



Dr. Cornelis Van Dam is professor of Old Testament at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

Science and Ideology

Scientific enterprise is a human undertaking with all the potential pitfalls that fallen humanity experiences

We live in an age that generally considers science as the neutral arbiter of knowledge. Science is considered to be objective and true. It approaches the data without any preconceptions and gets results. Indeed, we live in a time of unprecedented scientific advances which have led to exploring and gaining more knowledge from the microscopic sub-atomic to the vast reaches of outer space. Digitization and computers would be inconceivable without science, as would the many medical advances and conveniences that we so easily take for granted. It is no wonder that science is applauded and I for one am very appreciative of what scientists have been able to do.

However, while one can appreciate the tremendous scientific advances that have benefited society, it is an entirely different matter to subsequently place scientists on a pedestal by themselves as the dispensers of truth and direction for society. But such thinking is often the current secular mind-set. As Christians we need to understand the times and view with a healthy skepticism any scientific claims for which the evidence does not fit the "truth" being promoted and for which the claims go beyond the ability of science. In other words, scientists are human and can be driven by ideological presuppositions that colour and influence the way they interpret the evidence. Two recent examples underline how the practice of science can be driven by preconceived theories: global warming and the dating of dinosaurs.

Global warming

For years the reigning consensus among scientific experts has been that the world's climate is undergoing fundamental change. Planet earth was getting warmer and warmer due to human activity in producing atmospheric pollutants. This is called anthropogenic global warming. To avert catastrophic events caused

by rising ocean levels and warming northern climates, governments are urged to cut carbon dioxide emissions regardless of the cost and economic consequences. International conferences have been and continue to be held. Political pressure is on governments everywhere to do something.

There is a problem, though. The earth has actually been cooling for the last number of years. So the buzz word is now "climate change" rather than "global warming." Even though the evidence does not support the original hysteria of global warming, the pressure is still unrelenting to act on the basis of a scientific model that does not reflect reality.

An ideology is being promoted which is not sustained by facts. A minority of scientists have happily bucked the consensus. One such group is making information available on their website www.friendsofscience.org. The site points out that some of the "facts" are wrong and that the available evidence could be interpreted differently. For example, the sun, rather than human activity, could be responsible for some fluctuations in temperature.

However, those pushing the ideology of climate change are so determined that quite unscientific methods are being used to make and to strengthen their case. It even appears that records have been falsified to support a theory of climate change that is not supported by the facts. The Climatic Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia in Britain is one of the world's leading institutions concerned with studying natural and man-made climate change. The data which it sends to the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) is therefore very influential. The IPCC was established by the United Nations to provide authoritative scientific information to decision makers. But, stolen documents from the CRU show that for the last decade evidence has been manipulated and

doubts concealed about the validity of global warming. There was even a long series of communications discussing how best to marginalise and professionally hurt scientists who did not agree with the so-called consensus on global warming or climate change. All this has been widely reported in the media.¹

This is not the place to go into detailed arguments about the scientific data. And for the sake of clarity I wish to emphasize that as Christians we must be responsible stewards of the environment and protect it. The point I wish to make is that a scientific consensus may not be the truth or the best way of interpreting the evidence. Scientists can have ideological interests to make their findings fit their theories. They too are part of fallen creation. Another example makes a similar point.

Dating the dinosaurs

Mainstream science dates the dinosaurs to about sixty-five or more million years ago. However, in recent years soft tissue has been discovered in dinosaur fossils. To find pliable blood vessels, red blood cells, and proteins inside fossilized bone is quite remarkable. Such discoveries raise questions about the age of dinosaurs. How can such relatively fresh material survive in that form for millions of years? When the first discovery was made in 1997², scientists who hold to an evolutionary time table for dinosaurs were perplexed and could hardly believe the evidence. It was not considered probable that organic material could endure for such a long time period. Further and more stringent tests were demanded of subsequent finds, but the initial discovery was not only confirmed but additional data relating to organic remains were secured. In the face of the overwhelming evidence, scientists who believed that dinosaurs were millions of years old then said that it must after all be possible for such cells to survive that long! Note their belief in the millions of years takes precedence over the evidence which suggests a far shorter age. And indeed it has been shown that it is impossible for organic material like blood cells to last millions of years. The logical conclusion of the new finds would be to redate the time of the dinosaurs to a much more recent past. However, it is apparently extremely difficult for scientists to abandon the evolutionary paradigm within which they have been working. Even in the face of such telling

evidence as just noted, the ideology of evolution is winning out. The approach taken is that because the dinosaur has to be millions of years old, therefore the organic material must have been preserved for millions of years although we don't understand how that could ever be. Here a belief in a paradigm takes precedence over the available evidence.³

If scientists who have evolutionary presuppositions can resist such apparently clear evidence which begs for a much more recent date for dinosaurs and if they are unable to think outside their self-imposed evolutionary "box," how are we to evaluate their calculations about the age of the earth? That's a topic for the next time.

In conclusion

The scientific enterprise is a human undertaking with all the potential pitfalls that fallen humanity experiences. Ideology can interfere in the process of interpreting scientific evidence. It appears that ideology can even interfere in gathering the data. Christians do well to understand this reality and to evaluate the scientific consensus accordingly. Scripture instructs us to "Test everything. Hold on to the good" (1 Thess 5:21) and "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). Such vigilance is particularly necessary when science overreaches its limitations and endangers its credibility by projecting questionable data into the future or refusing to think outside its self-imposed paradigm when considering the past, as the two examples we looked at illustrate. The so-called general consensus and constant repetition of theories such as climate change or the evolutionary paradigm, in both scholarly and popular literature, do not make thereby make them to be true. They are at best tentative explanations and should be treated as such.

¹ For the above, see Michael Egnor, "Chris Mooney Turns a Climate "Trick" at <http://www.evolutionnews.org/>

² See Greg Moore, "Dinosaur Blood Revisited" at <http://creation.com/squirming-at-the-squishosaur>

³ For the above, see Mary H. Schweitzer, et al., "Biomolecular Characterization and Protein Sequences of the Campanian Hadrosaur *B. canadensis*," *Science* 324:5927 (2009) 626-631; for an abstract see <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/324/5927/626> ; "Dinosaur-Bird Link: Ancient Proteins Preserved in Soft Tissue From 80 Million-Year-Old Hadrosaur" in *Science Daily* May 1, 2009 available at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/04/090430144528.htm>; Carl Wieland, "Dinosaur Soft Tissue and Protein" (May 6, 2009) at <http://creation.com/dinosaur-soft-tissue-and-protein-even-more-confirmation>.

