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Bias

By Joe Spears

Have you ever wondered why some people seem so resistant to ideas? If you are a creationist, you might have wondered why some evolutionists seem so resistant to evidence against evolution. Or you might have noticed this in other fields, too. Well, it does seem amazing that the preponderance of evidence of evolution can be ignored, or discounted, so readily, so consistently, by some.

This is a phenomenon that has been observed and commented on down through time. Tolstoy wrote of this,¹ and so did Nobelist Max Planck.² Even evolutionist Gould wrote about this.³ He wrote of a researcher who was so blind to the truth, to the evidence, that not only did he ignore the evidence of his own experiments, his own data, but he also fudged the data and was not even aware that he had fudged it. Whether true or not, this was stated by an evolutionist, so some evolutionists must at least believe that such bias is possible.

I recently read of a scientist who discovered soft tissue in a triceratops fossil. However, I also read a comment about this discovery, posted on the web, criticizing this scientist and saying that science ought to follow where the data led, without regard to preconceived notions. The scientist had merely reported the data; no reference was made to creation or the Bible.

I was amazed. I thought the poster of this comment seemed to be doing the very thing that he was advising not to do. He seemed to be ignoring the data because of his preconceived notion. The data being ignored in this case was the very real evidence for existence of soft tissue in a dinosaur fossil. The bias in this case seemed that dinosaurs had to have lived at least tens of millions of years ago (too long for soft tissue to remain).

Consider the evolutionist Gould, who wrote in *The Mismeasure of Man* of a scientist who was so biased that he

¹ Confirmation bias <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confirmation_bias#cite_note-69> Accessed 2014 Dec 01

² Josephson B (2004 Nov 14) Covert censorship by the physics preprint archive. <<http://www.spaceandmotion.com/physics-censorship-nobel-prize-laureate.htm>> Accessed 2014 Dec 01

³ Gould SJ (1996) *The Mismeasure of Man*. Norton, W. W. & Company, Inc., New York, NY, 448

actually faked his own experimental measurements and then published the data in such a way that Gould was able to use the published data to show bias.³ Gould pointed out that the scientist could have reported the data differently, leaving out the part that exposed his bias, but he didn't. Why? Gould said the reason was that the bias was so inherent, so much a part of his way of thinking, that the scientist wasn't aware that he had a bias. Does this make sense? Well, whether the researcher was aware of it or not, he certainly seemed to have a bias.

There is a phenomenon, called *confirmation bias*, which is ignoring data that are contrary to one's bias and emphasizing data that seems to support it. The decision whether to accept the data is not based on the data itself, but on the presupposition. As one might say, when confronted by data contradicting his theory, "Well, so much the worse for the data!"

We ought to be aware of this factor, the *bias factor*, when considering what proponents of some position have to say. It may be wise to consider whether they have any bias and what that bias may be and to use that information to double check claims such as "there is no proof" for something. The truth may be that there is no supporting evidence of which he is aware. Also, we need to consider whether this person might be less than highly motivated to try to find out whether there is any such evidence! Bias tends to deter one from such investigation.

Einstein advocated questioning assumptions. This brings to mind those who refused to even look through Galileo's telescope. They *already knew*, so they would not bother to look and find out. Actually, they did *not* know, if knowing implies being correct in one's assumptions! Not being correct, they just *thought* they knew; they assumed, and that, incorrectly. So, double-check. And avoid double standards. Questioning evidence that is presented as supporting a position contrary to one's bias and requiring less stringent criteria for acceptance of evidence that supports one's bias is a double standard and obviously unscientific.

But aren't scientists dispassionate, unemotional, highly rational, objective and scientific? Well, let's see what one scientist had to say on this. Nobel prize winner Max

Planck said that progress was made in science only after the scientists holding to the old ideas died and were no longer on the scene. Only then could new ideas be accepted. Wow!

Bacon, in the *Novum Organum*, wrote,

The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion...draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects or despises, or else by some distinction sets aside or rejects.⁴

Tolstoy wrote,

I know that most men—not only those considered clever, but even those who are very clever, and capable of understanding most difficult scientific, mathematical, or philosophic problems—can very seldom discern even the simplest and most obvious truth if it be such as to oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusions they have formed, perhaps with much difficulty—conclusions of which they are proud, which they have taught to others, and on which they have built their lives.¹

What about purveyors of information: journalists, publishers, the media. Aren't they devoted to objective reporting? The Social Text affair comes to mind.⁵ Alan Sokal, a physicist, decided to perform a test:

To test the prevailing intellectual standards, I decided to try a modest (though admittedly uncontrolled) experiment: Would a leading North American journal of cultural studies...publish an article liberally salted with nonsense if (a) it sounded good and (b) it flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions? The answer, unfortunately, is yes...

