

Religion's "Wait and See" attitude when science says it may be wrong does not serve science

“The question of truth is as central to [religion’s] concern as it is in science. Religious belief can guide one in life or strengthen one at the approach of death, but unless it is actually true it can do neither of these things and so would amount to no more than an illusory exercise in comforting fantasy” Anglican priest and scientist John Polkinghorne.

Science is about questions and these questions are invariably sceptical. It is like, “I will not believe this unless I have to on account of the evidence.” Science is not belief in the normal sense but critical belief that it continually tests and challenges. Scientism is not science and good science is always labelled as scientism when the believers do not like its findings. There is no such thing as ignoring the findings of science and saying you will wait and see.

When religious doctrine and religious based historical claims get a challenge, believers say, "Yeah it seems to prove us wrong but we will wait and see. We won't say our faith is wrong just yet!"

This is really biased and antisience when it so happens that the challenge really does refute the faith. There is a difference between a challenge needing more checking and one that does not.

A religion proven wrong by other disciplines or one that is self-refuting such as Christianity (says God is love as if the violent commands from its God in the Bible are not there!) is a threat to science merely by having a wait and see attitude to science. It is terrible to take such an attitude over pure nonsense.

They will say, "Science and the science of the historian could be mistaken. Remember how science was taken in by the Piltdown Man hoax." Scientists - not all though - were fooled. Science cannot be fooled for it is a method and it is that unveiled the hoax.

Should everybody assume that scientific discoveries are true until we learn differently? Perhaps as long as we keep on checking.

A wait and see attitude to science is anti-scientific. The scientists are qualified to investigate and we are not. It is up to them to tell us if a wait and see attitude is needed or desirable.

The wait and see brigade care about seeing science and religion fit but not about science. If you get your wife to fit into your plans that does not mean you value her. It means the opposite.

Whoever is not for science is against it. A few Hindu groups do give out statements of faith that demand deference and respect for science and urge people to educate themselves in science. But no major religion has the same respect for science. Catholicism and Islam do not promote science in their statements of faith. It is more important for Catholics to proclaim that Mary was conceived sinless than it is for them to proclaim the validity of science. The former is Catholic dogma and the latter is not.

Suppose some scientific facts and claims fit a religion. Surely religion will not take a wait and see attitude as regards those? But the religion is prepared to wait and see if it turns out that this fit is based on mistakes as long as the mistakes are those of science. And the religion does not truly respect the facts - it only cares about them because they fit and not because they are facts. The anti-scientific attitude is still there. It is not dormant or anything but is really there.

So we see that religion necessarily has a wait and see attitude to science even if no conflict between the two can be ascertained. But the bottom line is that we must not forget that the wait and see is intrinsically a conflict.

A wait and see attitude to science is anti-science but to rig claims so that they become immune to scientific analysis is worse.

Christians teach the following: There are many things you can know or prove by scientific method. But there are things that can be shown to be believable but some things you can't prove like that. The Christian often does not think God is amenable to being proved using a scientific method. God has to be known in other ways. These other ways are “I know God by my experience, by how people who claim to follow God behave in the world and from his action history eg when he raised Jesus from the dead.”

In reality there is only one reason: “I have experienced God. I do this before I assess anything as his work be it how good people live or how people come back from the dead.”

What has this got to do with rigging science? It has a lot to do with it indirectly. Take the following possible argument: "I have experienced a spiritual force residing in these walnuts. I eat them knowing that though I have never been diagnosed with cancer that I had it and it kept the signs away." The God stuff opens the door to insane nonsense like that.

History borrows from science in the sense that it tests how reliable or otherwise testimony from people may be. The historian has to assess human nature and assessing is science. Ethics borrows from science in that it tests how things harm. A wait and see attitude in science leads to the same attitude with everything else. The honest historian finds that the gospels show no more than that people believed Jesus appeared to them. He cannot say on historical grounds that Jesus bodily rose for the fact remains that the gospels themselves do not say why the body was missing from the tomb. Even the risen Jesus did not say he rose in the tomb. The honest philosopher of ethics finds that the Bible God is very antilife and that Jesus was evil for condoning that kind of God and his worship.

Religion likes to be left alone by critical science. It likes the bits of science that it does not see as a threat. Why? Why do Churches and theologians keep acting like science was the only potential threat to religious faith? That is distraction for the bigger threats are ethics and history. They are utterly fatal threats.