I learned in Psychology class about five different perspectives on how to integrate faith and science. In this paper I will summarize those positions and describe the positions I have held and/or encountered.

Science only states that science is needed and religion is unnecessary. Faith only states that faith is needed and science is unnecessary. Perspectivalism states that science and faith are important but separate perspectives. “Christianizers” of science state that science is useful as long as it doesn’t contradict Christianity. Bi-directional integration states that science and faith should both influence each other and that the response to apparent contradiction should be to consider both sides.

My mom’s perspective is bi-directional integration. She described her reasoning as based on the assumption that “God knows everything but humans don’t. Conflicts are failures of our ability to understand.” She sees “very little outside of salvation issues as unchangeable”, possibly because she grew up in a family that “debated things with the assumption that people could change their mind”. She is “always open for new information to convince me that the science is wrong or that my faith is wrong” and says that “there is ultimate truth but we live in a fallen world and can’t perceive anything perfectly”.

In middle school, I was homeschooled part time. My mom used the Apologia curriculum for science and the Tapestry of Grace curriculum for history. The Apologia curriculum doesn’t completely eschew science, but it definitely considers the bible and faith as more important, so it would fit into the “Christianizers” of science perspective. A lot of the curriculum was focused on proving how the bible was right about science (for example, how the earth was 6,000 years old instead of 4.9 billion years old). Apologia’s website states that “We believe that every academic subject can and should be taught from a biblical worldview”. The Tapestry of Grace curriculum was more like bi-directional integration: “If children are taught to view the sins or errors of others with compassion and a biblical interpretation, they will both be warned of their own human tendency to sin, and become compassionate, but accurate, historians.”

I talked to a friend who is going into nursing school, and he fits more into the perspectivalist category. He told me he sees science and religion as different, complementary perspectives. He doesn’t take the Bible literally because because there is too much possibility of translation and interpretation errors. He describes himself as a liberal Catholic but says he puts more emphasis on morality than beliefs: “the moral aspect defines a christian more than being a devout believer in Jesus”. When there is a conflict, he tends to lean more towards science, but for the most part he doesn’t see science and faith as contradicting each other.

I also talked to my cousin who is a Philosophy major. She considers science the most important. When I first presented the question, she pointed out that we first need some degree of faith in science because if we doubt everything, we can’t come to an understanding about anything. When we got to talking about religion and science, she said that she didn’t think any religion she had heard so far matches up with logic. She says she has “seen religion impact a lot of things negatively” and that in her experience religious people are more likely to be conservative. She says it is important to think analytically and not have blind faith in religion or science.

I talked to an adult from my church in DC who works at NASA. He says he sympathizes with perspectivalism and bi-directional integration but that his perspective, which he calls “spheres of authority”, is not really addressed in the list. “Science addresses questions about the physical universe; while Faith answers questions about theology, morals/ethics.” He points out that trying to have science influence faith can cause problems: “applying science to morals typically leads to a Darwinian view of ethics where pragmatism reigns; or trying to quantify the efficacy of prayer by measuring the frequency with which people get what they pray for”, and the same is true with faith influencing science: for example the church’s dismissal of Galileo’s scientific findings. He also says he appreciates how the Reformed churches “have a high view of both general and special revelation. So, even when an apparent conflict appears, the church community allows the intellectual space to hold a range of views.” One of the effects of this “spheres of authority” perspective is that it “provides the flexibility to not classify inherent characteristics (those things we don’t have control over) as sinful. Instead, the measure of rightness/morality is how we apply the law of love.”

My perspective is most similar to bi-directional influence. I was raised a Christian. I was exposed to a number of different church, educational, and cultural backgrounds because my family moved a lot (Maryland to England to Japan to Virginia). This caused me to be more open-minded in general. I was also encouraged by my parents to think for myself and discuss and debate important issues with other people. I think that when I was younger, I wasn’t sure exactly how faith and science could intersect without being contradictory, so I just held them as different perspectives. However, over time and as I discussed these issues with other people, I came to realize that they can influence each other without contradicting each other. I think my position is something like the “spheres of authority” I mentioned earlier, but instead a venn diagram. Beliefs central to salvation cannot be analyzed by science, and scientific methods not addressed by Christianity (e.g., how to calculate an integral) cannot be analyzed by faith. However, in the overlap (e.g., how we should treat other people), we need to consider both science and faith.