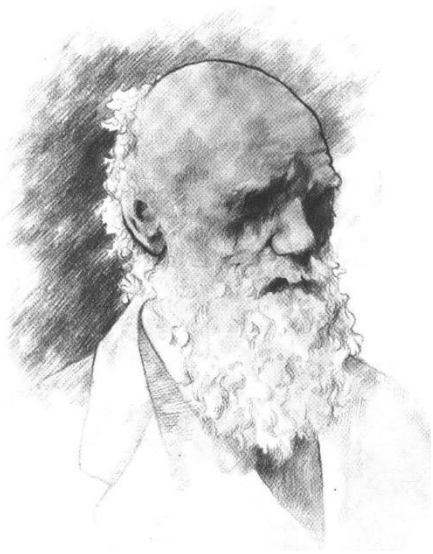
Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Thinking Further About Science

DAVID W. BREESE



As we have noticed, Darwin presented the concept of natural selection as the latest discovery, even a *law* of science. The initial impact of Darwin's research was upon the scientific community of his day, but that influence continues to be felt in the reverence the scientific community of our day gives to Darwin's ideas. It is useful, therefore, for us to consider this matter we call *science* and to investigate what we mean by the term. For indeed, science has come to be thought of as a mysterious entity beyond the intellectual capabilities of the average man; it is assumed that only rarely are the mysterious inner chambers of science penetrated by ordinary people.

In the word *scientist* we have one of the most revered titles of our day, because the word denotes one of the most respected professions of modern times. It might even be argued that modern times have themselves been created by the phenomena denoted in the phrase *the advance of science*. Science and the scientist have taken to themselves credentials deemed unassailable in our culture.

So much is this the case that any finding about anything can be rendered instantly déclassé by tagging it with the criticism "It's not scientific." On the other hand, the sublime truth of almost anything is established instantly when the expression "Science has taught us" is applied to it. "Being scientific" is to travel the high road of acceptance and status. So pervasive is this assumption that many strange notions have gained credibility when their proponents have applied to them the term *scientific*. The status of being "scientific" is so desired today that the word *science* has been inflated to the point that it is assumed that science knows it all and can tell us anything. Our society has come to assume that the source of all knowledge is science; once a thing is established as being scientific, it moves beyond debate and becomes an article of faith.

