

Science, the new Delphic Oracle

1. Introduction

Throughout time, science did not develop as a monolithic system and consequently acquired a diversity of aims.¹ These aims are broadly distinguished into epistemic aims, as an end in itself -Aristotelian aims, e.g. to gather knowledge- and practical aims as a mean to an end -Baconian aims, e.g. to increase quality of human life-.

In this essay, I will first argue that institutionalized science in the 21st century has become the new Delphic Oracle. Secondly, I will argue that science ought to have both epistemic and practical aims -*Aristo-Baconian parallelism*- and that moral progression ought to be the pinnacle of practical scientific aims.

2.1 The Delphic Oracle

According to Karl Popper, scientism is “being a superficial aping of the same”.² Although this might be an adequate definition, dogmatic scientism is much more destructive than a naïve critique on scientific method. Today, institutionalized science has become a Delphic Oracle and scientists, which I call Scientific Priests, use science predominantly as a means to personal ends; to climb the academic ladder (from PhD to assistant, associate and respectively full Priesthood), to gain a high societal status; to win the Nobel prize or to acquire power and wealth in general. They use and interpret scientific findings that match their own financial, political, ideological or religious agenda. Institutionalized science that has become the new Delphic Oracle -and its Scientific Priests- are being obeyed by masses.

¹ Crombie, Alistair C., *Styles of Scientific Thinking in the European Tradition*, (London: Duckworth. 1994), pp. 237

² Popper Karl R., *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Revised ed.). (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press., 1979), pp. 185

Although the method and mechanisms of the oracle are veiled for these masses, and despite that they are barely understood, “it is scientifically proven that” has become a religious proclamation.³ It seems that with big data, artificial intelligence and deep learning, -medical- science will literally become a data based oracle, thereby increasing its power over both the Priests and the masses. It is up to researchers their selves to protect science from such scientific dogmatism. Recently, international scientist have critiqued the dogmatic use of p-values within science -we found a p value of < 0.05 , thus we found truth!-.

Just as Kant critiqued the pinnacle of Enlightenment -reason itself-, these scientists started a movement in which they methodologically critique the zealously used statistical method in science -at least medical sciences- and are advocating for abandoning statistical significance as an inviolable measure to separate truth from untruth.⁴

2.2 Aristo-Baconian parallelism

Since science didn't develop as a monolithic system over time, it cannot and did not have one single aim in history. The aims of science could be identified as epistemic aims as an end in itself and practical aims as a mean to an end. From a metaphysical idealist perspective and in line with Kant's transcendental idealism, things in itself from the noumenal world cannot be known.⁵ Therefore, only gathering knowledge about the phenomenal world is possible and ought to be the main epistemic aim of science.

³ For some believers, this proclamation has acquired even a stronger epistemic value than revelation. Although it falls outside the scope of this essay, it is worth to mention a recent example on this issue. A recent study suggested that it was “scientifically proven that” fasting was beneficial for patients with cancer. I noticed (as a scientist with Islamic belief) on social media that especially Muslims were eager to share this ‘scientific finding’. Although the referred paper was methodological weak an no such scientific conclusion could be drawn -sadly enough- it was zealously shared on social media without proper scientific research, and therefore misused to support their own religious agenda (fasting is an important religious deed in Islam). By doing so they -unconsciously- ascribed more epistemic value to the scientific oracle, than to their own religious conviction based on Quranic revelation. Same examples could be given for members of other religious systems.

⁴ V. Amrhein, S. Greenland, B. McShane et al. *Scientists rise up against statistical significance*. Nature 567, 305-307 (2019)

⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science; with Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.64.

This knowledge in turn, may consequently -potentially- lead to the Kantian regulative inferences about God as the Ideal of Pure Reason, thereby enabling the existence of morality or according to Spinoza -Kant would disagree about such a possibility- to acquire knowledge of God

The more we know about natural things, the greater and more perfect is the knowledge of God we acquire.⁶

However, this Spinozist or regulative Kantian inferences are not a necessary condition for the existence and practice of science. It should never be the initial fuel to generate hypothesis, because such hypotheses are condemned to fall prey to expectation biases. Although discussing the demarcation problem and the limits of science falls outside the scope of this essay, it should be underlined that science should solely be concerned with observable entities in the phenomenal world.

Next to such epistemic aims, science also ought to have parallel practical Baconian aims as a means to an end that contribute to human progress; its collective happiness, wellbeing and quality of life. Since these aims are not mutually exclusive with Aristotelian aims, they should parallel co-exist in scientific aims in general as well as in the motives of scientists their selves. Bacon identified three ambitions in man

The first is of those men who with restless striving seek to augment their personal power in their own country. This is the vulgar and degenerate sort. The second is of those who seek to advance the position of their own country in the world; and this may be allowed to have more worth in it and less selfishness. The third is of those whose endeavour is to restore and exalt the power and dominion of man himself, of the human race, over the universe. Surely this is nobler and holier than the former two.⁷

⁶ Benedict De Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), pp. 103.

⁷ Bacon Francis, "Thoughts and Conclusions on the Interpretation of Nature as a Science Productive of Works," trans. B. Farrington in *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), pp. 90–96.

Following Bacon, I identify lower and higher Baconian motives in scientist. Although both use science as a means to an end, the former has only personal ambitions, while the latter strives to contribute to human wellbeing with noble motives. Finally, science should not only seek to increase human happiness or well-being, but it ideally should also strive for human moral progression. But knowledge doesn't always necessarily lead to moral behavior as Kierkegaard argued.⁸ Only when the lower self –who follows worldly passion- is trained, it allows reason to accept and convert knowledge to moral behavior. In this sense, never had the aphorism ascribed to the original Delphic Oracle, “Know thyself” been significant for scientist as today.

3. Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that institutionalized science today has become the new Delphic Oracle. It is used by Scientific Priests for personal ambitions and it is obeyed by masses. However, science ought to have Aristo-Baconian parallel aims; epistemic aims, to primarily acquire knowledge about the phenomenal world and potentially to make the Kantian regulative inference about God to enable morality and practical aims, to improve well-being and quality of human lives with moral progression as its pinnacle aim.

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⁸ Kierkegaard, Soren., *The sickness unto death: A Christian psychological exposition for upbuilding and awakening*. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp 107

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