

The peer review cartel

The modern scientist is supposed to be a docile and obedient bureaucrat and is trained and selected for that purpose – cheerfully switching ‘interests’ and tasks as required by the changing (or unchanging) imperatives of funding, the fashions of research and the orders of his master.

What determines a modern scientist’s choice of problem? Essentially it is *peer review* – the modern scientist is supposed to do whatever work that the cartel of peer-review-dominating scientists decide he should do and reward him for doing.

This will almost certainly involve working as a team member for one or more of the peer review cartel scientists (or their out-sourced ‘suppliers’); doing some kind of allocated micro-specialized task of no meaning and zero intrinsic interest – but one which, supposedly, contributes to the overall project being managed by the peer review cartel members.

Of course the funders and grant awarders have the major role in what science gets done, and these are all parts of an interconnected bureaucratic web of senior professional researchers. The allocation of funding, hence the direction of research and the subjects deemed acceptable, has long since been captured by the peer review cartel.

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Even more importantly than choosing the subject matter of research, the peer review cartel has captured *the ability to define success* in solving scientific problems.

To solve a problem, the cartel of dominant scientists in a field simply *declares that the problem has been solved!*

Since peer review is now regarded as the gold standard of science, when the peer review cartel announces that a problem has been solved, then that problem has *by definition* been solved.

Since truth is no longer transcendental but internal to research then nothing more needs be said: indeed there is nothing more to say. Power is truth (in modern research).

And anyone who disagrees is not competent to have an opinion, also by definition.

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To what does the modern ‘scientist’ aspire? Obviously not to discover the truth about reality. Instead, he aspires to become a member of the peer review cartel – one of the group who *allocate* ‘success’ in science.

In other words, the modern ‘scientist’ aspires to become a bureaucrat, a manager, a ‘politician’. In yet other words, the modern ‘scientist’ aspires to power – (im)pure and simple.

However, being a modern high level bureaucrat, manager or politician is incompatible with truthfulness, and dishonesty is incompatible with science; hence being a successful modern ‘scientist’ is incompatible with the practice of real science.

Understanding reality

A real scientist needs to want to understand *reality* - this necessarily entails first *believing in* reality (believing that reality is real), and secondly believing that one ought to discover and describe reality (which is the specific vocation of a scientist).

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The belief in reality is a necessary metaphysical belief, which cannot be denied without contradiction - nonetheless, in modern ruling elite culture it is frequently denied (this is called nihilism); which is why modern elite culture is unprecedented in being irrational, self-contradictory and self-destroying.

But obviously, a real scientist cannot be a nihilist - whatever cynical or trendy things he might say or do in public, in his heart he must have a transcendental belief in the reality of reality and must want to know something of it.

Thus *a real scientist cannot be a member of the modern ruling elite* – therefore, a real scientist in the modern world *must be powerless...*

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Science also involves the metaphysical belief ('metaphysical' meaning a necessary assumption which *frames* the practice of science, and is not itself part of science) – a belief in the *understandability of nature* including the human desire and capacity to understand.

Bruce G Charlton

(That is, understandability at some level of approximation, *sufficient* understanding - but not necessary detailed or comprehensive understanding.).

Without this belief in the understandability of nature, science becomes an absurd and impossible attempt to find the one truth among an infinite number of possible errors.

Nonetheless, in modern elite culture, a belief in the understandability of nature and human capacity is routinely denied - another aspect of nihilism. Among many other consequences, this denial destroys the science which makes possible modern elite culture.

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Explaining reality is a second step which *may* follow understanding, but effective explaining needs to be preceded by the desire to explain reality *accurately*, which itself entails honesty; again because there are an infinite number of *possible* explanations varying in accuracy between as close-as-possible to understood reality; to as far from accurate as you can get-away-with.

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Modern science is undercut by many things - one is the difficulty for modern scientists of working according to the proper motivations and beliefs of a real scientist.

Transcendental beliefs such as the reality of reality and the desirability of truth are difficult to hold in isolation and in a hostile environment that imposes multiple pressures to abandon proper motivations to expedience.

Not even trying

It is difficult, in other words, for a modern scientist to work according to the principles of real science; when to do so requires a lesser or greater sacrifice of career and status. And when any level of sacrifice of principles will negate the possibility of real science.

Yet the demands of real science are absolute. There can be no compromise with truth.

And the punishment for failure to be truthful is simple – failure of knowledge. No progress in science – but instead loss and destruction of knowledge.

Real science declined because scientific genius declined

That science progressed overall, rapidly and by a great deal between, say, 1700 and 1950 can be assumed.

But what drove this progress?

Scientific progress is talked about in three main ways, depending on the numbers/ proportion of the population involved in generating this progress. We could conceptualize science as the product of tiny minority of creative *geniuses*, an *elite class* of professionals, or a *mass population* of competence.

