



Featured Film: *Agora*

Topic of Philosophical Exploration: Religion & Science*, Epistemology**

Film Synopsis: This 2009 historical drama film set in 4th-century Roman Egypt centers around the famous female astronomer, philosophy and mathematics professor Hypatia of Alexandria (played by Rachel Weisz) who investigates the flaws of the geocentric Ptolemaic system and the heliocentric model that challenges it. Directed by Alejandro Amenábar, the story uses a mix of history and fiction to highlight the relationship between religion and science amidst the decline of Greco-Roman polytheism and the Christianization of the Roman Empire. Winner of the Goya Award for Best Original Screenplay, the title of the film takes its name from the *agora*, a gathering place in ancient Greece, similar to the Roman *forum*.

Some Philosophical Questions Raised in *Agora*

- What sorts of challenges have science and religion faced historically? And do these challenges still persist today?
- In which ways do polytheistic and monotheistic traditions differ? In which ways do they overlap?
- Generally speaking, should science fit religion? Or vice-versa?
- Math and astronomy play an obvious role in the sciences. Can/do they also play a role in religion?
- If the geocentric Ptolemaic system had been correct and the heliocentric model never arose as a competing system, would the religious conflicts of the Greco-Roman/Christian era have obtained? What does this mean relative to current times?
- What role has and does philosophy play in the course of history?

*Religion & Science

The complex, multi-faceted, challenging & oft tumultuous relationship between religion & science has been a topic of investigation for centuries and has generated a plethora of important philosophical questions, such as: What is the nature of religion and science?, What are the epistemologies of science and religious belief?, Are there areas of conflict and/or concord between religion and science? How does religious belief figure into the (alleged or actual) conflict between science and religion? Do all religions face the same challenges posed by science and vice-versa?

Models for understanding how religion-science relationship can be either descriptive – i.e., illustrating *how* the two relate – or prescriptive – i.e., offering suggestions about how they *should/ought to* relate. Both are helpful for gaining a more complete picture and have resulted in a variety of explanations over time that can be divided into the following general categories: conflict (science & religion are at conflict with one another), separation (science and religion ask different questions about the world), fusion/integration (the distinction between religion and science is blurred), and concord (science & religion are compatible). There are, no doubt, other approaches to the religion-science relationship that obtain as well. However, these four streams of thought have (generally speaking) been recipients of the most wading traffic.

Other things to consider when investigating the science-religion relationship include the role of politics, economics, and law. For example, what influence does each have on the nature of religion and science and our understanding of religion and science? The questions of epistemology must also be considered.

****Epistemology**

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with knowledge – namely, how we come to know something, whether or not what and how we know has limits, how we can distinguish between truths and falsehoods, and justified beliefs. Modern epistemology typically involves debates between empiricism and rationalism. Empiricism claims that knowledge can be acquired through experience (i.e., what we can take in by the senses/experience). Rationalism claims that knowledge can be acquired via the use of reason (i.e., knowledge acquired independent of sensory data/experience).

Epistemology is important on a personal level because it is central to the ways that we think and relate with others. It is also important on a social level because our thoughts typically inform the ways in which we structure society (e.g., laws, politics, environment, education, city planning, other). More generically speaking, epistemology is important because without some means of understanding how we acquire knowledge, the role of sensory data, and how concepts develop and form in our minds, we have no coherent path for our thinking. In other words, a sound epistemology is a requisite for sound thinking and sound reasoning. In addition, insofar as our thoughts inform the constructs that obtain in our society, then a sound epistemology is also a requisite for (the possibility of) a sound society – i.e., one that is based upon and operating from sound reasoning and thinking.

Much more can be said about the matter. The above account is, at best, a very distilled version of a branch of philosophical study that has remained a central focus for thinkers across the centuries. As such, there are considerable permutations, complexities, and evolutions in thought about the philosophical study of knowledge not reflected above.



Merlin CCC

Marisa Diaz-Waian, *Founder & Executive Director*

119 Reeder's Alley, Helena MT 59601

PO Box 2034, Helena MT 59624

E: <mailto:marisa@merlinccc.org> | C: 406-439-5788