unaffiliated believed in global warming, only 50 percent of religious believers do, which is “evidence for a correlation between religion and global warming denialism.” Those trained in social statistics will recognize that this is at best a very weak correlation. However, he continues by noting 34 percent of white evangelical Protestants polled believed in global warming. One reason for conservative Protestants not believing in global warming is belief in Armageddon, he says, and then quotes as evidence the view of a Republican house member that climate change is a myth because God told Noah he would never destroy the Earth by flood again. Of course, we have no evidence that typical members of evangelical groups believe in this link between climate change and Armageddon, but again it is implied.

This type of survey data has been more closely analyzed by sociologists. The question is: is it the religion of evangelicals that leads them to be more skeptical of scientific claims about global warming, or some other characteristic that evangelicals tend to have? Evangelicals are anti-elite, and conservative in the traditional sense of the term—suspicious of government. When you take the basic opinion statistics of the type Stenger uses but control for Republican party identification and political ideology, the religion effects disappear and conservative Protestants are just as much believers in global warming as are the non-religious.⁸ What does this mean? It means that there is not a religious basis for global warming denial, but rather the basis is other characteristics of evangelicals—probably that they watch too much Fox News. Stenger’s assumption about fundamentally different ways of knowing fact claims about the world are distracting his readers from the true culprits that he does identify and that they should be organizing against—the energy industry that funds skepticism of climate change.

In a breath of fresh air, one of the articles I reviewed on Huffington Post does not make the assumption of a knowledge conflict between religion and science, I would guess because the author is familiar with ordinary religious people. In an analysis of why some conservative Protestants reject the claims of scientists, the Reverend Jim Ball, who works for the Evangelical Environmental Network, identifies a number of barriers to action for conservative Protestants.⁹ The first is ignorance, with some not knowing “what a serious threat global warming is, especially

to the poor and vulnerable.” The second barrier he hears about from evangelicals is related to knowledge and is that “the science is not settled.” He says that “this dodge is simply unacceptable today,” and such a person should “ask God to help you see the truth, to have ‘eyes to see.’” The third is “mistrust of the messengers,” and here he references moral conflict in the public sphere between groups: “Maybe you feel that scientists have disrespected your faith, or even tried to take your faith away from you, that environmentalists and democratic politicians don’t share many of your values or beliefs.” The fourth is “fear of lifestyle impacts.” The fifth is that people are “immobilized by inaction.” The sixth is that it is so big a challenge, “how can you carry another burden like global warming, especially when no one person can solve this problem?”

This list was written by someone who is involved with the on-the-ground evangelical world, and undoubtedly encounters evangelical denialists repeatedly. Yet only one knowledge claim seems prominent enough in that world to make his list, and it is not presented as a knowledge conflict because no alternative religious way of knowing is presented. Indeed, that we should wait for science to settle suggests belief in scientific ways of knowing. He is reporting on a close to the ground conflict that is not about how facts about nature are generated. To anticipate later chapters, Ball’s third reason for evangelical lack of action on climate change—mistrust of scientists’ values—is the most accurate.

WHAT IS CONFLICT, AND BETWEEN WHOM?

It is amazing that in all of the few centuries of discussion of a “conflict” between religion and science, we have never explicitly been told what the conflict is about. Yes, we know the conflict is about certain scientific claims, like the age of the Earth or whether people can be healed via supernatural force. But, how would you recognize this conflict when you see it?

For the vast majority of scholars in the “religion vs. science” debate, the conflict is about incompatible ideas. For a very large portion of scholars who debate religion and science, the conflict exists only as ideas on a page—and whether these ideas can be logically related. For example, can we assert that Darwinian evolution is true while retaining the belief that God inspired those who wrote the Bible? If these debates simply remained intellectual puzzles at an Oxbridge High Table, nobody would care. But, these academic debates eventually trickle down to the public.

So, what is conflict? At minimum it must be said, and not surprisingly from a sociologist, that I am not focused upon conflict between ideas on a page but rather on social conflict between *people over action in the world*. I am not opposed to intellectual debate in the realm of pure ideas, but I should note that the reason so much energy is spent on debates about conflicting ideas is the presumption that

these ideas influence ordinary people's actions. For example, many scholars have dedicated a lot of time to showing that Darwinism is compatible with evangelical Protestantism, and the at least implicit hope is that their proposed solution will help ordinary evangelicals operate in the world.

