

# The Biblical View of Science

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Many non-Christians, and all too many Christians, are of the opinion that science, (i.e., the physical or natural sciences) is an ever-growing body of truth about the universe. The progress of science, its technological triumphs, so we are told, demonstrate its truth. Science is seemingly unassailable. After all, it works doesn't it? And isn't success the measure of truth?

This being the case, so it goes, when the Bible and science appear to be at odds, we need to re-interpret the Bible. For example, since science tells us (and the pope agrees) that (some sort of) evolution is a fact, not just a theory, we need to take a fresh look at Genesis 1. No longer can we assert with the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q 9) that "the work of creation is God's making all things of nothing, by the Word of His power, in the space of six days, and all very good." Six-day creationism needs to be re-examined. It is, we are assured, an obscurantist view of things.

To speak against this sort of scientific thinking is almost blasphemous in some circles, because, for many, science is the god of this age. Yet, that is what this paper intends to do, that is, to blaspheme the god of science. Science, it will be seen, is not the main revealer of truth. In fact, science is not capable of revealing any truth at all.

What then is the Biblical view of science? Science enables us to fulfill the mandate of Genesis 1:28: "Then God blessed them [Adam and Eve], and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the Earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the Earth.'" Science gives us directions for doing things, or "operating," in this world. It does not explain how the laws of nature work, nor does it accurately define or describe things. Science does not discover truth; it is a method for dominating and utilizing nature; it is merely a practical discipline that helps us live in God's universe and subdue it.

As strange as it might sound to the reader that science never gives us truth, it is precisely that belief that has been held by leading scientists and philosophers.<sup>1</sup> Albert Einstein, for example, speaking of our knowledge of the universe, said: "We know nothing about it at all...."

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The real nature of things, that we shall never know, never." The British philosopher Karl Popper wrote: "We know that our scientific theories always remain hypotheses.... In science there is no knowledge, in the sense in which Plato and Aristotle understood the word, in the sense which implies finality; in science we never have sufficient reason for the belief that we have attained the truth." Popper went on to say: "It can even be shown that all [scientific] theories, including the best, have the same probability, namely zero." Then too, Bertrand Russell, who will be quoted below, asserted that all scientific laws are based on fallacious arguments. And philosopher Paul Feyerabend, in his book *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*, writes:

On closer analysis we even find that science knows no 'bare facts' at all but that the 'facts' that enter our knowledge are already viewed in a certain way and are, therefore, essentially ideational. This being the case, the history of science will be as complex, chaotic, full of mistakes, and entertaining as the ideas it contains, and these ideas in turn will be as complex, chaotic, full of mistakes, and entertaining as are the minds of those that invented them.

John Robbins has pointed out that there are at least five logical difficulties with science, i.e., five reasons why science can never give us truth:<sup>2</sup>

1) Observation is unreliable. Scientists do not perform an experiment only once. Experiments are always repeated, and the results most always differ in some way. Why? Because the senses tend to deceive us; they are not to be trusted. Hence, numerous readings are taken in an attempt to guard against inaccurate observation. So much is this the case in science, that tests with unrepeatable results are never taken seriously. But if observation is unreliable, if the senses are so easily deceived, if the results frequently differ, why should one ever believe that he has discovered truth through observation?

2) All scientific experiments commit the fallacy of asserting the consequent. In syllogistic form this is expressed as: "If p, then q. q; therefore, p." Bertrand Russell, certainly no friend of Christianity, stated it this way:

All inductive arguments in the last resort reduce themselves to the following form: "If this is true, that is

true: now that is true, therefore this is true." This argument is, of course, formally fallacious. Suppose I were to say: "If bread is a stone and stones are nourishing, then this bread will nourish me; now this bread does nourish me; therefore it is a stone, and stones are nourishing." If I were to advance such an argument, I should certainly be thought foolish, yet it would not be fundamentally different from the argument upon which all scientific laws are based.

In the laboratory scientists work with a hypothesis. In this case the hypothesis is: "If bread is a stone and stones are nourishing, then this bread will nourish me." The scientist then attempts to deduce the predicted results that should occur if the hypothesis is true, such as "this bread nourishes me." He then performs an experiment to test the hypothesis to see if the predicted results occur. So he sits down at the table and eats the bread, and wonder of wonders, the bread does nourish him. The hypothesis, he concludes, is confirmed: "This bread is a stone and stones are nourishing." Silly you say? Yes! Yet, as Russell has asserted, it is not "fundamentally different from the argument upon which all scientific laws are based." That is to say, all scientific laws are based on fallacious arguments.

