

Updating Your Religion

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Introduction

I received a fundamentalist Christian worldview.

My professors in college helped me to start updating my worldview.

Data: the natural world, the claims of other human beings

Does physics rule out human immortality? (Carroll's challenge)

The limits of objective inquiry: what Møller and Kierkegaard teach us

The danger of a quick fix: why NOMA fails both science and religion

Status report: toward a worldview adequate for physics *and* for persons

Does physics rule out immortality?

Sean Carroll's argument

QFT gives a **complete inventory** of what exists at the energy scales relevant to human biology.

If a soul interacted with the body, it would couple to known fields. Such a coupling would produce **detectable anomalies**. None are observed.



Letting science guide us

Germ theory replaced miasma theory. We do not believe bad air causes disease.

Vaccines work. The science has settled the question, whatever traditional views may say.

These are cases where an old view **must be given up because of science**.

Carroll wants his argument to belong to this category. *He may be right about the form of the argument.*

Beating the atheist at his own game?

Some argue that the latest physics supports traditional religious doctrines:

- The fine-tuning argument
- Quantum mechanics and the soul

Both moves are suspicious for the same reason: they try to answer existential questions via objective inquiry.

The limits of objective inquiry

An old argument in new dress

Whoever is somewhat able to read between the lines in Hegel's writings will easily reach the inevitable conclusion that this philosopher holds the concept of personal immortality to be a notion with no reality at all.

Sean Carroll is not the first to use the dominant scientific framework of his day in an argument against immortality.

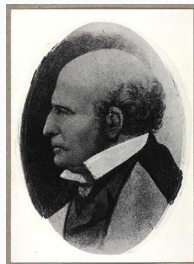
Left-wing Hegelians — e.g. Feuerbach, Strauss — made the same move in the 1830s and 40s: Hegel's System leaves no room for an immortal individual soul.

Danish philosophers saw a flaw at the root of the Hegelian approach.

Their lesson still applies.

Poul Martin Møller (1794–1838)

Those who ask for a demonstration of the reality of the doctrine of immortality and are unacquainted with the nature of science do not really know what they are asking for.



Arguments *for* and *against* immortality fail for the **same reason**.

Both sides treat immortality as an objective question — a fact to be settled from the outside.

If the human subject doesn't participate in the infinite, then scientific results are insignificant

Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets U dødelighed, med Hensyn til den nyeste herhen hørende Literatur.

I.

Den Mening, at en Begribslære handler rigtig, naar den tilføjer
Udbetragelsen af Skæffter i videnskabelig Form, set om disse gaar
ud paa en andensteds Beskrivelse af den christelige Religions Hoved-
saetninger, er rigtig bleven ubestaaet ved en mægtelig Kends-
gerning. Frederich Kieffer fra Magdeburg har nemlig,
(saa sandfærdigvis er en stor Del af Maanedsskriftets Læsere
bekendt), for et Par Aar siden i Breslau udgivet et Skrift,
der har givet os Lys, fordi det har til Bæmke at gældsætte,
at den christelige Tro paa den personlige U dødelighed er en Gæ-
deme, der nu har været sin længste Tid. Den maaer nemlig, at
denne Sandhed forlangt har været en afgjort Sag blandt
Mænd, der staa paa et videnskabeligt Standpunkt, og at Alene
nu er kommen, da den Evighed ogsaa hos Mændene har for-
seende for den consequent fremfærdende Pædagogikens Lys.
Denne Afhandling erer en altselig, naar Overbeviisning. Uagtet
den naerer en til Evigheden gældsættende Forordning om, at den
har faaet et heles Kald til at optænde med en dybt rebsætt

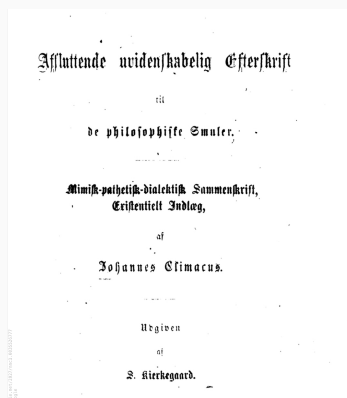
Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

Objectively the question cannot be answered, because objectively it cannot be put.

Putting the subject in the background is a **methodological** demand — it is how science works.

Carroll treats it as a **metaphysical** discovery: the subject simply doesn't matter.

Mistaking a methodological idealization for a conclusion about reality.



The view from nowhere

I know that I have not found it in the System, where indeed it is also unreasonable to seek it; for, in a fantastic sense, all systematic thinking is sub specie aeterni. . . the question is about the immortality of a mortal, which is not answered by showing that the eternal is immortal.

