

Christianity and Science

Friends or Foes?

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Introduction

Today science has become man's greatest endeavor to discover truth, people tend to equate science with truth and other kinds of knowledge with imagination. Atheists have used this mindset to their advantage by claiming that science has disproved God.

The tendency has been to think that man's knowledge and ability know no limits. In fact, that very idea was echoed by the eminent evolutionary paleontologist, Richard Leakey, in his book, *Origins*:

The fruits of intellectual and technological endeavor in this latter quarter of the twentieth century give us just an inkling of what the human mind can achieve. The potential is enormous, almost infinite. We can, if we choose, do virtually anything; arid lands will become fertile, terrible diseases will be cured by genetic engineering; touring other planets will become routine; we may even come to understand how the human mind works (1977, p. 256).

What is Science?

Geneticist John Klotz, in his text, *Genes, Genesis and Evolution*, stated that "science is man's groping for the truth. Science deals only with the natural, with things that can be apprehended by the sense organs. Science deals with those things that can be measured" (1970, p. 11).

The goal of Science

The goal of science is to investigate matter and energy and discover their properties and behavior pattern. If a particular thing is neither matter nor energy, then it cannot be investigated in a laboratory. For example, love is a fact of life, but since it is neither matter nor energy it cannot be investigated by science. There is no gadget to measure the mass, length, breadth, or temperature of love.

Science, therefore, cannot be used to investigate all reality, but rather those realities that are seen in the form of matter and energy. The investigation takes place with the help of repeated

experiments. All negations and affirmations depend upon experimental observations, and nothing can be established without relevant experiments.

Physics investigates the physical properties of matter and energy. Chemistry, biology, astronomy, and the various scientific disciplines known to us investigate the physical behaviour of things pertaining to their respective fields.

The Limits of Science

As great as science is, the scientific method nevertheless is subject to certain limitations. Three readily come to mind.

1. The scientific method is limited to what can be observed with the five senses.

George Simpson, the renowned evolutionist of Harvard, wrote:

“It is inherent in any acceptable definition of science that statements that cannot be checked by observations are not really about anything—or at the very least they are not science” (1964, 143:769).

It is only through use of the five senses that this observation takes place.

If something can be seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted, then science can deal with it. But to expect science to investigate something in the proverbial “sixth sense” is to demand too much of the scientific method, and lays it open to charges of abuse or misuse.

2. The scientific method is limited to telling us “how” a process works, not “why.”

In his book, *Questions of Science and Faith*, J.N. Hawthorne remarked:

“Science can give us the ‘know-how’ but it cannot give us the ‘know-why’ ” (1960, p. 4).

James D. Bales noted: The scientific method is incapable of dealing with the realm of purpose. It can deal with cause and effect relationships. It cannot deal with the “why” (1976, p. 37).

Science deals with mechanism, not purpose. “Why”—in regard to purpose—is not a question science is equipped to answer.

3. The scientific method is limited in that it is non-moral.

Nobel Prize winner Jacques Monod once stated that “science is ignorant of values” (1969, p. 21). There is nothing inherent in the scientific method that provides for the definition or study of morals. Paul Little, in *Know Why You Believe*, was correct when he said:

It should be recognized that science is incapable of making value judgments about the things it measures.

There is nothing in science itself which will determine whether nuclear energy will be used to destroy cancer or to destroy cities. This is a judgment outside the scientific method to determine (1967, p. 105).

Thornton Whaling, in his book, *Science and Religion*, wrote:

Physical science knows by experimentation and observation; historical science knows through credible testimony; psychology, by immediate consciousness of freedom and personality; philosophy through the universal laws of pure reason or thought; religion, by the answer of the infinite Personality to the call of moral and spiritual need. And to claim that knowledge belongs alone to any one of these fields is to ignore the breadth of possible knowledge and the high endowments of human nature, through a certain concealed Pharisaism which is the essence of conceit and obscurantism. For natural science, history, psychology, ethics, philosophy, or religion to affirm that there is only one mode of cognition, and that way its own, is to betray a fatuous pride which convicts of lack of real culture in the court of high reason (1929, pp. 12-13).

