



Research Paper

Objectivity Where We Need It Most: The Ethics of the Science of Ourselves

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ABSTRACT

Scientists make a career commitment to objectivity as a sacred value, but no where is it more lacking and needed than in the study of human behavior. While behaviorists profess an ethic of objective analysis of empirical data, as practitioners, they often make a mockery of olde tyme, small town academic values in their commitment to succeed in the post-modern world of spin and PR.

KEY WORDS: Objectivity, Ethics, Science, behavior, empiricism, academics.

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DISCUSSION

Our notions of human evolution have always and still suffer from the wishful thinking of people who should know better. Wallace and Darwin (1858) offered a natural, causal mechanism which explain “How” not “Why” we developed from earlier living forms. The intellectual challenge this presented to the Western mind itself evolved through the three classic stages of effrontery: 1.) It is wrong; 2.) It is against the Bible; 3.) We all knew it anyway. Although essentially no one in the scientific community knows it, there really is no conflict between Darwin and Jesus, who had no ideas about scientific matters whatsoever. The standard conflict in this case is really between Darwin and St. Peter, who constructed a theology to explain why God let his son be crucified. Thus, the long-standing dispute between science and religion regarding human origins has no real ethical basis nor is it necessary. Anyone can be a Christian (Jesus-loving) scientist by the simple expedient of dropping St. Paul’s bit about original sin in the Garden of Eden.

In the contemporary world, the American Psychological Association provides an unfortunate example of an excellent public relations organization misplaced in the scientific community. It has a great code of ethics, although it is difficult to find anyone in a position of authority who abides by it. Repeatedly over the past several decades errors have been left uncorrected and the reputations of psychologists who fail to toe the official APA line have suffered for the sin of living up to the stated creed of the group.

Likewise, the police are notorious for breaking the law they swear to uphold. Naturally, they get a free ride from the prosecutors office, because DA’s regard the cops as the front line troops in the battle against crime. This whole problems harkens back to Plato and the issue of who polices the police. He assumed “No one”, because the police—having internalized prevailing cultural morality— would simply do what they should do because they should do it.

It is a sad commentary on the contemporary behavioral sciences that everyone would be much better off if we all did what we should do. But, that is what ethics is about. As for objectivity, that follows from a thorough, balanced review of all approaches to an issue. It encompasses diversity and uses it as a well-spring to being equally fair to everyone.

