

Philosophic Underpinnings of Science: problems with science being equated to reason

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17 Mar.1995

LANL Newsbulletin

globalflood.org/origins-debate.html

Marvin Mueller, in a recent guest editorial, suggests that supernatural explanations are inherently untestable and that true science "cannot allow even one supernatural explanation of natural phenomena." I would like to examine the philosophical underpinnings for this way of thinking. Very clear connections can be made with the ideas of Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century who argued the only category of reality accessible to human reason is that of the phenomenal. The immediate implication of this assumption is that categories such as aesthetics, ethics, human emotion, and indeed all things spiritual are beyond reason. In today's terminology, beyond reason means beyond science. But is this basic premise of Kant valid? Certainly, one can subscribe to it and honestly believe it, but is it true? I submit it is not.

Mueller alludes to the "bothersome" issue of consciousness in a materialist model of reality. Indeed it should be bothersome. One very real product of mind or consciousness is language--that is, the use of abstract symbols or code to record and relay thought. Coded information is a category of reality that transcends matter and energy. Such a proposition may be surprising to many. But it can be demonstrated in that the essential nature of such information is independent of its carrier, be it acoustic oscillations, ink patterns on paper, modulations of electromagnetic waves, voltage patterns in a transistor network, alignment of magnetic domains on a floppy disk, or smoke signals. So not only is consciousness part of the noumenal realm, but a quite tangible product of consciousness, namely, language, also belongs to a nonmaterial category. Reason itself, so closely linked to language, must be noumenal as well. Therefore it is straightforward to conclude Kant's basic thesis is faulty and the reductionist sort of materialism Mueller is advocating is simply contrary with the way things really are.

Is it possible to evaluate with the mental faculties the question of the origin of the coded information in DNA and to include in this rational evaluation the possibility of a Superintelligent Designer? Of course it is, unless ones prior philosophical commitments and model for reality automatically preclude such a possibility. On the other hand, materialism absolutely requires a theory of

evolution. A materialist has no other choice. A critical question, then, is of what does reality truly consist? Just what is the correct model for reality?

The suggestion Prof. Johnson made here in December that scientists should undertake serious examination of their philosophical underpinnings and consider how these indeed influence the way they think deserves strong affirmation. Johnson argued that equating science with materialist assumptions is emphatically not a prerequisite for doing good science, as a review of the history of science readily shows. The experience of the former Soviet Union vividly demonstrates that a materialist framework which has no categories for aesthetics, ethics, justice, compassion, affection, volition, much less for God Himself carries with it quite tangible human consequences. On what rational grounds should science be linked to such a philosophical framework? In this era when the American public is asking why it should continue past levels of support for the scientific enterprise, I believe there is even more reason than ever to heed Prof. Johnson's advice and encourage rather than suppress (and label as "anti-scientific") open discussion of these important questions.

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