

EDITORIAL

THREE KINDS OF SCIENCE

A number of years ago I was reading the campus newspaper at a large university where I was a graduate student. My attention was focused on a book review — definitely no ordinary book review! Several professors had been contacted to comment on the book and some of the comments were not too complimentary. The problem was that this was an unconventional biology textbook which favored creation instead of evolution. One comment was to the effect that science could not be fitted into the impossibly narrow confines of the biblical account of beginnings. This statement appeared significant to me, because it implied that science was broader and more open than the defined conclusions of Scripture. A broader approach would have a greater potential of finding truth.

I continued reflecting on this question from several perspectives, and in the process began wondering if science could be fitted into the impossibly narrow confines of a naturalistic philosophy that arbitrarily excludes God and suggests an evolutionary origin of nearly everything. Even if God exists, would a science that excludes Him from its explanatory menu ever be able to find Him? Which discipline is impossibly narrow? It seemed to me that evolutionists had the right to accuse creationists of beginning with their conclusions; however, creationists had the right to accuse evolutionists of doing likewise. Who had the really impossibly narrow viewpoint?

The question raised is complex and is not easily resolved. Part of the problem is that there is no simple definition or understanding of what science is. Science is a broad concept that can be approached and understood from a variety of perspectives. Because of this we can divide science in various ways. Possible categories are natural sciences, social sciences, experimental sciences, and theoretical sciences. For the purpose of this discussion I would like to suggest three kinds of science: (1) naturalistic science, (2) creation science, and (3) methodological science. I am not especially enamored with these designations but will use them because they do convey somewhat the concepts represented.

Naturalistic science reflects the modern philosophical understanding of science. It is a mechanistic approach to reality; explanations are based on our common understanding of cause and effect; God is ignored or does not exist. Evolution of the universe and of life is the only acceptable model of origins. It is noteworthy that much of man's study of nature (science) has not been conducted under the aegis of a naturalistic philosophy. A naturalistic science only gained broad acceptance a little over a century ago. The leading scientists who laid down the foundations of our modern science, such as Robert Boyle, Blaise Pascal, Carl von Linne, and Sir Isaac Newton, were much more like creation scientists than naturalistic scientists.

Creation science posits that there is a God who is the Creator, and the Bible is His word. Nature is interpreted in the context of that basic philosophical stance. Creation science is often treated with derision by naturalistic scientists, especially evolutionists who sometimes point out that the term "creation science" is an oxymoron. Creation is not considered to be a science, because creationists are starting with the conclusions of creation. On the other hand, it is not at all clear that evolutionists don't start with an evolutionary agenda as they interpret nature.

I would like to suggest a third type of science, which for lack of a better term will be called **methodological science**. This science focuses on science as a method of finding what nature is saying. As such it is free of the restrictions of either naturalistic or creation science. It is more open to find truth wherever the data lead, regardless of conclusions. It is subject to the logical conundrum that as soon as any philosophically significant conclusions are accepted, you no longer have an open system of inquiry. As with naturalistic and creation science, you can easily move into a thought pattern where further study will be influenced by the conclusions already drawn.

We have mentioned three different approaches to the study of science, with objections to each. Which system is best for finding truth? First, it needs to be pointed out that a retreat into agnosticism or relativism is unsatisfying and unproductive. Many an open mind reveals only a vacuum! We should look for truth. Since we exist, we know that reality exists, and we should try to find the truth about it. I would like to suggest that science be approached from the

methodological perspective. This is a good place to begin. It may not be the best place to end, but there is something to be said for letting nature speak for itself. We are all entitled to draw our own conclusions, but the scientific process (i.e., the study of nature) will be more valid if we start from a neutral methodological perspective. Science of itself can be best approached without the encumbrance of preconceived ideas. After the initial homework is completed and after those areas beyond the scientific purview have also been considered, one may want to draw some broader conclusions, but one should be aware of the bases which led to the conclusions drawn.

There is a problem from confusing definitions of science. But the three kinds of science mentioned above underscore a more serious problem. The problem is the confounding of scientific data and interpretations. The data from nature can be very impressive, and it is easy to let the validity of the data undeservedly enhance an interpretation. For instance, we are all impressed with the three billion bases of the genome of man that are found in each cell. These kinds of data are used to point out how wonderful either evolution or creation is. But the data of themselves may not warrant either conclusion, nor may they warrant calling an opposing view impossibly narrow. We may want to use the data of nature in formulating our world views, and indeed we should use it as part of the total picture of reality available to us. However, much more than is common practice, we need to differentiate between data and conclusions. Too often our statements that science demonstrates this, or proves that, do not really mean that at all. They mean that in our particular interpretation of science we can refer to these data to support our viewpoint. In scientific endeavors we should try to clearly distinguish between the data of nature and interpretations of those data. A methodological approach to science would favor this. We should let the data of nature speak for themselves, and not make them say more than they do. Our private views can be expressed, but they should be identified as such, and should not be confounded with the facts of nature.

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