In the first paragraph I deride "the dogma imposed by the long post-Enlightenment hegemony over the Western intellectual outlook": that there exists an external world,...

Is it now dogma in Cultural Studies that there exists no external world?...

The article was duly published, though it was filled with nonsense. Why? Could the answer be bias? Bias—if something agrees with one's preconceived notions, it is accepted without too close an inspection.

Another example is that of the treatment of the chronometer labeled H1 that was developed by Harrison. Sobel, the author of *Longitude*, describes how someone

who seemed biased against Harrison's chronometer (whom we shall refer to as "M.") came to pick up the instrument, which was "accidentally" dropped on the way out of the building.⁶ M. was in favor of a lunar method of determining longitude and was a competitor for the large monetary prize of 20,000 pounds for a successful method of determining longitude. Harrison's method involved the use of chronometers, and a damaged chronometer would certainly not help Harrison win the coveted prize. Did the bias of M. lead to the "accidental" dropping of the chronometer? This happened centuries ago but illustrates how bias may motivate a person to sabotage the work of others or to destroy any evidence that one's own bias is incorrect.

Another thought

New ideas seem to be opposed on the basis of their lacking full development. The early computers weighed tons and did less than one that today fits in your pocket. Early autos broke down often. Why not give new ideas a chance? Almost by definition, new ideas are not completely developed; that often takes time. Development, over time, provides more details, more information, and solves more minor problems. Yet this incomplete development sometimes seems to be the reason for not developing ideas further.

It seems to me that the basis for opposition to a theory or of a model ought not to be the (sometimes irrelevant) details, unanswered questions, or aspects of the theory not yet proven. Of course these questions can be answered, but these problems ought not to be reasons to reject outright the idea or to reject it more than is warranted. These are often aspects or the incompleteness of the development of an idea.

While too often focusing on the details (which are often irrelevant details), criticisms of different ideas also too often seem to ignore the foundation or the basic concept. In fact, they sometimes provide evidence of ignorance of the foundational concepts of what they criticize. Have you ever heard or read that some critic of a paper "has not read my paper?" Or have you been in a discussion in which someone was opposed to an idea, that the person obviously failed to completely understand? These examples illustrate this lack of comprehension of the fundamentals of ideas. This is not just my opinion; it is something so common that it is taught in elementary logic courses, as a logical fallacy: equivocation, etc. The common saying for this is "not seeing the forest for the trees."⁷

⁴ Confirmation bias <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confirmation_bias#cite_note-bacon-68> Accessed 2014 Dec 01

⁵ Sokal AD <http://www.physics.nyu.edu/sokal/lingua_franca_v4/lingua_franca_v4.html> Accessed 2014 Dec 01

⁶ Sobel D (1995) *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time*. 1st ed. Walker and Co, New York, NY

⁷ Straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel, as another example of this, also comes to mind.

I have read more than one such criticism or reason that something “is not true,” which in fact was an assumption built on lack of understanding the concepts and sometimes lack of knowledge.

Also, new ideas seem to be rejected in the history of business. Harvard business professor Clayton M. Christensen wrote of this in his book, *The Innovator’s Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*, in which he described the rejection of a new technology by an older, established company and the technology developer being forced to start his own company.⁸ The new company then proceeds to become rather stiff competition for the older company. The interesting observation of the author is that the new successful company then too often proceeds to repeat the same mistakes of its older competitor—the new company becomes somewhat established and then itself rejects other new technology, which gets developed elsewhere as a third new company that then proceeds to take much of the success and market from the second company. History repeats itself.

According to this Harvard business professor, ideas in business sometimes seem to suffer the same fate that Planck articulated concerning ideas in science.

Thomas Kuhn

Kuhn is well known as the author of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Let’s look at what he said:

Almost always the men who achieve these fundamental inventions of a new paradigm have been either very young or very new to the field whose paradigm they change.⁹

As in political revolutions, so in paradigm choice—there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community...this issue of paradigm choice can never be unequivocally settled by logic and experiment alone.¹⁰

We might ask why people take different sides of an issue, and continue with opposition or support, even in spite of evidence to the contrary. Are the two sides not able to see the evidence from the other side? There seems to be a communication divide between the two sides in such cases. In an article titled “The Incommensurability of Scientific Theories,” Eric Oberheim dealt with differing scientific paradigms and the problem of communication between proponents of opposing paradigms. He stated the following which may shed some light on this gap:

In the influential *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn made the dramatic claim that history of

⁸ Christensen CM (1997) *The Innovator’s Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*. 1st ed. Harvard Business Review Press, Boston, MA

⁹ Kuhn TS (1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 89-90

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 93

science reveals proponents of competing paradigms failing to make complete contact with each other’s views, so that they are always talking at least slightly at cross-purposes. ...These competing paradigms lack a common measure because they use different concepts and methods to address different problems, limiting communication across the revolution-revolutionary divide.¹¹

The mention of the missing common measure—or different standards—should be noted. A way to bridge the gap would be to take reality as the foundation of all truth, not what one wants to be true. The evidence for truth is not how strongly one feels about an issue! This is one way of accomplishing the meeting of the minds so necessary, and apparently so missing, in the above quote.