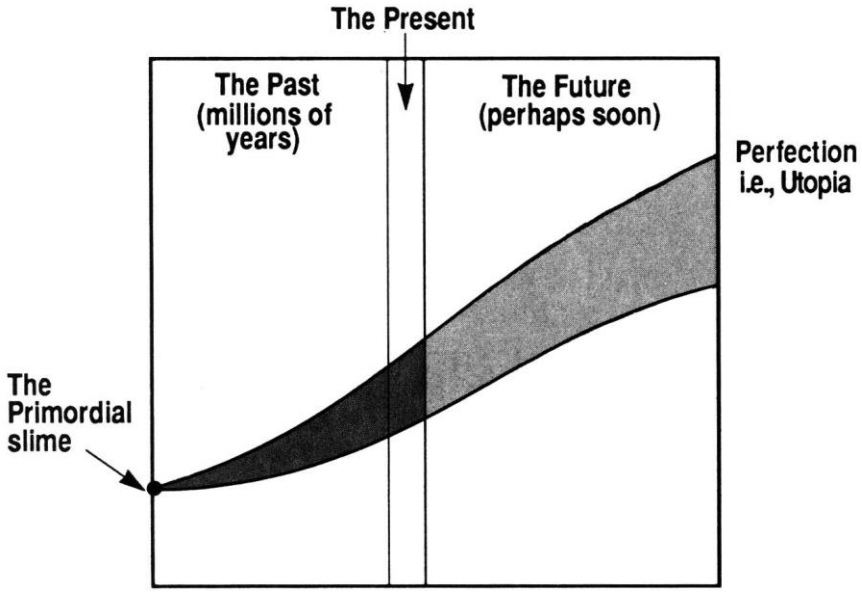


Fig. 1. What the scientist thinks he sees in viewing history

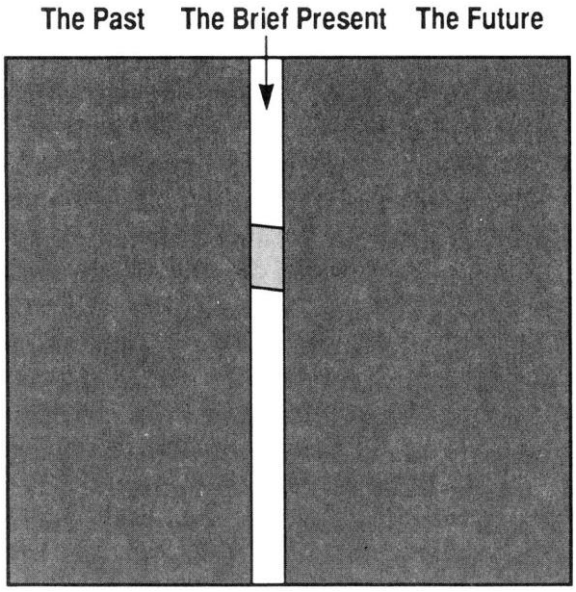


Fig. 2. What the scientist really sees

But what are we really talking about when we refer to "what science has done" and talk about how science will bring to pass a new and better world? Is it not possible that when we think a little more deeply about science we shall discover that science is valuable only to a certain point, after which it becomes a false legitimizer of a whole set of unwarranted and dangerous conclusions?

What is science? At its core, science is observation. What distinguishes that observation from the normal apprehension of things is that it is a more careful, more codified, more patiently recorded observation than merely the casual observations of life.

What does science observe? First of all, and most basically, science observes *entities*. Science says, "This is a rock." Upon deeper observation, science says, "This is granite," or, "This is sandstone." It moves from superficial to analytical observation. It tells us specifically what kind of a rock this is. In its function as an observer, science has discovered and related information about the elements that constitute the components of the things that can, in limited fashion, be observed.

Second, science observes *combinations of entities*. Science tells us, "This rock and that moss usually go together," or, "This thunder and this lightning often are present in combination." It tells us that air is composed of oxygen, nitrogen, and trace elements.

Third, science observes *phenomena*. It notices, for example, that when sodium and water come together the result is the springing up of fire. Phenomena, therefore, are normally matter in motion, matter changing its form, or matter moving from the apparently inert to the dynamic.