The most consequential conflict is therefore between people. Imagine a fundamentalist Protestant sitting in a pew in East Texas thinking that the Earth is six thousand years old. Since this view is at odds with the scientific consensus, he has the intellectual prerequisite for conflict with science, but is not yet in conflict. He *is* in conflict with science when he goes to the local school board and says out loud that the schools should not teach modern geology, a position that would presumably be opposed by others. Similarly, someone is engaged in religious conflict with science if they cancel their appointment with their oncologist and instead go to a Pentecostal preacher to be healed. And, to turn to moral conflict, a religious person is in conflict with science if they call their congressperson and ask that embryonic stem cell research be banned because their religion teaches that embryos have the same status as born persons. That all said, it is often difficult for social science to observe actual conflict between religion and science, and often all we can measure is the cognitive prerequisites to conflict, such as attitudes. However, what I will choose to empirically examine, and how I interpret what I examine, will be based on my premise that what ultimately matters is human action.

The Importance of the Public Instead of Elites

My concern with debates in the public sphere, and my definition of conflict which requires human interaction, makes the views of the citizens much more important than those of the elites. For my purposes, an elite is anyone who has a social role that allows them to influence the views of other people beyond their immediate acquaintances and family members *on the issue under debate*. So, obviously all academics are potentially elites, as are scientists, politicians, clergy, theologians, church officials, journalists, pundits, TV and movie producers, and leaders of social movements. The public, or citizens as I will often call them, are all of the other members of the public who lack this power. Someone could be elite in one context but not in another. For example, corporate executives are likely elites on the issue of worker pay, but are unlikely to be so for a debate about religion and science. The elites in the religion and science debate are largely academics, scientists, and religious leaders, with a smattering of others we could call public intellectuals.

The reason that the public is more important for debates in the public sphere is that elites cannot, at least in the present day, do too much on their own. The president of the Southern Baptist Convention, an elite, cannot engage in religion and science conflict by banning the teaching of evolution in public schools in Texas. But, he can eventually do so if he gets the public to start a social movement, and this public

pressures elected officials. Rush Limbaugh is an elite, and has power because of his role, but his ability to stay on the air, and to influence policy, is dependent on the public. If we are interested in conflict over religion and science as I have defined it—for example, whether children will learn evolution—we need to understand the public.

We know a lot about how the elites in the religion and science debate think, and very little about how the public views religion and science. To anticipate my argument, the elites see the relationship—and thus any conflict—between religion and science as concerning knowledge. Critically, much of what is seemingly known about the public has actually been distorted by extrapolating the views of the elites to the public. But, in the past ten years a new group of scattered sociological studies have been undertaken that do not begin by presuming that the relationship concerns knowledge. We can now see how the entire “religion and science debate” needs to be reconfigured if we are going to talk about the public.

ELITE AND PUBLIC BELIEF SYSTEMS

Before continuing, I must clarify some terminology. A “belief” is a feeling of being sure that something is true, whether or not there is evidence or justification for it.¹⁰ An example would be believing the Earth is four and a half billion years old. “Knowledge” means justified belief. My belief about the age of the Earth becomes knowledge if I also believe that radiometric dating accurately describes the age of rocks, as the radiometric dating is the justification for my belief. It is telling about the status of religion and science in the contemporary age that we do not say “religious knowledge” but “religious belief,” because religion is considered to be unjustified by evidence. We do not say “scientific beliefs” but rather “scientific knowledge,” which indicates that if a claim is scientific, it is considered to be justified belief.

A belief system is simply the relationship between beliefs. A particular type of belief system relevant to the religion and science debate is what I will call a knowledge system, where beliefs are structured in a hierarchical fashion, with higher-level and more abstract beliefs justifying lower-level and less abstract beliefs. The lower beliefs, since they are now justified, become knowledge.

Scholars see religion and science as knowledge systems, in which people engage in deductive reason from the most abstract justificatory principles down to the most concrete claims.¹¹ In this elite account, beliefs are like the pyramids in Figure 1. On the ground of the hypothetical pyramid on the right is a belief such as “the Earth is 6,000 years old.” To justify this belief, somewhere higher in the pyramid there needs to be a belief such as “what the Bible says is literally true,” and above that, perhaps at the top, something like “God can control nature.” In the pyramid on the left, a different on-the-ground belief is that the Earth is 4.5 billion years old, which is considered true because the radiometric dating of rocks is true. We know the radiometric dating is true because that which is observed through human senses is true.

