

Published on Al-Islam.org (https://www.al-islam.org)

Home > Knowing God > God and the Reasoning of the Experimental Science

God and the Reasoning of the Experimental Science

Modern man tends to take refuge in the reasoning of the experimental sciences without stopping to consider its limits and boundaries. This attitude of mind is one of the most misleading and most destructive when God is brought into consideration. The more the human mind works on a particular subject and the stronger it grows in the mastery of that subject, the more it tends to neglect other subjects and drop them from its purview. Thus men tend to regard divine matters as secondary, and outside the scope of the researches of science.

The tendency is to use the same spectacles to look at every type of phenomenon, however diverse. Since the specialists of the experimental sciences devote the entire force of their thought to their own particular subject, all other interests remain foreign to them. It is this lack of acquaintance with and distance from the intangible which prevents them from conceiving anything beyond the natural world where they can make tests and experiments, always with material elements. Their tools are the weights and measures of materials. So they accept only those forms of human knowledge which admit of quantification.

The sciences, devoted to describing and explaining factual occurrences, research into the relations within the phenomenal world from the infinitely large to the infinitesimal. But the relation between God and that world is outside their range. Measures of the physical cannot be asked to yield information about the metaphysical. God cannot be put on a microscopic slide for laboratory observation! The Creator of the material universe, of the space–time continuum, transcends matter, space, and time. Measures of the tangible He cannot be reduced to.

We know that a relation exists between the taking of a certain drug and an alteration of metabolism or of health. Ask a doctor how the drug works and he'll answer in terms suited to your degree of knowledge, rather than in obscure technical terms. To say "God is the answer" to a particular medical problem is not a scientific answer, but a layman's. Medical problems require medical answers. Each science must use its own technical terms in its own universe of discourse. Divinity has its own universe of discourse and

its own terminology. Specialists confine themselves to one science. The independence of such sectional scientific studies from the more all–embracing study of the idea of God has left in the subconscious of many a scepticism about the Divine because they do not recognise that their work has deliberately confined itself to a small portion of reality, and to that alone.

Further, all experimental sciences lead to material results, which can be put to work for daily life. These seem real and immediate to the people who use them. Those people therefore are hesitant and sceptical about larger ideas whose relevance to day–to–day details is not so immediately obvious. Each science has set up an impregnable confining wall round its territory. Its effectiveness within those walls naturally increases our confidence and reliance on its work. Our world–outlook tends to take colour from the attitudes of mind which the sciences have injected into our consciousness and unconsciousness, to their own advantage, and so to the diminution of other influences.

Unless a man is possessed of a firm and stable faith he remains a stranger to the ways of those who know God. His scepticism grows. He regards as acceptable whatever in life coincides with scientific thought and reading. He discounts anything that his sciences do not prove – or even try to prove – for him. The basis of religious thinking is thus left untilled and untended. He considers undeserving of attention any problem which cannot be taken in isolation from all religion, be judged by its outward appearance, and proved by experiment. Having grown used to scientific language, with its formulae and equations, he regards religious matters as lightweight and commonplace.

The error is great. Science may start by expressing its observations in abstruse and complicated formulae. But once they are translated into life, they too become simple and commonplace.

Medical science may employ meticulous care in examining an involved case, and put to work much technical knowledge expressed in abstruse terms. But when it comes to telling the sick person what is wrong and what has to be done, it must be made simple enough. "Take this medicine. Avoid X in your diet. Rest a lot for several days." The knowledgeable doctor does not explain to the patient the fundamental formulae or of drugs that affect it. He only states the bare essentials of the treatment.

Again, anyone nowadays can use the telephone or radio. They have become parts of everyday life. The rules for getting the best out of them are explained to the user in simple, ordinary, everyday language. All the abstruse terminology of technicalities is omitted. The proper place for that sort of language is in the scientific and industrial centres which invent and construct the instruments, or in the books and libraries dedicated to the matter.

It is therefore unjust and illogical for science to regard religious affirmations as simple and outside their sphere merely because they are not expressed in abstruse or scientific terminology. It is in fact the glory of religion that its principles and precepts can be expressed in simple everyday words to be understood by the people.

Further, if the precepts and principles of religion were within the scope of human research, proof, and

taste, there would be no need for apostles or prophets. We could have constructed it ourselves, just as scientist and manufacturer together construct a machine.

Man has, in no age so far, been able to claim that he has researched into and mastered all the secrets of this earth, or knows all that there is to know. Man is still evolving. He must frequently correct his errors. And he has still much ignorance to turn into knowledge.

Now let us examine the boundaries of scientific domain, and what problems the sciences have a right to express opinions about. Has the range of their activities, and the realm of their researches, become fixed within definite limits?

The subject that the experimental sciences must study is the material world – material phenomena alone. The scientific tools, and their measures for attaining their goals, consist of observation, hypothesis. experiment with control, and proof.

They work on the world and its objects, from the largest to the infinitesimal. Hence they are judged to be objective and impersonal. If their findings accord with the external world, they are accepted. If not, they are rejected. Testing proves the conformity of a finding with the world around it.

Which scientific research has the right to penetrate the realm of faith and belief? At what point do the experimental sciences make contact with God?

In fact, the experimental sciences have nothing to do with a person's faith or lack of faith. Since the sphere of the natural sciences is natural phenomena, they cannot express an opinion about God, whether negative or positive. All religious schools, at least of the People of the Book, teach us that God is not bodily substance. The five senses cannot perceive Him. He is not contained in the space–time continuum.

His essence is all–sufficient and self–sufficient. He has no need of anything outside Himself. Read all the books of the experimental scientists; you will not find that experiment can test God or any of His attributes. For God is not a phenomenon of nature. No experiment can be set up to test a hypothesis about Him. If an experimental scientist utters all kinds of denials about God on the basis of his research, he has moved out of line even of the rules of his own science. He shows himself ignorant of the subjects and sphere of his occupation. The sciences have not even an A–B–C of the knowledge of God. So it is utterly illogical for a person who has sunk himself in the ocean of the experimental sciences to start denying God.

George Lister in his book, *Introduction to Philosophical Principles*, writes: "To imagine something which occupies neither space nor time and is immune to alteration or change is impossible."

Such a statement obviously reflects a mentality pivoted on nature and the tangible. Such a mind is bound to regard anything outside its sphere of action as impossible. The most an honest natural scientist can say is: "The metaphysical is outside my universe of discourse. So I keep silent about it. I neither

affirm nor deny it." He dare not commit himself to anything beyond that. A person who confines himself to that realm in the world of being which permits tangible experiments may not deny that there can be realities outside his sphere of work. If he does make such a denial, he must recognise that it is merely an expression of his own choice, not the fruit of research, test, and proof by scientific experiment.

For God-fearers, the sort of god a natural scientist might want – that is, one who establishes his existence and identity in terms of natural causes and effects – is no God at all.

Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/knowing-god-sayyid-mujtaba-musavi-lari/god-and-reasoning-experimental-science%C2%A0#comment-0