Science: Its Role for a Christian and How Do We View It?

- Can we prove the theories of science true?
- Can we prove the theories of science false?
- Karl Popper and his view of Science

One can have a pragmatic view of Science

Just turn the crank-Who cares what is inside the box!

What is wrong with this? It isn’t how Science is done, but there is a bigger problem.

How do we treat the models and theories of Science?

- If a scientific theory, like say atomic theory, quantum mechanics, global warming, evolution(??) makes successful predictions, how do we interpret the results of the theory?
- Ways to interpret fall into two broad camps.
  - Realism
  - Antirealism

Realism & Antirealism

“Science aims to give us, in its theories, a literally true story of what the world is like; an acceptance of a scientific theory then involves the belief that it is true.”(Bas van Fraassen, p. 8, The Scientific Image, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).)

Scientific realism, roughly defined, is the view that successful scientific theories are true or approximately true models of the theory-independent world. A number of antirealist approaches to science agree that science works—it solves problems, gives us predictions, allows us to control nature and describe observation simply—but that its success does not indicate that scientific theories are true or approximately true.(J.P. Moreland, p. 13, Christianity and the Nature of Science: A Philosophical Investigation, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989).)
Constructive Empiricism: Bas van Fraassen

“Science aims to give us theories which are empirically adequate; and acceptance of a theory involves as belief only that it is empirically adequate.” (van Fraassen, p. 12)

“...scientific activity is one of construction rather than discovery; construction of models that must be adequate to the phenomena, and not discovery of truth concerning unobservables.” (van Fraassen, p. 5)

- What is the truth? What do you think?
- Obviously depends on your metaphysics
- As well as your view of the world
- The issue of nonobservables
- Are we justified in believing in them? (Atoms, electrons, black holes?) Do they exist?
- This the just the problem for van Fraassen. Atoms are not observable.
- Are there really “nonobservables”? Is the table an observable?
- What should a Christian think about these issues?
- Just what is the role of Science?
- A power play?
- Discovering God’s thoughts?
- Faithful Stewardship?

Steward of What?

God’s Creation

‘In order to subdue the earth, a knowledge of the earth was indispensable, knowledge of its oceans, of its nature, and of the attributes and laws of this nature.”


Steward of what God has revealed to us. (Dr. Morris and Isaiah 28:23ff)
Humble Realism

Humble Realism would first of all see that the goal of science as glorifying God and enabling us to be better stewards of His creation. In order to do that, Humble Realism would see science as attempting to discover truth about the nature of reality, but is aware that a complete understanding of even a limited part of reality is going to be beyond us. The entities and laws postulated by theories are assumed to be accurate, yet incomplete, approximations to what is present in the theory-independent world, but the mental model of those images must be informed by the problems of scale chauvinism we all struggle with. Humble Realism embraces the view of humans as limited and fallen creatures, who realize that our finitude is a gift from God, all the time acknowledging that the truth of Imago Dei has something to do with how we can be stewards of this creation, including the ability to grasp a limited understanding of God’s faithfulness in creation.

...Humble Realism acknowledges that it is only because of a faithful God that one can understand some aspect of reality in a limited way and that all the knowledge we have is revelation from the one who holds all things together (Colossians 1:18) Finally, Humble Realism will hopefully allow one to take joy in what we learn about God’s creation.

(Broussard-5 year paper.)

An example of the problem....Jesuits in the time of Galileo

“How to deal with the increasing superiority of heliocentric celestial mechanics? If the Jesuits had been realists, they would simply have proclaimed the system false, citing Scripture and church decrees, and refused to sanction the utility of an erroneous hypothesis. Such a position, while theologically quite sound, would have been very weak strategically; therefore Ricolli and other Jesuits instead revived the fictionalist stance, discussing heliocentric astronomy with great erudition and even considerable enthusiasm, but always with the caveat that it was merely a hypothesis, like dozens of other hypotheses that scientists adopted for convenience. [emphasis mine]

“... astronomical systems were all fictional devices designed only to save the appearances of things, and that appearances have nothing to do with reality, which is the business of philosophers rather than astronomers.”


Modern Day Issues: J.P. Moreland

“attempts to integrate science and theology, including efforts to resolve apparent conflicts between them, should not automatically assume a view of science known as scientific realism. ... An eclectic model of science on a case-by-case basis, should be used to integrate science and theology.” (Moreland, p. 13)
“In sum, an eclectic approach to the realist/antirealist debate deserves serious consideration and could provide a conceptual framework for developing one’s view about the integration of science and theology. For example, when science and a theological statement or biblical interpretation come into conflict part of the solution may lie in adopting an antirealist view of the scientific statement.” (Moreland, p. 205)

Moreland’s view

“An antirealist approach should be taken toward some scientific theory in those cases where the phenomena described by that theory lie outside the appropriate domain of science, or the scientific aspect of some phenomena is inappropriately taken to be the whole phenomena itself.” (Moreland, p. 206, italics in original)

Just like the Jesuits... 

Modern Day Issues: Appearance of Age

“The Bible’s account of the chronology of creation points to an illusion... The seeming age of the stars is an illusion... Either the constancy of the speed of light is an illusion, or the size of the universe is an illusion, or else the physical events that we hypothesize to explain the visible changes in light or radiation are false inferences.” [Gary North]

Well?

• Is this treating knowledge faithfully?
• What does it do to our views of stewardship?
• What do YOU believe about the issues of the antithesis and common grace?