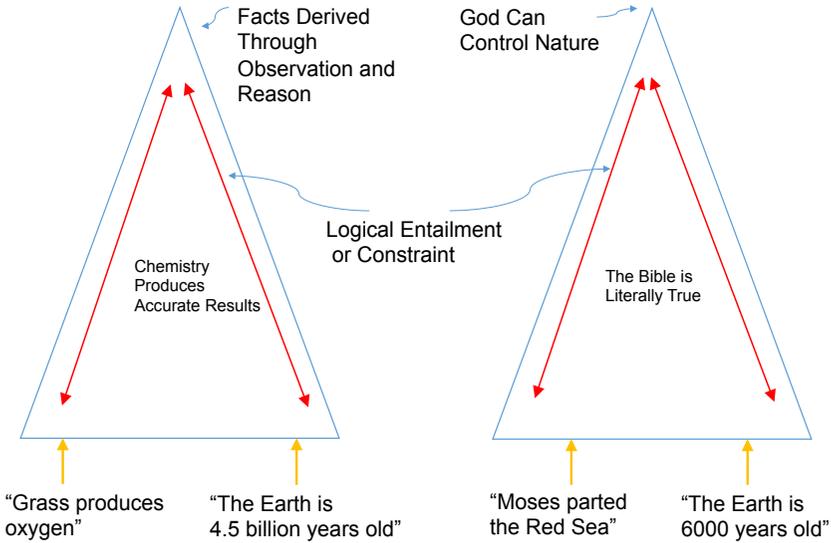


FIGURE 1. Hypothetical Knowledge Systems.

All of the lower parts of the pyramid not only have to be logically consistent with each other, but have to be logically consistent with what is above them. In this view of structure of beliefs, beliefs from the bottom of opposing pyramids such as “Moses parted the Red Sea” and “grass produces oxygen” cannot be held by the same person, because if you follow each claim up through the levels of deductive justification, they end up in logically incompatible places near or at the top of each pyramid. Put simply, in this view, if you believe in the method that produced the statement about grass you cannot believe that the sea parted due to divine intervention. Or, to turn to my introductory example, if you believe God created humans, not evolutionary forces, you cannot also believe scientific claims about global warming. Figure 1 is a depiction of the religion and science conflict as portrayed in the Huffington Post.¹²

Critically, academics and other elites generally hold to these knowledge systems of deductive belief for the issues that they focus upon. Moreover, I would describe the tasks of philosophy, theology, and science as making the vertical and horizontal links in pyramids as logically coherent as possible. In fact, you could argue that this is what academic training *is*, where expertise on a topic is learning to justify your lower-level beliefs with higher-level ones.

Any set of beliefs could be organized in this way. We can imagine that knowledge about baseball could be so organized, and if one listens to sports radio, there are a lot of middle-aged men in America who have intricately organized, logically coherent justificatory belief systems about that sport. That is not how most people

view baseball. But, religion and science have historically been defined *as* these pyramids. Peter Harrison persuasively argues that the interaction between science and religion around the time of the 16th Century Reformation led to *both* religion and science being defined by elites as hierarchical belief structures.¹³

Academics and other elites reason in this way because they exist in institutions that reward them for it. The philosophy professor who does not reason in this way will be denied tenure. If this very book has inconsistent fact claims at the bottom, or does not describe its higher-level principles accurately enough, it would not be published. However, and again critically, members of the public are generally not rewarded for formulating logical structures like this about religion or science, or at least do not have logical structures that reach quite as high or have the same degree of coherence. They may have spent the effort to develop such structures in other areas, like sports or politics. I will examine social science research on the coherence of the public's belief systems much more closely in Chapter 5. But, once we no longer assume that the public has a hierarchical justified system of belief back to first principles concerning religion and science—as is assumed in the scholarly literature—we will have to rethink the entire “religion and science debate.”

CONFLICT OVER WHAT? THREE TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RELIGION AND SCIENCE

We have discussed what conflict *is*, and between *whom* it occurs (public or elites). The final distinction is conflict over *what*? The response from scientists would be—knowledge, of course, because we scientists are only discovering knowledge. However, that turns out to be a very distorted view of the situation. There are three possible relationships, and thus possible conflicts, between religion and science. These are the relationships of systemic knowledge, propositional belief and morality.

The Systemic Knowledge Relationship and Possible Conflict

I use the term systemic knowledge to indicate depictions of relationship and possible conflict that assume people are using hierarchical systems of justified belief like those represented in the pyramids in Figure 1. The vast majority of the claims about conflict are that science justifies concrete beliefs about nature through reason and observation, while religion justifies belief through faith and authority. Systemic knowledge conflict will be most recognizable to readers—in fact, I suspect most would wonder what else the religion and science debate could possibly be about. The common image is of a debate between justifying claims about the age of the Earth by consulting the Bible vs. justifying its age by radiometric dating.

