

Revelation, Speculation and Science

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

It is one of those embarrassing historical ironies that modern science could not have arisen except in the atmosphere of a Christian world-and-life view. Nevertheless, the scientific community today persists in playing the prodigal by assuming an antagonistic stance against the Christianity of divine revelation. Hypnotized by Darwin's evolutionary scheme and enchanted with the products of scientific technology, modern man has granted science a secularized godship and bows before it in fetish idolatry.

The pitting of science against revelation is certainly odd. For, a certain state of affairs is needed for the scientific endeavor to be meaningful or fruitful. The scientist must believe that the state of affairs is conducive to science, or he would not venture into the scientific enterprise. He must believe that there is a world of things and processes that can be known, and that he himself sustains a relationship to this world that allows him to know these objects and events. But then, what reason can the scientist give for his belief that the state of affairs is actually conducive to science? Why is the world such as it is and not otherwise?

The Predicament for Science

Here the scientist, who depends on the self-sufficiency of his logico-empirical procedures, is in a predicament. His response is usually to make various hypotheses about the world and then point to the beneficial results that flow from such hypotheses; he gives, can give, no reason for those hypotheses -- they just are, because they work. If pressed, or if he is philosophically inclined, he may even go so far as to say that his "working hypotheses" have no reason unless it be "chance."

In other words, the consistent naturalistic scientist seems to hold to an irrational set of beliefs about the state of affairs simply in order that his "rational" scientific endeavor may get off the ground. It is rather obvious that prior to any scientific endeavor we must begin either from speculation (about "chance" hypotheses) or from revelation. The Scriptures (of the one Person who knows) reveal how it is that this world, and man in it, are such as to make scientific endeavor meaningful. The state of affairs that exists is due to the creation and providence of the sovereign God. If science (so-called) could actually refute the truths of Scripture, then there would be no actual basis for science at all. The desire of the scientific community to pit its enterprise and conclusions against Christian revelation is ultimately suicidal.

The Question of Origins

The antagonism between science and Scripture historically came to a head in the question of origins. The Christian asserts that the world is conducive to the scientific task precisely because God created it that way. (And this creation is revealed to be "nature," a completed work of God not subject to the continuing progressive development posited by evolutionary theory). Even within the Christian community, remnants of this bitter

confrontation are still evident in the dispute between those who hold to a "mature" (completed) creation, and those well-meaning scientists and theologians who would accommodate to the "science-in-vogue" by holding to "theistic evolution." Yet, it must be remembered, the non-Christian naturalistic scientist considers the "fact" of evolution as the supreme case against the Bible.

Despite the enthusiasms of modern science in pursuing study and research on the "origin of life," it must be recognized that all questions of origins fall outside the realm of empirical science! The methodology of science is simply not equipped to deal with events that are neither recurring or repeatable under experimental control. In the matter of origins, where the scientist can neither observe nor experiment, one is left to depend either on guesswork speculation or infallible revelation. The choice should be simple; for the Christian, it is.

Naturalistic science will usually retort that examination of present materials and processes enables us to extrapolate backwards so as to determine what must have occurred. But here again, forsaking his own basic methods, the scientist is speculating (not observing) on the course of historical development; he assumes (but cannot show experimentally) that not only is nature uniform now but always has been, that processes seen today have always worked as they do now. (The "theistic evolutionist" likewise assumes that today's processes must be basically similar to God's creative activities. This, in effect, is to say that creation was "immature," that God did not finish his creative work at a point in the past.) To pretend to answer questions about origins by extrapolating the observable present into the unobservable past is to reason in a circle; it is to forsake the proper descriptive role of science and to make it an arbitrary determiner of the past instead.

The Answer: the Triune God

The origin and nature of the universe depend upon the Triune God. The scientist cannot proceed without a prior belief (acknowledged or not) in the sovereign Creator. Obviously also, the doctrines of creation and providence as found in Scripture are mutually necessary; to believe the one is to believe the other. The scientist too must believe in the controlling providence of God over the processes of the creation, or else he wouldn't be a scientist.

Years ago, David Hume noted that the scientists proceed on a scientifically unfounded, yet critically essential belief in the uniformity of observable nature. Yet, he pointed out, there is no reason (beyond psychological habit) for the naturalistic scientist to expect the sun to come up tomorrow. Science as an autonomous self-contained discipline has no honest answer to Hume. But if science, properly conceived, subordinates itself to God's revelation, then it knows why the sun will come up for it knows that God providentially controls all the operations of his created universe in a regular and dependable fashion.

