

The Proper Role of Science: Exposing Scientism

by Charles Colson

In his inaugural address, President Obama said he would “restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology’s wonders to raise health care’s quality.” By this, many suspect he means to spend taxpayer money on embryonic stem cell research, which destroys humans at the embryonic stage.

Evidently, President Obama has been listening to those who want research funded, some because they are driven by greed but many others driven by a dangerous worldview called scientism.

As Nancy Pearcey and I write in our book, *How Now Shall We Live?*, scientism has its roots in Darwinism. Tufts University professor Daniel Dennett writes that Darwinism, rightly understood, is a “universal acid” that dissolves away all traditional moral, metaphysical, and religious beliefs. For if humans have evolved by a material, purposeless process, then there is no basis for believing in a God who created us and revealed moral truths, or imposing those moral views in any area of life.

Dennett is using a common tactic—using science as a weapon to shoot down religious faith. The standard assumption is that science is objective knowledge, while religion is an expression of subjective need. Religion, therefore, must subordinate its claims about the world to whatever science decrees.

Scientism assumes that science is the controlling reality about

life, so anything that can be validated scientifically ought to be done. Other things are subjective fantasy—like love, beauty, good, evil, conscience, ethics.

So science, which originally simply meant the study of the natural world, has in this view

other people’s diseases. Or cloning. Or medical experiments on humans, as the Nazis conducted.

Our task is to expose the flaws in scientific naturalism—not because we are against science but because we want it to fill its proper role as a means of investigating God’s

world and alleviating suffering within ethical boundaries.

And it’s right that we should be doing this because it was a Christian view of reality that led to the scientific method, investigating all the things

God has created.

I hope that the President, in using those words, understood the difference between good science and scientism.

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been conflated with scientific naturalism, a philosophy that the natural world is all that exists.

Humans are reduced to “objects” that can be inspected, experimented on, and ultimately controlled. In 1922, G.K. Chesterton warned that scientism had become a “creed” taking over our institutions, a “system of thought which began with Evolution and has ended in Eugenics.”

C.S. Lewis warned that the rise of scientific naturalism would lead to “the abolition of man,” for it denies the reality of those things central to our humanity: a sense of right and wrong, of purpose, of beauty, of God.

And if we deny the things that make us truly human, by definition we create a culture that is inhuman—a culture that, for example, embraces moral horrors like the killing of humans at the earliest stage of life on the spurious grounds that doing so might cure

Charles Colson is the founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries (PFM). This Breakpoint Commentary was originally published January 29, 2009. Breakpoint is the worldview ministry of PFM.