There is a strong and a weak version of the systemic knowledge relationship that depends on what science “is” or requires, which parallels the distinction made

by philosophers and historians between the use of methodological and metaphysical naturalism in science.¹⁴ The weak version assumes that the apex of the scientific knowledge pyramid is methodological naturalism, which is “a disciplinary method that says nothing about God’s existence,” where fact claims are justified through observation and reason.¹⁵ With methodological naturalism, only natural processes can be invoked as explanation, and science cannot use the supernatural in its explanations or methods. But, science would make no claims about that which cannot be empirically investigated, like the existence of God.

In this weak version of the systemic knowledge relationship, people could not believe in a demonstrable scientific claim about nature (e.g., how plants work) and a religious claim about nature that *is* testable (e.g., the Earth is six thousand years old). That is, believing in a young Earth would mean you could not believe in scientists’ facts about other topics—and hence there would be conflict. But, this weak version would allow for people who believe in scientific facts about plants to also believe in nonempirical claims like the existence of God, Heaven, the Virgin Birth and so on. This weak version of the systemic knowledge relationship is most commonly portrayed by the elites in the academic religion and science debate, with the assumption that any conflict comes from violating its precepts.

The strong version of the systemic knowledge relationship assumes not only methodological naturalism, but also that science requires *metaphysical* naturalism, where science actively “denies the existence of a transcendent God.”¹⁶ This is most recognizable as the position of the scientific atheists. Metaphorically, the apex of the scientific pyramid in this strong version is metaphysical naturalism, which requires that a person could not believe scientific claims based on scientific methodology about why plants move and also believe in a nontestable claim like the existence of God. You could also not believe two on-the-ground fact claims—one religious and one scientific—even if the religious one is never examined by science. For example, a Catholic could not believe in scientific claims about global warming and in the Resurrection, even if there is no scientist who ever makes a claim about the resurrection (e.g. there is no scientific discipline of anti-Resurrection studies).

I will show in subsequent chapters that the elites in the debate assume either the strong or weak version of the systemic knowledge relationship. This is typically indicated by claiming that someone’s belief in one fact claim implies belief in another (implicitly, because they are connected by the same justificatory belief above), or by reference to the justificatory beliefs themselves (typically called “method”). The elites’ extrapolation of this relationship to the public has hampered our understanding of religion and science. I will show that it is implausible for the public to have such a conflict between religion and science because, as I will discuss below, people do not have the time, motivation, or desire to make their beliefs logically coherent in the way this model demands.

Of course, elites have had the time and have been rewarded. For example, in the infamous 1860 Oxford debate between Bishop Wilberforce and T. H. Huxley over Darwin's claims about evolution, both were elites focused on this issue. Wilberforce knew he would have to respond to Huxley, and logical coherence would have been the standard of who won the debate.¹⁷ Similarly, in the 1925 Scopes trial, William Jennings Bryan knew he would be forced to respond to Clarence Darrow. But, members of the general public are not going to face a Darrow—or a university tenure committee, to mention another social institution that rewards logical coherence. It is important to point out that I am not opposed to systemic knowledge, nor to the academics and organizations that try to create it. I had better not be, as I work in a university that requires it. Rather, I am opposed to assuming that systemic knowledge is used by everyone for all issues, and that the public views institutions only through the lens of knowledge.

Propositional Belief Relationship and Possible Conflict

The relationship concerning propositional beliefs does not presume logical justification or deduction from more general beliefs. A proposition is an assertion without a justification—it is at the bottom of the pyramid in Figure 1 with no logical connections higher in the pyramid.¹⁸ Any agreement or conflict remains at the propositional belief level—such as “science claims the Earth is billions of years old, but my religion tells me the Earth is 6,000 years old.” No one who is rewarded to argue in terms of logical systems of ideas—such as a university professor—would reason in this way. But, it is quite plausible for the general public, who are not rewarded for using tightly connected logically coherent structures of justified belief, to do so. This relationship is not described in the current religion and science literature, which assumes a systemic knowledge relationship, but it is the best description of the public's orientation to religion and science derived from the sociological studies that I will report below.