The scientist must presuppose a regulated universe, and in so doing he presupposes an ordered creation. Every scientist makes certain basic assumptions about reality and

knowledge, consciously or otherwise; and these thoughts are religiously motivated: "That which is known of God is plainly seen in them, for God has revealed it to them. For since the creation of the world His unseen attributes, not only His infinite power but also His divine nature, have been perceived, being understood by the things created" (Romans 1:19-20).

The Question of Relationship

It should be clear at this point what the relationship between science and Scripture properly is. The presupposition of any meaningful scientific endeavor is the truth of Christian theism as given in God's Word; if the world is not what Scripture says it is then science is not possible. The sovereign God controls all the operations of his creation, thus providing the uniformity we see in nature, a connection between the mind and the material world, a union of logic and facts, and standards of absolute truth.

The relation between science and Scripture is not one of synthesis between two tentative theories; rather, it must be one of subordination. If science is not subordinate of Scripture, then Scripture must be subordinate to science and science itself will be autonomous. If science is independent of revelation, then nature must be assumed to be self-sufficient and containing in itself the principles for its own interpretation. Thus God is either identified with nature (the error of pantheism) or is shoved out of the picture altogether (the practical result of deism). Either God is God, or science deifies itself.

The activity of science is never impartial; there is always a substructure of metaphysical or religiously motivated belief. If there were not, science would be futile, its feet firmly planted in mid-air. The naturalistic scientist claims to work with "the facts." Yet even to speak of "facts" is to make some metaphysical declaration concerning the existence of factuality itself. The only "honest" metaphysics for the philosopher who rejects God's revelation is an agnostic solipsism, an "I-don't-know-and-it-can't-be-known-ism." Yet, if there is one metaphysics besides Christianity that the scientist abhors, it is solipsism. But, on what basis can he discredit this "logical" position? What source of information can refute it?

The Basis: Scripture's Truth

The only basis, the only presupposition, that allows for factuality and the scientific enterprise is the truth of Scripture. Without the Bible, science has no order in nature to expect, and the scientist finds himself adrift between abstract timeless logic and pure ultimate potentiality - or "pure chance." The world of actuality is only an accident, and the "universe" (if there is such a thing) cannot be known since there is no known connection between sense experience and analytic thinking, no reason why irrational dreams are not as true as rational thought.

The scientist must believe that he confronts a system when he does his work, or else the work would be futile. That system is either the result of the purposeful plan of the sovereign God, or it is the reflection into the unknowable "universe" of the ordering mind

of man - which in its turn is equally unknowable. If the scientist refuses to presuppose the truth of Scripture (which is actually an epistemological impossibility), he will have neither a true universe to investigate or any reason to suppose he has the ability to do so. The Bible provides the only possible presupposition for all thought and science.

We turn down a dark alley if we do not submit every discipline, every thought, to God's absolute authority. We must begin with Scripture and let it interpret the scientific enterprise. The Word of Christ the Lord must be given first place in everything. If we neglect to let Scripture govern every academic pursuit, we have fallen prey to the shifting sands of human opinion.

The Archaic "Modern" Approach

Adam and Eve took the "modern" approach; they wanted to interpret the world apart from supernatural revelation. The question of what were the qualities and nature of a particular fruit and what effects from eating it might result, were "scientific" questions to be answered by independent research apart from the Word of an authoritative Lord. Why should we repeat their error? It should be obvious that if man, before his disabling fall into sin, needed God's supernatural revelation to interpret his world properly, how much more do we who live under the effects of sin! The methodology of Adam and Eve, being inspired by Satan, has come to be exalted and followed by all unrepentant sinners and is the substance of "science" as commonly conceived.

The only true science, the only science worthy of the name, proceeds from the truth of God's supernatural revelation to fulfill its divinely given task of subduing God's creation (Genesis 1:28). To attempt science apart from God's Word and authority is spiritual suicide for the effort itself and the scientist who attempts it. Man is never autonomous; he is always a creature dependent upon his Creator God. In science, as in philosophy, culture, or politics, "except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that built it" (Psalm 127:1).