Science and Religion: Common Ground?

Can science and religion co-exist? Can science possibly share a common ground with religion? This discussion is limited to the Christian religion, as taught in the Bible.

In the Christian religion, the basis for believing something, even belief in God, is evidence. I realize this may seem strange to those who thought that faith was based on not having any evidence, or believing without evidence, and that the presence of evidence did away with the faith aspect of believing things. However, in this case, rather than going by what people believe about this issue, perhaps even very strongly believe, let us ignore the strength of a feeling or of a belief as not constituting evidence for the feeling of belief. Instead, we will look at what the Bible of Christianity says, to determine what that same Bible teaches.

We read in this Book of a doubting Thomas, but wait—he was not denied the evidence he asked for, nor was it suggested that he should believe in Jesus without evidence. You might disagree with that statement, claiming that Thomas was supposed to believe without evidence, since he said he would not believe unless he saw evidence of the resurrection.¹² So, you may say doubting Thomas wanted to see evidence of the resurrection and did not need it to have faith. But look at the evidence Thomas *already* had *before* he asked for even more evidence:

¹¹ Oberheim E, Hoyningen-Huene P (2013) The incommensurability of scientific theories. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/incommensurability/>> Accessed 2014 01 Dec

¹² The other disciples therefore said unto him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said unto them, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” John 20:25

Assuming the Bible to be true, for the purpose of this analysis, we see that:

- Thomas had worked with Jesus
- Thomas had probably seen many miracles, if not performed some himself, such as
 - Jesus waking on water
 - Feeding of thousands miraculously
 - Numerous healings
 - Casting out of demons
 - Raising of the dead

We know that many people knew of these events. In the case of the feeding of thousands, thousands were directly participating and receiving and obviously would have been cognizant of the miraculous meal they had actually participated in consuming. It would be perplexing and surprising and highly improbable that Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, would be ignorant of these happenings.

So the story of doubting Thomas is no proof that faith must be without evidence, for Thomas already had proof, had evidence, in spades. The more accurate interpretation is that one who has abundance of evidence already ought to believe what that evidence indicates rather than denying the indication of the evidence, while demanding more evidence.

The example for Christians concerning having (and not having) faith was the lack of faith Israel demonstrated when they had the opportunity to go into the promised land (Numbers 14). What God said in the book of Hebrews on this event is very enlightening. He said they had not believed God *for all the evidence* he had shown them. And this, my friends, is the prototypical example from the Bible for the church about faith. And this classic example of faith was faith, or believing, based on evidence.

Numbers 14:11 And the LORD said unto Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?"

So, Christian faith is based on evidence. Paul, in the book of Romans, says God has shown evidence to people, so they are without excuse. In other words, they have evidence.

Enough on the theology. Suffice it that faith, or at least the faith of the Bible, is based on evidence. Science is supposedly based on evidence. There we have the common ground. But what about the disconnect between science and religion? Where does that lie?

There is no disconnect between true science and true religion if both are considered to involve honest seeking for truth.

You don't have to throw your intelligence away to become a Christian; quite the contrary. We have just seen examples of faith from the Bible that base faith on evidence. But who is it that believes several impossible things every day before breakfast, that is, without evidence or contrary to evidence? Who is it that believes:

- Rocks turned into bats and people
- Things happened that are less likely than winning the lottery. Even if winning the lottery required, instead of picking a winning ticket out of a few thousand or even million tickets, picking a single atom out the entire universe, winning this lottery is still trillions of times more likely than even a single cell evolving according to none other than the evolutionist (not creationists) who wrote a book titled *Mathematics of Evolution*.¹³
- Fossil soft tissue lasted millions of years, when it scientifically should not have.

That is enough. Books could be written, and have been, on these topics and more. Those examples indicate the impossibility of the things that are routinely believed by evolutionists. Is it scientific to believe in things highly unlikely, and not only to believe in them, but to oppose even questioning them and to claim that they are proven beyond doubt? Does this sound like science, or more like bias?

The facts do not support evolution. Let us consider an approach to scientific research, or any kind of research for that matter. Look at the evidence fairly, without bias. Then decide, after seeing enough to make an intelligent decision, without bias, without ignoring evidence, and without assuming that things are not possible or proven simply because you have not seen their evidence.

