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The Lens of Faith

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The Lens of Faith

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"For seven years during the nineties, I taught a course at St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto called *Christianity and Science*. It served as an introduction to the science division of the Christianity and Culture Program. In that context, it illustrated the essential relationship that Christianity has had to the development of the modern disciplines of natural science out of the ancient and Medieval discipline of natural philosophy. It was a full-year course. The first semester introduced to the students a lesson that many did not expect and some were reluctant to accept: that the scientific knowledge which we hold as certain, can only be described as provisional at best. Some were loath to accept this because the lens of culture has focused upon us the opposite image of absolute certainty."



From Our Guest Essayist

The Lens of Faith

For seven years during the nineties, I taught a course at St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto called *Christianity and Science*. It served as an introduction to the science division of the Christianity and Culture Program. In that context, it illustrated the essential relationship that Christianity has had to the development of the modern disciplines of natural science out of the ancient and Medieval discipline of natural philosophy. It was a full-year course. The first semester introduced to the students a lesson that many did not expect and some were reluctant to accept: that the scientific knowledge which we hold as certain, can only be described as provisional at best. Some were loath to accept this because the lens of culture has focused upon us the opposite image of absolute certainty.

Generally, it is not too difficult to convince people of the non-confirmable nature of religious faith. Anyone who prays knows that it is a less reliable means of attaining results than ordering goods on the internet. The very nature of faith is that it is non-confirmable. Religions teach and religious people believe in what they cannot see—a God beyond time, space, and physical measurement. Religious truths are not

scientifically confirmable because they are beyond sense perception, the essential prerequisite of empirical inquiry.

However, holding scientific facts does require a kind of belief, albeit a structure of belief quite different from religious faith. Do science students personally confirm every fact taught to them in class by experiments in the lab? Do they believe what the professor says is true? Or do they just store it in their short-term memories long enough to download it permanently onto an in-class exam paper?

What shocked some students in my Christianity and Science course was that the best thing we can say about scientific truth is that it is also conjectural and not certain, perhaps even less certain than religious faith because doubt is the essence of scientific discovery. I am not suggesting that Pythagoras's theory will one day be overturned, but that the broader and more wide-ranging conclusions of science as done by scientists and reported increasingly in the media are much more in doubt than the Discovery Channel reports in their "gee-wiz" fashion.

The truth about the universe is an enormous truth that we discover pieces of, slowly but surely as research dollars are spent and enormous efforts are made by clever scientists. However, what we learned yesterday, and hold as true today can to varying degrees, and may in all likelihood, be displaced or broadened by knowledge we will learn tomorrow. This is what makes science exciting, but can also lead to public skepticism because last year's warning about drinking coffee might lead to its praise next year as the cure-all for cancer.

We might conclude then that there is no scientific truth, merely scientific facts, that like cell phone models, become continuously re-marketed with new and intriguing

features. Science is a study of what *can* be observed in the physical world, either through our senses or through machines that extend our senses beyond what they ordinarily detect. Observation is ongoing and continues to be so for as long as we train our eyes on the vastness of the universe. However, it is possible that scientific truth will one day be unattainable, even though it may take a million years.

Those who confess religious faith do not and cannot know God in this same way. God is not measurable because God transcends the physical universe, outside of the measuring range of scientific instruments. *The truths of faith are not scientific truths.* What cannot be measured by science cannot be verified as scientific fact. Scientific belief and religious faith are two different ways of knowing, and because of that, science cannot directly prove God's existence nor, however, can it disprove it. God is not measurable therefore not an object of scientific study, provisional or otherwise.

By the same token, faith cannot prove or disprove scientific fact. There is no science in bible. The scientific method did not exist per se prior to the eighteenth century. The bible is the theological record of a community of faith, accepted as revealed truth, not proven in a laboratory. What is true is more than merely material truth. What we perceive as transcendent religious truth, or if you will non-material truth, is beyond a trillion human lifetimes to even dent the surface.

Some scientists believe that science has annihilated the validity of religious faith. These scientists do not know epistemology. Richard Dawkins is one of them. Recently he embarrassed himself by publishing a book *The God Delusion*, where he tried to disprove God's existence using the scientific method. To deny at least the possibility that science

is not the only truth overstep the bounds of the scientific method. To say so is actually a religious statement. Let's pursue an example:

Religious faith or a personal experience of God is scientifically irrefutable. Scientists can only say that there are no scientific proofs for God's existence, nothing more, and any theologian would agree, wholeheartedly. Scripturally based religions hold that God's personal revelation of divinity to humanity began in ancient time and continues now because personal testimony of faith throughout history has been unbroken. We cannot measure this. No measurement can disprove it. However, we can observe the universe, which some people believe God created for us to reflect upon.

Both science and scripture say we are made up of the very stuff of that universe – stardust. As we continue to study and reflect upon our universe, the consciousness of this universe reflects upon itself, and ever peers through various methodological lenses to what we believe lies beyond.

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