

EDITORIAL

SCIENCE, A GOOD PLACE TO BEGIN . . .

I well recall the amazement and satisfaction I found in a physics laboratory experiment in which ordinary white light was separated by a prism into many distinct colors. Intuitively I had classified white as simply another color as is seen on a typical chart of paint colors. Now, I had learned that white was a combination of many colors that could be separated with a simple spectroscope. The reverse process was likewise fascinating as I noticed that the combining of many colors from decorative Christmas lights yielded a nearly white light. Science had worked. It was a rewarding pursuit.

We are all, or should be, impressed with the accomplishments of science. We have come to expect new discoveries and explanations almost daily, and wait impatiently for the next breakthrough. Technology based on science has provided a marvelous technocracy that almost threatens to engulf us. These advances give us unequivocal evidence that the scientific method works. For discovering explanations for the natural world about us, there seems to be no better methodology than science. In addition, science deals with the more concrete aspects of reality which give us a gratifying degree of security in this successful area.

We might feel very satisfied with science, except that all does not seem well. An exclusively scientific system of thought often leaves out too many areas that, we suspect, are part of reality. One only has to mention such concepts as consciousness, meaning of reality, morality, good and evil, freedom of choice, concern, conscience, loyalty, or love to realize that there seems to be a realm beyond the simple naturalistic cause-and-effect explanations of science.

A number of thought leaders have testified in one way or another about the reality beyond science. Vannevar Bush, who had an illustrious career as a scientist and administrator and who has been called the “father of the modern computer,” has stated that “Science proves nothing absolutely. On the most vital questions, it does not even produce evidence.”¹ The noted astronomer Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington, in referring to the areas of meaning beyond science, observed:

Natural law is not applicable to the unseen world behind the symbols, because it is unadapted to anything except symbols, and its perfection is a perfection to symbolic linkage. You cannot apply such a scheme to the parts of our personality which are not measurable by symbols any more than you can extract the square root of a sonnet.²

The famous mathematician-philosopher Arthur North Whitehead emphasizes the limitations of scientific explanation by pointing out that “Scientists animated by the purpose of proving that they are purposeless constitute an interesting subject for study.”³ Physician-author Oliver Wendell Holmes described the relation more graphically when he quipped, “Science is a first-class piece of furniture for a man’s upper chamber, if he has common sense on the ground-floor.”⁴ Last century, as the theory of evolution was being developed, Alfred Russel Wallace, whose ideas of biological evolution closely paralleled those of Charles Darwin, pointed out that man’s mental nature, i.e., his moral and intellectual capacities, could not have been developed by the laws of natural selection.⁵ The philosopher Huston Smith states the problem more directly: “In envisioning the way things are, there is no better place to begin than with modern science. Equally, there is no worse place to end....”⁶ These words eloquently emphasize some of the limitations and the patent incompleteness of science.

The expression “scientific world view” can suggest a contradiction in terms, because science gives only a partial view of reality, and its value as an explanatory system is limited. Any wholistic world view must account for those areas of experience beyond naturalistic explanations. Tempting as it may be, we should not reduce truth to our own simplistic level of understanding. Truth must look beyond science for many explanations. That is where God comes in.

Ariel A. Roth

ENDNOTES

1. Bush V. 1967. *Science is not enough*. NY: William Morrow & Co., p 27.
2. Eddington AS. 1929. *Science and the unseen world*. London: George Allen & Unwin, p 33.
3. Quoted by: Sullivan JWN. 1933. *The limitations of science*. NY: Mentor Books, p 126.
4. Holmes OW. 1872. *The poet at the breakfast-table*. Boston: Hough, Mifflin & Co., p 120.
5. Wallace’s ideas on man’s uniqueness are expounded in: (a) Wallace AR. 1870, *Contributions to the theory of natural selection*, especially chapter 10 — “The limits of natural selection as applied to man.” London: Macmillan & Co.; and (b) 1889. *Darwinism: an exposition of the theory of natural selection*. London: Macmillan & Co.
6. Smith H. 1976. *Forgotten truth: the primordial tradition*. NY: Harper & Row, p 1.