In this model, since people do not reason up to higher-level justificatory beliefs, there is no reason why people in a tradition that has conflicting propositional belief claims with science would be in conflict over *all* scientific knowledge. For example, a believer in a six thousand-year old Earth could accept most of the claims in the field of chemistry, because chemistry contains few or no propositional statements that conflict with any religious claims. They would presumably, however, avoid the parts of science that make many conflicting statements, like geology. I will show in later chapters that there *is* evidence for this type of conflict with *some* religious groups. The question is how pervasive this more limited conflict really is, and I will suggest that it is probably limited to a very small group of religious people in the U.S. Later, I will describe the social effect of such a conflict, which is much less

dramatic than would be the case if the religious public were engaged in systemic knowledge conflict with science.

Moral Relationship and Possible Conflict

I think that the moral relationship between religion and science, which often results in conflict, is dominant in at least the contemporary U.S. While academics use the term “morality” in many ways, I will follow cultural and historical sociologists who use it to mean “relating to human character or behavior considered as good or bad . . . [or] the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil, in relation to the actions, desires, or character of responsible human beings.”¹⁹

This relationship between religion and science is rarely if ever talked about directly, and is obscured by our focus on knowledge conflict. The relationship in many cases is one of agreement—both religion and science believe in the moral value of the relief of human suffering and that it is good to acquire knowledge about the world. This relationship is also obscured because scientists typically claim that they do not advocate for a morality. Instead, they are engaged in the morally neutral analysis of nature. However, a better way to describe the work of a chemist who is trying to understand how electrons move is that this work *does* promote a moral perspective that “inquiry into the functioning of nature is of value.” Similarly, cancer research presumes the moral value that suffering is bad. It is just that there is moral consensus about these scientific activities, so they are not even considered to concern morality.

But, there are also many instances of contemporary moral conflict. For example, is it morally acceptable to take the mitochondrial DNA out of one human egg and put it in another? Is it acceptable to engage in embryonic stem cell research? More abstractly, does Darwinian theory implicitly teach a moral lesson to children? Critically, these debates are independent of any conflict over knowledge, and many religious people have been opposed to scientists on each of them.

Even if scientists do not take a public moral stance such as “destroying embryos is acceptable,” scientific research and technology itself is often morally expressive. As bioethicist Erik Parens points out, technology is not morally neutral, but pushes people in particular moral directions.²⁰ For example, inventing a test to see whether a fetus or embryo has Down syndrome presumes that people should avoid having children with Down syndrome. Of course, people can refuse the test, but the existence of this test, and the fact that doctors are supposed to discuss it with pregnant woman, expresses the moral message.

I am not the first to see the importance of moral conflict between science and religion. Some of the historians who have been able to get a bit closer to the views of the religious public have shown how the public often has both knowledge and moral conflict with science. For example, Ronald Numbers’ canonical

book about creationism shows that creationist activists were often not so concerned about the fact claims of Darwinism, but rather that Darwinism was teaching youth a particular moral lesson.²¹ For example, the defender of the creationist view in the Scopes trial, William Jennings Bryan, was concerned about “the paralyzing influence of Darwinism on the conscience. By substituting the law of the jungle for the teachings of Christ, it threatened the principles he valued most: democracy and Christianity.” He thought that this teaching had led to both German militarism and the German decision to declare war in World War I.²² However, historians have generally not theorized this moral conflict. I will argue that this moral conflict is more relevant to today’s public than is knowledge conflict.

SUMMARY OF SUBSEQUENT CHAPTERS

This book should definitely not be considered the last word on this subject, but more like a provocation. I am pulling together information from diverse fields to lay the groundwork for my claims, and in the data analytic chapters I rely upon a myriad of data that was not originally designed to test my thesis. I want to convince others that this thesis demands further investigation.

I should be clear at the outset that I am focusing on the U.S. in order to keep a sprawling topic under control, as well as due to a lack of data from other countries and, frankly, my own limited knowledge of non-Anglophone cultures. Some of the academic debate I will be summarizing includes Britain, which has had an influence on American debates and has a strong history of an elite debate between religion and science. Moreover, besides a few brief discussions of Judaism, I am not focusing on religious minorities in the U.S. because, again, there are almost no contemporary data, primarily because each minority group represents two percent of the population or less. Therefore, my analysis is primarily about different types of Christians and the nonreligious.²³

In Chapter 2, I start to outline the assumptions in the academic religion and science debate. I examine the academic *advocates* in the debate, the scientists and the theologians, as well as dialogue associations that share the views of the theologians, and show that they assume that the relationship between religion and science concerns systemic knowledge. The most extreme are the scientific atheists who assume the strongest version of the systemic knowledge conflict thesis—that a person who believes in any scientific facts cannot believe in any religion. I review the liberal Christian theological synthesizers, who also assume that both religious and scientific knowledge are systems, but who also think they can be synthesized into one knowledge structure. I also explain why these groups hold the positions they do.