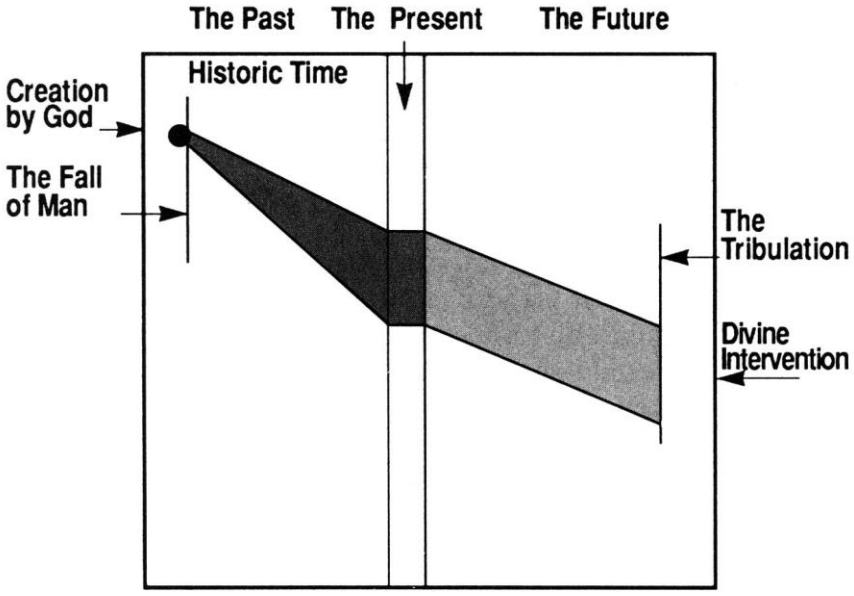


Fig. 3. The actual course of history as it has transpired and will unfold

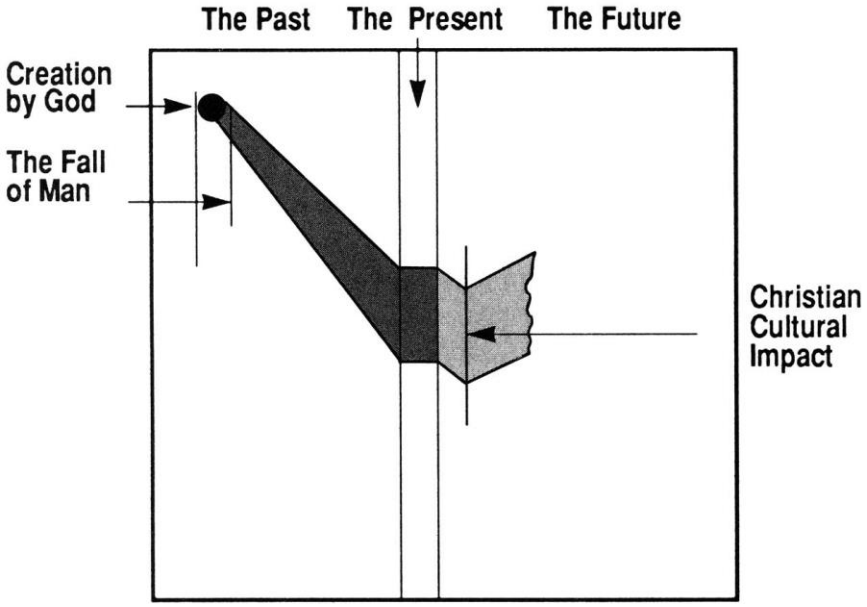


Fig. 4. The exception to cultural deterioration

Fourth, science *performs experiments*. It sets up laboratories and brings together certain entities that do not combine predictably in nature. By making these combinations predictable, science can observe even more deeply the phenomena that can be produced by artificially bringing together certain combinations of elements. The controlled experiment is science's most dependable device for proper observation.

At its core, then, science is empiricism. It *observes* things and attempts to state the facts about the essence of those things and about the observable activity that those things produce when they are related to other things in certain quantities and environments.

Having observed and analyzed, science moves into the realm of the practical, suggesting valuable new combinations that are of practical use in the world beyond the laboratory. In this commendable function, science has given us the internal combustion engine, the flashlight, the rocket, the space shuttle, the satellite, radio transmission, and a thousand other dependable products that once would have been the astonishment of society. Even now, out of its experiments, science produces products whose unforeseen capabilities are the wonderment of us. The careful observation of things (entities) and phenomena (matter in interaction) has produced a myriad of useful discoveries that have given the illumination, mobility, and efficiency to major sections—specifically to the civilized portion—of the human race. These wonders have produced a predictable, even legitimate, well-earned respect for the observations and applications of those millions of patient workers in our time called *scientists*.

That respect has now, however, led society into a dangerous attitude, an attitude that comes close to making a god out of science. This unwise apotheosis should concern thinking people. A timely warning concerning the limitations of science needs to be raised, for no one is truly wise or scientific unless he knows not only the possibilities but also the impossibilities of science. One would do well, then, to think about the limitations of science.

1. *Science cannot know the ultimate nature of* things. Observation and analysis can take us only so far. After that there stretches out, beyond our ability to observe, the unreachable vistas of a limitless unknown. Despite its accomplishments, science has given us no final answers. No one knows what life is. No one knows what light is. No one knows what the final building blocks of matter are. No one knows how the mind influences the body. Scientists deal with electricity, but no one knows what electricity is. We know something about phenomena, but we do not know anything about the ontology of things. We know what things *do*, but we do not know what things *are*.

2. *Science cannot know the origin of things*. We know of the present existence of certain entities and phenomena, but the *provenance* of these things escapes us. The assertion that something was created or brought to pass *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) is an assertion about which science is unable to comment. No observer of anything can tell us the origin of that thing solely on the basis of observation. Whether or not the universe was created out of nothing is a question that the scientist, as a scientist, has no more competence to answer than an ordinary man. When Charles Darwin wrote *Origin of the Species* he told us nothing about origins. Rather he spoke only of processes through which he believed biological life replicated itself upward, successive generations reproducing from the simple to the complex. But this theory was arbitrarily distilled from his observation of present life forms and residues. It was not based on empirical observation, for *no* observer but God was present to observe the beginning of things. The scientist who says, "This is the way it all began," is not speaking as a scientist, but rather as a speculator on a par with all others who speculate about beginnings.