3) Science commits the fallacy of induction. Induction is the attempt to derive a general law from particular instances. Science is necessarily inductive. For example, if a scientist is studying crows, he might observe 999 crows and find that they all are black. But is he ever able to assert that all crows are black? No; the next crow he observes might be an albino. One can never observe all crows: past, present, and future. Universal propositions can never be validly obtained by observation. Hence, science can never give us true statements.

4) Equations are always selected, they are never discovered. In the laboratory the scientist seeks to determine the boiling point of water. Since water hardly ever boils at the same temperature, the scientist conducts a number of tests and the slightly differing results are noted. He then must average them. But what kind of average does he use: mean, mode, or median? He must choose; and whatever kind of average he selects, it is his own choice; it is not dictated by the data. Then too, the average he chooses is just that, that is, it is an average, not the actual datum yielded by the experiment. Once the test results have been averaged, the scientist will calculate the variable error in his readings. He will likely plot the data points or areas on a graph. Then he will draw a curve through the resultant data points or areas on the

graph. But how many curves, each one of which describes a different equation, are possible? An infinite number of curves is possible. But the scientist draws only one. What is the probability of the scientist choosing the correct curve out of an infinite number of possibilities? The chance is one over infinity, or zero. Therefore, all scientific laws are false. They cannot possibly be true. As cited above, the statement of Karl Popper is correct: "It can even be shown that all theories, including the best, have the same probability, namely zero."

(5) All scientific laws describe ideal situations. As [Gordon] Clark has said, "At best, scientific law is a construction rather than a discovery, and the construction depends on factors never seen under a microscope, never weighed in a balance, never handled or manipulated."<sup>3</sup> Clark uses the law of the pendulum as an example:

The law of the pendulum states that the period of the swing is proportional to the square root of the length. If, however, the weight of the bob is unevenly displaced around its center, the law will not hold. The law assumes that the bob is homogeneous, that the weight is symmetrically distributed along all axes, or more technically, that the mass is concentrated at a point. No such bob exists, and hence the law is not an accurate description of any tangible pendulum. Second, the law assumes that the pendulum swings by a tensionless string. There is no such string, so that the scientific law does not describe any real pendulum. And third, the law could be true only if the pendulum swung on an axis without friction. There is no such axis. It follows, therefore, that no visible pendulum accords with the mathematical formula and that the formula is not a description of any existing pendulum.

From our study of these five logical difficulties, it can be readily seen that science is not capable of giving us any truth. And if the scientific method is a tissue of logical fallacies, why should Christians seek to argue from science to the truth? Simply stated, they should not. Science is useful in accomplishing its purpose, i.e., subduing the Earth. But that is all it is useful for, nothing more.

The question arises, "If science never gives us truth, how can it be so successful?" It all depends on how one defines success. We are now able to put a man on the moon; we are also able to destroy our fellow man with one push of a button. Are these measures of success?

Scientific theories are always changing (whereas truth is eternal). Is constant change a measure of success?

Science is successful when one understands its purpose, and when one understands that false theories sometimes work. Newtonian science, for example, worked for years. It has been replaced by Einstein's theory. But even though he believed his theory to be a better approximation of the truth than Newton's, Einstein declared that his own theory was false.

Science has its place in a Christian philosophy, an important place. But science is never to be seen as a means of learning truth. Truth is found in the Scriptures alone; the Bible has a monopoly on truth. It is God's Word that must be believed, not the experiments of men. As Robbins has said: "Science is false, and must always be false. Scripture is true and must always be true. The issue is as clear, and as simple, as that."

## Notes

1. The quotes used here are cited in the Foreword of Gordon H. Clark's *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God* (The Trinity Foundation, 1987), and in the December 1994 edition of *The Lofton Letter*, edited by John Lofton, 10, 11.
2. John W. Robbins, *Logic Seminar*, Westminster Institute, July 1995.
3. Clark, 57.

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This article originally appeared in the January 1997 edition of  
*The Trinity Review*  
*The Trinity Review* is published by  
The Trinity Foundation  
P.O. Box 68  
Unicoi, TN 37692  
Telephone: (423) 743-0199  
[www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org)