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A Letter to Future Generations: What Science Really Is

Student Name

Institute Name

Course Name

Instructor Name

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A Letter to Future Generations: What Science Really Is

Dear Future Scientists and Thinkers,

As you start your exploration of science, you will come across concepts about what science is, how it functions and what it can accomplish. There are also some of these ideas that are correct. Many are not. It is to these unyieldingly persistent myths about science that I will write, unless you are under the impression that you have been deceased all along. I wish you had clear eyes, honest hopes and a true comprehension of what science can or cannot accomplish.

Myth One: All Work in Science Is Reviewed to Keep the Process Honest

Most school dropouts go away thinking that scientists constantly scrutinize each other in terms of experiments, thus establishing a dependable system of checks and balances. The truth of the matter is much less comforting. The peer review, although useful, is only a fraction of that which is, in fact, printed. The problems of reproduction are too infrequent to be systematic in reproducing the work of others, and there is insufficient funding to do so. This loophole in regulation is not in vain. The academic pressures around tenure, competition and funding create conditions under which fraud may take place, and even without deliberately acting dishonestly, errors which could accumulate in the literature may occur. A scientific community where people only observe what has worked cannot well comprehend a phenomenon. When you are studying science, there must be transparency in demand. Enquire what did not come like on the contrary what it did come like.

Myth Two: Science and Its Methods Can Answer All Questions

Science is quite an extraordinary power, yet it is not all-powerful. A philosopher, Karl Popper, provided scientists with a good means of defining what their field can and cannot do: the principle of falsifiability. That a claim could be, in principle, proved false defines a claim as

scientific according to Popper. The law of gravity is a qualifier, since we could, in theory, find evidence that would disprove the law of gravity. An explanation of the creation of the species with supernatural help fails to qualify since there are no experiments that could, under any circumstances, prove something supernatural. More importantly, science is also unable to answer any moral, ethical or social question. Abortion, a given social policy, a given work of art: whether or not each of these is ethically acceptable, ethically permissible, it is, or it is not. These are questions that science is structurally incapable of answering. Individual scientists are allowed to have personal opinions, but the method of science is silent on such things. Since the knowledge of this boundary shields science and the larger human conversation against misdirection by category errors.

Myth Three: Science Is Procedural More Than Creative

Perhaps the most harmful myth experienced in the classroom is that science is a mechanical, step-by-step process, and everyone can follow it in order to get to the reality. The truth is that the progress of science cannot be done without creativity. Although scientific inquiry is grounded on induction - the collection of individual facts, and corresponding general conclusions - the move out of raw data to a useful pattern or theory is not logical or procedural. It is imaginative, even with the same training and having the same data, two scientists might come up with completely different theories due to the fact that they see things differently. Newton observing an apple fall, Darwin perceiving descent, with modification among the species, these were not the results of an algorithm. They were imaginative thoughts. This fact is, unfortunately, subdued in most of the science classrooms. The pre-determined results of laboratory exercises, the step-by-step handbooks, and the expected answers teach students not to think; they are to execute procedures. This strategy, as was argued by scholar Sheila Tobias, pushes inquisitively

and creatively young minds not just out of science, but the entire discipline is left poorer by this. The future generations must be informed: science requires you in case you experience an impulse to create something.

Myth Four: Science and Its Methods Provide Absolute Proof

And here, may we not invoke, as the most tempting myth of all, the fact that science proves things. It does not. Scientific knowledge is tentative, that is, it is always subject to new revision in the view of new evidence. Evidence amassed may forcefully prove a theory to be true, but it cannot establish it permanently. The typical example is didactic: when all swans that this particular scientist has ever seen are white, a researcher can come to the conclusion that all swans are white. The finding of one black swan immediately disproves that conclusion. What to do with certainty in science is falsifying - proving a specific idea to be wrong. This works contrary to what this intuition suggests because, in this way, the knowledge that science does produce has passed through true tests.

Until I read this article, along with the resources that we read during the last two weeks, I believed in many of these myths. I supposed that science was self-correcting by nature, and that its methods were universal and exhaustive and that its conclusions were as close to being permanent truth as human beings could approach. Popper, falsifiability principle, problem of induction, structural limitations of peer review, made me think once again about each of those assumptions. I have found that the philosophy of science is not a mummolo of dry, procedural manuals - it is a dialogue, a continuing conversation concerning the boundaries, duties and inventive facets of human inquiry.

The two pieces of advice I have to offer you are as follows: firstly, always remember to ask what a scientific assertion cannot explain, and who have attempted to demonstrate it false.

Second, approaching science is an endeavor that is creative, human, and fallible, not an infallible machine. The two habits of mind will be more useful to you than any process you might be taught in textbooks.

With hope for your curiosity,

A Fellow Learner