



Why do we love science? OR What fascinates us about science?

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Humans, in their thinking, are drawn to patterns or more precisely the *discovery* of patterns. Imagine the mathematical pattern of the Pythagorean Theorem $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ that governs right triangles or of the number π , which seems to display no pattern at all as we numerically extend it.

There is something transparent to the human mind regarding mathematical intelligibility. It allows the intellect to see at depth, more so than mere qualitative reasoning. This is the fascination with science: humans are able to obtain all the intellectual gratification that mathematics affords, but not solely in the realm of causally inert numbers; science tells us about the world of existing things. The more mathematically precise the science, the greater is our satisfaction with it. And when we can have a mathematically precise description of a pattern in the world of nature, this we call a law of nature and esteem it highly.

This is all very well and good. But what if there were a deeper set of truths that one could discover that are even deeper patterns to nature? This is my fascination with philosophy. The patterns and regularities that philosophers argue over, however, are largely *qualitative* and so our mode of deduction, that which regulates our arguments is not mathematics but logic. Unfortunately, though like math, logic is able to reveal contradictions, it is not able to give us positive insight into the way the world exists. This is largely the explanation of the lack of consensus among philosophers and the perception from the laity that philosophy is purely a discipline of groundless abstractions.

To be sure, it can be that at times. But at its best, philosophy asks questions that are even more fundamental than those of the sciences and offers answers that are truly ultimate. A scientist may try to examine the forces that one particle exerts on another; the philosophers debate the nature of causality. A scientist may investigate why some particular change occurs; the philosophers debate the very nature of contingent being and its becoming.

There is a danger for the scientist; that in dealing with some rarified slice of the world in a very precise, highly technical way, he loses sight of the very human, commonsensical world in which we live. Stanley Jaki has mentioned that the nature of our universe speaks clearly of its Creator to those whose minds eyes have not become “jaundiced by attending exclusively to quantities.”

The same danger arises for the philosopher. This is also why the best science is that which, although containing some theoretical facets, seeks to explain actually occurring phenomena (which is when science becomes useful in technology). Similarly, the best philosophy is that which,

although containing some seemingly useless abstractions, it offers explanations that comport with the world of common sense.

Thomistic philosopher, Etienne Gilson has written, “We must not forget as philosophers what we know as men.” This is what attracts me to the existentialism of Aquinas. But that is a discussion for another time.

This, then, is one role that philosophy can have in relation to the sciences, and one role that the philosopher can have in relation to the scientist: in all of our abstract academic pursuits we remain, not “minds that think, but beings that know other beings as true, pursue them as good, and appreciate them as beautiful.” Namely, we can seek to keep each other grounded.

As a Christian, I am committed to the idea that any good scientific theory that accurately describes the world will ultimately be describing the world created by God. Similarly, any good philosophy that accurately describes the world will ultimately be describing the world created by God.

In our day when science has a commanding voice in the public square, the philosopher can point to places where the scientist has strayed from his assessment of the natural world into the area of ultimate questions and answers. The arena of ultimate questions and answers is the arena of the philosopher and the theologian, for even if the scientist could give us an exhaustive explanation of the existence and interactions of every particle in the universe, the question would still remain: Why is there a Universe at all? To this he can give no answer, not as a scientist. As a man he will want to offer a response because “all men are metaphysical animals.” But he does so outside his profession and training, he does so as a layperson in the realm of ideas properly annexed to philosophy or philosophical-theology.

To bring things full-circle, this present discussion about the relationship between the sciences and philosophy, is ultimately the attempt to find a distinct pattern in the natures of these two types of inquiry and their fruitful interaction. This is that realm of the philosophy of science that plays on both sides of the street, as it were. In the realm of ideas, then, these three remain: science, philosophy, and theology. But the greatest of these is Theology.

By

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