

Philosophical reflection about the nature of science and the nature of soul

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The nature of science

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Because in an occidental conception of the world, soul and God are spiritual, i.e. immaterial,

and it is impossible to detect, with a scientific device, something immaterial.

The nature of science

Laplace went in state to beg Napoleon to accept a copy of his work, who had heard that the book contained no mention of God. Napoleon, who was fond of putting embarrassing questions, received it with the remark:

M. Laplace, they tell me you have written this large book on the system of the universe, and have never even mentioned its Creator." Laplace, who, though the most supple of politicians, was as stiff as a martyr on every point of his philosophy, drew himself up and answered bluntly:

The nature of science

"Je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse-là." (I did not need to make such an assumption). Napoleon, greatly amused, told this reply to Lagrange, who exclaimed, *"Ah! c'est une belle hypothèse; ça explique beaucoup de choses"* (Ah! that is a beautiful assumption; it explains many things). Laplace then declared: "This hypothesis, Sire, does explain everything, but does not permit to predict anything. As a scholar, I must provide you with works permitting predictions." Laplace thus defined science as a predicting tool.

quoted by Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen Wikipedia, Laplace, 30.12.07)

The nature of science

Why is it impossible to predict anything using the notions of God or of the soul?

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Why is it impossible to predict anything using the notions of God or of the soul?

To predict we need to see or to detect a cause, and it is impossible to detect, with a scientific device, something spiritual.

The nature of science

Vitalism is a doctrine that the functions of a living organism are due to a vital principle, that's to say a soul, distinct from physicochemical forces.

The nature of science

“And so to those of you who may be vitalists I would make this prophecy: what everyone believed yesterday and you believe today, only cranks will believe tomorrow.” (F. Crick)

“Ancient philosophers, instead of a positive knowledge, which they cannot reach because of lack of observation, created only words. To these words, we can only attach indistinct ideas without fundament.” (Lamarck, 1809)

The nature of science

In the field of biology,

the soul is considered like a **brake** on scientific progress.

It is a way of explaining things appealing to an invisible cause out of the reach of experience.

The nature of science

The question could be reformulated in the following manner:

Is there place for the soul in a philosophy of man which takes into account the outcomes of the neural sciences?

The nature of science

Is it possible to conceptualize another neural science which gives room for the soul?

Or, in other words, is it possible to reintroduce the concept of soul in the science?

In this case, it would change drastically science and produce another kind of science.

The nature of science

Differences between science and metaphysics

The nature of science

Differences between science and metaphysics

“The success of science has depended on a well-defined division of labor coupled with a strategy of divide and conquer. There is no such a things as science; there are only sciences [...]. Each of these sciences [...] carves off a strictly circumscribed domain. Staking out a domain requires delimiting permissible questions”.

The nature of science

Differences between science and metaphysics

Enter metaphysics. One traditional function of metaphysics [...] is to provide an overall conception of how things are. This includes, not the pursuit of particular scientific ends, but an accommodation of the pronouncements of the several sciences. It includes, as well, an attempt to reconcile the sciences with ordinary experience. In one respect, every science takes ordinary experience for granted

The nature of science

Differences between science and metaphysics

A science is empirical insofar as it appeals to observation in confirming experimental outcomes. But the intrinsic character of observation itself [...] is left untouched by the sciences. The nature of observation - outwardly directed conscious experience - stands at the limits of science."

(John Heil, Philosophy of Mind, Routledge contemporary introduction to philosophy, New York: 1998)

The nature of science

Conclusion

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Science is methodologically materialistic: it cannot detect anything spiritual

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And the soul is a difficult question

Historically, modern biology was born in opposition to vitalism, which implies

The rejection of the concept of soul

The nature of science

Towards a new science

- The reintroduction of the concept of soul in biology would imply
- not only a historical change,
- but also a change in the fundamental methods of science,
- That is to say **a new science.**

The nature of science

Towards a new science

- All of us, we have grown in the illusion of Laplace
- We think, science must describe the system of the Universe in an autonomous way
 - without taking into account any notion coming from outside of science.

The nature of science

Towards a new science

- We have forgotten that the science cannot justify the fundamentals of its method :

The freedom of the scientist in the experiment

The nature of knowledge

The nature of consciousness

The nature of life

The nature of being

The nature of science

Towards a new science

- If you think that we can already give scientific definitions of these concepts,
- anyway you cannot build a discipline on concepts you have to define afterwards and pretend you are autonomous.

The nature of science

Towards a new science

We have forgotten as well, that science is a circumscribed knowledge

Therefore, with experimental sciences you can never explain a thing completely

A fortiori, you cannot explain a thing in its globality

- What is life?
- What are human beings?

The nature of science

Towards a new science

- A new science must be aware of its intrinsic methodological limits
- Or accept to work with metaphysical notions impossible to check with an experiment or to demonstrate (at least with a scientific demonstration)

So, it will be perhaps possible to fill the gap between philosophy and experimental sciences.

The nature of science

Conclusion

Enter metaphysics