3. *Science cannot fathom past processes*. The function of science is observation of the *present*. One who observes and then thinks that he properly interprets the processes of the present has not thereby taken to himself the credentials of a geological historian, making sure pronouncements about the past. Indeed, the reality we see today may have been brought to pass by a process entirely different from what we think ("what we think" being the results of empirical observation) to be the present processes. It is also true that the time element we assume from present processes may not, in fact, have obtained with reference to the past. No one, therefore, can know the age of anything if he was not present to observe that object's beginning or does not have access to someone who was. No one can

know with certainty the process from point A to point B unless he has had the opportunity to constantly observe that process or has access to someone who did. Remember, even observation is superficial. Processes, even in the present, vary greatly under the influence of many known and possibly many more unknown conditioning factors.

To say, therefore, that the theory of evolution is scientific is to deprive the word *scientific* of any meaning, for scientific knowledge has to do with observation and experiment. So-called knowledge of a thing like evolution comes neither by observation or experiment and therefore cannot be called scientific. Anyone who is not a fool (a fool being one who willy-nilly changes the meaning of words) should know this.

"But," says the scientist, "evolution is the most *probable* account of the past." But, alas, here the logic breaks down again. Nothing can be called probable unless it is tested against that which is provable. Without provabilities there are no probabilities. Hence, when he insists that evolution is true, the scientist loses his credentials as a scientist and as a logician.

4. *Science cannot predict the future with certainty*. Being limited to observation and analysis of the present, the true scientist learns to deal very carefully and, we trust, humbly, with the future. After he has made all of the calculations and has constructed all of the models of probability with reference to the future, the scientist dares not truly trust his conclusions apart from experiments. The new plane must be flown by a test pilot—or, better still, a robot—before it carries passengers. The nuclear bomb must be tested at Los Alamos before it is carried on an aircraft to a distant Hiroshima.

No developmental scientist has ever had anything work *exactly* as he predicted. Most devices, however careful may have been the process of their development, are failures initially because of some unforeseen element. So the trustworthy scientist will only tentatively suggest the near-term results of a given action, while all of the time keeping his fingers crossed that it will indeed come to pass. Because it so often does not, the scientist learns to leave room in his plans for new and previously unforeseen numbers. The wise scientist asserts little about the future and even less about the past. The future will confirm or deny his experiments; the past retains its stony, stoical silence.

5. *Science cannot control all possible forces*. The wise scientist admits that he must deal with "the powers that be." He is not the Creator but, rather, is a myopic, observing creature. He did not create gravity and does not really know what it is. In his experiments he merely creates minuscule, controlled situations and hopes for the best. Even these situations tend to teach him that he is not an originator or an actuator but is instead a cooperator with vast realities that are beyond his comprehension.

No mind in all the earth can prove that it *knows* what are *all* the forces that work upon us at any given moment. Because we know the ultimate nature of nothing, we must therefore content ourselves with a few feeble measurements of our present condition and use those measurements in our crude experiments. Even while doing the measuring, we must, if we are properly humble, admit to the possible existence of a hundred other forces that are beyond our ability to measure. When speaking about anything—about space, for example—the competent scientist can be heard to say, "There may be a thousand other things out there about which we know nothing, and we are curious to examine them." Curiosity rather than foolish over-confidence is the proper attitude of the scientist.

So it is that the casualties of the space shuttle or the victims of the San Francisco earthquake should produce within all of us the proper degree of humility. The presence of casualty in the universe is irrefutable, settle-it-forever evidence that man is not the master, but only the observer. The idea that the individual man is the true master of anything is finally unforgivable self-idolatry.

6. *Science cannot know the reason "Why?"* When the child asks, "Why does the sun come up in the morning?" we think we have the answer, indeed have said something profound, by talking about the rotation of the earth. In the same fashion, science pretends to have the answer by saying that the warming winds in the south come from the *el niño* factor. The scientist explains summer, winter, spring, and fall by speaking of the orbit of the earth around the sun and the degree of tilt in the earth's axis that makes it appear that the sun moves north and south of the equator. With quickly spoken words like these, the scientist thinks that he has explained the seasons. But the questions remain: "*Why* does the earth tilt?" "*Why* does the sun shine at that exact intensity?"

The scientist can be expected to be impatient with, even embarrassed by, these questions. That is because he knows that they point to a process called "infinite regression." Behind all questions are deeper questions, and behind those are deeper ones yet. Therefore, the question, "Why?" can only be answered superficially in a way that we hope will satisfy the curiosity of the moment.