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1. Genius – science as the product of 10s to 100s of people per generation (for England at its height – much less for most other places) – a fraction of one percent of the population.

This idea states that science is the product of, depends on, a relatively small number of geniuses - without whom there would be no significant progress.

(The ingredients of ‘genius’ have been substantially elucidated by H.J Eysenck in his 1995 book of that name. These include high general intelligence (IQ), and also creativity – that is a tendency to make broad associations and connections between disparate phenomena. Eysenck notes that creativity is often an aspects of a ‘masculine’ personality type that is *moderately*-high in what he termed ‘psychoticism’; which includes elements such as selfishness, impulsivity and a tendency to

Not even trying

mental illness and antisocial behaviour. In other words, many geniuses are 'difficult' people...).

Therefore an age of scientific progress can be boiled down to the activity of tens or hundreds of geniuses; and the history of science is a list of great men.

Since little/ nothing is known about how to *generate* scientific genius, the task is mainly one of recognition selection of individuals; aiming to ensure that those who seem, potentially, to possess creative genius are given the chance to implement it – rather like the 'methods' for discovering and developing top athletes and sportsmen, chess grandmasters, or great singers and classical musicians.

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2. Elite - 1000s to 10,000s of people per generation – a few percent of the population.

Science is the product of an elite of highly educated and trained people, usually found in a relatively small number of elite and research-orientated institutions, linked in an intensely intercommunicating network.

This elite are presumed to generate, by their cooperation, significant scientific progress.

Without this elite, and these elite institutions, there would be no significant progress.

According to this view, the history of science is a history of institutions. So the promotion of science is a matter of the creation and sustenance of elite degrees, elite universities, elite research units etc.

A matter, therefore, of selection of institutions.

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3. Mass - 100,000s to millions of people per generation – a large percent of the population, ideally most of the population.

By this view, science is the product of a 'critical mass' of scientifically-orientated and educated people spread across a nation or culture; and whose attitudes and various skills add or synergize to generate scientific progress. If society as a whole is not sufficiently 'scientific' in this sense, then there will not be significant progress.

The history of science is seen as a history of gradual transformation of populations - mainly by educational reform. So the promotion of science is a matter of *science teaching* (e.g. in STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics) – to as high a level and for as many of the population as possible.

A (common) twist on this is the idea that all humans have vast untapped potential - and that this potential might *somehow* be activated - e.g. by the right kind of education; leading to an elite of geniuses, or a mass-elite, or something...

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Perhaps the mainstream idea nowadays is a mushy kind of belief/aspiration that science is essentially elite but that the elite can be expanded indefinitely by education and increased professionalization.

Another common modern variant is that scientific progress *began* as based on individual creative genius, then became elite-driven, and nowadays is a mass ('democratic') movement.

Not even trying

However, this is merely an historical description of what has actually happened (more or less) to *professional research* - underpinned by the unchallenged (but false) assumption that scientific progress has indeed been maintained throughout this transition.

But there is no reason to accept that assumption of continued progress (given the vastly increased level and pervasiveness of hype and dishonesty in science).

Certainly there do seem to be historical examples of scientific progress without need for a prior scientific mass of the population, or even a pre-existing elite gathered in elite institutions. It looks very much as if science is mostly a product of individual genius; and a sufficient concentration and succession of creative geniuses are the key necessity - without which scientific progress will not happen.

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Of course, nowadays there are (approximately) zero geniuses in science, so admitting that genius is necessary to significant scientific progress entails admitting that we are not making progress.

Again: *admitting that there are no geniuses means admitting there is no progress...*

which admission would devastate all scientific *careers*, since these careers depend upon the conviction and expectation of continued progress.

Therefore, the necessity for genius in science is an hypotheses that cannot be entertained.

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Nonetheless, my reading of the history of science is that a sufficient supply of genius really is necessary to significant scientific progress (although history has not always recorded the identities of the presumed geniuses).

At any rate, science has often made significant progress without elites in the modern sense, and elites often fail to make progress; and the idea that scientific progress arises from mass education of the masses is very obviously sheer moonshine, without a shred of evidence in support...

Furthermore, if geniuses are necessary for real scientific *progress*, and if real scientific progress is necessary for *modernity* (i.e. a society based-on growth - such that growth in productivity will out-run population growth)...

And if (as it seems) there are (for whatever reason) no more geniuses...

Then scientific progress has already stopped and will not re-start (unless there can again be not just a few but a sufficiency of real geniuses in science) – and modern society will in due course collapse due to the usually-operative ‘Malthusian’ mechanism that the weight of population will grow to be in excess of economic (especially food) production.