In Chapter 3, I continue to describe the academic debate by turning to the *observers or analysts* of the debate of the scientists and theologians, who are

primarily historians and sociologists. They too share the view that any relationship is based on systemic knowledge. If my entire thesis is correct, we would expect that the sociologists who study the contemporary public to see moral conflict, so I focus on the source of the sociologists' blinders.

In Chapter 4, I start to develop my overall explanation for why the participants in the academic debate assume the public is also in systemic knowledge conflict. Put simply, radical changes to the religion of the American public over the past fifty years have not been accounted for. For example, it turns out the sociology debates examined in Chapter 3 that assume systemic knowledge conflict are based on much older theories. In this chapter I examine more contemporary definitions of religion, debates about secularization, and the sociology of science and show that these all portray religion and science as *not* in knowledge conflict. Moreover, the history literature examined in the previous chapter, produced by professional historians, was largely of elite debates from fifty or more years ago. Looking at the recent history of public debates between religion and science, largely not written by historians, we see debates that are fixed resolutely on morality, not knowledge. I conclude this chapter by showing how the exemplar case of contemporary religion and science debate—Darwin and evolution—is primarily about morality.

In Chapter 5, I turn to existing research on the public to show that it is extremely unlikely that the *contemporary* religious public thinks their religion is about knowledge claims about nature, or that science is exclusively about nature. This makes systemic knowledge conflict unlikely. I begin with a history of American religion and science and conclude that it is really only in the conservative Protestant tradition that the religious public could be taught a knowledge conflict with science. I continue by examining contemporary social science research that suggests, to somewhat overstate the case, that members of the general public do not have knowledge systems—which would make systemic knowledge conflict impossible.

I continue by discussing research on the contemporary American religious public showing that conservative Protestantism is decreasingly concerned with truth and doctrine. The tradition is also becoming increasingly therapeutic—concerned with the happiness and well-being of the individual. Moreover, religious Americans in general are increasingly assembling their religious beliefs from different religious systems with less concern for what the elites would consider incompatibilities. All of this suggests that conservative Protestantism is not concerned with systemic knowledge about nature. Finally, I turn to what we know about the public's view of science and scientists, and show that it is unlikely that the public views scientists as morally neutral observers of nature, but are rather more likely to see them as morally questionable outsiders who potentially need to be controlled. This disparate research on the public provides the grounds for being skeptical that we will find systemic knowledge conflict between religious citizens and science.

In Chapter 6, I put the conflict narrative to an empirical test and do not find any religious groups where the members are in systemic knowledge conflict with science. I do find that most Christian traditions are, to varying degrees, in propositional belief conflict with science over a few fact-claims about the world—fact-claims that do not matter to the everyday lives of the vast majority of Americans. Finally, I engage in some speculation as to why—given that I did not find systemic knowledge conflict—religious people would be disproportionately engaged in propositional belief conflict. Of all the possibilities, I focus for the rest of the analyses in this book on the idea that this more limited belief conflict is actually driven by moral conflict with science.

Chapter 7 puts the moral conflict theory to an empirical test. Data that can be used to examine moral conflict between religion and science are limited because the scholars who develop data sources have presumed that science is about knowledge. However, I outline three types of moral conflict which I can indirectly examine. The first is conflict over which institution will set the meaning and purpose of society. Will we have faith in science or religion? I show that religious Americans, and conservative Protestants in particular, are in conflict with science over which institution our society should have faith in. The second is conflict over the implicit morality embedded in some scientific claims, such as Darwinism. I find that conservative Protestants are in moral conflict with science over scientific claims in the public sphere. The third conflict is over technology, such as medical technology having to do with embryonic stem cells or the genetic modification of humans. I find that conservative Protestants are in moral conflict with scientists over technology to modify the human body. I finish the chapter with a close look at interviews with religious people about reproductive genetic technology. This analysis suggests a subtle moral conflict exists over the use of this particular set of technologies.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion, and I finish by discussing the contribution of sociological analysis of the contemporary public relationship between religion and science to other disciplines in the religion and science debate. If we are to have an improved debate, we need a social location, and I ponder the possibilities. I finish by describing the research agenda necessary for this new direction in the field.