Assuming things are not there, simply because one does not see them, is one indication of immaturity. Jean Piaget wrote on child development. When a child is very immature, the child thinks that if he does not see something, it does not exist. This explains peek-a-boo and its amazing interest to young children. Do we behave as children in refusing to believe something exists or that something is possible, simply because we have not seen the evidence for it yet?

We don't have to believe in things that are not proven, but we don't take it for granted they are impossible either. We can stay open-minded. We can refuse to accept or to reject theories, concepts, models, etc., on the basis of insufficient reason.

To claim that we don't know how we got here is one thing; to say we don't understand how a God could create the universe is one thing. To say we don't understand how

¹³ Hoyle F (1999) *Mathematics of evolution*. Acorn Enterprises LLC

the universe got here without God is one thing, which would be honest to say.

It would be honest to say we don't know how evolution could produce the living things we see either since, in fact, no one does understand how evolution could explain the existence of living species. (James Tour, one of the top ten cited chemists in the world, said that if anyone should understand evolution, he should. He builds molecules in the lab. And he says he does not understand how evolution can be fact at all.¹⁴)

Here is where too often one hears claims that all scientists know evolution is true, but *where is the evidence?* The facts, the evidence to support evolution, are not there; the evidence against evolution is abundant. To ignore this evidence and make the claim contrary to the evidence is not scientific; it brings us back to the title of this piece, Bias.

To say that evolution is proven beyond doubt is what? Is it science, or is it bias? Think about it.

Other interesting quotes

Nobel prize winner Louis de Broglie:

If one had taken the ideas of these scientific geniuses who have been the promoters of modern science and submitted them to committees of specialists, there is no doubt that the latter would have viewed them as extravagant and would have discarded them for the very reason of their originality and profundity.²

From James Tour, PhD
T. T. and W. F. Chao Professor of Chemistry
Professor of Computer Science
Professor of Materials Science and NanoEngineering
Rice University

Furthermore, when I, a nonconformist, ask proponents for clarification, they get flustered in public and confessional in private wherein they sheepishly confess that they really don't understand either. Well, that is all I am saying: I do not understand. But I am saying it publicly as opposed to privately. Does anyone understand the chemical details behind macroevolution? If so, I would like to sit with that person and be taught, so I invite them to meet with me. Lunch will be my treat. Until then, I will maintain that no chemist understands, hence we are collectively bewildered. And I have not even addressed origin of first life issues. For me, that is even more scientifically mysterious than evolution. Darwin nev-

¹⁴ Tour J. Layman's reflections on evolution and creation. An insider's view of the academy. <<http://www.jmtour.com/personal-topics/the-scientist-and-his-theory-and-the-christian-creationist-and-his-science/>> Accessed 2014 Dec 01

er addressed origin of life, and I can see why he did not; he was far too smart for that. Present day scientists that expose their thoughts on this become ever so timid when they talk with me privately. I simply can not understand the source of their confidence when addressing their positions publicly.^{14,15}

Nobel prize winner Max Planck:

A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.²

Galileo Galilei:

I wish, my dear Kepler, that we could have a good laugh together at the extraordinary stupidity of the mob. What do you think of the foremost philosophers of this University? In spite of my oft-repeated efforts and invitations, they have refused, with the obstinacy of a glutted adder, to look at the planets or Moon or my telescope. ...²

In questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single individual.²

This seems to hit the nail on the head, in identifying what seems to be a recurring theme: ignoring evidence contrary to evolution, while promoting that same evolution. Examples abound. The data that are ignored include the mathematical improbability of evolution, the problems of irreducible complexity, the lack of transitional fossils, and C14 dating of dinosaur fossils. The list can go on and on.

So, in light of this, let's consider the facts, trying to be unbiased. When this is done, I think we may be sur-

¹⁵ In a presentation (which is online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeU6Jab_Kto) Professor Tour stated: "I will tell you as a scientist and as a synthetic chemist, if anybody should be able to understand evolution it is me because I make molecules for a living. ... I don't understand evolution. ... I know that there's a lot of people out there that don't understand anything about organic synthesis, but they understand evolution. I understand a lot about making molecules. I don't understand evolution ..."

Let me tell you what goes on in the back rooms of science. With National Academy members, with Nobel Prize winners.

I have sat with them and when I get them alone - not in public, ... and I say, do you understand all of this, where all of this came from and how this happens, every time that I have sat with people who are synthetic chemists who understand this, they go uh-uh ... nope ... I have sat with National Academy members and Nobel Prize winners. Sometimes I will say do you understand this, and if they're afraid to say yes, they say nothing, they just stare at me.

prised to find that evolution is *actually not* supported by the evidence. ☹

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, December 11, 7:00 pm, Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 631
Fred Johnson will discuss the fallacy that one must believe in evolution to be a great scientist.