Science is not the only means of giving us true information about the world; its methodology limits it significantly.

One thing science cannot do, even in principle, is disprove the existence of anything. So when people try to use science to disprove the existence of God, they're using science illegitimately. Such a claim would require omniscience.

Can Science Disprove God?

It should be clear by now that the purpose of science is to study matter and energy, and nothing beyond that.

God is neither matter nor energy. Therefore the methods of experimental sciences cannot be applied to disprove His existence.

If anyone claims that sciences have disproved the existence of God, he must be asked to defend his position. He has to explain the experiment, the place where this was performed and the place where the results were published. Anyone can make any claims saying that science has demonstrated this or that fact, but then he should be able to support his claims by pointing to relevant experiments.

No one claiming that science has disproved God has ever come up with experimental evidence to support this claim. This is because they are using the name of science to intimidate the ignorant. There is no truth in their claims, but they will continue repeating this false claim as long as they can successfully disturb people.

Edmund W. Sinnott has observed:

Science and religion, ministering so diversely to the life of man, will necessarily follow different roads, but they still can powerfully reinforce each other. Surely they should enlarge their boundaries together. Both church and laboratory will be more effective in their service through such mutual aid. They must both be strong, but neither can be so without the other's help. Between them they hold up the hopes of man today as he strives to fulfill his splendid destiny (1953, p. xi).

Wernher von Braun, the foremost missile expert of the 20th century, declared

Through a closer look at creation, we ought to gain a better knowledge of the Creator; and a greater sense of man's responsibility to God will come into focus. Science and religion are not antagonists, but sisters. Both seek ultimate truth. Science helps to reveal more about the creator through His creation.... But it still bothers some people that we cannot prove scientifically that God exists. Must we light a candle to see the sun? (as quoted in Warner, 1972, pp. 314-317).

Science from a Christian Perspective

Science is one of the means by which man may glorify God. This is because God is the creator of all that is.

He has hidden the treasures of his glory in the very universe in which we exist.

The power in the atom, momentum, energy, mass, time, etc. are all creations of God and, therefore, under his authority.

The more the Christian learns of these things, the more He can glorify God.

Science must be subservient to Him, not the other way around.

English philosopher Herbert Spencer acknowledged that science is divided into five basic fundamentals: time, force, action, space, and matter. That is exactly what Moses wrote in Genesis 1:1—"In the beginning (time) God (force) created (action) the heavens (space) and the earth (matter)."

CONCLUSION

Science is a marvelous enterprise that has benefited mankind in more ways than would be possible to list. But its continued success is dependent in large part on an understanding of its proper nature and correct use. An understanding of what science is, how it works, and its inherent limitations will not only help us appreciate science, but prevent its abuse as well.

To suggest that knowledge can be acquired solely on the basis of science, and that empirical observation is the "court of ultimate appeal," is to err. Such an attitude ignores other numerous, significant avenues of human endeavor, as well as additional means of coming to knowledge and truth.

In closing, I want to affirm that there is no real conflict between true Science and Christianity. The conflict arises when one does not recognize the inherent limitations of science due to our human finitude.

The Bible reveals that the cosmos indeed declares the Creator. The Psalmist writes, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God and their expanse is declaring the works of His hands" (Psa. 19:1). And as Paul tells us, everyone knows that there is an omnipotent, omniscient Creator through observing His creation and that God has given His image bearers an awareness of absolute morality and ethics. He goes on to warn that it is man's sinfulness, his rebellion, that suppresses these truths (Rom. 1:18-25; 2:14-16). That is the presupposition that we operate from in the apologetic enterprise of reasoning in the marketplace (Acts 17:16-34).