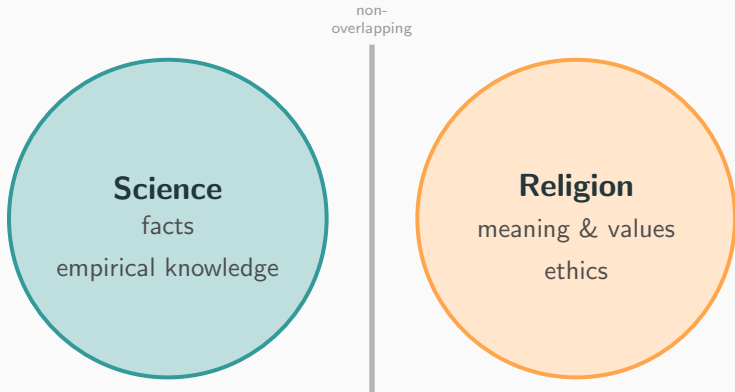
Kierkegaard's target: **Hegel's system** — thinking *sub specie aeterni*, from the standpoint of eternity and the universal, where the existing individual simply disappears.

Our target: **Physical theory** — a framework that likewise operates from nowhere in particular, after the subject has been removed.

Hegel's aspirations were no different in principle than those of physics today. (Weinberg: *Dreams of a Final Theory*)

Temptation: Non-overlapping magisteria

Gould's non-overlapping magisteria



Rasmus Nielsen's failed attempt

Nielsen tried to wall off religious claims from scientific challenge entirely.

Hans Brøchner's objection: the partition thesis is self-undermining. The declaration that science and faith cannot touch each other is itself a philosophical claim — which Nielsen's own law forbids.

You cannot step outside both domains to declare them non-overlapping.

NOMA is bad for religion: a faith that rational inquiry cannot reach has abandoned *fides quaerens intellectum*. Nielsen's faith is **static by design**.

Analogy: Determinism and free will

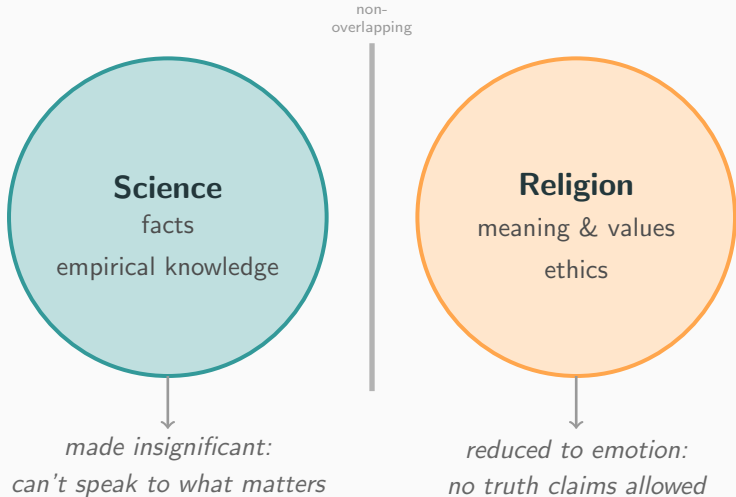
NOMA = compatibilism applied to science and religion.

Science with no stake in the human project

becomes a tool of control and extraction.

Gnōthi seauton: if science can't speak to seauton, all the worse for that science.

The cost of partition



Status report

A better path

Carroll: **begin without a subject** — the human being never enters the picture.

The alternative: begin with the human being doing science — for the human being.

Møller → Kierkegaard → Høffding → Bohr:

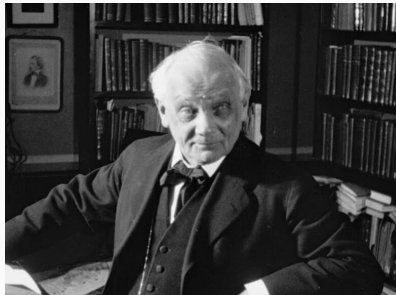
a tradition that never loses sight of the physicist as a person.

Harald Høffding (1843–1931)

Our knowledge is always knowledge
from somewhere, by someone.

This is not relativism. It is a
constraint on what objectivity can
mean.

Took science seriously. Took
religious orientation seriously.
Refused to dissolve the tension.



Niels Bohr (1885–1962)

*In the drama of existence we
are ourselves both actors and
spectators.*

Not a retreat from objectivity — a
more honest account of what
objectivity can mean for a human
inquirer.

(Student of Høffding)

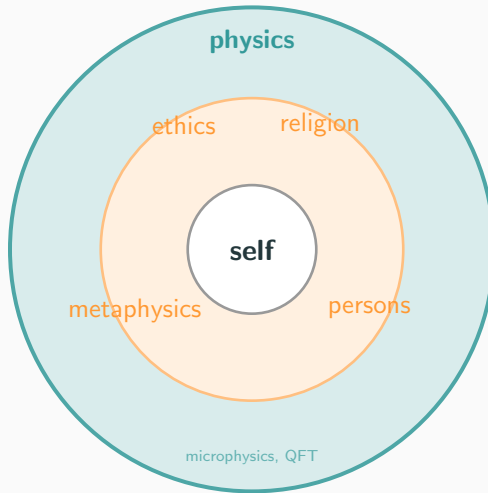


Bohr to his future mother-in-law

"But you must not think that I do not believe in anything at all; I believe that there is meaning in the world, a meaning that human beings cannot understand, but only sense."

Written when Bohr left the Danish church, c. 1912.

An integrated worldview



The dogmatist's move: start from microphysics.

My choice: the tradition that starts with Socrates.

Gnōthi seauton

Stay in the dialogue.