

# Expository essay on the movie contact philosophy essay



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The history between religion and science has been ambiguous. The achievements over the past hundred years, constantly unknowing the facts, the modern era looks at science as being almost divine. As the result of this the society has been denying the separateness of religion and science and has combined these two belief systems into one. The Contact portrays this feelings of today`s people. The Contact tells the story of a scientist Dr. Eleanour Aroway, working for Search for Extratrestrial Intelligence Institute (SETII), who discovers a radio link signal that contains instructions from aliens on how to build a device to travel in to a distant place outside of the galaxy. These events indulge in to debate over the religious and scientific aspects of the discovery. While Aroway presents the scientific side, Palmmer Jose, an advisor of the United States on religion, represents the religious side. Finally Aroway choose to represent all of humanity by using this machine to travel to a distant place outside the universe. To inspire the viewer, the Contact carefully blends the two beliefs in to the degree that they lack any separateness. However attempting to blend religion and science into one belief, Contact ends up seeming unrealistic and at times awkward.

In reality, religion and science are not the same, and like water and oil, they cannot easily combine. It is important to first establish the concept of speech genres and how they can be used to explain the inherent separateness of religion and science. Because religion and science are each associated with its own speech genre, they must by definition use different types of opinions. Therefore, what defines the scientific way of speaking is the use of opinions that are created with the notion of a scientific believer, who could be anyone

from a scientist to nature itself. Meanwhile, what defines the religious way of speaking is the use of opinions that are created with the conception of a higher being, which can be told by anyone from a priest to God himself. Because religion and science are polar opposites of opinions, it is impossible for an opinion from one genre to be a response to an opinion from the other genre. Finally, I come to my thesis since Science is a matter of faith to many people, and could even be considered one's religion, as the movie tries to bring out. But unlike most orthodox/institutional religions, science not only encourages, but also requires, that you constantly question your faith and find ways to disprove what you believe. I've found that if you stop looking when you've found what you wanted to find, it results in pathological science. That fundamental difference between science and religion alone makes it more likely to find "truths", if they exist, using the scientific method than any other. Therefore the existence of different opinion creates difference between the two speech genres and avoids their fusion.

I will now support my thesis and show how the Contact tries to combine religion and science into one belief system and how this idea and the related mismatched speech genres make an awkward movie. The first point to be discussed is faith. The Contact attempts to demonstrate this presence of faith in science When Dr. Eleanor interviewed about her discovery on a news channel, the journalist asks her to comment on the security and safety concerns involved with the transportation device. She responds by saying in a scientific manner that she thinks it would be safe to build and use the machine because the aliens who sent its instructions are probably millions of years ahead of humans in technology: " I have to believe that a civilization

that advanced knows what they're doing. All it requires on our part is....."

She pauses for a moment to think of the correct scientific word to insert into her sentence. But before she speaks again, the journalist quickly asks, "Faith?" The entrance of religion into a scientific discussion leads to an awkward silence in the discussion for Dr. Eleanor. While director is trying to show how religion and science cannot be separated from each other, the awkwardness of the moment instead seems to show the difference between the two belief systems. We know that Dr. Eleanor considers possible reactions from the interviewer when she creates her opinion. Because she is speaking the scientific genre language, she expects to hear a scientific opinion in return, or in other words, she expects an opinion from a scientific believer. However, when the response to what she says uses vocabulary from a different genre, the chain of speech communication is interrupted, and this is confusing for the viewer. This scene intensely illustrates the difficulty of combining opinions from both religion and science into one fluent conversation. Second example is when Dr. Eleanor returns from her trip to the ends of the universe without any evidence that she traveled anywhere. It is later discovered that the camera she has with her during the trip records eighteen hours of static, thereby leading the viewer to know that Dr. Eleanor's experience is substantiated by empirical evidence. But before this discovery is revealed, the only evidence of Dr. Eleanor's journey is her story. Without proof of an alien encounter, the viewer is expected to simply believe that it happened. If the experience of faith is thought of as a conversation, then believing would be an utterance, while that in which one has faith would be the addressee. Since the scientific addressee would be nature, while the religious addressee would be God, it is obvious that there are two different

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types of faith. Although this may be a commonality, the two ways of being faithful are ultimately incompatible.

A second similarity to which this movie alludes is a sense of awe. When Dr. Eleanor is traveling through the universe, she stops moving at one point and observes a spiritual event. She begins crying as she says, " No words can describe it. [...] They should have sent a writer. It's so beautiful. I had no idea." By revealing the overwhelming emotion that she feels for the universe, this scene reflects the admiration that scientists have of nature, which is similar to the feelings that a priest might feel about God's creations. Let us again think of this as a conversation. Within the scientific speech genre, nature creates an opinion, or reveals its remarkable aspects and someone scientific reacts by expressing emotion. Within the religious speech genre, God creates an utterance, and someone religious reacts by expressing emotion. Therefore, the addressee will differ depending on whether nature or God creates the sentiment-evoking utterance, which suggests that there are two types of awe. The movie's claim that a sense of emotion fuses the two systems of belief is a generalization.

The third example of mixing belief systems in the film that is not directly related to speech, but where the ensuing awkwardness can be explained by speech genres. One such example is when the movie tries to show science being used to answer traditionally religious questions. At the beginning of the movie, the young Dr. Eleanor asks her dad how far radio signals can reach. When he answers that humans can talk to distant planets, Dr. Eleanor responds, " Dad, could we talk to Mom?" Because her mother has passed away, he answers, " I don't think even the biggest radio could reach that

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far.” This dialogue implies that science cannot answer questions that belong to the sphere of religion. However, by the end of the movie, the viewer is asked to accept the notion that science can answer the ultimate religious questions, as Aroway’s scientific discovery enables her to rejoin her deceased father. In another example of the same philosophy, Bill Clinton, playing himself in the movie as President of the United States, pronounces that this scientific breakthrough “ promises answers to some of our oldest questions.” It could readily be interpreted that Clinton is talking about science answering religious questions, in yet another instance of the director trying to fuse both into one belief system. Here again the idea of science answering religious questions is nonsensical. While a scientific experiment is not directly a form of speech, it can be thought of as a question in the language of science. When one of these scientific utterances is constructed, the conception of a scientific addressee is present, and a religious response is totally out of place. As long as a question is grounded in science, only a scientific response will suffice. This phenomenon stems directly from how the question is created.

Now coming to the conclusion the Contact stems from its proclivity to gloss over fundamental incompatibilities. Because of the importance of the addressee in defining a speech genre, religion and science cannot be fused into a unified belief system. It could almost be said that the movie’s attempt to combine the two has a lot in common with cold fusion, which is a way of fusing atomic nuclei using very little energy. It was exciting when the existence of cold fusion was first announced to the world, the same way it was exciting for the director of Contact to announce his idea for a belief

system fusion. But cold fusion was eventually determined to be an illusion, just like our finding for the film's version of fusion. In both cold and belief system fusion, little energy is required, while in reality, fusion needs a large driving force. Since it is true that nuclear fusion can take place if enough energy is present, could it be possible for religion and science to mix if a special hybrid speech genre existed? If such were real, might it be possible for humans to have the vocabulary to comprehend the exact relationship between science and religion? But until then, these two systems of belief are necessarily separate.