But ultimate answers escape us. Any person who hopes to retain his sanity must never forget that basic fact: ultimate answers escape us. This is true about every person, however brilliant and insightful he may be, from Albert Einstein (who never found the unified field theory, the quest of his lifetime) to the most immature school child. The simple fact is that ultimate answers have not been and cannot be discovered by scientific research. The things that can be seen by the eye only reveal, and that fractionally, something of their nature and their activities. The rationale behind that nature and the true engine behind that observable activity cannot be divined by any mere observation.

7. *Science cannot say what ought to be*. In all of its observations, science is really discovering what is, or what *happens*. Science as such has nothing to say about "oughtness," the idea that one thing is right and another thing wrong. It simply observes and makes humble suggestions as to probabilities that may or may not be confirmed about the activity of physical entities in the near future. That's it.

Moreover, whereas ultimate things are not made of atoms and molecules, it is precisely and only with physical entities that science concerns itself. Thus, for answers to questions of ultimate meaning one has to go beyond science.

So, again, science as such cannot tell us what to do. It is unable to suggest the key to happiness, purpose, or fulfillment. It knows nothing of intangibles such as love, hate, honor, duty, or even valid ambitions. Being unable to discuss what most people understand to be spiritual things, science bows out.

It follows, therefore, that we ought not to make a god out of science. It is far more limited, inarticulate, and mute as to the realities of life than most people realize. Science is, in its real sense, a mechanical, undramatic thing. Yes, it occasionally ignites a fire, but men must not mistake that fire for the true and worthy object of their worship. Science is basically "nuts and bolts" (or the modern counterpart) and should be respected for what it is, but it should not be revered.

How, then, shall we discover the realities of the distant past, the infinite future, the remoteness of space, or the inner reaches of the soul? How shall we know who to love, who to hate, what to live for, what to die for? Why should a man be true to his wife or do the honest thing rather than the convenient thing? Why are some things worth dying for and others of little or no value? Yes, where do values come from, and how do they apply to life?

Science is unable to provide an answer to these and other important questions of life. As far as science is concerned, a hatchet is a hatchet, whether it is used to carve a statue or to kill a friend.

But, alas, we learn from departments other than science that a hatchet is not just a hatchet. It is an instrument capable of being used for moral or immoral purposes. We instantly see, therefore (if we are not blinded), that important things are not atoms, molecules, hatchets, or rockets. No, indeed, important things are moral values. Life and existence in this world cannot be explained or appreciated apart from them.

Where do moral values come from? They come from the eternal and everlasting God who made the universe. This is the God whose existence some scientists deny—not because

they are scientists but because they lack humility, never having taken the time to properly consider the limitations of science. How supremely ridiculous it is for a person to hold a bubbling test tube up against the sun and say, "There is no God!" Yes, the scientist may have "made" the test tube (he didn't really), but who made the sun? The beginning of wisdom is recognizing that there is a God who stands behind it all. This God created the universe; it is "the work of His hands."

But if science is no help, how can we know this God?

Here science shows its limitations. It can only suggest the first step, the beginning of that quest. It helps us to observe nature, and helps mostly when it states that "this is the creation of God."

The beautiful and complete answer to the question, "How can we know God?" is given to us by God Himself. It is that God made the universe and has revealed Himself in time and space in the Person of Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. Wisdom begins when we come to know Christ, in whom are hidden all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The created universe, with all of its wonders, is but the backdrop to the real story of eternity, the story of redemption in Christ. Let no one become so preoccupied with so-called science that he neglects to move beyond science with its limitations to a knowledge of the invisible God. Science is neither ultimately nor dependably accurate. It gives us but a superficial analysis of the work of God in creation. The work of God in redemption is the great work of the Lord. He invites every person who lives to believe the gospel, to come to know Christ, and to have the gift of God, which is life eternal.

As we have seen, science cannot explain the moral nature of man, and therefore refuses to recognize the depths of sin into which man has fallen. It sees no need for redemption but only calls for education. Being so disposed, it cannot offer true hope to a lost humanity. It has been very good, however, at producing the instruments by which a lost humanity progressively attempts to destroy itself.

Science attempts to analyze the created universe behind which is God. It is that God who invites us to step up from empiricism to faith. Faith in Christ and the work on the cross is the door to eternal life and ultimate knowledge[1]

[1] Breese, D. (1990). *Seven men who rule the world from the grave* (pp. 35–45). Moody Publishers.